

AGENDA FOR SYNOD



Responding to God's
gracious call.



Christian
Reformed
Church

**AGENDA
FOR SYNOD**

2018



**Christian
Reformed
Church**

June 7-14, 2018
Covenant Fine Arts Center
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Synod 2018 will convene with a special joint worship service with the delegates to the Reformed Church in America (RCA) General Synod 2018 on Thursday, June 7, at 7:00 p.m. in the Calvin College Chapel. Throughout the days that follow (through Monday morning, June 11), the RCA and CRC assemblies will join together for times of worship, joint advisory committee meetings, workshops, and plenary sessions to engage in and learn about our collaborative ministry.

The CRC synod will officially constitute on Friday morning, June 8, in the Covenant Fine Arts Center (where all CRC plenary meetings will be held) immediately following joint morning worship at 8:00 a.m. with the RCA general synod in the Van Noord Arena on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Pillar Church in Holland, Michigan, will serve as the convening church of Synod 2018 of the CRC. Reverend Jonathan Brown, pastor of Pillar Church, will serve as the president pro-tem until synod is duly constituted and its four officers have been elected. A community-wide Synodical Worship Service, planned by a joint committee of the RCA and CRC, will be held Sunday, June 10, 2018, at 7:00 p.m. at the DeVos Center for Arts and Worship at Grand Rapids Christian High School, 2300 Plymouth Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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—designed as a secure site 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. In addition, orientations will be held for advisers and delegates to synod, as well as for advisory committee chairs and reporters and their alternates on Thursday, June 7, on the Calvin College campus (see the proposed daily schedule on pp. 10-11 for more information).

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 3 and 10. 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 in unity, growth, and renewal. May Synod 2018 “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. 4:12-13).

Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director of the CRCNA

I. Welcome

We are grateful for your service as a delegate to Synod 2018. Whether you are a returning delegate or you are serving for the first time, we sincerely hope and pray that you will find synod to be a rewarding and enriching 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. 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 as you prepare and after your arrival at synod. 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 Council of Delegates calls the matter of confidentiality to the attention of Synod 2018 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 2018:

Thursday orientations and opening worship

3:30 - 5:00 p.m.	Orientation for delegates and advisers—first-time delegates and advisers encouraged to attend; all welcome
5:15 - 6:45 p.m.	Orientation for chairs and reporters, and alternate chairs and alternate reporters of advisory committees
7:00 - 8:15 p.m.	Opening worship with RCA General Synod
8:15 p.m.	Joint reception with RCA delegates

Convening Friday

8:00 - 8:30 a.m.	Joint worship with RCA General Synod
9:00 - 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 - 8:30 p.m.	Joint session with RCA General Synod
8:30 p.m.	Joint reception with RCA General Synod

Saturday

8:00 - 8:30 a.m.	Joint worship with RCA General Synod
8:45 - 11:45 a.m.	Joint advisory committees with RCA General Synod
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 5:00 p.m.	CRC advisory committee meetings
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	CRC advisory committee meetings

Sunday

Morning worship at area CRC churches	
3:00 - 4:30 p.m.	Joint workshops with RCA General Synod
5:00 - 6:15 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 p.m.	Joint Synodical Worship Service

Monday

8:00 - 8:30 a.m.	Joint worship with RCA General Synod
8:30 - 10:00 a.m.	Joint session with RCA General Synod
10:00 - 10:20 a.m.	Joint refreshment break
10:30 - 11:45 a.m.	CRC 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

Tuesday – Wednesday

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

Thursday

8:15 - 11:45 a.m.	Plenary session
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 5:00 p.m.	Plenary session

*Synod will conclude with worship and adjourn no later than 5:00 p.m. Thursday.

DELEGATES TO SYNOD 2018

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Alberta North		
	MinisterDayna Vreeken	Minister. Richard J. deLange
	Elder Gary W. Duthler	Elder Helen M. Doef Deacon
	Deacon Jennifer Snaterse	_____
	Other. Arthur L. Verboon	Other Jacob H. Boer
Alberta South/Saskatchewan		
	MinisterBrian D. Kuyper	Minister. Matthew D. Vanden Heuvel
	Elder Jack A. Beeksmā	Elder Christine Vanderberg
	Deacon Randy J. Dekens	Deacon Cynthia M. de Graaff
	Other. Rafik Kamel	Other S. George Koopmans
Arizona		
	MinisterJose Rayas	Minister. _____
	Elder Rodney J. Hugen	Elder _____
	Deacon _____	Deacon _____
	Other. Rene Rivery	Other _____
Atlantic Northeast		
	MinisterDerek M. Zeyl	Minister. Bruce Dykstra
	Elder Cornelis Van Barneveldt	Elder _____
	Deacon Lillian E. Hackathorn	Deacon _____
	Other. Nicholas W. Monsma	Other Joel D. Vande Werken
B.C. North-West		
	MinisterMary-Lee Bouma	Minister. Henry Jonker
	Elder Lori A. Fieber	Elder Hank VanRyk
	Deacon Melissa Van Dyk	Deacon Paul J. Moravec
	Other. Dena Nicolai	Other Chelsey L. Harmon
B.C. South-East		
	MinisterJana L. Vander Laan	Minister. Michael B. Koot
	Elder Pam Marissen	Elder Peter Roukema
	Deacon Charles J. Dykman	Deacon _____
	Other. Thomas J. Bomhof	Other Michael J. VanderKwaak
California South		
	MinisterMirtha M. Villafane	Minister. William Verhoef
	Elder Ron L. Glass	Elder Gabriel Colangelo
	Deacon Rudy R. Manrique	Deacon Deborah A. Dahlin
	Other. Andrew T. Hanson	Other Louis W. Wagenveld
Central California		
	MinisterJames J. Chiang	Minister. Kenneth D. Boonstra
	Elder Sandra L. Griffin-Baerwald	Elder Titus E. Davis
	Deacon Cynthia J. Fair	Deacon David L. Harrington
	Other. Jeffrey T. Hoek	Other Mark VanDyke

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Central Plains		
Minister	George Den Oudsten	Minister. Thomas R. Wolhuis
Elder	Russell R. Van Hemert	Elder _____
Deacon	Robert J. Rus	Deacon _____
Other.	Brad Bierma	Other. Mark J. Jicinsky
Chatham		
Minister	Timothy R. Luimes	Minister. Gregory A. Fluit
Elder	Diane Plug	Elder John Van Til
Deacon	Lynette Van De Hoef	Deacon John H. Klein-Geltink
Other.	David S. Van Berkel	Other. Michael R. Wagenman
Chicago South		
Minister	Michael J. Kooy	Minister. _____
Elder	Emily Bosscher	Elder _____
Deacon	Roger DeGroot	Deacon _____
Other.	Timothy B. Toeset	Other. _____
Columbia		
Minister	Robert J. Toornstra	Minister. Carl J. Leep
Elder	David A. Van Dyke	Elder John Van Schepen
Deacon	_____	Deacon _____
Other.	Jelmer P. Groenewold	Other. Virgil L. Michael
Eastern Canada		
Minister	Daniel Meinema	Minister. Nicholas C. Baas
Elder	Richard Smit	Elder _____
Deacon	Joyce J. Luimes	Deacon Gerrit Tenyenhuis
Other.	Jacob M. Van de Hoef	Other. Pieter A. Heerema
Georgetown		
Minister	Brian P. Bosscher	Minister. Mark D. Bennink
Elder	Raymond Dennis	Elder Eric J. DeVries
Deacon	Kathy Jelsema	Deacon _____
Other.	Jeffery W. Scripps	Other. Susan E. LaClear
Grand Rapids East		
Minister	Elizabeth A. Vander Haagen	Minister. Randall J. Buursma
Elder	George N. Monsma, Jr.	Elder _____
Deacon	Claire A. Knight	Deacon Richard Van Houten
Other.	Darrell L. Delaney	Other. _____
Grand Rapids North		
Minister	Elaine G. May	Minister. Joshua E. Blunt
Elder	Karen D. VanderMeulen	Elder Chadd M. Huiuzenga
Deacon	Russell L. Slendebroek	Deacon Linda B. Rienstra
Other.	Jeanne F. Maher	Other. Kevin S. Heeres
Grand Rapids South		
Minister	Ruth Boven	Minister. Martin A. Benckhuysen
Elder	Jacque Bolt	Elder Jan Heerspink
Deacon	_____	Deacon _____
Other.	Curtis A. Walters	Other. David A. Struyk
Grandville		
Minister	Anthony J. Meyer	Minister. Heather Strooboscher
Elder	Larry Klein	Elder _____
Deacon	Carole TenHaaf	Deacon Paul Streelman
Other.	Joy Witte	Other. _____

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Greater Los Angeles	MinisterChris T. Choe ElderJames A. Grasmeyer DeaconAnnette L. Biggs OtherErick D. Westra	MinisterFernando Valencia ElderSteve McKeehan Deacon Other
Hackensack	MinisterPetr Kornilov ElderLenore Maine DeaconAmy Vander Vliet OtherEfren S. Echipare	MinisterPaul J. Van Dyken ElderKaren J. Walker DeaconMichael S. Terborg OtherDouglas H. Bratt
Hamilton	MinisterJoel Bootsma ElderMark Vandervliet DeaconJohn B. Dekker OtherAnthony D. Elenbaas	MinisterJeffrey B. Vandermeer ElderCor Visser DeaconGina M. Taylor OtherKenneth F. Benjamins
Hanmi	MinisterJahng Soo Jeong Elder DeaconSoohe Lee OtherSun Il Kim	MinisterTeukkoon Timothy Jung Elder Deacon Other
Heartland	MinisterNathan Kuperus ElderHarvey G. Obbink DeaconKeith E. Boersema OtherLoren J. Kotman	MinisterAldon L. Kuiper Elder Deacon OtherJesse L. Walhof
Holland	MinisterDominic J. Palacios ElderGerrit K. Haagsma DeaconJack MacDonald OtherJenna L. Brandsen	Minister ElderCalvin J. Hoogstra Deacon OtherDavid L. Spoelma
Hudson	MinisterIn Chul Choeh ElderRoy G. Heerema Deacon OtherKendall A. Everett	MinisterMary B. Stegink Elder Deacon Other
Huron	MinisterJohn C. Medendorp ElderRick DeGraaf DeaconJames Vanderleeuw OtherKevin J. teBrake	MinisterEdward Jager ElderJeremy Vandenberg DeaconHerman Vander Munnik OtherVictor S. Laarman
Iakota	MinisterCalvin Hoogendoorn ElderSanneke C. Kok DeaconDavid Kuipers OtherDaniel S. De Graff	MinisterStephen D. Moerman Elder Deacon OtherClifford D. Hoekstra
Illiana	MinisterMark A. Bonnes ElderPaul J. Epley Deacon OtherJoel W. Zuidema	MinisterDaniel J. Roels Elder Deacon OtherDaniel R. Svendsen

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Kalamazoo	MinisterMichael D. Koetje ElderRoger L. Klok DeaconEsther Korzilius OtherAnthony J. Gretz	MinisterG. Ben Bowater ElderTom Balkema Deacon OtherPhilip D. Kok
Ko-Am	MinisterEdward W. Yoon ElderSang W. Park DeaconJenny U. Yoon OtherWon Ki Kim	Minister Elder Deacon Other
Lake Erie	MinisterMatthew T. Ackerman ElderLarry D. Gruppen DeaconMary A. Rupke OtherChristopher B. Lanham	Minister Elder Deacon Other
Lake Superior	MinisterAnson Veenstra ElderMichael J. Wiersma DeaconTeda J. Heerema OtherJeffrey C. Vanderhoof	MinisterJoseph Hamilton ElderA. Marina Nederlof Deacon OtherDavid S. Huizenga
Classis Minnkota	MinisterJoshua M. Christoffels ElderJohn W. Byl DeaconRobert M. Byl OtherRoger W. Sparks	MinisterDavid J. Weemhoff Elder Deacon OtherJohn A. Bothof
Classis Muskegon	MinisterDouglas M. MacLeod ElderSteve Breuker DeaconLouise Breuker OtherKenneth T. Krause	MinisterCynthia R. de Jong ElderRon Bielema Deacon OtherCory J. Nederveld
Classis Niagara	MinisterMichael J. Vandyk ElderHilbert Bokma DeaconKaren Van Dyk OtherGeorge Sportel	MinisterSidney Couperus Elder Deacon OtherKevin J. VanderVeen
Classis Northcentral Iowa	MinisterRussell W. Boersma ElderHerb Schruer Deacon OtherJason T. Semans	MinisterSteven L. Schulz Elder Deacon Other
Classis Northern Illinois	MinisterFred A. De Jong ElderSharon Buma DeaconClaire E. McWilliams OtherMark K. Brouwer	Minister ElderKenneth A. Wagner Deacon Other
Classis Northern Michigan	MinisterKenneth D. Koning ElderAlan L. Diemer Deacon OtherAdam M. Barton	Minister ElderTodd Kuperus Deacon Other

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Classis Pacific Northwest	Minister John C. Knoester Elder Greg Boon Deacon Linda W. Grace Other Jennifer Geelhood	Minister Joseph M. Strong Elder Aaron J. De Boer Deacon Barbara M. Schaeffer Other William G. Vis
Classis Quinte	Minister Benjamin G. vanStraten Elder Cathy Vink Deacon Hilda Van Drunen Other Shawn R. Brix	Minister Ryan W. Braam Elder Bill Grootnibbelink Deacon _____ Other Steven L. Kooy
Classis Red Mesa	Minister Stanley W. Jim Elder Caleb Dickson Deacon Kevin Jones Other Willie Bennally	Minister David J. Dykstra Elder Debra Chee Deacon Tyler Eelkema Other Robert J. Byker
Classis Rocky Mountain	Minister W. Dean Dyk Elder Russell R. Center Deacon DeLinda N. Baker Other Roger De Young	Minister Henry F. Serrano Elder Terry M. Gray Deacon Daniel W. Pfretzschner Other Nolan B. Vander Ark
Classis Southeast U.S.	Minister Stanley J. Workman Elder Sandy L. Wagner Deacon Irma N. Rodriguez Other Christopher N. Cassis	Minister Obelto Cherubin Elder Juan P. Sierra Deacon _____ Other Felix Fernandez
Classis Thornapple Valley	Minister Roger S. Greenway Elder Casey Jen Deacon Kathy A. VanderLaan Other Edward W. Coleman	Minister Dirk M. VanEyck Elder Robert J. Zoerman Deacon Amy Wiersma Other Ben J. Ridder
Classis Toronto	Minister Richard A. Bodini Elder Henry Eygenraam Deacon Alida Kloet Other John Tenyenhuis	Minister Ruth M. Hofman Elder _____ Deacon _____ Other _____
Classis Wisconsin	Minister Craig Van Hill Elder Randy Hendrikse Deacon Charles C. Adams Other Keith D. Buist	Minister Joshua J. Van Engen Elder David Katsma Deacon Carol Wynstra Other _____
Classis Yellowstone	Minister Steve Bussis Elder Cornelius W. Kroon Deacon George DenHartigh Other Clair Vander Neut	Minister Chris A. Kostelansky Elder _____ Deacon _____ Other _____
Classis Zeeland	Minister Mark D. Neymeiyer Elder Steve Schrotenboer Deacon Angie Ploegstra Other Stephen F. Terpstra	Minister Mark D. Timmer Elder Ronald Hutson Deacon Darlene E. Vander Wilt Other Shaun M. Furniss

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES REPORT

The Council of Delegates (COD) of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) held its inaugural meeting in October 2017, gathering delegates representing classes, with additional at-large members, to address the mission and ministry of the CRCNA on behalf of synod. For the first time, a single board—the COD—addressed agency matters in detail with regard to Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) and Resonate Global Mission, along with the matters concerning Congregational Services ministries of the CRCNA, since all of these entities are now governed by the COD.

The COD presents the following report as a summary of its work in the interim since the meeting of Synod 2017.

I. Introduction

A. *Governing on behalf of synod*

The COD functions with a constituent-representative model of policy governance. Policy governance suggests a board's role is to see that the organization achieves what it should, avoiding the unacceptable (via the concept of limitations), all on behalf of its constituents.

This constituent-representative model of policy governance provides a "link between the organization's board and its constituents. The constituents are represented on the governing board and participate in policy development and planning."¹ For these purposes, the term *constituents* refers to CRCNA members.

Similar to all forms of policy governance, there is clear differentiation between board activity and staff/administrative activity. Those serving on the COD are not invited into management functions. Staff/administrative members do not chart the direction and set the policies for the denomination, but they serve as implementers, working within the contours of COD-set policies toward the goals and limitations identified by the COD in conjunction with the CRC constituency. Moreover, as the COD sets direction and evaluates the effectiveness of outcomes, staff and administration are always attentive to context, making recommendations and providing analysis to the COD in ways that consider binationality, diversity, and the like.

This model flows from CRC church polity as described in Church Order Article 27-a: "Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ; the authority of councils being original, that of major assemblies being delegated." In other words, ecclesiastical authority begins with congregations and is delegated to classis and then to synod. Church Order Article 27-a is balanced by Article 27-b: "The classis has the same authority over the council as the synod has over the

¹ Bradshaw, P., R. Hayday, and R. Armstrong; "Non-profit Governance Models: Problems and Prospects," paper originally presented at ARNOVA Conference, Seattle, Washington, 1998.

classis”—emphasizing the authority of the broader assemblies, which are made up of officebearers who represent Christ’s authority in those assemblies as they make decisions for the broader church. The role of officebearers in each of these assemblies is significant in Church Order Article 1-a: “The Christian Reformed Church, confessing its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word, acknowledging Christ as the only head of his church, and desiring to honor the apostolic injunction that officebearers are ‘to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up’ (Eph. 4:12), and to do so ‘in a fitting and orderly way’ (1 Cor. 14:40), regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities.”

As an ecclesiastical governance entity serving in the interim of synod, the COD provides governance by means of the authority delegated to it by synod and with its synodically elected membership representing classes or serving in at-large capacities.

(COD Governance Handbook, section 1.1: Governance)

The mandate and functions of the Council of Delegates as adopted by synod are outlined in the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook (at crcna.org, search “Council of Delegates”).

COD members also serve as the directors of the CRCNA Canada Corporation, the CRCNA U.S. Corporation, the BTGMI Canada Corporation, and the BTGMI U.S. Corporation. These legal entities (Canada and U.S.) include joint ministries agreements for BTGMI corporations and the CRCNA corporations.

The Council of Delegates has met two times since Synod 2017 (October 2017 and February 2018), and is scheduled to meet again in May 2018. The COD’s agenda is primarily first reviewed by one of five committees: Congregational Ministries Committee, Global Mission and Ministries Committee, Mercy and Justice Ministries Committee, Ministry Plan and Communication Committee, and Support Services Committee. These committees hear and study reports regarding the mission, vision, and values of our various ministries; the ways our ministries are integrated into a ministry (strategic) plan; the financial status, administrative leadership, and the organizational health in each ministry-priority area, and the ways in which the COD responds both to synod and constituents. Committees present their recommendations to the full COD for action. In addition, the COD oversees the work of the executive director.

Nearly all of the matters addressed by the COD affect the full CRCNA as a binational church, but, in compliance with Canadian regulations, the Canadian corporations review and approve all actions **relative to the joint operation of the collective ministry activities** taken by the full COD and, as necessary, address any matters that relate directly to uniquely Canadian issues and matters of law. The COD, as synod’s agent, is grateful for the opportunity to serve the entire church.

B. COD membership

The members of the Council of Delegates from the classes include B. Bernard Bakker (Eastern Canada), Bev Bandstra (B.C. South-East), Darrell J. Bierman (Huron), Gary D. Bos (Columbia), Timothy Bosscher (Grandville), John H. Caicedo (California South), Cori Christiaanse (Quinte), Samuel Cooper (Toronto), Wendell Davelaar (Northcentral Iowa), Fernando L. del Rosario (Central California), Bruce DeKam (Northern Michigan), Andy de Ruyter (B.C. North-West), Paul R. De Vries (Thornapple Valley), Peter J.

DeVries (Yellowstone), Christopher W. deWinter (Niagara), Donald G. Draayer (Lake Superior), John O. Eigege (Rocky Mountain), Beth Fellingner (Chatham), Laurie Harkema (Lake Erie), Emmett A. Harrison (Grand Rapids East), Sally Haywood (Illiana), Susan B. Hoekema (Muskegon), Sheila E. Holmes (Hackensack), Calvin Hoogendoorn (Iakota), Melvin O. Jackson (Greater Los Angeles), Stanley W. Jim (Red Mesa), Bomsu Kim (Pacific Northwest), Michelle J. Kool (Alberta North), Jose Antonio (Tony) Lara (Arizona), Theodore Lim (Ko-Am), Daudi Mutisya Mbuta (Grand Rapids North), Bruce McMurry (Wisconsin), Ronald J. Meyer (Zeeland), Brian L. Ochsner (Central Plains), Tong Kun Park (Hanmi), Cora Rempel (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), Arnie J. Stolte (Northern Illinois), David A. Struyk (Grand Rapids South), Samuel D. Sutter (Atlantic Northeast), Garry H. Sytsma (Hamilton), Kevin T. TenBrink (Kalamazoo), Leland Vanderaa (Minnkota), Mark Volkers (Heartland), Jei Wilson (Chicago South), and Stanley J. Workman (Southeast U.S.).

Four at-large members also serve the COD: Elsa Fennema (U.S.), Verney Kho (Canada), Ashley Medendorp (Canada), and Aaltje Van Grootheest (Canada).

The executive director (Dr. Steven R. Timmermans) serves *ex officio* as a corporate trustee of the CRCNA and BTGMI U.S. Corporations and as a member of the Council of Delegates (without vote). The executive director and the Canadian ministries director for legal purposes serve as guests of the CRCNA and BTGMI Corporations based in Canada.

In addition, two guests from the Calvin Theological Seminary board of trustees (Sid Jansma, Jr., and Daniel G. Brown) and two guests from the World Renew board of delegates (Jim Jooose and Joy Anema) attend the COD meetings and serve on a COD committee. These nonvoting COD guests are given privilege of the floor during meetings. COD member Fernando L. del Rosario also serves as a member on the Calvin College board of trustees, providing a link to this CRCNA institution.

Since their appointment in June, the following three members resigned from the COD for various reasons: David E. Den Haan (Georgetown), Scott A. DeVries (Holland), and Joel D. Vande Werken (Hudson). Nominations for these vacancies have been requested from the classes and will be presented to synod for election by way of the supplemental report.

At the direction of Synod 2017, the COD Nominating Services Committee developed a proposal that was adopted by the COD, establishing the terms and rotation for the current COD membership. Ideally eight or nine members will end their term with the board each year to provide continuity in the long run—meaning that some members will be serving out their term from previous board service (transitioning from the Board of Trustees, the Back to God Ministries International board, or the New Mission Agency board) with a shortened term rather than two full terms (six years) on the COD.

The following were appointed as officers of the COD and of respective corporations for the 2017-2018 term:

1. COD officers: Rev. Paul R. De Vries, chair; Mr. Andy de Ruyter, vice chair; Mr. Tim Bosscher, treasurer; Rev. B. Bernard Bakker, secretary.

2. Corporation officers

- a. CRCNA Canada Corporation: Mr. Andy de Ruyter, president; Rev. Donald D. Draayer, vice president; Rev. B. Bernard Bakker, secretary; Ms. Cori Christiaanse, treasurer.
 - b. CRCNA U.S. Corporation: Rev. Paul R. De Vries, president; Rev. Emmett A. Harrison, vice president; Ms. Elsa Fennema, secretary; Mr. Tim Bosscher, treasurer.
 - c. BTGMI Canada Corporation: Mr. Andy de Ruyter, president; Rev. Donald D. Draayer, vice president; Rev. B. Bernard Bakker, secretary; Ms. Cori Christiaanse, treasurer.
 - d. BTGMI U.S. Corporation: Rev. Paul R. De Vries, president; Rev. Emmett A. Harrison, vice president; Ms. Elsa Fennema, secretary; Mr. Tim Bosscher, treasurer.
3. Executive Committee: Rev. B. Bernard Bakker; Mr. Tim Bosscher; Mr. Andy de Ruyter; Rev. Paul R. De Vries, chair; Ms. Beth Fellingner; Ms. Susan Hoekema; Ms. Ashley Medendorp; Rev. Tong Kun Park. Dr. Steven R. Timmermans serves *ex officio*.

C. *Salary disclosure*

At the directive of synod, the Council of Delegates reports the following salaries for senior CRCNA, Back to God Ministries International, and Resonate Global Mission staff directly employed by the Council of Delegates:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
20	1	1	0
19	2	1	1
18	3	3	0
17	6	2	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 2016-2017 ranges) are as follows:

2017-2018 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 COD

A. Polity matters

1. Convening church of Synod 2019

The Council of Delegates, in receipt of the invitation of Faith Community CRC in Wyoming, Michigan, recommends that synod designate Faith Community CRC as the convening church of Synod 2019. The congregation will be celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2019 and considers it an honor to serve the denomination in this way. Synod will be held on the campus of Calvin College.

2. RCA/CRC survey results and analysis

The COD at its October 2017 meeting discussed ways to continue to enact the “Pella Accord”—the 2014 joint resolution with the Reformed Church in America to collaborate in ministry as opportunities arise. It also reviewed results from Synod 2017 delegate feedback to three scenarios presented: cooperation, collaboration, and consideration of a new creation. The COD placed emphasis on pursuing specific efforts of vision-based collaboration with the RCA and continual sharing of information with constituents.

3. Interim appointments

On behalf of synod, the COD has ratified the following appointments of synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies* made by classes:

Appointment	Classis	Member	Alternate	Term
Synodical Deputies	Chatham		Rev. Eric Groot-Mibbelink	
	Grand Rapids South	Rev. George G. Vink		2020(1)
	Lake Erie	Rev. Randall D. Engle	Rev. Christopher B. Lanham	2020(1)
	Northern Michigan	Rev. Adam M. Barton	Rev. Gregory J. Kett	2020(1)
	Rocky Mountain		Rev. Roger De Young	

*Terms of alternate synodical deputies run concurrent with those of the synodical deputies.

4. 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 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.

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

Data for the board diversity report (with regard to gender and ethnic diversity) for the 2017-2018 year has been received from the denominational boards (Council of Delegates, Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, and World Renew). In addition, data from the World Renew Joint Ministry Council (JMC) is included along with data from the World

Renew Board of Delegates. *Note:* The JMC is elected from the membership of the World Renew Board of Delegates.

There are presently 161 denominationally appointed board members (not including the JMC count), and the JMC, elected from the World Renew Board of Delegates, has 15 members. So, among a total of 176 members, 49 (28%) are women, and 31 (18%) are people of color. The data received from the boards for the 2017-2018 board term reflects a *decrease* of 3 percent in women delegates and a *decrease* of 2 percent for people of color on our denominational boards as compared to the 2016-2017 reporting year. This year, in the joining of the former Board of Trustees with the boards of Back to God Ministries International and the new mission agency to form the new Council of Delegates, it was decided that each board should also be examined individually in light of synod's goal of having at least 25 percent ethnic minority membership. The board membership of Calvin College is 17 percent ethnic minority; Calvin Theological Seminary, 16 percent; World Renew (JMC), 27 percent; and the COD, 28 percent.

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

At the instruction of Synod 2013, each CRC agency, Calvin College, and Calvin Theological Seminary are asked to submit to the executive director, as part of their strategic plan, diversity goals and timelines in their leadership, administrative, and regional ministry teams. This annual report was received by the executive director, and the compliance and progress were reported to the Council of Delegates in February. In addition, the director of synodical services regularly reminds and encourages stated clerks and denominational boards to seek ethnic diversity in nominating people to serve on denominational boards and as delegates to synod. The COD noted that, while over the long term there has been growth in diversity of leadership, on boards, and at other levels, we need to be diligent in continuing to increase diversity.

7. 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 COD has appointed the following persons to serve as young adult representatives to Synod 2018 (* indicates service in this capacity in 2017):

*Mr. Izhar Alvarez
Mr. Benjamin Boersma
*Ms. Kristy Bootsma
Ms. Jenna Rodermond

Ms. Robyn Stegink
Mr. Benjamin VanderWindt
Ms. Lydia Verstrate

8. Ministry presentations at synod

Through the years, synod has received special presentations by the educational institutions, agencies, and ministries on a three-year rotation. Requests and feedback shared in recent years have initiated a change in these presentations to synod. Beginning in 2018 the rotation schedule will focus on the denomination's five ministry priorities. Synod 2018 will hear from our ministries serving in Gospel Proclamation and Worship: Calvin Theological Seminary and Worship Ministries.

9. Regional pastors proposal

The Office of Pastor Church Resources (PCR), responsible for the resourcing of regional pastors, has observed a shift toward more regionalization and the challenges it presents for regional pastors. The report in Appendix A proposes that the appointing and accountability of regional pastors be made in the classis but maintains the long-standing collaborative relationship between the classis and PCR. As a result, the report recommends changes to Church Order Article 42 and its Supplement that would provide collaboration between the classes and the Office of Pastor Church Resources in the appointment of regional pastors. Recognizing the value of this proposal, the COD recommends the report and the recommendations in Appendix A for adoption by synod.

10. Judicial Code Committee

The Judicial Code Committee (JCC) 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.

We are still in the process of implementing the changes to the JCC composition adopted by Synod 2014. Rev. Henry Kranenburg (having served four years) and Mr. Joel Vos (having served five years, with four years as chair) are concluding service on the JCC in 2018. It is recommended that synod express gratitude to Rev. Kranenburg and Mr. Vos for their service to the committee. Nominations to fill these two positions will be presented on behalf of the Judicial Code Committee by way of the COD Supplement in the spring.

11. National and binational gatherings

a. Canadian regional gathering

A Canadian regional gathering, to be held in Edmonton, Alberta, on the campus of The King's University, is being planned for May 23-25, 2019. The national gathering will include three days of listening, celebrating, and discerning together.

b. Inspire 2019

Having received overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding Inspire 2017, the COD has decided to hold this binational conference every two years. A team has been formed, and planning for Inspire 2019 is under way. The next denominational conference will be held

August 1-3, 2019, in Windsor, Ontario, across the river from the location of the first event. Inspire 2019 will provide an opportunity for members from all of the CRC's 1,000-plus churches to connect through practical workshops, engaging speakers, worship, and energizing conversations. Sign up to receive updates on this exciting event at crcna.org/Inspire2019 to learn more and to register in the coming year.

12. Classis Renewal Group

Synod 2015 directed the executive director to “appoint and resource a working group (Classis Renewal Group) to build on the work of the existing Classis Renewal Ministry Team, including an 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). The Classis Renewal Group has been at work studying the role of classes in the CRCNA. The group presented its final report to the Council of Delegates in February for action. Matters related to classis renewal are presented by way of the report in Appendix B for synod’s information (e.g., a new advisory team appointed) and for response regarding a proposed Church Order change.

13. Publications and services

a. *Yearbook*

The CRC *Yearbook* is made available in print, as a downloadable PDF (available at faithaliveresources.org), and in online format (crcna.org/Yearbook) near the beginning of each calendar year. Also available through Faith Alive is the *Yearbook Supplement*, containing the CRC church directory as found in the online Church Finder at crcna.org/yearbook. These publications reflect an extensive information-gathering process of denominational and local-church information as of approximately August 31 of each calendar year preceding the annual publication. Data received from the churches, classes, and ordained personnel throughout the rest of the year is continually updated in the online *Yearbook* (at crcna.org/Yearbook). The online format includes the Church Finder feature, providing maps, church service times, membership information, and links to church websites, among other helpful information. Classis and denominational statistics can also be downloaded from the online *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*.

Among some of the statistics 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.

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

The *Church Order and Its Supplements 2017* reflects the updates adopted by Synod 2017. The latest version, published by the Office of Synodical Services, was distributed to each of the churches in early fall 2017 and has been translated into Korean and Spanish. The *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, also updated following the decisions of Synod 2017 and translated for Spanish-speaking churches, is available in electronic format *only*. Both the Church Order and the Rules for Synodical Procedure are available in digital format at crcna.org/SynodResources.

c. *Agenda for Synod and Acts of Synod*

The publication 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 2017 by the Office of Synodical Services, reflecting the decisions of Synod 2017. Anyone desiring to access or download a copy of this tool for the classes may do so by going to the stated clerk and synodical deputy webpage at crcna.org/StatedClerks.

e. *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*

A very helpful tool for churches and classes—the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* by Dr. Peter Borgdorff—has been updated to reflect decisions of Synod 2017. This resource is a companion to the CRC’s Church Order, offering commentary and explanation of guidelines set forth and decisions made by synod over the years. The manual is available for viewing in the CRC Digital Library (crcna.org/DigitalLibrary), and print and downloadable versions are available through Faith Alive (faithaliveresources.org).

B. *Program matters*

A significant part of the Council of Delegates’ 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, institutions, and ministries and via this section of the COD’s report in this agenda. Additional information regarding financial matters is contained in Appendix E to this Council of Delegates Report as well as in the *Agenda for Synod 2018—Financial and Business Supplement* that will be distributed just prior to synod. The final budget and the ministry-share request will be presented to synod by way of the COD Supplement report and synod’s financial matters advisory committee.

The COD provides denominational oversight on behalf of synod throughout the year. The office of the executive director serves as the primary link between the COD 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 Back to God Ministries International, the director of Resonate Global Mission, the director of synodical services (DSS), and the director of communications and marketing (DCM).

The Ministries Leadership Council (MLC), convened by the executive director of the CRCNA, has responsibility for implementing the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church (*Our Journey 2020*), for the collaboration of the ministries, and for the review of program matters. The binational membership of the MLC is made up of executive leadership, directors of agencies, presidents of the educational institutions (or their designees), and others representing specific offices and functions. The Canadian Ministries Team, convened by the Canadian ministries director, provides leadership to the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada.

The program and financial matters processed by the COD 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 Council of Delegates 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 in North America. The plan provides a framework for the COD's supervision of the management of the agencies and ministries; 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 in previous years, the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA identified (and the COD recognizes) a set of mutually desired futures. These desired futures, endorsed by Synod 2015, include the following:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 Journey 2020 provides a set of strategic and integrated directions for the agencies, ministries, and institutions of the Christian Reformed Church by focusing on what we believe God is calling congregations to be and to do in ways unique to the ministry contexts and opportunities of each. Short videos about these desired futures—meant to inspire and encourage congregations and classes—have been developed and are available at crcna.org/welcome/our-journey-2020. In addition, assistance is provided for congregations and classes in using the desired futures and strategic goals of *Our Journey 2020* in ways that resonate with the needs and opportunities of each.

Our Journey 2020 was officially launched in July 2016. Measures have been developed to track (a) denominational agency and ministry efficacy in the provision of assistance and resources, and (b) the attainment of the desired futures through surveying Christian Reformed churches and their members across North America. In its October and February meetings, the COD learned that in nearly all areas provision of assistance and resources is occurring as planned, with the exception of low interest among congregations in partnering for church planting and among ministers in seeking to plant churches. In October the COD learned that survey results from the first cohort of congregations invited to participate show positive signs toward attainment of the desired futures. Also noted was a higher response rate among Canadian congregations and their members.

The COD adopted a timeline for developing the next ministry plan (including listening sessions during national and binational gatherings to gather input), for receiving a draft plan for endorsement, and for presenting a revised ministry plan in 2020.

2. Our Calling

Proposed by the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture to Synod 2014, the term *Five Streams*—changed to “Our Calling” in 2016—became a focus of the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in its collaboration, programs, and reporting. Synod 2015 adopted the five themes of Our Calling of the Christian Reformed Church (included below) to function 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).

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.

Consistent with prior actions of both adopting the five features and then relabeling them as "Our Calling," we note that these ministry priorities are being utilized to communicate more effectively what the CRC members and ministers, congregations and classes, and ministries and agencies are called to do. The *Annual Ministry Report*, the *Agenda for Synod*, and introductory brochures all utilize this categorization. Further, the Council of Delegates committee structure and committee mandates reflect these priorities.

3. CRC agency, institution, and congregational services reports

The Council of Delegates is responsible for submitting 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 these materials, we invite you to praise God for ministry opportunities.

4. Prioritization and evaluation

Synod 2016 instructed the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA "to evaluate and prioritize all existing programs and ministries with the goal of reducing the institutional footprint" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 858). Synod 2017 received an update on the process, and its delegates gave their own personal impressions of each ministry's value for God's kingdom by completing a survey prior to synod. The delegates also participated in an exercise during synod that generated data to produce a final analysis and report regarding prioritization and evaluation of ministry programming. At its February 2018 meeting, the Council of Delegates, following up on this instruction to the BOT, finalized a report and now submits it with accompanying recommendations in Appendix C for address by Synod 2018.

5. Timothy Leadership Training Institute

The Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLTI) in Summer 2017 officially became a ministry of the CRCNA and, along with Global Coffee Break and Educational Care ministries, is under the direction of Dr. Gary Bekker. Further information about the ministry of TLTI is found in this *Agenda for Synod*, beginning on page 130.

6. Sustaining Congregational Excellence

Since its startup in 2007, the Sustaining Congregational Excellence program has assisted smaller CRC congregations to flourish, advancing the denominational priority at that time to create and sustain healthy congregations. The recent review and prioritization of programs and budget considerations, along with the startup of the Ignite ministry innovation program, led to the decision of the COD in February to discontinue the Sustaining Congregational Excellence program.

7. Evangelism, congregational renewal, and church planting

In light of Ministry Plan assessment findings, and in response to Synod 2017's call for heightened awareness and response with regard to membership decline (see *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 706), the COD has directed the work of staff leadership in the following ways:

- a. A team of Resonate Global Mission and Calvin Theological Seminary staff, in consultation with Back to God Ministries International leaders, addressed the main focus of the following recommendation adopted by Synod 2017: "to make available a list of current denominational resources related to church renewal, including church planting with emphasis on training for evangelism." Received by the COD in February and now recommended to synod is a report providing a biblical theology for church planting and evangelism, addressing contemporary contexts, and providing a list of resources and tools (see Appendix D).
- b. The COD anticipates receiving at its May meeting a plan to address two additional actions of Synod 2017 (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 706) related to church renewal. In light of the 2014 joint resolution ("Pella Accord") with the Reformed Church in America to "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately" (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 504), and in response to the instruction of synod, CRC leaders partnered with RCA leaders and received a planning grant of \$150,000 to develop a plan for assembling church renewal resources in a way that reflects best practices, integrates resources, and provides effective strategies for implementation by classes and churches.

8. Ethnic diversity ministry

The COD at its February meeting endorsed a holistic, integrated approach toward diversity ministry. This decision coincided with the conclusion of ethnic ministry efforts begun in the past by Christian Reformed Home Missions before it became part of Resonate Global Mission. The new approach includes two interlocking features. First, the denomination is now served by an Ethnic Diversity Functional Team

(EDFT)—a group with representatives from multiple agencies and ministries appointed by the Ministries Leadership Council of the CRCNA. Second, six Ethnic Leadership Groups have been identified:

- Indigenous
- Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander
- Korean Relations Team
- Black and Reformed Leadership Network
- Consejo Latino
- East Meets West (Chinese)

Each of these groups is self-directed and is focused on identifying key priorities for their context and ministry area. The key priorities and plans are shared with the EDFT, which is committed to finding ways to support the ethnic ministry groups as they work on the execution of their plans. Resonate Global Mission, as a member of the EDFT, is integral to this work.

Note: Synod 2016 adopted the following with regard to new ministry proposals (see *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 857-58): “That synod require that all new ministry proposals include a ministry-share cost implication and/or alternative funding plan for sustaining the ministry.” While the two features described above constitute a new direction for ministry *strategy* (not a ministry *program* proposal), the direction does not call for new ministry-share resources because the agencies and ministries involved currently have budgets covering the various aspects of this approach.

9. ServiceLink, Connections, and regional resourcing

ServiceLink began its work in fall 1995 with a mandate to provide mission trip and service opportunities for Canadian churches and individuals. In its recent history ServiceLink began serving U.S. churches as well, but within six months of initiating that program, the main mission agencies in Grand Rapids indicated they were able to meet such needs. Then, upon the recommendation of the Canadian Ministries Team and the Ministries Leadership Council, the Board of Trustees approved a change in ServiceLink’s mandate in September 2016: “ServiceLink will, first and primarily, be a collaborative resourcing bridge between agencies and ministries of the CRC and local Canadian churches” (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, p. 40). At about the same time, the Lilly-funded Connections project began serving four classes in Canada and eight classes in the United States, providing regionally based resourcing for congregations—ministry quite similar to the revised ministry of ServiceLink.

Now that the initial review of this pair of strategies has been completed, it has become evident that continuing with one denomination-wide initiative will be appropriate. As a result, the COD has discontinued ServiceLink as a separately named support function and is laying the groundwork for the Connections approach to ministry in all 48 classes.

In light of this action of the COD, it is important for congregations (and synod) to understand the rationale and impact on resources.

Synod, primarily through the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture, has provided the following vision for the denomination (see

Agenda for Synod 2013, pp. 351-52)—and this is evident in the COD’s action—

- Consider the concerns re losing prioritization of race relations within a broad social justice sphere.
- “The CRCNA needs to utilize a team approach”
- “The CRCNA needs to operate as a network”
- “The CRCNA needs to apply a multidisciplinary approach”

The CRC Ministry Plan includes two strategic focal points that this action addresses:

- Congregations and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church develop new ways of working together at all levels—local, regional, national, and binational—that are effective, efficient, responsive, clear, and sustainable.
- 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.

In addition, as noted earlier in this report, Synod 2016 adopted the following with regard to new ministry proposals (see *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 857-58): “That synod require that all new ministry proposals include a ministry-share cost implication and/or alternative funding plan for sustaining the ministry.” While this action to discontinue ServiceLink and to expand Connections constitutes a change in ministry *strategy* (and is not a ministry *program* proposal), the shifts proposed above neither increase nor decrease the ministry-share resources previously dedicated to ServiceLink because they will now be directed toward Connections. In addition, the various agencies and ministries currently have budgets covering various regional representatives; these positions are neither decreasing nor increasing in cost because of this program shift. The Burlington office is working with the agencies to address the service-opportunities assistance in ways similar to those provided in the Grand Rapids office.

It is recommended that synod take note of this shift in programming from the former ServiceLink function to the new Connections approach. Finally, at its February meeting the COD also received a report on the emerging plan for regions and their use for resourcing congregations. The Congregational Services group of ministries and Resonate Global Mission together have identified six geographic regions—two in Canada and four in the United States. These ministry regions are further categorized into subregions, each with one to five classes. Both ministry and agency regional employees, as well as volunteers, will increasingly work as teams in each region and subregion, collaborating to best serve congregations.

10. Other ministries and services of the CRCNA

a. Ministry Support Services

The staff of Ministry Support Services (MSS) is responsible for *The Banner*, Faith Alive Christian Resources, *Libros Desafio* (Spanish-language resources), and a number of professional services that support CRC ministries with marketing, brand management, order and subscription processing, call center, editorial services, rights and permissions management, design, web services, purchasing, and distribution. At any one time, more than 150 projects are in process, and thousands of words are being written, edited, and incorporated with photos, graphics, and other design elements for publication on paper or in pixels. The call center handles about 10,000 phone calls per year, in addition to processing online orders, emails, and live chats on various CRCNA websites.

Working with the CRC Translation Team and a network of non-English language community liaisons, the amount of document and resource translations being requested is increasing. To aid in accurate interpretation of sometimes complex concepts, where practical, MSS recommends English and other-language translations to appear side-by-side, as in the recent translations of the Church Order in Spanish and Korean (see crcna.org/SynodResources).

In the interests of consistent branding and quality presentation, MSS has worked with communications staff to create guides for Brand Standards and Editorial Style.

In addition, MSS is supporting Back to God Ministries International's move to the Grand Rapids, Michigan, office with distribution, address list management, and subscriber services.

b. *The Banner*

The Banner, the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church, currently prints and distributes 83,500 copies of its paper version in the United States and Canada. More than 3,000 people have signed up to receive the weekly Banner Update, which directs readers to new content on the Banner website (thebanner.org). Our efforts on social media also help to ensure that Banner content is available to anyone in a variety of forms.

The launch of the newly designed Banner magazine and website has gone smoothly, starting with the January 2018 issue. Appreciation has been expressed for new content, revised magazine structure, and clean design.

The Banner app is available for free download on iPhone and Android devices, and almost 1,500 people have begun using it. This app makes it even easier for people to access online content as it is posted.

We are most thankful for a huge show of support from our readers, as nearly 6,000 donors gave over \$400,000 for our annual appeal fund-raiser in 2017.

c. Faith Alive and *Libros Desafio*

Although Synod 2013 approved the dissolution of the Faith Alive Christian Resources board and noted the necessary transition

regarding critical functions of Faith Alive, MSS continues to sell and reprint resources that were already published. As those products grow older, and without new products to take their place, sales continue to decline. Sales are currently about \$1 million per year, compared to about \$3 million in 2013. Similarly, *Libros Desafío* has ceased publishing new titles but continues to sell and reprint the backlist; sales are about \$225,000 per year.

A couple of years ago, MSS introduced a special “CRC discount” whereby our churches receive a discount of 15 percent compared to what churches of other denominations pay. In addition, we launched the CRC Digital Library, which allows anyone attending a Christian Reformed congregation to access most Faith Alive titles online for free. The goal of both of these initiatives is to allow Christian Reformed churches to make full use of these titles that they helped publish.

d. The Network

Begun in 2010, the Network (crcna.org/Network) has become one of the CRC’s most-visited websites. The Network is a place where people involved in their local church can connect—with each other and with denominational staff—about the “nuts and bolts” of ministry.

Use of the site continues to increase. Over the past year, traffic has increased 30 percent. CRC members have posted thousands of blogs, discussion topics, and ministry questions. In addition, more than 2,000 ministry resources are now online.

The Network website underwent a significant redesign earlier this year. One of the key changes was to enable it to serve as a central search hub for all church resources developed by CRCNA ministries.

e. Click, Call, Chat

Ministry Support Services has played a lead role in two initiatives aimed at making it easier for churches to access denominational resources. In the first initiative, we have developed a central web interface where people can search all the church resources available from CRC ministries (instead of having to visit dozens of separate websites). Because it uses the Network’s infrastructure, it also allows churches or classes to post their own resources to share them with other churches. You can try out this central search at any time by visiting cncna.org/resources.

In the second initiative, we are changing what happens when you phone the denomination for help. In the past, we relied heavily on simply transferring calls from one department to another. Now we are giving special training to a team of people who can answer the most frequently asked questions from churches and connect them with the right resources (info, materials, people) for their situation. The goal is to provide more answers with fewer transfers. It also goes beyond phone calls—this team is fielding questions via live chat on the denomination’s website as well. Considering the wide variety of resources and services available from all the CRC ministries, there is a lot of work to be done to equip staff with the systems, training, and knowledge base they will need to help with the range of questions

that can come in. But we are making progress and are on track to promote this service more widely in the coming months.

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 2018—Business and Financial Supplement*, which will be made available to the delegates at the time synod convenes. This supplement will include financial disclosure information, agency budgets for fiscal year 2019 (July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019), and the recommended ministry-share amount for calendar year 2019. 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 Council of Delegates Supplement report later in May.

1. In fulfilling its mandate as a policy governance board, the Council of Delegates requests that synod take note that in October 2017 the COD reviewed and adopted a revised Financial Reserve Policy for the ministries of the CRCNA.
2. The Council of Delegates received updates on several facilities projects taking place at CRCNA offices. A significant renovation project at the Burlington, Ontario, offices wrapped up in early March. The renovated building will provide much-needed additional office and meeting space. The Palos Heights (Ill.) Back to God Ministries International building was sold to Trinity Christian College in December. The BTGMI programming now operates primarily from the Grand Rapids office building. Plans are under way to incorporate a new studio for media recording in the Grand Rapids facility.

D. *Christian Reformed Church Foundation*

The ministries of the Christian Reformed Church encompass the breadth of God's creation. As Christians, we are called to proclaim the gospel, to disciple believers, to raise up servant leaders, to engage in global mission, and to respond to human need through mercy and justice.

God has a plan for using the Christian Reformed Church to transform lives and communities as we seek to become a more diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries, and he has a place for us in his plan. One of the ways in which we can faithfully engage with God's plan is through our finances.

The role of the Christian Reformed Church Foundation is to help us do that by joining with other CRC members in financially supporting God's work among us.

The CRC Foundation in Canada and the United States serves the Christian Reformed Church in North America by matching visionary disciples with venture capital, helping to kick-start innovation and collaborative ministry ideas in your neighborhood, church, or classis.

The Foundation does this primarily through Ignite | Funding Ministry Innovation. Ignite allows the CRC to explore new ministry ideas and initiatives that advance God's kingdom with minimal sacrifice to current ministries.

In the past year local congregations have seen an investment of more than \$100,000 in ideas that have opened up new opportunities of ministry in their local communities.

Ignite in 2017 served local congregations in the following ways:

- Invested \$10,000 in the “Mobile Living Room” project, which involved the renovation of a bus that supports homeless persons and struggling neighbors of Awake CRC in Seattle, Washington.
- Invested \$3,000 in “Breathing Space,” a ministry to students at Michigan State University and community neighbors who need a place to reflect, breathe, and study God’s Word.
- Provided \$10,000 to Oasis Community CRC in Winter Garden, Florida, to help start a day-care program in a neighborhood of more than 30,000 unchurched neighbors.

These are just some of the initiatives supported by the CRC Foundation and Ignite. The list of ideas to advance God’s kingdom is growing—support is crucial in turning these ideas into reality. Visit crcna.org/ignite to review more of the ministry ideas funded by the CRC Foundation.

The CRC Foundation also carried out the following work:

- Created a review team for Ignite applications—donors, staff, and board members review, discuss, and disburse funding for new ministry ideas.
- Accepted and incorporated RACOM (Back to God Hour Advancement Board) into the CRCNA Foundation.
- Challenged CRC members to match a \$25,000 gift for a Peace Process in Wukari, Nigeria. Gifts exceeded \$25,000. The resulting fund is now a Global Peace Fund enabling the CRC to engage in peace talks in other parts of the world.

The Christian Reformed Church Foundation in the United States and Canada serves the Christian Reformed Church in North America by funding innovative and collaborative projects led by CRC churches, agencies, and ministries. Over the past twenty years, the CRC Foundation in both the United States and Canada has worked to equip and advance more than eighty-five start-up ministry projects through more than \$9 million in investments. Many of these ministries have become long-term ministries, such as the Timothy Leadership Training Institute, Partners Worldwide, the Network, and several church plants and leadership initiatives.

The CRC Foundation works in concert with the Council of Delegates. It is legally established in the United States and Canada.

III. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Paul R. De Vries, chair of the Council of Delegates; Dr. Steven R. Timmermans, executive director; and members of the executive staff as needed when matters pertaining to the Council of Delegates are discussed.

B. That synod grant all requests for privilege of the floor by the COD, agencies, educational institutions, standing committees, and study committees of synod contained within the reports to Synod 2018.

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 2018.

D. That synod designate Faith Community CRC, Wyoming, Michigan, as the convening church of Synod 2019, meeting on the campus of Calvin College (II, A, 1).

E. That synod approve the interim appointments made by the COD for synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies (II, A, 3).

F. That synod adopt the Regional Pastor Proposal Report (Appendix A) and the following revisions to Church Order Article 42 and its Supplement (changes indicated by strikethrough and italics) (II, A, 9):

Article 42-a

a. The classis shall be responsible for appointing persons to provide counsel ~~and advice~~ to churches *and to pastors*. The classis shall appoint church visitors to visit each church in classis on a yearly basis. The classis shall appoint classical counselors to provide advice to any church in the process of calling a minister of the Word. *The classis shall appoint regional pastors to support ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors.*

Proposed Article 42-d

d. *The regional pastor's task is to support and encourage all who are pastors and to ensure that newly ordained pastors in the CRC are engaged in a mentoring relationship.*

Proposed Supplement, Article 42-d

1. *Regional pastors shall be appointed for a specified term of service.*
2. *Regional pastors shall be appointed in collaboration with Pastor Church Resources.*
3. *Regional pastor expenses shall ordinarily be borne by the classis.*
4. *Annual written reports of the regional pastor shall be provided to classis and copied to Pastor Church Resources.*
5. *General oversight of the regional pastor program, including development of resource materials and training, will be coordinated by Pastor Church Resources.*
6. *Regional pastors assist newly ordained pastors in the selection of a mentor, according to the decision of synod:*
 - a. *All candidates for ministry will upon ordination engage with a mentor. Each newly ordained minister will be served by a mentor for the first five years of ministry.*
 - b. *For the first five years of ministry of each person who enters the Christian Reformed Church ministry by way of Church Order Articles 7, 8, or 14-e, engaging with a mentor will be required.*
 - c. *A mentor will be provided for any minister of the Word who desires a mentor.*

(Adapted from Acts of Synod 1982, p. 78)

G. That synod thank Rev. Henry Kranenburg and Mr. Joel Vos for their service to the Judicial Code Committee (II, A, 10).

H. That synod address the following with regard to the Classis Renewal Group Report found in Appendix B (II, A, 12):

1. That synod take note of the establishment of a new Classis Renewal Advisory Team coordinated by the classis renewal consultant and composed of staff and volunteers, who will do the following:
 - a. Continue to explore and address the challenges and opportunities facing classes in an ongoing and adaptive way.
 - b. Assist classes in developing and implementing a ministry plan (as described in Church Order Article 75).
2. That synod request all classes to develop and share their ministry plan (cf. Church Order Art. 75, adopted by Synod 2015) with the Classis Renewal Advisory Team so that the team can provide the COD with a summary of the plans (to be forwarded to Synod 2020).
3. That synod adopt the following revision to Church Order Article 39 (new text indicated by *italics*):

Article 39

A classis is a group of Christian Reformed churches that come together to seek, discern, and submit to God's will; offer one another mutual support and accountability; find ways to live out a collective calling within their region; and allow for a healthy and sustained connection to the wider denomination. A classis shall consist of a group of neighboring churches. The organization of a new classis and the redistricting of classes require the approval of synod.

Note: The COD judges that the above changes are not substantive and are therefore recommended for adoption by Synod 2018.

I. That synod address the following with regard to the Prioritization and Evaluation Report found in Appendix C (II, B, 4):

1. That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to continue to be attentive to possibilities for combining program functions and infrastructure within and beyond the denomination and, in so doing, to continue working toward optimum ministry programming for our denominational infrastructure.
2. That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to continue pursuing opportunities for rearrangement (see Appendix C, section IV, C, 3), particularly as opportunities are presented in upper-level positions and by way of retirements.
3. That synod take note that the COD instructed the executive director to find ways to significantly curtail physical plant costs in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by exploring alternatives such as (1) alternative energy sources, (2) renting existing space to other nonprofit organizations, (3) encouraging remote/home office work, (4) significant reductions of

building square footage, and the like. The executive director will provide a report and recommendations to the COD (for eventual presentation to synod) in October 2018.

4. That synod receive the Prioritization and Evaluation Report in Appendix C as fulfillment of Synod 2016's instruction concerning prioritization and evaluation.

J. That synod receive the List of Resources re Church Renewal, Church Planting, and Evangelism Training Report in Appendix D as fulfillment of Synod 2017's request for such a list (II, B, 7, a).

K. That synod take note of the shift in programming from the former ServiceLink function to the new Connections approach as described in section II, B, 9 of this report.

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

Council of Delegates of the
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Paul R. De Vries, chair

Appendix A

Regional Pastor Proposal for Inclusion in the Church Order

I. Background

Regional pastors have been a part of the Christian Reformed Church landscape since 1982. What began as a five-year pilot project has become a familiar part of our ecclesiastical practice. Initially a report from the Healing Ministries Committee proposed a strategy for dealing with concerns about significant strain and stress in the relationships between pastors and congregations (see *Acts of Synod 1982*, pp. 75-78, 581-90). The intent was to provide assistance both in the healing necessary after painful circumstances and separations, and in preventive efforts. Caring for pastors was part of the initial DNA of the Pastor-Church Relations office (PCR, now named Pastor Church Resources to reflect recent developments in its ministry), and the care of pastors and congregations continues to be a core element of this ministry. Certain dimensions of caring for pastors have developed and grown over the years, and PCR now also focuses on vocational assessments, the promotion of peer groups, continuing education and vocational formation, and support for the ecclesiastical organization (*classis*) within which pastors and congregations function.

The initial strategy included the regional pastor initiative, a mentoring program for newly ordained CRC ministers of the Word, and pastor-relations committees in local congregations. To lead these efforts, a full-time director, Rev. Louis Tamminga, was appointed. Today, thirty-five years later, two parts of the initial strategy continue to exist, serving well in the ongoing challenge of supporting, strengthening, and sharpening the care of pastors. The need for attending to the well-being of pastors is as important today as when the mentoring program and regional pastoring began.

Shifts in emphasis have taken place along the way. A key shift to consider is the process by which regional pastors are chosen and appointed. Initially the director of Pastor-Church Relations was “to select, supervise, and train regional pastors and mentors” (*Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 584) Already in 1983, however, two overtures expressed concern about this centralized approach to the appointment process. Synod did not adopt those overtures, noting that Synod 1982 had instructed PCR “to work as closely as possible with classes and their church visitors” (*Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 78), but the expressed concerns prompted clarifications. The current practice is as follows: classical interim committees nominate regional pastors, and the Pastor Church Resources office appoints. The process for mentors is similar: newly ordained CRC pastors are asked to take the initiative in finding a mentor and are welcome to seek assistance in this search from the regional pastor. Nominated mentors are then appointed by PCR. The process between classes and PCR has been collaborative.

In general, this process has worked well, but it has been increasingly noted that the act of appointing implies a line of accountability. Practically speaking, it is difficult to hold appointees accountable from great distances without firsthand experience and knowledge. Today, with the momentum away from centralization and toward a more regional “ownership” of ministry, the time seems right to address concerns about accountability and to articulate and maintain the connection between the Pastor Church Resources office and the important roles of regional pastors and mentors. This proposal represents a deliberate attempt to keep *appointment* and *accountability* close to each other within the classis, while at the same time maintaining a vital and necessary connection with PCR. The general oversight, resourcing, and training provided by PCR serves the purpose of cohesiveness and consistency in ministry support throughout the denomination.

The COD recommends that the appointment of regional pastors be made by the classis in collaboration with the Pastor Church Resources office. This recommendation shifts the appointing and accountability to the classis but maintains the collaborative relationship between the classis and PCR. The recommendation also includes a specified term of service for regional pastors in order to provide a time for evaluation. This is intended for the benefit of the regional pastor as well as the benefit of the classis and all of its pastors.

The recommendation also ties accountability in the mentoring program directly to the regional pastor. This is consistent with the movement toward keeping the appointment of mentors and the accountability of mentor/mentee relationships close together. Resource materials will continue to be provided by the Pastor Church Resources office in the form of encouraging best practices and a training tool, *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring*, available as a free download from the PCR website or in free hard copies (not including the cost of shipping).

For thirty-five years regional pastors and the mentoring program have been a vital part of the way in which we care for pastors and strive positively for their flourishing. We believe that including regional pastors and mentors within the provisions of the Church Order is a way to acknowledge the reality of these roles and to encourage their continuing service.

II. Recommendation

That synod adopt the following revisions to Church Order Article 42 and its Supplement (changes indicated by strikethrough and *italics*):

Article 42-a

a. The classis shall be responsible for appointing persons to provide counsel ~~and advice~~ to churches *and to pastors*. The classis shall appoint church visitors to visit each church in classis on a yearly basis. The classis shall appoint classical counselors to provide advice to any church in the process of calling a minister of the Word. *The classis shall appoint regional pastors to support ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors.*

Proposed Article 42-d

d. *The regional pastor's task is to support and encourage all who are pastors and to ensure that newly ordained pastors in the CRC are engaged in a mentoring relationship.*

Proposed Supplement, Article 42-d

1. *Regional pastors shall be appointed for a specified term of service.*
2. *Regional pastors shall be appointed in collaboration with Pastor Church Resources.*
3. *Regional pastor expenses shall ordinarily be borne by the classis.*
4. *Annual written reports of the regional pastor shall be provided to classis and copied to Pastor Church Resources.*
5. *General oversight of the regional pastor program, including development of resource materials and training, will be coordinated by Pastor Church Resources.*
6. *Regional pastors assist newly ordained pastors in the selection of a mentor, according to the decision of synod:*
 - a. *All candidates for ministry will upon ordination engage with a mentor. Each newly ordained minister will be served by a mentor for the first five years of ministry.*
 - b. *For the first five years of ministry of each person who enters the Christian Reformed Church ministry by way of Church Order Articles 7, 8, or 14-e, engaging with a mentor will be required.*
 - c. *A mentor will be provided for any minister of the Word who desires a mentor.*

(Adapted from Acts of Synod 1982, p. 78)

Appendix B Classis Renewal Group Report

I. Mandate

The Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture presented its final report to Synod 2015, including the following, which resulted in the appointment and work of the Classis Renewal Group:

6. That synod instruct the executive director to appoint and resource a working group (Classis Renewal Group) to build on the work of the existing Classis Renewal Ministry Team, including an 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.

7. That synod instruct the executive director to present an interim report on the Classis Renewal Group to synod's authorized governing board in May 2016 and a final report to the same group in 2017.

(Acts of Synod 2015, p. 680)

Because of the hire of a classis renewal consultant in 2016 and the desire to fully engage in the work that was under way of the Classis Renewal Group, a one-year extension for reporting was granted by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA in February 2017. The group here presents its final summary and recommendations for consideration by the Council of Delegates and subsequently synod.

II. Historical context

Classis renewal is not new to the CRC. The history of classis renewal is outlined within many documents accessible for reference via a link on the CRC classis webpage (crcna.org/classis). Following is a brief and incomplete sketch of that history, but it provides a collated and accessible entry point into the context in which the Classis Renewal Group (CRG) has done its work:

- 1992: Christian Reformed Home Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission) and CRWRC (now World Renew) officially approve the formation of a task force on “The Role of Classis in the 21st Century.” Its mandate is to support the development of vibrant classes to enhance local church growth and community ministry—and includes development of papers such as Craig Van Gelder’s “Looking Back—Seeing Forward.”
- 1995, 2000, and 2002: National conferences are held on enhancing the role of classis through strategic planning and support. The task force is named the Classical Renewal Ministry Team (CRMT).
 - Nine benchmarks of a healthy classis are developed.
 - Conferences on developing a strong classis are held regionally.
 - Classical ministry teams replace classical home missions committees and diaconal committees/conferences.
 - Staff positions within classis are established by a few classes.
 - Many classes incorporate deacons into their meetings.
- CRMT is staffed with a classis coach on a part-time basis, pioneered by Rev. Al Hoksbergen and Rev. Thea Leunk.
- 2010: The classis coach role is incorporated into the CRCNA Network.
- 2014: Classis coach Karl Westerhof is incorporated into the Better Together team of Pastor-Church Relations (now Pastor Church Resources). The role is recognized as vital to supporting the ongoing development of the role of classis in ministry.
- 2015: Significant changes in the Church Order are adopted, formally incorporating deacons into the assemblies of the church. Church Order Article 75 calls for classes to have a formal ministry plan, establishing a ministry expectation for classes. The Classis Renewal Group is formed, recognizing the importance of developing clarity regarding the role of classes and supporting classes as a vital part of a healthy denomination.

- 2016: Rev. Al Postma is hired on a full-time basis as classis renewal consultant to support classes and to recommend next steps in creating a healthy denominational structure with a vibrant middle judicatory.
- 2017: The Board of Trustees of the CRCNA receives an interim report from the Classis Renewal Group and approves a one-year extension for the final report and recommendations.

III. Nature, scope, and purpose of classis

One of the tensions in understanding the purpose of classis is whether it is a gathering of churches or a group of churches. Historically a classis has often been understood to be a deliberative assembly (i.e., a gathering). Today, however, the general understanding and expectation of classis is much broader. The word *classis* has a variety of meanings.

This lack of clarity can bring about frustration as expectations go unmet or even unrecognized. However, in the past year the classis renewal consultant listened to classis leaders around the denomination and began to sense the following four basic expectations or desires by classis leaders as they expressed their understanding of the nature, scope, and purpose of classis.

A. *A place of discerning the Spirit in community*

The church belongs to Christ, and Christ's body always exists in a plurality. Just as the walk of faith is not a solo endeavor for individual Christians, congregations need one another in order to better discern and follow the Spirit's leading. When delegates gather, they do so not as representatives of their own local congregations; instead, they are sent to discern God's will with others on behalf of their church community. Trusting in the Spirit's leading, a church must be willing both to submit to the discernment of the wider body and to speak into the ministry life of other congregations. Classis, as a deliberative assembly, is a community in which this may happen.

B. *A network of support and accountability*

We are created to live in relationships, and church leaders need a setting in which they are asked not only to come to a decision or to achieve something together but also to seek out a community of churches with which to share joys and struggles, to be encouraged and challenged. As such, there is a desire for spending time together that goes beyond making decisions and instead allows for networking, mutual support, and being equipped for ministry.

C. *Living into a collective calling*

At some point, churches that are in healthy relationships with one another will begin to ask how God might be calling them to serve their city or region together. There are ministry opportunities that go beyond the ability of any one church. Groups of churches can have joint prayer initiatives, fund a campus pastor, provide grant funding for a church plant, or start a nonprofit to address economic needs. Some of these will be classis-wide, while others may be in one major urban center of a large, geographically spread classis. Being in relationship often opens our eyes to ways that God may be calling churches to work together in some way.

D. *A connection into the wider church*

For many people, the main experience of being part of the broader family of the Christian Reformed Church is by way of the local classis. The classis

is the context in which churches participate in their denomination, as in sending delegates to the annual synod, which gathers delegates from both Canada and the United States. The ongoing work of classis also connects the breadth of North American ministry into congregations' own regional and local contexts, providing connectivity for meaningful relationships with denominational ministries.

It is our belief that healthy classes are ones that are living into each of these four core purposes in creative, adaptive, and intentional ways. These purposes also seem to be foundational in the sense that however a group of churches is organized (by geographical proximity or by affinity), these four purposes would need to be addressed in any classical ministry structure.

IV. Exploring current challenges for renewal

In listening to classis leaders, the CRG has discerned the following common themes as it relates to the health and renewal of classis.

A. Desire for renewal

We are hearing the expression of a deep desire to recapture the value of connecting and working together regionally. Sometimes this desire is expressed in disappointment that classis is not more effective. However, there is an opportunity to support catalyzing this disappointment into creative and committed energy for renewal.

B. Capacity

Rarely is classis someone's primary priority. While there may be some expectation that ministers serve in various classis roles, the serving tends to be seen as in a volunteer capacity outside of their core pastoral ministry. If a position is paid, remuneration usually consists of a small honorarium. Turnover is high both in the short term (new delegates at every classis meeting; committees with limited terms) and in the long term (pastors moving in and out of the classis), resulting in a lack of sustained visionary leadership. Because church conflicts and difficulties are addressed by the classis, the executive team and/or the agenda for meetings can easily become consumed by such urgent matters. Classis leaders, unsurprisingly, often feel tapped out just by keeping the system running. Some classes have found it helpful to hire a staff person, but many express that they do not have funding for such a position or they do not have a clear expectation of what a staff person would do.

C. Leadership development

Classis is led and managed mainly by pastors. Pastors tend to be the most known and visibly available to fill committee vacancies, so they are the first to be asked. Few classes have strategies in place to intentionally raise up leaders for regional ministry from within the constituent churches.

D. Desire for connecting with others

Many people serving in classis do so in isolation. There is a need to facilitate connections with others serving in similar ways. Some recent examples of connections that have been appreciated are the following (in 2017):

- A gathering of Canadian classis leaders, including the stated clerk and another leader from each classis. Two such gatherings have taken place already.

- A gathering of U.S. stated clerks.
- A classis leaders summit, including representatives from Classes Atlantic Northeast, Heartland, Northern Michigan, and Pacific Northwest.
- A regional pastors biennial gathering (happening for many years).

E. Need for support

Denominational resourcing for classis leaders—such as coaching, consultation, and convening groups for sharing learning—is an important and valued support that encourages classis leaders to do their work well. There can be a sense among classis leaders that they are given a task and are then left on their own to do it. We have been made aware, though, that there is a deep appreciation for direct support that builds their capacity to do what they have been asked to do. Some of the support comes through the work of Rev. Al Postma, the classis renewal consultant, by way of simple cross-pollination and facilitation of the sharing of ideas among classes.

F. Diversity and meaningful participation

Many people indicate that classis is not a place where they can participate in a meaningful way. A sense of exclusion is often expressed in connection with one's ethnicity, gender, age, and/or officebearer designation. This is experienced with respect to having a voice in classis meetings as well as finding inclusion within the organizational structures and procedures. Classes seeking renewal must be intentional with respect to hospitality for diversity.

G. Classis as geographical or affinity based

Today our society leans toward connecting with people who are similar to us. Being a broad-based geographic community that extends across cultural lines can pose challenges. There seems to be a growing desire for churches and church leaders to network with others who share a similar organizational style or share similar values, and yet we recognize that it is an important discipline for the church to learn to be in community with a diversity of people. As Canada and the United States grow increasingly diverse, the urgency for cultural hospitality is greater than ever.

H. Strategic planning

While many classes currently have vision/mission statements, few have an actual strategic plan for effectively bringing their vision to life in both the short term and the long term. Classis leaders already know many of the challenges they are facing, but a strategy to address them is often either lacking or unarticulated. When a classis is revisioning, the core structures (e.g., classical rules for procedure) are easily left untouched. Without organizational alignment the classis can easily fall back into default modes of behavior. Further, there often seems to be a lack of sustained visionary leadership in the implementation stage, perhaps due to turnover or to burnout from the expectation that those who are best at developing a vision will also be the most effective implementers.

I. Accountability

Classes can make decisions, but follow-through is often lacking. There may be many reasons for this (e.g., capacity, energy, funding, etc.), but we have noticed that there are very few accountability structures in place for classis other than in disciplinary cases. When Synod 2015, made up of delegates from each of the classes, decided, for example, that all classes adopt a

ministry plan, no specific plan was developed to ensure that this would happen. Lack of accountability can cause even the most well-intentioned classes to remain in default behaviors. To assist with developing accountability, one of our recommendations proposes that all classes share with one another, by way of a new Classis Renewal Advisory Team, how they have been living into the commitment to establish a ministry plan.

V. Exploring and addressing Church Order

The Church Order is less limiting to the effectiveness of classis or to the creative space for renewal than many may assume. The many structures and visions for ministry in the classes are not uniform across the denomination, yet all of their variety fits within the Church Order. Some classes meet over the course of one day, with the farthest-away delegates driving less than an hour to reach the meeting. Others schedule multiday meetings that involve lodging and flights for delegates and, understandably, significant expense. Some classes see their meetings as an opportunity to rekindle friendships, spending intentional time encouraging and challenging one another. Some classes are appreciated for their efficiency and business-oriented administrative proceedings, allowing for the least amount of disruption in delegates' schedules. These differences merely scratch the surface on the variance we find across the CRC; yet, again, they all fit within the Church Order.

In some cases, classis health may be found in places that are living into the current Church Order in fresh and creative ways (perhaps without realizing it). For example, some of the vibrant and thriving classes may be ones that have taken seriously the requirement of Church Order Article 41 to dedicate sufficient time for sharing advice and/or learning more about specific ministry issues. Or perhaps classes that no longer make use of church visitors might still live deeply into the calling of Church Order Article 42 by having people dedicated to providing counsel and advice to churches in a variety of ways.

One thing the Classis Renewal Group notes that is lacking in the Church Order is an articulated purpose of classis. Describing the overall goal of churches as being in community with one another may assist the process of developing a vision for ministry and a subsequent strategic plan. We recommend adopting a revision to Church Order Article 39 to more specifically name the varying activities of classis as outlined in the "nature, scope, and purpose" section above. The proposed text for Article 39 follows (new text indicated by *italics*):

Article 39

A classis is a group of Christian Reformed churches that come together to seek, discern, and submit to God's will; offer one another mutual support and accountability; find ways to live out a collective calling within their region; and allow for a healthy and sustained connection to the wider denomination. A classis shall consist of a group of neighboring churches. The organization of a new classis and the redistricting of classes require the approval of synod.

VI. Continuing the work

Given both the need and the long-standing support for classis renewal within the CRC, we recommend that the current Classis Renewal Group be

dismissed and that a new advisory team be established under the leadership of the classis renewal consultant. This new team, including both denominational staff and people involved in their own local classes, will be tasked with continuing the conversation about the role of classis in the life of the church today and will ensure that there is ongoing support for the increased health and effectiveness of classes.

Overall, our work in classis renewal is adaptive ministry. We look forward to continued work with classes as they take a closer look at how they may strategically address their ministry needs today.

VII. Recommendations

A. That the COD take note of and inform synod of the establishment of a new Classis Renewal Advisory Team coordinated by the classis renewal consultant and composed of staff and volunteers, who will do the following:

1. Continue to explore and address the challenges and opportunities facing classes in an ongoing and adaptive way.
2. Assist classes in developing and implementing a ministry plan (as described in Church Order Article 75).

B. That synod request all classes to develop and share their ministry plan (cf. Church Order Art. 75, adopted by Synod 2015) with the Classis Renewal Advisory Team so that the team can provide the COD with a summary of the plans (to be forwarded to Synod 2020).

C. That synod adopt the following revision to Church Order Article 39 (new text indicated by *italics*):

Article 39

A classis is a group of Christian Reformed churches that come together to seek, discern, and submit to God's will; offer one another mutual support and accountability; find ways to live out a collective calling within their region; and allow for a healthy and sustained connection to the wider denomination. A classis shall consist of a group of neighboring churches. The organization of a new classis and the redistricting of classes require the approval of synod.

Note: The COD judges that the above changes are not substantive and are therefore recommended for adoption by Synod 2018.

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Appendix C Response to Synod's Evaluation and Prioritization Assignment

I. Introduction

Synod 2016 instructed the CRCNA Board of Trustees (BOT)

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

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

Grounds:

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

(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 858)

II. Report to Synod 2017

A. *Chart of description, establishment, and ministry-share allocation*

The Board of Trustees report to Synod 2017 responded to synod's request in the form of charts and reporting on all of the CRC ministries, their history, and their funding. The "CRC Ministry, History, and Funding Overview Grid" (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, Appendix E, pp. 137-38) provided the percentages of ministry shares allocated to CRC ministries, based on 2015-16 distributions. Summaries are provided below (updates based on 2016-17 distributions are provided in parentheses):

- Three agencies received the greatest proportion of ministry shares: Christian Reformed Home Missions, 16.3% (16.3%); Back to God Ministries International, 15.3% (15.3%); Christian Reformed World Missions, 21.0% (21.0%).
- The two educational institutions received the following: Calvin College, 11.9% (12.0%); Calvin Theological Seminary, 12.3% (12.3%).
- Five ministries received 2-4% of ministry shares: Aboriginal Ministries (Canada), 2.3% (2.5%); Faith Formation Ministries, 2.1% (2.8%); Pastor Church Resources, 3.9% (3.1%); Race Relations, 2.4% (1.8%); Social Justice and Hunger Action, 2.6% (3.1%).
- The remaining ministries received less than 2% of ministry shares: *The Banner*, 1.9% (1.6%); Candidacy Committee, 1.0% (1.0%); Centre for Public Dialogue, 1.0% (0.6%); Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, 1.0% (1.2%); Disability Concerns, 0.8% (1.0%); Faith Alive, 0.3% (0.6%); Safe Church Ministry, 0.9% (0.8%); ServiceLink, 0.4% (0.6%); World Literature, 1.3% (0.6%); Worship Ministries, 1.5% (1.7%).
- Timothy Leadership Training Institute and World Renew received no ministry-share support.

Also included in the “Overview Grid” was the degree to which each ministry relied on ministry shares in 2015-16 (updates for 2016-17 are in parentheses).

- Ten ministries received more than 75% of their funding from ministry shares: Aboriginal Ministries (Canada): 100.0% (100%); Candidacy Committee, 100% (99.8%); Centre for Public Dialogue, 100% (100%); Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, 79.9% (84.6%); Faith Formation Ministries, 92.3% (90.3%); Pastor Church Resources, 92.1% (91.6%); Race Relations, 86.6% (80.9%); Safe Church Ministry, 83% (84.7%); Social Justice and Hunger Action, 84.5% (86.5%); Worship Ministries, 83.9% (84.2%).
- Nine ministries received 25% to 75% of their support from ministry shares: Back to God Ministries International, 32.6% (36.0%); *The Banner*, 33.8% (26.3%); Calvin Theological Seminary, 32.0% (32.3%); Disability Concerns, 63.5% (68.5%); Christian Reformed Home Missions, 48.9% (43%); ServiceLink, 42.1% (96.6); Christian Reformed World Missions, 28.8% (29.0%); World Literature, 49.3% (33.2%).
- Faith Alive received only 4.0% (8.8%) of their revenue from ministry shares, and Calvin College received only 1.9% (1.7%).

Not included in the list are denominational operations and synodical services, since the instruction from synod was to “produce a detailed chart of all existing *ministries*” (emphasis added). Yet no look at the financial resourcing of CRC efforts is complete without mention of the financial support that the denominational office and synodical services require. Combined, these units received 94.9% of their operating expenses from ministry shares.

The *Agenda for Synod 2017* also included descriptions and historical information for each ministry (Appendix F, pp. 138-66).

B. Goals for each agency and ministry

The BOT report to Synod 2017 also included a “Program Evaluation Overview” listing the key goals for each CRC agency, institution, and ministry (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, Appendix G, pp. 167-79). Presented in alignment with the five ministry priorities of Our Calling, the goals of many of the ministries appear in multiple calling areas, showing the breadth of ministry activity in each ministry priority: Faith Formation, Global Mission, Gospel Proclamation and Worship, Mercy and Justice, and Servant Leadership. Further, as mentioned in the report to synod, the various ministry goals also contribute directly or indirectly to the goals of the Ministry Plan: *Our Journey 2020*.

III. Results from inputs

The task given by Synod 2016 included instruction “to seek input from churches and classes in the prioritization and evaluation” of the CRC’s ministries. We focused on the representatives of churches and classes delegated to Synod 2017, asking all delegates to complete a survey before arriving at synod, and to respond again after discussing initial results in table groups during Synod 2017.

A. Pre-synod input

Before synod, we sent an electronic survey to the delegates and advisers to Synod 2017. Respondents included 126 classis delegates, six young adult representatives, two women advisers, and one ethnic adviser.

- 29% of the respondents were from Canada; 71% were from the United States.
- 44% indicated that they live in a suburban area; 32%, in a rural area; 24%, in an urban area. This pattern was similar among delegates from both Canada and the United States.
- 76% were male; 24% were female. This pattern was similar among delegates from both nations.
- 64% were over age 50; 7% were age 30 or younger; 39% were in between. This pattern was similar among delegates from both nations.
- 86% identified as Caucasian; 4%, as Hispanic or Latino; 4%, as East Asian or Asian; 1.5%, Black; 4.5%, as another ethnic group. Delegates from the United States (17% non-Caucasian) reflected more diversity than those from Canada (5% non-Caucasian).

The survey was divided into five sections, each of which focused on one of the five ministry priorities. Respondents were asked to indicate their evaluation (from 1 = *no value*, to 5 = *great value*) of the role provided by each ministry in each section. The broad-scale results are provided below; some of the analyses rely on data available elsewhere (e.g., results by age groupings).

1. Faith Formation

	1 = No Value (n)	2 = Little Value (n)	3 = Some Value (n)	4 = Good Value (n)	5 = Great Value (n)	Total n	Average
1. Back to God Ministries International: Ensure that speakers of ten major world languages will have biblical and Reformed discipleship content, accessible by means of a variety of media distribution systems.	1.49% (2)	4.48% (6)	11.94% (16)	41.04% (55)	41.04% (55)	134	4.16
2. <i>The Banner</i> : Help readers find fresh awareness by providing tools as they seek, learn, worship, and serve as Reformed Christians in contemporary society.	5.26% (7)	9.77% (13)	29.32% (39)	44.36% (59)	11.28% (15)	133	3.47
3. Calvin College: Help students learn that Christian faith increases when grounded in biblical, theological, and historical knowledge; is strengthened by historic spiritual practices; and finds purpose in acts of justice, mercy, and love.	1.50% (2)	5.26% (7)	13.53% (18)	45.11% (60)	34.59% (46)	133	4.06
4. Chaplaincy and Care Ministry: Extend the ministry of Christ in places where chaplains provide ministry beyond the boundaries of the church.	0.00% (0)	5.97% (8)	15.67% (21)	45.52% (61)	32.84% (44)	134	4.05
5. Disability Concerns: Ensure the faith formation of persons with disabilities, through support of the work of Friendship Ministries.	0.75% (1)	6.02% (8)	20.30% (27)	47.37% (63)	25.56% (34)	133	3.91

6. Faith Formation Ministries: Strengthen and support congregational leaders with vocabulary, resources, creative steps, and implementation ideas so that their entire spectrum of faith formation culture, practices, and programs is enhanced.	0.00% (0)	8.27% (11)	20.30% (27)	35.34% (47)	36.09% (48)	133	3.99
7. Missions Agency: Enable congregations and ministries to actively make disciples who live in the way of Jesus by increasing the number of diverse, locally rooted, and globally connected congregations and ministries.	1.50% (2)	5.26% (7)	9.77% (13)	36.09% (48)	47.37% (63)	133	4.23
8. Pastor Church Resources: Support congregations and their leaders by providing direct consultation during times of transition or crisis, assistance in pastor-search processes, and seminars and training for church health.	2.26% (3)	6.02% (8)	18.80% (25)	45.86% (61)	27.07% (36)	133	3.89
9. Safe Church Ministry: Equip ministry leaders so that children and youth are included in an intentional circle of God's grace and love, providing them a safe place in which to grow in faith.	1.50% (2)	9.77% (13)	25.56% (34)	31.58% (42)	31.58% (42)	133	3.82
10. Aboriginal Ministries (Canada): Further the faith formation of Indigenous individuals and groups by making discipleship and faith formation materials available in culturally relevant resources.	6.82% (6)	9.09% (8)	28.41% (25)	34.09% (30)	21.59% (19)	88	3.55
11. Office of Social Justice and Centre for Public Dialogue: Help CRC members and congregations develop a deeper understanding of justice as an integral part of our faith walk, and respond to God's call to let justice flow like a river.	6.02% (8)	13.53% (18)	30.83% (41)	26.32% (35)	23.31% (31)	133	3.47

Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) is a newcomer, having begun its work as a pilot project in 2013. Yet the survey results seem to suggest that congregations are finding FFM's efforts helpful, with over 90% finding *some*, *good*, or *great value* in FFM's support to congregations. A quick glance at the percentages might lead one to surmise that the ministries least valued are those for which less than half of respondents selected *good value* or *great value*—as in 49.63% for the *Office of Social Justice* and the *Centre for Public Dialogue*. However, we note that among respondents up to 30 years of age, 66% found these ministries to be of *good value* or *great value*.

Calvin College received a mean score of 4.16 from delegates from the United States and 3.82 from those from Canada. The pattern is flipped relative to (1) *The Banner*, for which delegates from Canada contributed to a mean score of 3.69 compared to a mean score of 3.37 from the United States; (2) *Chaplaincy and Care Ministry*, with a mean score of 4.28 from Canada compared to 3.96 from the United States; (3) *Faith Formation Ministries*, with a mean score of 4.26 from Canada and 3.88 from the United States; and (4)

Safe Church Ministry, with a mean score of 4.08 from Canada and 3.71 from the United States. (The national differences in responses for *Calvin College* and *The Banner* were similar in the Servant Leadership section.)

In the Faith Formation section of the survey, the two nationally based offices of *Centre for Public Dialogue* and *Office of Social Justice* were paired together. In this grouping, the results from Canadian delegates yielded a mean score of 3.74 compared to 3.36 from United States delegates. (Similar national differences were evident when the two were paired in the Gospel Proclamation and Worship section.)

2. Global Mission

	1 = No Value (n)	2 = Little Value (n)	3 = Some Value (n)	4 = Good Value (n)	5 = Great Value (n)	Total n	Average
1. Aboriginal Ministries (Canada): Share the gospel contextually in Canadian Indigenous communities and cultures, fostering awareness of the linkages between culture and Christian faith.	4.65% (4)	10.47% (9)	30.23% (26)	30.23% (26)	24.42% (21)	86	3.59
2. Back to God Ministries International: Help speakers of ten major world languages come to know Jesus Christ and grow in following him, so that churches will be strengthened.	2.26% (3)	3.76% (5)	12.03% (16)	39.85% (53)	42.11% (56)	133	4.16
3. Mission Agency: Seek to increase the number of diverse, locally rooted, and globally connected congregations and ministries actively making disciples who live in the way of Jesus.	0.00% (0)	3.76% (5)	14.29% (19)	39.10% (52)	42.86% (57)	133	4.21

For *Back to God Ministries International* (BTGMI) and *Resonate Global Mission* (the new mission agency name approved after this survey was implemented), more than 80% of respondents provided ratings of *good value* or *great value*. Moreover, these strong endorsements are evident across all age groups. For *BTGMI*, 90% of respondents up to age 30 and from ages 41-50 selected *good value* or *great value*, with the other groups rating it nearly as high. For *Resonate Global Mission*, 90% of respondents up to age 30 and from ages 31-40 selected *good value* or *great value*. For these ministries, there was little difference between the responses of Canadian and U.S. delegates.

3. Gospel Proclamation and Worship

	1 = No Value (n)	2 = Little Value (n)	3 = Some Value (n)	4 = Good Value (n)	5 = Great Value (n)	Total n	Average
1. Aboriginal Ministries (Canada): Establish safe communities for multicultural learning and worshiping that express and empower holistic (spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical) followers of Christ.	7.14% (6)	13.10% (11)	29.76% (25)	29.76% (25)	20.24% (17)	84	3.43
2. Calvin Theological Seminary: Prepare pastors for ordination in the CRCNA and, through the Center for Excellence in Preaching, serve pastors with multifaceted resources to cultivate and support their preaching competencies.	0.75% (1)	1.49% (2)	9.70% (13)	32.09% (43)	55.97% (75)	134	4.41
3. Chaplaincy and Care Ministry: Assist CRCNA chaplains in providing spiritual and emotional care in contextually appropriate ways to groups they serve (at military bases, hospitals, etc.).	0.00% (0)	5.97% (8)	20.90% (28)	47.01% (63)	26.12% (35)	134	3.93
4. Office of Social Justice and Centre for Public Dialogue: Assist worship leaders in planning worship and sermons with content that reinforces our Christian identity as peacemakers, justice seekers, and kingdom builders.	7.58% (10)	15.15% (20)	31.82% (42)	27.27% (36)	18.18% (24)	132	3.33
5. Worship Ministries: Provide networks of mutual learning among worship leaders, other organizations, and ecumenical relationships; and equip CRC ministry leaders to reflect and embrace resources and contexts important for worship.	3.03% (4)	7.58% (10)	22.73% (30)	50.00% (66)	16.67% (22)	132	3.70

From the selections of *good value* and *great value* in this section, it is clear that *Calvin Theological Seminary* provides a leading role in preparing pastors for gospel proclamation and worship, with 88% of respondents selecting these ratings. Nearly 75% also selected these ratings when considering *Chaplaincy and Care Ministry*, and two-thirds did the same for *Worship Ministries* (for which the mean score from Canadian delegates was 4.03 and from U.S. delegates was 3.56). While an overall 50% or less described *Aboriginal Ministries*, the *Office of Social Justice*, and the *Centre for Public Dialogue* with these two ratings, more than 75% of respondents up to age 30 did so.

4. Mercy and Justice

	1 = No Value (n)	2 = Little Value (n)	3 = Some Value (n)	4 = Good Value (n)	5 = Great Value (n)	Total n	Average
1. Aboriginal Ministries (Canada): Give voice in urban Aboriginal communities to biblically informed positions expressing support for Indigenous justice.	4.88% (4)	9.76% (8)	28.05% (23)	34.15% (28)	23.17% (19)	82	3.61
2. Centre for Public Dialogue (Canada): Stimulate learning, dialogue, acts of citizenship, and advocacy in response to God's call to justice and reconciliation.	3.66% (3)	14.63% (12)	31.71% (26)	29.27% (24)	20.73% (17)	82	3.49
3. Disability Concerns: Help churches prioritize the full inclusion of people living with disabilities, providing them with the tools they need to minister with and engage people with disabilities in their congregation and community.	0.76% (1)	6.87% (9)	27.48% (36)	36.64% (48)	28.24% (37)	131	3.85
4. Office of Social Justice: Help CRC members and congregations love their neighbors in tangible ways by becoming equipped to serve God as agents of God's justice, peace, and renewal with specific focus on the most vulnerable.	6.06% (8)	9.09% (12)	25.76% (34)	33.33% (44)	25.76% (34)	132	3.64
5. Office of Race Relations: Assist congregations in utilizing opportunities for training and engagement that mobilize them as advocates for racial justice.	5.26% (7)	10.53% (14)	29.32% (39)	34.59% (46)	20.30% (27)	133	3.54
6. Safe Church Ministry: Assist each classis in developing and using a safe church team or a safe church liaison to serve as a resource to congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response.	3.01% (4)	5.26% (7)	29.32% (39)	30.83% (41)	31.58% (42)	133	3.83
7. World Renew: Increase the capacity of communities and missional partners to engage in transformative practices that improve, in sustainable ways, the well-being of people made vulnerable by circumstances of poverty, disaster, or injustice.	0.00% (0)	0.75% (1)	9.77% (13)	27.07% (36)	62.41% (83)	133	4.51

Affirmation is strong for all of these ministries serving the church with mercy and justice efforts. Two highlights deserve mention. First, nearly 90% of respondents selected *good value* or *great value* in considering the work of *World Renew*, a pattern found across all age groups. Second, 100% of respondents up to age 30 associated *good value* or *great value* with *Disability Concerns*; in contrast, only 53% of respondents ages 31-40 and 52% of those ages 41-50 did the same.

5. Servant Leadership

	1 = No Value (n)	2 = Little Value (n)	3 = Some Value (n)	4 = Good Value (n)	5 = Great Value (n)	Total n	Average
1. Aboriginal Ministries (Canada): Identify and develop leaders from each urban Indigenous ministry community by means of individualized leadership development plans.	4.94% (4)	13.58% (11)	32.10% (26)	34.57% (28)	14.81% (12)	81	3.41
2. Back to God Ministries International: Develop leaders in specific areas (e.g., Burkina Faso) by assisting their knowledge of the Bible and leadership skills.	2.31% (3)	5.38% (7)	17.69% (23)	43.85% (57)	30.77% (40)	130	3.95
3. <i>The Banner</i> : Stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and the culture of which we are a part, in a way that encourages biblical thinking about these issues and is in line with our confessional heritage.	8.33% (11)	10.61% (14)	31.06% (41)	35.61% (47)	14.39% (19)	132	3.37
4. Calvin College: Help students learn to use their hearts, minds, and talents to be attentive, insightful, and creative participants in the world and to develop lifelong practices of responding to God's call with their gifts.	3.03% (4)	5.30% (7)	17.42% (23)	43.18% (57)	31.06% (41)	132	3.94
5. Calvin Theological Seminary: Identify, recruit, and train leaders to be servants in the kingdom of God by means of the candidacy process, including those coming from other educational preparation.	0.76% (1)	1.52% (2)	11.36% (15)	29.55% (39)	56.82% (75)	132	4.40
6. Candidacy Committee: Foster the development of pastoral leadership, help classes and councils identify potential new leaders, and attend to denominational requirements for those becoming a minister of the Word or commissioned pastor.	3.03% (4)	4.55% (6)	19.70% (26)	50.00% (66)	22.73% (30)	132	3.85
7. Chaplaincy and Care Ministry: Enlist, endorse, encourage, and enfold those who feel a calling to ministry in the unique field of chaplaincy while increasing awareness in congregations of this call among ordained clergy.	0.77% (1)	6.15% (8)	22.31% (29)	46.92% (61)	23.85% (31)	130	3.87
8. Disability Concerns: Develop leaders among persons with disabilities as well as others by implementing connection events and utilizing learning communities.	0.76% (1)	13.64% (18)	21.21% (28)	40.91% (54)	23.48% (31)	132	3.73
9. Missions Agency: Increase the number of diverse leaders equipped to participate in God's mission of saving the lost and renewing all things.	1.53% (2)	4.58% (6)	13.74% (18)	41.22% (54)	38.93% (51)	131	4.11

10. Pastor Church Resources: Support and enhance the leadership abilities of congregational and classis leaders.	3.05% (4)	6.11% (8)	22.90% (30)	44.27% (58)	23.66% (31)	131	3.79
11. ServiceLink (Canada): Provide opportunities for sharing volunteer ministry opportunities and best practices while also providing ministry tools and resources, ensuring that all local leaders understand the CRC resources available to them.	8.64% (7)	12.35% (10)	29.63% (24)	38.27% (31)	11.11% (9)	81	3.31
12. Sustaining Pastoral and Congregational Excellence: Provide opportunities for pastors to learn, support, and encourage each other; and help ministry leaders nurture health in their congregations through self-selected ministry projects.	0.75% (1)	7.52% (10)	20.30% (27)	48.12% (64)	23.31% (31)	133	3.86
13. Timothy Leadership Training Institute: Develop pastors and lay leaders (particularly those without access to formal education) with instruction in biblical concepts and congregational leadership; and develop master trainers.	0.78% (1)	8.53% (11)	19.38% (25)	40.31% (52)	31.01% (40)	129	3.92

Many of our ministries contribute in some way to raising up leaders for the church. *Calvin Theological Seminary*, in particular, received strong affirmation for their role in leadership, but it is also apparent that *Calvin College*, the *Candidacy Committee*, *Resonate Global Mission*, *Timothy Leadership Training Institute*, and *Back to God Ministries International* are recognized for their important and interlocking roles in leadership development. Further, efforts that support leaders are also affirmed: *Chaplaincy and Care Ministry*, *Pastor Church Resources*, and *Sustaining Pastoral and Congregational Excellence*.

Two exceptions to the overall strong pattern bear explanation. First, the low number of responses regarding *ServiceLink* may have to do with respondents' knowing that *ServiceLink* was facing a transformation (explained in the Council of Delegates report, *Agenda for Synod 2018*, pp. 34-35). Second, responses regarding *The Banner* display an unusual pattern: in all age groups except one, only 20% or less of respondents selected *no value* or *little value*; in the 31-40 age group, 42% selected *no value* or *little value*. (This pattern is somewhat similar to that of responses about *The Banner's* role in Faith Formation, except that only 35% in the 31-40 age group selected *no value* or *little value* there.)

B. Summary

While it is difficult to provide definitive results, it is possible to make some general observations. First, *Aboriginal Ministries*, the *Centre for Public Dialogue*, and the *Office of Social Justice* often appear to be slightly less valued, but when age-group analyses are considered, these ministries are strongly valued by persons up to age 30. Second, our longstanding efforts in missions and education continue to be considered valuable (*Back to God Ministries International*, *Calvin College*, *Calvin Theological Seminary*, and *Resonate Global Mission*), and yet relatively new ministries (*Faith Formation Ministries* and *Worship Ministries*) are quickly demonstrating their value. Third, *The Banner*

seems to be undervalued by a significant percentage of millennials. Fourth, when the *Office of Social Justice* and the *Centre for Public Dialogue* were presented together, stronger values were offered by Canadians than by respondents from the United States. Finally, from this snapshot, it appears that none of the CRC's ministries is considered significantly lacking in priority by a large proportion of CRC constituents.

C. Synod 2017 input

During Synod 2017 delegates had time to review the pre-synod survey results (including differentiation by age, ethnicity, gender, and nationality) and to discuss those results. Each group of delegates (typically 4 per classis) submitted one response from their small group (though some said that was difficult to do).

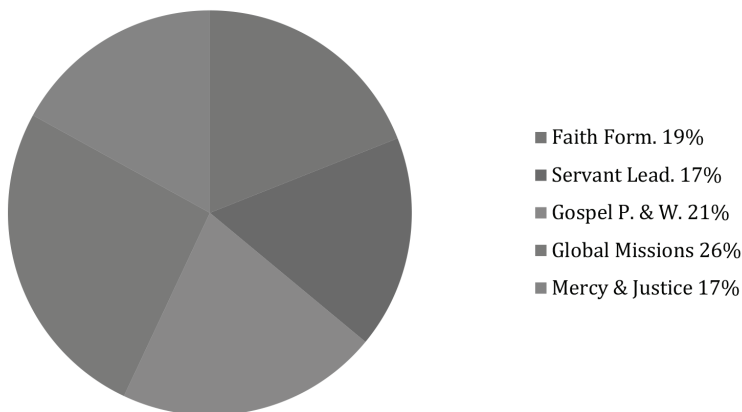
Records of the groups' observations about the pre-synod survey results include statements such as the following, concerning prioritization:

- minimal differentiation in responses
- interconnectedness of the various ministries and their priorities
- no highlighted priority; all close to average
- all ministries share a great deal of support
- all ministries seem to be valued to a large extent; this makes it very difficult to set or change priorities
- no one seems to want to give up anything, which makes it harder to prioritize
- no one is willing to say a specific ministry should be scaled back or discontinued
- we were surprised at how evenly distributed the prioritization of each ministry was

However, a few key observations provided insights to better understanding:

- There is a lot of overlap in the varied work of the agencies, which perhaps reflects a need to merge the work of various groups and then find a way to prioritize within each agency.
- There is a high value on education, including Calvin College; this says that we prioritize faith formation for our upcoming generations.
- Young people were much more interested in matters of social justice, and older folks were more interested in the established ministries (e.g., BTGMI, *Banner*).
- Canadian delegates seem to value the denomination's work more than U.S. delegates.
- World Renew scores high; this may point to a desire to see ministry that responds quickly and directly.

In addition, during the table-discussion time at Synod 2017, delegates were asked to provide their ideal ministry-share allocations in relation to the five ministry priorities. The average allocations are depicted in the following chart:



Sometimes average scores hide variations in response, so ranges may be examined. The simplified distributions for each ministry priority follow (as expressed in the number of respondents selecting a percentage in a given range):

Ministry Priority	15% or less	16% to 23%	24% or more
Faith Formation	15	16	12
Servant Leadership	21	15	7
Gospel Proclamation and Worship	11	17	15
Global Mission	7	15	21
Mercy and Justice	17	13	8

Finally, during Synod 2017 the table groups were also asked to provide their ideal ministry-share allocations by agency/ministry. The average allocated percentages follow, presented in order of greatest to least:

- 25% Resonate Global Mission
- 12% Back to God Ministries International
- 11% Calvin Theological Seminary
- 7% Calvin College
- 7% Faith Formation Ministries
- 6% Worship Ministries
- 4% Chaplaincy and Care Ministry
- 4% Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action
- 4% Pastor Church Resources
- 3% Aboriginal Ministries (Canada)
- 3% *The Banner*
- 3% Candidacy Committee
- 3% Disability Concerns
- 3% Office of Race Relations
- 3% Timothy Leadership Training Institute
- 2% Centre for Public Dialogue
- 2% Safe Church Ministry
- 2% ServiceLink

IV. Current realities

A. The instruction by Synod 2016 declared a “goal of reducing the institutional footprint.” In a communion in which we confess God’s sovereignty over every square inch, this instruction may have struck some constituents as unusual. However, if one looks at ministry-share receipts over the past few years, it is clear that reduction is a possibility that must be considered. Considering ministry-share receipts of \$25,378,873 in 2011 compared to \$22,296,441 in 2016, this pattern affects CRCNA ministry—and will be addressed at synod next year, per Synod 2016’s assignment to “reimagine ministry shares . . . and to report to Synod 2019” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 858).

B. In the context of decreasing ministry shares, at least two questions should be considered. First, has administration become bloated, directing inappropriate levels of ministry share to administration? The following chart¹ provides recent data of total expenditures (in thousands of dollars) funded by all sources, but a cautionary note is required. Considering the past structure of each agency, one should not assume that definitions for delineating costs have been the same among the agencies as for Congregational Services (which includes all other ministries discussed in this report except for Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, World Renew, and TLTI).

	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
	Program	Support	Program	Support	Program	Support	Program	Support
BTGMI	7,102 74.4%	2,443 25.6%	6,604 73.8%	2,350 26.2%	6,006 71.1%	2,442 28.9%	6,460 72.6%	2,440 27.4%
CR Home Missions	5,108 78.6%	1,392 21.4%	4,440 74.9%	1,484 25.1%	3,645 71.1%	1,478 28.9%	4,114 72.5%	1,558 27.5%
CR World Missions	11,877 83.0%	2,433 17.0%	11,994 83.0%	2,457 17.0%	11,642 81.1%	2,706 18.9%	11,782 80.6%	2,841 19.4%
Cong. Services	4,468 98.9%	50 1.1%	13,294 99.7%	37 0.3%	13,528 99.9%	17 0.1%	12,526 99.8%	20 0.2%

Second, have ministry programs been restricted or compromised due to decreasing ministry shares? The brief answer is that **Congregational Services** have been most challenged by decreases in ministry share because of their significant reliance on ministry share for the majority of their revenue; the **agencies** have been able to receive other forms of revenue through donors and estates to help replace ministry-share shortfalls—but with the added expense of developing advancement departments of fundraising professionals over time (which, in part, explains why the *support* dimension for the three agencies in the table above shows greater percentages of expense than for Congregational Services).

C. Denominational leaders have not waited to see this report before beginning to take action to reduce the institutional footprint. Actions of the past two years include the following:

¹ *Support* reflects costs for the administrative tasks necessary for operations (e.g., finance, advancement, etc.). *Program* reflects costs for ministry delivery.

1. **Sale** of the BTGMI building in Palos Heights, Illinois, and the consolidation of BTGMI services into the Grand Rapids, Michigan, office (and, to a lesser extent, the Burlington, Ont., office).
2. Moving **from program to strategy**, as in the case of ServiceLink’s moving to the Connections model. Programs often require infrastructure (administrative support, etc.), whereas strategies are often more organic and nimble (this shift is described elsewhere in the Council of Delegates report, *Agenda for Synod 2018*, pp. 34-35).
3. **Rearrangements and reductions** have occurred. For example, there is now one director for the Office of Race Relations and the Office of Social Justice instead of a director for each office. The table below shows recent denominational employment data (in full-time equivalents [FTEs]), and, while some observers may have hoped for a trend toward decreasing numbers of employees, a significant challenge to that outcome has been program growth often mandated by synod or requested by congregations/classes/boards.

	FTEs at year-end 2015	FTEs at year-end 2017
U.S.	215.5	207.2
Internationals based out of the U.S.	48.5	43.1
TOTAL U.S.	264.0	250.3
CDN	77.7	78.5
Internationals based out of Canada	25.0	22.0
TOTAL CDN	102.7	100.5
Both countries (including internationally based)	366.7	350.8

4. Finally, there have been some occasions of **discontinued** programming (affecting, of course, the trends in the tables above)—for example, the discontinuance of much of the work of World Literature Ministries—and before that, Faith Alive. In those cases, expenses dropped dramatically (e.g., World Literature had been requiring nearly \$0.5 million a year; now it is operating with \$200,000 annually), but those programs still have inventory and sales—and yet, as in much publishing today, sales do not cover costs. As a result, we have developed very few new products. Another example is the proposed discontinuance of the Sustaining Congregational Excellence program. Instead of budgeting to offer grants to congregations, we have found that donations can meet this need through Ignite | Funding Ministry Innovation.

V. Conclusions

The assignment given by Synod 2016 resulted in, as this report describes, broad affirmation of our many ministries and the important work they do. Yet the stated goal of the assignment—to reduce the institutional footprint—cannot be ignored. Thus we present the following recommendations to continue this effort.

Further, it is important to note that these recommendations are offered at a time when companion work is under way. For example, synod also asked that ministry shares be reimagined and reported on to Synod 2019. That report and recommendations may well affect current ongoing efforts directed at good stewardship. The Council of Delegates also continues to look at compensation and other factors that are significant components of our institutional infrastructure.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to continue to be attentive to possibilities for combining program functions and infrastructure within and beyond the denomination and, in so doing, to continue working toward optimum ministry programming for our denominational infrastructure.

B. That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to continue pursuing opportunities for rearrangement (see section IV, C, 3), particularly as opportunities are presented in upper-level positions and by way of retirements.

C. That synod take note that the COD instructed the executive director to find ways to significantly curtail physical plant costs in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by exploring alternatives such as (1) alternative energy sources, (2) renting existing space to other nonprofit organizations, (3) encouraging remote/home office work, (4) significant reductions of building square footage, and the like. The executive director will provide a report and recommendations to the COD (for eventual presentation to synod) in October 2018.

Appendix D

List of Resources re Church Renewal, Church Planting, and Evangelism Training

I. Background

In response to an overture concerned with membership decline (Overture 11, *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 429-34), Synod 2017 adopted several recommendations focusing on church renewal. This report is a response to the following decision: "That synod instruct the executive director to make available a list of current denominational resources related to church renewal, including church planting with emphasis on training for evangelism" (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 706). This report refers to evangelism and church planting in the context of renewed and vital congregations.

II. Executive summary

The executive director tasked a team of Resonate Global Mission and Calvin Theological Seminary staff, in consultation with staff of Back to God Ministries International, to respond regarding the requested "list of current denominational resources." After prayerful discernment and discussion, the team decided that it would be helpful to provide a short discussion on the religious and biblical context of church renewal as it relates to evangelism and church planting as background to the requested list. It is the hope of this team that the following discussion will prompt the kind of reflection,

discernment, and painful yet creative change that will truly bring renewal in the CRC. The following three points summarize their conclusions:

1. The North American church (including the CRCNA) is at a critical juncture because of shifting cultural and demographic trends. There is a great opportunity to reorient the church for mission, and yet there is a strong possibility that decline will accelerate if we fail in this task. We serve a God who can do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20). Evangelism and church planting will flourish as CRC members open their imaginations to see God’s people in a multiethnic, multicultural, diverse context (as in Rev. 7:9).
2. Renewal for evangelism and church planting is an act of the Holy Spirit and not the application of “the correct tools” by ministry professionals. If “mission” is God’s and the church exists to participate in God’s mission, then renewal begins and ends with God. The Lord must breathe life into the dry bones of his church (Ezek. 37) and give it a passion for evangelism and church planting. Such breath reinvigorates Christ’s church for mission through prayerful encounters with the Holy Spirit.
3. For spiritual renewal to happen, the church must stop separating and compartmentalizing mission tasks like evangelism and church planting from worship, preaching, discipleship, and more. This model worked in the now defunct world of “Christendom” or “churched culture,” but it does not work in the current context, where biblical and ecclesiastical memory is rapidly disappearing from society. To be the Lord’s covenant community in today’s world means that everything we do is evangelistic and oriented toward proclaiming the good news of Christ Jesus concretely in a world alienated from God.

III. Introduction

We applaud Synod 2017’s interest in and concern about the decline of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Organizations cannot change unless they urgently grasp the need for change. God desires a self-reflective and responsive people (Mal. 3:6-7). We appreciate the spirit and tenor of the recommendation, which emphasizes the value of a well-stocked “ministry toolbox.” However, we must be sober enough to realize that a “list of current . . . resources” cannot, in and of itself, grow our churches. If that were so, the answer to church renewal through evangelism and church planting would only be “a click” away via an Internet search for “resources for church renewal.” Experiencing a renewed evangelistic focus in our denomination happens only through prayerful Spirit-led discernment and costly change. For this reason, a team of staff from Resonate Global Mission and Calvin Theological Seminary, in consultation with staff of Back to God Ministries International, decided to provide the requested “list of current denominational resources” as an appendix to a brief discussion on the religious and biblical context of church renewal as it relates to evangelism and church planting. It is our hope that this discussion will prompt the kind of reflection, discernment, and painful yet creative change that will truly bring renewal in the CRC.

A note about terms: In the following discussion we will use the terms *mission*, *church/congregational renewal*, *evangelism*, and *church planting*. The term *mission* refers to everything that God is doing through his Son, his Spirit, and his people to establish his kingdom on earth. A congregation is renewed insofar as it aligns itself with *God's mission*, his purpose for the existence of the church. Thus, a presupposition of our analysis is that *church renewal is fundamentally connected to mission*. *Evangelism* and *church planting*, which in the past and still in the present have often been considered to be tasks of mission, must therefore be basic functions of a renewed church.

IV. Religious and social context of church renewal with regard to church planting and evangelism

Note: As we reflect on the changing social and religious context in North America that is in large part behind the present decline in the CRC, it is important to note that this subject was addressed at length and in great detail by the Strategic Planning and Adaptive Change Team (SPACT) in its September 2014 report. This report contains background and recommendations that are helpful to congregations and denominational leaders seeking to renew the CRC. The report can be found at www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/spact_report.pdf.

Understanding the broad North American religious context is important in understanding church membership decline in the Christian Reformed Church.¹ The decline of church membership is not limited to the CRC. The External Scan research conducted by the CRCNA Strategic Planning Task Group in 2012 reported the following about the decline of Christianity in the broader American and Canadian church context:

Decline of Identification with Christianity in U.S.: The percentage of Americans identifying with Christianity declined from 91% in 1948 to 77% in 2008. The most significant increase of “others” was among those not identifying with any religion, from 2% in 1948 to 12% in 2008. Large mainline denominations declined from twenty-six million in 1968 to around eighteen million in 2004, while large evangelical denominations increased from just over fifteen million in 1968 to around twenty-three million in 2004. While two-thirds of persons raised Protestant remain so, about one third have switched to another Protestant denomination.

Decline of Identification with Christianity in Canada: After 1960, Canadians remained “believers” but rapidly declined as “belongers,” with 80% today agreeing that you don’t need to go to church to be a good Christian. Well over 75% of evangelical churches are now plateaued or in decline.

A more recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2015 confirms the same trajectory: “The percentage of adults (ages 18 and older) who describe themselves as Christians has dropped by nearly eight percentage

¹ The period 2000 to 2012 saw an increase in the number of CRC congregations from 982 to 1099 (117), but membership declined from 276,376 to 251,727 (24,649), with most congregations shrinking in size and with weekly attendance decreasing from 264,000 to 209,000. While there was an initial increase in growth by evangelism, the trend has been downward since 2005 despite the increase in the number of congregations (*Internal Scan*, CRCNA Strategic Planning Working Group, 2012; p. 2).

points in just seven years, from 78.4% in an equally massive Pew Research survey in 2007, to 70.6% in 2014.”² According to James Emery White, “the unaffiliated” are the fastest-growing and second-largest religious category—after Catholics.³

The new social and religious context in North America is that the traditions, stories, and institutions of Christianity that shaped culture and framed dialogue (including evangelism) are increasingly unknown and judged by many to be increasingly irrelevant. Christendom (or church culture), the shared Western culture and values of Christianity that have been the pre-supposition of much of our ministry, has nearly eroded away.

A. *What is our context for the church’s evangelism?*

Our inherited paradigms and methods of evangelism are often based on assumptions found in Christendom—that the church still maintains a position of influence in society. Evangelism often still comes from an assumptive place of cultural power, influence, appeal, and location. Missiologist George Hunsberger states, “The day has gone when the church was generally valued by the society as important to the social and moral order and when . . . people tended to seek out a church for themselves. . . . The Christendom experiment has run its course and is over, but our images and instincts are still formed by its memory.”⁴ In a post-Christendom society, people are no longer seeking or valuing church. The church’s place in culture becomes

- post-attractional, no longer a destination of value.
- post-propositional, no longer a source to receive wisdom and truth.
- post-universal, no longer a source relative to shared meaning.

Thus, increasing numbers of people in our modern context no longer value and recognize the church and its message. The underlying assumption of generations of evangelism and church planting has been called into question.

B. *A new opportunity*

While many may lament this new reality, we who are concerned with renewal for evangelism and church planting should see it as a new opportunity. First, as the church and its message recede from the cultural memory of North Americans, so do the many failings and missteps of the church and its individual members. Nonbelievers will carry less and less “baggage” from the past as their spatial and temporal distance from the church increases.

Second, a society adrift from its religious heritage is a society divided, disconnected, and searching for identity, security, and community. People are searching for a deep connection and a place to flourish, important qualities that a renewed church can offer. Missiologists Dwight J. Zscheile and Craig Van Gelder give voice to the exciting possibilities of this new context:

² See *America’s Changing Religious Landscape (Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow)* at <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape>.

³ James Emery White, *Rise of the Nones* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2015), p. 17.

⁴ George R. Hunsberger, *The Story That Chooses Us: A Tapestry of Missional Vision* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 21-22.

There are huge opportunities for Christian churches to speak into the search for identity, purpose, meaning, and community that many Americans experience today. The divisions in the United States and the world, which seem bitterly enduring, call out for healing and reconciliation.⁵

However, Zscheile and Van Gelder rightly note,

But the assumption that people will look to established institutional religious structures to meet these needs and formally affiliate with them as in previous generations does not seem to be holding for many people today. Unless churches provide new ways of connecting with people where they are and of bringing them together meaningfully, they will continue to struggle and decline.⁶

This socioreligious reality points the CRC in one direction—a renewed posture of listening to the Holy Spirit and discerning how to connect with our communities through evangelism and church planting. The SPACT report concludes,

As massive demographic and cultural changes have taken place in North America over the past 50 years, many CRCNA congregations are experiencing disconnects from their ministry contexts. The influx of multiple cultures, increased social-cultural diversity, lifestyle differences, and justice and poverty issues present challenges to many of the historical values and practices of CRC church life. Many congregations are finding they need to engage in a more participatory and relational approach to life valued by many people in today's broader context. This means these congregations need to *listen to and learn from and with* the "other" within their contexts—a practical approach that is new for many of us in the CRC.

This new posture of listening and discernment is a key to changing the narrative of decline within the CRC in our new and evolving socioreligious context.

C. *A note about increasing ethnic diversity*

Those of us familiar with the CRC realize that it is historically white, European, and middle-class in character. In past generations, gains in church membership came from population segments that were similar in character. However, current demographic realities in the United States and Canada show that the white, middle-class segment of the population is declining by percentage (and has plateaued numerically), while other ethnicities are increasingly present (by percentage and number) in mainline and evangelical Protestant churches.⁷ While diversity in CRC circles is increasing, it does not mirror the rates of demographic change more broadly in North America. The result is easy to predict. Any denomination that remains majority white and middle-class will by default tend to decline in numbers and influence. Thus, the ability of the CRC to welcome and enfold those unlike its dominant culture will be a key factor of growth or decline.

⁵ Dwight J. Zscheile and Craig Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2018), p. 253.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁷ See "America's Changing Religious Landscape," pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape.

V. A biblical theology of church planting and evangelism in the context of church renewal

A. *The renewal of God's people, Israel*

If the church is defined organically as the Lord's chosen people, it is not a stretch to say that church or congregational renewal is a foundational scriptural theme. The first eleven chapters of Genesis show that God is the Creator of all the world, including all of humankind, and that God has a mission he is seeking to accomplish. Genesis 1 begins with God speaking and creating life. God crafts humans in his image to join in his work of tending to creation and its development. After the fall into sin (Gen. 3), God turns his attention to the renewal of his mission, the now marred human race, and the world in which it lives. The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12 and following), shows how God assembles a covenant community for the purpose of being a light and a channel of blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:3; 22:16-18), echoing the original calling given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2).

The exodus and the giving of the law emphasize *Yahweh's* rule over the nations and the need for Israel to remain unique (holy, set apart) among the nations as a witness to the one true God (Deut. 6). If *Yahweh* is the one true God, then the gods of the nations are mere idol gods (Isa. 44-45). *Yahweh*, therefore, is the God of all, regardless of whether they acknowledge it, as Isaiah 40-66 and many psalms of praise (such as Ps. 67, 96, 98) point out. Despite God's faithfulness, his people, Israel, however, are unfaithful. They fail to keep covenant, and they languish in exile, desperately in need of renewal to fulfill the vocation of blessing and being a light to the nations. In view of this renewal, the Old Testament prophets often use the metaphor of "pilgrimage" to refer to the attractive nature of a renewed Israel as a covenant community assembled around its Lord (*Yahweh*), whose footstool is Mount Zion (i.e., the Jerusalem temple). The prophets foresee a day when the people of the nations will stream to Zion⁸ and align themselves with *Yahweh* and his renewed people, who are a faithful witness to the nations, pointing all peoples to the sovereign Lord (Isa. 55:4).

B. *Renewal in the New Testament*

In the New Testament, Jesus the Messiah enters the biblical narrative in fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies to carry on Israel's mission by proclaiming renewal and repentance for God's people. Jesus' message (and that of John the Baptist), aimed primarily at Israel (Matt. 10:6; 15:24; Luke 1:16, 54, 68) was simply, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Jesus' (and the gospel writers') preoccupation with the renewal of Israel can be seen in the fact that the majority of the preaching, narratives, and parables in the gospel accounts encourage Israel's repentance and renewal. Paul, calling himself "the apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8), used the same strategy as Jesus. Paul preached repentance and renewal "first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10). Like Jesus, Paul envisioned a renewed Israel (Rom. 9-11) fulfilling its vocation to be a light and a blessing to the Gentiles, over whom *Yahweh* ruled just as certainly as he ruled over Israel. New Testament writers came to understand that the renewed and restored Israel of Old Testament

⁸ Ps. 87; Isa. 2:1-4 (Mic. 4:1-4); 18:7; 25:6-8; 66:18-19; Jer. 3:17; 16:19; Mic. 7:12; Zeph. 3:8-10; Zech. 2:10-13; 8:20-23; 14:16-19.

expectation would in fact be made up of people from every tribe and nation (Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:6-8; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 3:6; etc.).

C. *A biblical theology of church planting and evangelism*

What does this biblical theology of renewal mean for evangelism and church planting? First and most obviously, according to Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) there is no renewal of God's people (the church) other than what is uniquely focused on and motivated by the task of being a light and blessing to people who are outside the covenant and need to come in. The church is a body *sent into the world* (Matt. 28:16-20; John 20:21; Acts 1:6-8). Church renewal is and must always be for the task of bearing authentic witness to the good news of God's kingdom in the world. The Lord hates worship, preaching, teaching, and acts of piety that are divorced, separated, or alienated from living out his Word in the midst of the world (James; Amos 5; Isa. 58). True renewal centers on repentance, a complete shift of heart and mind in the community and the individual that comes to expression in the reorientation of their entire lives under the lordship of Christ. This kind of renewal is an act of the Lord, or, in the New Testament perspective, a gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, evangelism and church planting are essential tasks that happen within a renewed covenant community that is obedient to its vocation of bearing witness to the gospel (the "good news," *euangelion*) of Jesus to the world. Modern usage separates evangelism out as a form of communication that happens outside the walls of the institutional church for the purpose of converting nonbelievers. *Preaching* and *teaching*, on the other hand, happen within the church and are focused on believers. However, in the New Testament, all proclamation of Christ is "evangelistic" and aimed at both renewal and expanding the human borders of the covenant community. In this sense, Peter's sermon in Acts 2 was just as evangelistic as Stephen's pointed defense before his Jewish accusers in Acts 7. Further, it was clear that the early church understood its own inward life as an evangelistic witness (Acts 2:42-47). As we think about the place of evangelism in today's church, the New Testament encourages us to make *all our proclamation and life* evangelistic, removing the false dichotomy between evangelism and preaching/teaching, and aiming at renewal both internally and externally.

Church planting in the biblical context of God's mission and church renewal follows a similar trajectory. In the New Testament, the *ecclesia* (church) represents the renewed "assembly" (*qahal*) of Israel, made up of both Jews and Gentiles who confessed Christ as Lord. The New Testament clearly portrays the first churches as being planted among believing Jews, such as the church of Antioch, where the believers were first called "Christians" (Acts 1:26). Within the first churches, believing Gentiles soon found a place, thanks to the early church's understanding of Israel's vocation to the nations (especially Isa. 40-66). Because all the work of the apostles was *evangelistic* in nature, communities of new believers naturally sprang up around the entire Roman world as early Christians engaged in family life, commerce, and travel. Propelled by the gospel, the early apostles who established these communities continually pressed onward (Rom. 15:19-20, 24), planting churches and leaving behind key disciples who could deepen and expand the apostolic faith. Thus, there is no separation between the "established church" in need of renewal and the "emerging church." In the New Testament, church planting naturally happened (along with evangelism) in authentic communities of disciples.

As we reflect biblically on congregational renewal as it relates to evangelism and church planting, we may draw two conclusions. First, Scripture is preoccupied with the renewal of God’s people for the outwardly focused task of expanding the covenant community and making an impact in God’s world. Second, a renewed and vital church engages in evangelism and the planting of new congregations out of its fundamental identity of being a “set-aside” and “sent” covenant people.

VI. A contextual theology of evangelism and church planting

A. The Holy Spirit, evangelism, and the spontaneous expansion of the church

In light of the above biblical narrative about the mission of God, we now focus more deeply on the topics of church planting and evangelism. It is important to outline a few foundational assumptions that undergird our approach to evangelism, church planting, and mission in the power of the Holy Spirit based on the foregoing discussion.

B. What is the gospel?

The gospel is good news, not good advice. It is public truth, not simply a personal, private matter. The gospel is public truth in that it tells us the true story of what God has done in history through the person and work of Jesus to rescue his people and world from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death (John 3:16-21; 1 Cor. 15:1-8). Just as sin polluted the shalom of God’s creation, affecting all aspects of life, so too Jesus has come to “make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found.” To say that the gospel is public truth is to acknowledge that this news must direct all of life and all our relationships—with God, self, others, and creation.

The gospel is irreducible and must not be confined to one fixed form. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism has captured this truth poignantly: “The Bible proclaims the gospel story in many forms. The gospel is like a multifaceted diamond, with different aspects that appeal to different people in different cultures. It has depths we have not fathomed. It defies every attempt to reduce it to a neat formulation.”⁹ Insisting on a strict prescriptive formulation of the gospel for evangelism in all cultures would misunderstand the teachings of the New Testament, which contains many descriptions of the gospel in various contexts. For example, the gospel is described as “the good news of peace by Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36), “the testimony [or mystery] about God” (1 Cor. 2:1), “the word” (Acts 8:4), “the word of the Lord” (Acts 15:35), “the message of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18), “the word of truth” (James 1:18), “the message of truth” (Eph. 1:13), “the word of God” (Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23 [cf. v. 25]; Acts 4:31; 6:2; 11:1; 13:44), “the testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4:33 [cf. 17:18]; 2 Tim. 2:8), “the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1; 2 Cor. 11:7 [cf. Mark 1:14; 1 Tim. 1:11]), “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 24:14 [cf. Luke 8:1]), “the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:19 [cf. 1:3]; 1 Cor. 9:12 [cf. Eph. 3:8]), “the good news of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24), and “the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13).¹⁰

⁹ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978, p. 8.

¹⁰ C. Rene Padilla, *Mission between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Carlisle, Eng.: Langham, 2010); see also Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), and Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2005), p. 296.

C. *The privileged call to participate in evangelism*

Mission and evangelism are first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit in which the church participates. The triune God goes before us through the Holy Spirit to work in the world, accomplishing God's creating and redeeming purposes. This prior work of the Spirit before Paul arrived in Athens was the basis of Paul's evangelistic message in Acts 17:26-27. The task of evangelism is to discern the work of the Spirit in the life and community of others and to identify openings for gospel witness in word, deed, and lifestyle.

The "good news" of the gospel is heard in different ways across cultures. While the gospel of Jesus is the central message of evangelism, what people hear as "the good news" will vary depending on their personal and communal history, circumstances, and needs. This is not an argument for relativism but rather speaks to the very nature of the biblical truth and God's method of working in the world. J. H. Bavinck explains:

Abstract, disembodied, and history-less sinners do not exist; only very concrete sinners exist, whose sinful life is determined and characterized by all sorts of cultural and historical factors; by poverty, hunger, superstition, traditions, chronic illnesses, tribal morality, and thousands of other things. I must bring the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ to the whole man, in his concrete existence, in his everyday environment. It is obviously then a great error on my part if I do not take a person's culture and history seriously.¹¹

Particular methods, tracts, and tools of evangelism go in and out of vogue. Given the multifaceted nature of the gospel and the culturally embedded life of the evangelist, our focus should be on telling the stories of Jesus and discerning and following the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people we encounter as they interact with the biblical stories.

It is the pleasure of the Holy Spirit to bring the power of this gospel message to life in the lives of others. We know that the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16) and that people cannot believe in someone they have not heard of if someone does not share the gospel (Rom. 10:14). But we must remember that it is the sovereign domain of the Spirit to open hearts and minds to receiving the truth. The work of evangelism includes the proclamation of news about the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord. We desire that people receive this message and be reconciled to God through Christ and pray for the Holy Spirit to do his work as the supreme evangelist (John 16:7-15; Eph. 1:17-21).

D. *Postures of faithful evangelism*

We are witnesses to the gospel, not the owners of the gospel, nor judges of the salvific status of others. Evangelism should come from a place of joy as an overflow of gratitude and humility. We are like beggars telling other beggars where we have found bread. This approach has been described in various ways as "graceful evangelism," "bold humility," and "joyful witness," all of which speak to the posture of the evangelist and the tone of the message. It is especially important in light of the history of Christian mission and evangelism to be mindful of our posture and tone in evangelism.

¹¹ J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1993), p. 81.

The Lausanne movement expresses this point: “We commit ourselves to be scrupulously ethical in all our evangelism. Our witness is to be marked by ‘gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience.’ We therefore reject any form of witness that is coercive, unethical, deceptive, or disrespectful” (Lausanne, *Cape Town Commitment*).

E. Living in ways that “beg the question”

Most of the evangelistic sermons in the book of Acts are prompted by questions of curious bystanders in response to some act or way of living by an individual or Christian community. Therefore “a church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross” (Lausanne). As people not only encounter our words but also observe our actions and lifestyle as a community, they can be awed and drawn in or offended and turned off to hearing the gospel message. Therefore, as stated above, it is incumbent on us to “commit ourselves to be scrupulously ethical in all our evangelism. Our witness is to be marked by ‘gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience.’ We therefore reject any form of witness that is coercive, unethical, deceptive, or disrespectful” (Lausanne, *Cape Town Commitment*).

F. Evangelism is not the task for an elite squad of missionaries

The call to mission and witness is core to the identity and vocation of the whole church, which has been commissioned to proclaim the whole gospel to the whole world and to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; John 20:21). Especially in uncertain times and seasons of church decline, we can become gripped with fear about the future of the church and become attached to evangelistic methods and tools that promise numerical results. Whatever evangelistic, renewal, or mission strategies are pursued, it is essential to disciple all Christians to engage in Christian mission. The people of God in their everyday workplaces, in home and society, are strategically located at the forefront of God’s mission in the world.¹² For it is there, in those ordinary daily routines, that they have the opportunity to place the cross at the center of everyday life and bring the gospel to bear on their life and work in full view of others.

G. The connection between evangelism and church planting

It has been said that the “vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for (1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in any city, and (2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city.”¹³ Evangelism is often reduced to conversion and the moment when people make a decision to follow Christ. In the New Testament, this is not so clearly demarcated. The “evangelistic” commissions typically cited are actually calls to a holistic work of discipling from conversion, baptism, and growth in the faith. This work of discipleship cannot be pursued apart from the Christian communities that entail local churches. Beginning with the spread of the gospel in “Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” as noted by Jesus in Acts 1:8, we see evangelism and church planting going hand-in-hand.

¹² Hendrik Kraemer, *Theology of the Laity* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 2005).

¹³ Tim Keller, “Why Church Planting?” (<http://www.acts29.com/why-church-planting>).

VII. Conclusions

As we reflect back on the discussions of socioreligious context and theology (both biblical and contextual), we can draw the following important conclusions:

1. The first and most obvious conclusion is simply that renewal for evangelism and church planting is an act of the Holy Spirit and not the application of “the correct tools” by ministry professionals. If “mission” is God’s and the church exists to participate in God’s mission, then renewal *begins and ends* with God.¹⁴ The Lord must breathe life into the dry bones of his church (Ezek. 37) and give it a passion for evangelism and church planting. Such breath reinvigorates Christ’s church for mission through prayerful encounters with the Holy Spirit. The question is, *Do we want it?* Such a movement of renewal will be messy in our current church culture.
2. The North American church (including the CRCNA) is at a critical juncture because of shifting cultural and demographic trends. There is a great opportunity to reorient the church for mission, and yet there is a strong possibility that decline will accelerate if we fail in this task. We serve a God who can do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20). Evangelism and church planting will flourish as CRC members open their imaginations to see God’s people in a multiethnic, multicultural, and diverse context (as in Rev. 7:9).
3. In order for spiritual renewal to happen, the church must stop separating and compartmentalizing mission tasks like evangelism and church planting from worship, preaching, discipleship, and more. This model worked in the now defunct world of “Christendom” or “churched culture,” but it does not work in the current context, where biblical and ecclesiastic memory is rapidly disappearing from society. To be the Lord’s covenant community in today’s world means that everything we do is *evangelistic* and oriented toward proclaiming the good news of Christ Jesus concretely in a world alienated from God.

VIII. Resources and tools for evangelism and church planting

Note: While the list below is not exhaustive, it is intended to provide a helpful starting point for congregations seeking resources for church renewal. Other helpful resources exist and can be adapted to the diverse ministry contexts in which CRC leaders and congregations live and serve. In addition to written resources, we encourage CRC leaders to connect with seasoned mission leaders in their communities to reflect on these questions.

Connected to the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America

1. Go Local (resonateglobalmission.org/go-local): An initiative of the CRC through Resonate, by which participants learn new ways to join God in their neighborhoods and follow God in mission together through simple, repeatable missional practices.

¹⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright aptly concludes: “It is not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world.” *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 62.

2. Multiply 222 (multiply222.com): A network born out of Sunlight Community Church in Port St. Lucie, Fla., that trains leaders for the purpose of evangelism, discipleship, and church planting.
3. Go and Tell (declarethegospel.com): A three-hour seminar and accompanying resources developed for equipping Christians to share the gospel.
4. Church Renewal Lab (calvinseminary.edu/the-renewal-lab): A two-year renewal process from Calvin Theological Seminary's Institute of Global Church Planting and Renewal that helps CRC congregations refresh their mission focus.
5. Ridder Initiative (rca.org/leader/ridder-church-renewal): A two-year leadership development process from Western Theological Seminary for CRC and RCA congregations for the purpose of personal and congregational transformation.
6. Coram Deo (coramdeoassociation.org): An association of churches that provides workshops, training, assessment, coaching, and other resources in order to multiply leaders and multiply churches that make disciples.
7. Church Multiplication Network (multiplicationnetwork.org): A global ministry that provides resources and training in the areas of planting new churches and revitalizing existing churches for mission.
8. Coffee Break (crcna.org/CoffeeBreak): A global initiative of the CRC that takes the form of an evangelistic Bible study in small groups connecting Christians with their communities.

Other

9. Fresh Expressions (freshexpressionsus.org): An international network that cultivates new forms of church alongside existing congregations, providing resourcing through vision days, workshops, and learning communities.
10. 3DM (3dmovements.com): A global movement with regional hubs that offer learning communities, workshops, and coaching for the purpose of discipling people to live on mission and make disciples.
11. Alpha (alpha.org): A series of sessions that can be held in various contexts for exploring the Christian faith over food, a talk or video, and discussion.
12. Navigators (www.navigators.org): An international, interdenominational ministry that equips people for evangelism and discipleship through various resources, books, and studies.
13. Evangelism Explosion (evangelismexplosion.org): A ministry that provides training and materials to equip people for how to share their faith in Christ and multiply disciples.
14. Luis Palau Festival (palaufestivals.org/grandrapids): An evangelistic event designed to connect churches to service projects in the community. This event will happen in West Michigan in 2018.

Respectfully submitted,
 Jeff Bos
 Moses Chung
 Zachary King
 Kevin Schutte
 Cory Willson

Appendix E Condensed Financial Statements of the Agencies and Institutions

Back to God Ministries International Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2017				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 1,700		123		1,823
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	3,463		1,004	99	4,566
Receivables & Advances	43	-	-	-	43
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	-	-	-
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	359	-	-	-	359
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	5,565	-	1,127	99	6,791
Accounts Payable	365	-	-	-	365
Notes/Loans Payable	274	-	-	-	274
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	298	-	-	-	298
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	937	-	-	-	937
Net Assets	\$ 4,628	-	1,127	99	5,854
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 15-16 Actual		Fiscal 16-17 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	3,050	\$	2,962
% of Total Income		32.6%		36.0%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	3,125	\$	3,575
Estate Gifts	\$	2,980	\$	1,161
Total Gift Income		6,105		4,736
% of Total Income		65.3%		57.6%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants-Animation	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	188	\$	530
Total Other Income		188		530
% of Total Income		2.0%		6.4%
TOTAL INCOME		9,343		8,228
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
English	\$	2,214	\$	2,167
FTEs		16		16
International	\$	3,642	\$	3,246
FTEs		8		8
Education	\$	150	\$	155
FTEs		2		2
Total Program Service \$	\$	6,006	\$	5,568
Total Program Service FTEs		26		26
% of Total \$		71.1%		70.6%
% of Total FTEs		72.2%		72.2%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	929	\$	931
FTEs		4		4
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	1,513	\$	1,392
FTEs		6		6
Total Support Service \$		2,442		2,323
Total Support Service FTEs		10		10
% of Total \$		28.9%		29.4%
% of Total FTEs		27.8%		27.8%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	8,448	\$	7,891
TOTAL FTEs		36		36
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	895	\$	337

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

	-----June 30, 2017-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 12,659	-	-	-	12,659
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	13,894	-	-	-	13,894
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	22,792	-	17,124	40,261	80,177
Equities	38,809	-	29,157	68,552	136,518
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	208,114	-	-	-	208,114
Other	4,490	-	-	-	4,490
Total Assets	300,758	-	46,281	108,813	455,852
Accounts Payable	2,884	-	-	-	2,884
Notes/Loans Payable	78,192	-	-	-	78,192
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	5,820	-	-	-	5,820
Deferred Income	3,248	-	-	-	3,248
Other	48,694	-	-	-	48,694
Total Liabilities	138,838	-	-	-	138,838
Net Assets	\$ 161,920	-	46,281	108,813	317,014

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.

Over 1,438 accounts for instruction, scholarships, grants, research, public service, student services, etc., funded by outside sources.

Endowed gifts.

**Calvin College
Income and Expenses (000s)**

	Fiscal 15-16 Actual	Fiscal 16-17 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 2,367	\$ 2,324
% of Total Income	1.6%	1.5%
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ 3,603	\$ 3,518
Estate Gifts	\$ 55	\$ 45
Total Gift Income	<u>3,658</u>	<u>3,563</u>
% of Total Income	2.4%	2.4%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ 139,630	\$ 140,396
Grants	\$ -	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$ 4,217	\$ 4,700
Total Other Income	<u>143,847</u>	<u>145,096</u>
% of Total Income	96.0%	96.1%
TOTAL INCOME	<u><u>149,872</u></u>	<u><u>150,983</u></u>
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Education	\$ 131,204	\$ 131,690
FTEs	572	558
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
	\$ -	\$ -
	-	-
Total Program Service \$	<u>\$ 131,204</u>	<u>\$ 131,690</u>
Total Program Service FTEs	572	558
% of Total \$	87.5%	87.2%
% of Total FTEs	79.0%	77.7%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 7,600	\$ 8,383
FTEs	55	59
Plant Operations	\$ 8,055	\$ 8,119
FTEs	66	69
Fund-raising	\$ 3,013	\$ 2,791
FTEs	31	32
Total Support Service \$	<u>18,668</u>	<u>19,293</u>
Total Support Service FTEs	152	160
% of Total \$	12.5%	12.8%
% of Total FTEs	21.0%	22.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	<u><u>\$ 149,872</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 150,983</u></u>
TOTAL FTEs	<u><u>724</u></u>	<u><u>718</u></u>
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	<u><u>\$ -</u></u>	<u><u>\$ -</u></u>

**Calvin Theological Seminary
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2017-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 2,273	-	1	-	2,274
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	21	-	1,995	-	2,016
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	53	-	-	-	53
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	10,142	-	10,142
Equities	-	-	14,897	12,768	27,665
Partnerships	-	-	-	7,097	7,097
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	1,050	1,050
PP & E	10,436	-	-	-	10,436
Other	3,378	-	-	-	3,378
Total Assets	16,161	-	27,035	20,915	64,111
Accounts Payable	1,633	-	-	-	1,633
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	92	-	-	-	92
Annuities Payable	-	-	160	-	160
Deferred Income	-	-	169	-	169
Other	-	-	3,429	-	3,429
Total Liabilities	1,725	-	3,758	-	5,483
Net Assets	\$ 14,436	-	23,277	20,915	58,628
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 15-16 Actual		Fiscal 16-17 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	2,449	\$	2,379
% of Total Income		32.0%		32.2%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	1,215	\$	1,261
Estate Gifts	\$	140	\$	198
Total Gift Income		1,355		1,459
% of Total Income		17.7%		19.7%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	2,440	\$	2,266
Grants	\$	1,342	\$	1,204
Miscellaneous	\$	69	\$	90
Total Other Income		3,851		3,560
% of Total Income		50.3%		48.1%
TOTAL INCOME		7,655		7,398
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Instructional	\$	3,031	\$	2,881
FTEs		22		22
Public Service	\$	104	\$	79
FTEs		1		1
Academic Support	\$	1,262	\$	1,232
FTEs		5		5
Student Services	\$	577	\$	628
FTEs		5		5
Student Aid	\$	329	\$	314
FTEs		1		1
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	5,303	\$	5,134
Total Program Service FTEs		34		34
% of Total \$		69.2%		70.1%
% of Total FTEs		68.0%		68.0%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	872	\$	896
FTEs		9		9
Plant Operations	\$	910	\$	691
FTEs		2		2
Fund-raising	\$	582	\$	606
FTEs		5		5
Total Support Service \$		2,364		2,193
Total Support Service FTEs		16		16
% of Total \$		30.8%		29.9%
% of Total FTEs		32.0%		32.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	7,667	\$	7,327
TOTAL FTEs		50		50
Post-retirement benefit costs >		-		-
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	(12)	\$	71

**Congregational Services
Balance Sheet (000s)**

INCLUDED IN SYNODICAL ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

**Congregational Services
Income and Expenses (000s)**

	Fiscal 15-16 Actual	Fiscal 16-17 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 5,474	\$ 5,395
% of Total Income	40.7%	41.8%
Other Gift Income:		
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 940	\$ 929
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -
Total Gift Income	<u>940</u>	<u>929</u>
% of Total Income	7.0%	7.2%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ 5,872	\$ 5,195
Grants	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Services & Misc	\$ 149	\$ 373
Total Other Income	<u>7,021</u>	<u>6,568</u>
% of Total Income	52.3%	50.9%
TOTAL INCOME	<u>13,435</u>	<u>12,892</u>
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Lead-Chaplaincy Services	\$ 266	\$ 293
FTEs	2	2
Lead-Pastor-Church Relations/SCE	\$ 982	\$ 959
FTEs	6	6
Lead-Candidacy	\$ 235	\$ 207
FTEs	2	2
Lead-Ecumenical Relations	\$ 150	\$ 131
FTEs	-	-
Lead-Network/Healthy Church	26	9
FTEs	1	-
Justice-Race Relations	\$ 654	\$ 463
FTEs	4	4
Justice-Safe Church Ministry	\$ 244	\$ 236
FTEs	2	2
Justice-Disability Concerns	\$ 265	\$ 284
FTEs	2	2
Justice-Social & Restorative Justice	\$ 727	\$ 727
FTEs	5	5
Justice-Ministries in Canada	\$ 1,088	\$ 1,009
FTEs	5	5
Faith-ChurchLink	\$ 153	\$ 120
FTEs	2	2
Faith-Church Resources (FA)	\$ 538	\$ 635
FTEs	4	4
MSS-Agency services	\$ 4,859	\$ 4,138
FTEs	24	24
MSS-Faith Alive (FA)	\$ 841	\$ 721
FTEs	-	-
MSS-Banner (FA)	\$ 1,221	\$ 1,172
FTEs	4	4
MSS-Libros Desafio (FA)	\$ 556	\$ 358
FTEs	3	3
MSS-Communications	\$ 198	\$ 200
FTEs	3	3
Worship-Worship Resources (FA)	\$ 404	\$ 410
FTEs	3	3
Grant Programs - Leadership Init., Connections,	\$ 121	\$ 458
FTEs	-	-
Total Program Service \$	<u>13,528</u>	<u>12,530</u>
Total Program Service FTEs	72	71
% of Total \$	99.9%	99.8%
% of Total FTEs	98.6%	98.6%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
D.D.M.	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ 17	\$ 22
FTEs	1	1
Total Support Service \$	<u>17</u>	<u>22</u>
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1
% of Total \$	0.1%	0.2%
% of Total FTEs	1.4%	1.4%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	<u>\$ 13,545</u>	<u>\$ 12,552</u>
TOTAL FTEs	<u>73</u>	<u>72</u>
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	<u>\$ (110)</u>	<u>\$ 340</u>

Employees' Retirement Plan - Canada (in Canadian \$)
Balance Sheet (000s)

	December 31, 2017				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 189	-	-	-	189
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	456	-	-	-	456
Equities	4,614	-	-	-	4,614
GICs / Stable Asset Fund	133	-	-	-	133
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	5,392	-	-	-	5,392
Accounts Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Forfeitures Due Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	-	-	-	-	-
Net Assets	\$ 5,392	-	-	-	5,392
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)**

		2016 Actual		2017 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	\$	450	\$	462
Participant Contributions	\$	58	\$	57
Investment Earnings	\$	313	\$	330
Total Other Income		821		849
% of Total Income		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS		821		849
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Distributions	\$	434	\$	519
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	434	\$	519
Total Program Service FTEs		-		-
% of Total \$		97.7%		97.2%
% of Total FTEs				
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	10	\$	15
FTEs		-		-
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Support Service \$		10		15
Total Support Service FTEs		-		-
% of Total \$		2.3%		2.8%
% of Total FTEs				
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$	444	\$	534
TOTAL FTEs		-		-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$	377	\$	315

**Employees' Savings Plan United States
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	December 31, 2017				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	6,275	-	-	-	6,275
Equities	21,764	-	-	-	21,764
GICs / Stable Asset Fund	2,964	-	-	-	2,964
Diversified	6,422	-	-	-	6,422
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	37,425	-	-	-	37,425
Accounts Payable	8	-	-	-	8
Forfeitures Due Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	8	-	-	-	8
Net Assets	\$ 37,417	-	-	-	37,417

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)**

		2016 Actual		2017 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	\$	2,352	\$	2,487
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Investment Income	\$	1,787	\$	5,493
Total Other Income		4,139		7,980
% of Total Income		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS		4,139		7,980
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Distributions	\$	1,330	\$	3,846
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	1,330	\$	3,846
Total Program Service FTEs		-		-
% of Total \$		90.7%		96.4%
% of Total FTEs		0.0%		0.0%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	136	\$	144
FTEs		1		1
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Support Service \$		136		144
Total Support Service FTEs		1		1
% of Total \$		9.3%		3.6%
% of Total FTEs		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$	1,466	\$	3,990
TOTAL FTEs		1		1
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$	2,673	\$	3,990

**Loan Fund
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2017-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 6,102	-	-	-	6,102
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	17,563	-	-	-	17,563
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	52	-	-	-	52
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	-	-	-
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	19	-	-	-	19
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	23,736	-	-	-	23,736
Accounts Payable	54	-	-	-	54
Notes/Loans Payable	17,990	-	-	-	17,990
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	18,044	-	-	-	18,044
Net Assets	\$ 5,692	-	-	-	5,692
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 15-16 Actual	Fiscal 16-17 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	\$ 984	\$ 922
Total Other Income	984	922
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME	984	922
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Loan Interest	\$ 574	\$ 447
FTEs	1	1
Provision for loan forgiveness (CRCNA)	\$ -	\$ 1,948
	\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service \$	\$ 574	\$ 2,395
Total Program Service FTEs	1	1
% of Total \$	61.2%	87.5%
% of Total FTEs	33.3%	33.3%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 364	\$ 342
FTEs	1	1
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
Total Support Service \$	364	342
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1
% of Total \$	38.8%	12.5%
% of Total FTEs	66.7%	66.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 938	\$ 2,737
TOTAL FTEs	2	2
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ 46	\$ (1,815)

**Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - Canada
Balance Sheet (000s) in Canadian \$**

	-----December 31, 2017-----				
	Pension	S.A.F		Total	
Cash	\$ 1,984	401	-	-	2,385
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	96	10	-	-	106
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	11,097	-	-	-	11,097
Equities	45,784	-	-	-	45,784
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Real Estate (nonoperating)	2,503	-	-	-	2,503
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	61,464	411	-	-	61,875
Accounts Payable	160	22	-	-	182
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	160	22	-	-	182
Net Assets	\$ 61,304	389	-	-	61,693
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 2016 Actual	MPF 2017 Actual	SAF 2016 Actual	SAF 2017 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 100	\$ 93
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	97.1%	95.9%
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	\$ 3,170	\$ 3,167	\$ -	\$ -
Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Earnings/(Losses)	\$ 3,209	\$ 7,231	\$ 3	\$ 4
Total Other Income	6,379	10,398	3	4
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%	2.9%	4.1%
TOTAL ADDITIONS	6,379	10,398	103	97
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Distributions	\$ 2,618	\$ 2,890	\$ 15	\$ 7
FTEs	-	-	-	-
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service \$	\$ 2,618	\$ 2,890	\$ 15	\$ 7
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-	-	-
% of Total \$	74.8%	77.9%	100.0%	100.0%
% of Total FTEs	0.0%	0.0%	-	-
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 882	\$ 818	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	1	1	-	-
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Total Support Service \$	882	818	-	-
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1	-	-
% of Total \$	25.2%	22.1%	0.0%	0.0%
% of Total FTEs	100.0%	100.0%	-	-
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,708	\$ 15	\$ 7
TOTAL FTEs	1	1	-	-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$ 2,879	\$ 6,690	\$ 88	\$ 90

Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - United States
Balance Sheet (000s)

	-----December 31, 2017-----				
	Pension	S.A.F			Total
Cash	\$ 3,452	152	-	-	3,604
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	184	-	-	-	184
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	18,452	-	-	-	18,452
Equities	72,067	-	-	-	72,067
Diversified / Alternative	8,196	-	-	-	8,196
Real Estate (nonoperating)	10,478	-	-	-	10,478
PP & E	314	-	-	-	314
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	\$ 113,143	152	-	-	113,295
Accounts Payable	40	66	-	-	106
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	40	66	-	-	106
Net Assets	\$ 113,103	86	-	-	113,189
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.					

**Resonate Global Mission
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2017-----				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 5,180	-	156	-	5,336
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	666	666
Receivables & Advances	790	3	4	-	797
Inventory	7	-	-	-	7
Prepays & Advances	18	-	-	-	18
Investments (note 1):	-	-	-	-	-
Bonds	678	1,812	686	319	3,495
Equities	1,098	1,950	2,137	470	5,655
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	24	-	-	-	24
PP & E	370	-	-	-	370
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	8,165	3,765	2,983	1,455	16,368
Accounts Payable	1,200	-	-	-	1,200
Notes/Loans Payable	31	-	-	-	31
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	187	-	-	-	187
Deferred Income	2	-	-	-	2
Other	988	-	-	-	988
Total Liabilities	2,408	-	-	-	2,408
Net Assets	5,757	3,765	2,983	1,455	13,960

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.

List supplied upon request (land/buildings overseas are off book).
HM-Mission Trg Fund: \$379; Hawaii: \$1,165; Estate special proj: \$227.

**Resonate Global Mission
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 15-16 Actual		Fiscal 16-17 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	7,444	\$	7,215
% of Total Income		34.4%		33.8%
Other Gift Income:				
Gifts & Offerings	\$	10,209	\$	10,046
Estate Gifts	\$	3,189	\$	1,429
Total Gift Income		13,398		11,475
% of Total Income		61.8%		53.7%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	134	\$	252
Grants	\$	57	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	633	\$	2,422
Total Other Income		824		2,674
% of Total Income		3.8%		12.5%
TOTAL INCOME		21,666		21,364
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Ministry Teams - N. America	\$	3,086	\$	2,970
FTEs		18		18
Ministry Development - Mission Innovation	\$	559	\$	751
FTEs		5		5
Africa & Europe	\$	3,631	\$	3,845
FTEs		18		18
Eurasia-reclassified 17-18	\$	2,546	\$	-
FTEs		14		14
Latin America & Asia	\$	4,017	\$	6,015
FTEs		19		19
Global/other Int'l program	\$	1,461	\$	1,327
FTEs		40		40
Mission Educ Engagement/Vol	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		2		2
Total Program Service \$	\$	15,300	\$	14,908
Total Program Service FTEs		116		116
% of Total \$		78.5%		78.5%
% of Total FTEs		85.9%		85.9%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	2,132	\$	2,117
FTEs		6		6
Operations and Logistics/PLC	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Mission Support & Fund-raising	\$	2,051	\$	1,954
FTEs		13		13
Total Support Service \$		4,183		4,071
Total Support Service FTEs		19		19
% of Total \$		21.5%		21.5%
% of Total FTEs		14.1%		14.1%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	19,483	\$	18,979
TOTAL FTEs**		135		135
**Ptnr & Vol fte est. incl above		30		30
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	2,183	\$	2,385

**Synodical Administrative Services
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	June 30, 2017				Total
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	
Cash	\$ 4,226	-	1,780	-	6,006
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	1,567	-	-	-	1,567
Inventory	1,006	-	-	-	1,006
Prepays & Advances	109	-	-	-	109
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	1,811	-	-	-	1,811
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	6,331	-	-	-	6,331
Other	467	-	411	-	878
Total Assets	15,517	-	2,191	-	17,708
Accounts Payable	3,245	-	-	-	3,245
Notes/Loans Payable	1,797	-	-	-	1,797
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	95	-	-	-	95
Other	481	-	-	-	481
Total Liabilities	5,618	-	-	-	5,618
Net Assets	\$ 9,899	-	2,191	-	12,090
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: \$47,000 AOYC, \$73,000 DORR, \$1,630,000 Lilly, \$411,000 Bi-natl Gathereing, and \$30,000 other.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Synodical Administrative Services
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 15-16 Actual		Fiscal 16-17 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	2,296	\$	2,355
% of Total Income		49.1%		53.3%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	602	\$	85
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		602		85
% of Total Income		12.9%		1.9%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	-	\$	1,948
Services & Misc	\$	1,779	\$	33
Total Other Income		1,779		1,981
% of Total Income		38.0%		44.8%
TOTAL INCOME		4,677		4,421
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Synodical Services & Grants	\$	2,400	\$	1,534
FTEs		5		5
Communications				
FTEs				
Sea to Sea expenses & grants				
FTEs				
Leadership Programs	\$	17	\$	81
FTEs		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	2,417	\$	1,615
Total Program Service FTEs		5		5
% of Total \$		64.7%		53.6%
% of Total FTEs		41.7%		41.7%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	1,203	\$	1,144
FTEs		4		4
D.M.A.	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		2		2
Fund-raising (Foundation)	\$	116	\$	253
FTEs		1		1
Total Support Service \$		1,319		1,397
Total Support Service FTEs		7		7
% of Total \$		35.3%		46.4%
% of Total FTEs		58.3%		58.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	3,736	\$	3,012
TOTAL FTEs		12		12
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	941	\$	1,409

**Synodical Administrative Services (Agency Services)
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 15-16 Actual	Fiscal 16-17 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	\$	- \$	-
Services & Misc	\$	6,648 \$	6,433
Total Other Income		6,648	6,433
% of Total Income		100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME		6,648	6,433
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Advancement	\$	1,122 \$	845
FTEs		9	9
Finance & Payroll	\$	2,302 \$	2,344
FTEs		22	22
IT and Phones	\$	1,494 \$	1,508
FTEs		7	7
Human Resources	\$	375 \$	396
FTEs		2	2
Coordinated Services	\$	158 \$	152
FTEs		2	2
Total Program Service \$	\$	5,451 \$	5,245
Total Program Service FTEs		42	42
% of Total \$		82.0%	81.5%
% of Total FTEs		95.5%	95.5%
Support Services:			
Management & General			
FTEs			
Plant Operations/Debt Serv.	\$	1,197 \$	1,188
FTEs		2	2
Fund-raising (Foundation)			
FTEs			
Total Support Service \$		1,197	1,188
Total Support Service FTEs		2	2
% of Total \$		18.0%	18.5%
% of Total FTEs		4.5%	4.5%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	6,648 \$	6,433
TOTAL FTEs		44	44
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	- \$	-

**World Renew
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2017-----				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 376	7,811	9,411	-	17,598
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	1,444	1,000	771	-	3,215
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	1,067	-	-	-	1,067
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	27	-	-	-	27
Equities	9,401	-	-	-	9,401
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	883	-	103	-	986
Other		-	-	-	-
Total Assets	13,198	8,811	10,285	-	32,294
Accounts Payable	1,224	-	-	-	1,224
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	160	-	-	-	160
Deferred Income	6	-	-	-	6
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	1,390	-	-	-	1,390
Net Assets	\$ 11,808	8,811	10,285	-	30,904
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.	Term endowments as stipulated by board = \$8,040 GAC reserve \$771				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Mission home = \$103; Purpose-restricted gifts = \$9,247; Term endowments as stipulated by donors = \$935				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**World Renew
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 15-16 Actual		Fiscal 16-17 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
% of Total Income		-		-
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	17,416	\$	18,615
Estate Gifts	\$	5,871	\$	2,817
Total Gift Income		23,287		21,432
% of Total Income		65.9%		61.2%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	11,758	\$	12,597
Miscellaneous	\$	311	\$	1,004
Total Other Income		12,069		13,601
% of Total Income		34.1%		38.8%
TOTAL INCOME		35,356		35,033
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Overseas programs	\$	11,078	\$	11,734
FTEs		38		40
North America programs	\$	415	\$	125
FTEs				
Disaster relief programs	\$	1,521	\$	1,596
FTEs		13		13
Above-budget relief costs	\$	12,796	\$	12,413
FTEs		3		3
Education	\$	1,603	\$	1,578
FTEs		12		12
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
Total Program Service \$		27,413		27,446
Total Program Service FTEs		66		68
% of Total \$		86.6%		86.2%
% of Total FTEs		70.2%		70.8%
Support Services:				
Management & General		1,641		1,608
FTEs		7		7
Plant Operations		-		-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising		2,593		2,791
FTEs		21		21
Total Support Service \$		4,234		4,399
Total Support Service FTEs		28		28
% of Total \$		13.4%		13.8%
% of Total FTEs		29.8%		29.2%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES		31,647		31,845
TOTAL FTEs		94		96
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)		3,709		3,188

REPORTS OF AGENCIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND MINISTRIES

Introduction

It is the responsibility of the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA, as it was with the Board of Trustees before it, to submit 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 Calling—five 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 will be provided by denominational boards and standing committees of synod, 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, institutions, 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**

Calvin College's enduring mission is to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. To fulfill this mission, the current strategic plan, *Calvin 2019: Strengthen, Support, Secure*, holds the college accountable to its goals in practical and measurable ways.

Higher education faces new challenges each year, but not without new opportunities. Calvin has a long tradition of reforming and renewing, allowing it to remain a hub for innovative teaching and learning as well as serious, high-caliber scholarship. We expect the work we do to be rooted in a vibrant Reformed Christian faith.

In the 2017–2018 year, the college is focused on the following key objectives from its strategic plan:

- Calvin is launching Calvin LifeWork, a four-year program to prepare students for vocation, career, leadership, financial literacy, and life skills. More than 600 first-year students have enrolled in this program.
- Calvin is in the second year of a new retention initiative focused on student success. This fall, first- to second-year retention rose 2.1 percentage points, and substantial retention gains were made in every at-risk group. This represents a substantial achievement. The college has received a \$1 million grant to continue to experiment with new approaches to retention over the next four years.
- Calvin is planning for renovation of facilities and the replacement of energy systems at the college. As we do this work, we are focused on improving the long-term human, financial, and economic sustainability and efficiency of the campus.

Additionally, Calvin reaffirms its commitment to diversity and inclusion, working toward enhanced cultural competency within the Calvin community, inclusive excellence and global awareness on campus, and increasing the proportion of underrepresented populations among students, faculty, and staff.

Calvin is also in the process of envisioning the college's focus and position ten years and more into the future through the *Vision 2029* initiative. This process has already entailed careful preparation and research, community dialogue—including an online platform for feedback—and an analysis of initial findings. The college will be drafting and revising the vision through March 2018 and sharing and approving it by May 2018.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Calvin is an academically rigorous Christian college in the Reformed tradition, and our daily activities strongly reflect the five callings of the CRCNA. Our mission statement is clear: Calvin College equips students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. In doing so, the college partners with the CRCNA in striving to actualize the following five callings.

A. Faith formation

The campus ministries staff at Calvin creates and curates worship and discipleship experiences for students, faculty, and staff. The student Barnabas team nurtures spiritual life in the residence halls and walks alongside peers in their faith journeys. Regular campus-wide Bible studies are open to all members of the Calvin community. In these studies, small groups of students, faculty, and staff form to engage in a campus-wide study for a semester, based on a book of the Bible or topic of faith.

B. Servant leadership

Calvin values the CRCNA's dedication to "identifying, training, and recruiting leaders in the kingdom," and our Calvin LifeWork program is likewise designed to cultivate student gifts while training leaders in churches, communities, and the workplace. Additionally, the college's Service-Learning Center pairs Calvin students with community partners for service-learning around the greater Grand Rapids area—as well as across the country through spring break trips.

C. Global mission

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship's annual Symposium on Worship and the International Studies Department's annual Faith and International Development Conference bring mission-minded partners to campus to deepen and broaden our view of God's world and our partnership in missional endeavors.

D. Mercy and justice

The college's John M. Perkins Leadership Fellows program empowers an incoming cohort of students each year to train as leaders who engage and combat the issues of poverty, racism, injustice, and materialism.

Calvin was also a key partner in the Hope for Restoration: Radical Hospitality and Prison Reform conference (March 2017), focused on criminal justice reform and restorative justice. Students of Calvin College who study remotely at Handlon Correctional Facility through the Calvin Prison Initiative organized this conference, which was met with strong attendance.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

The college community aims to see the gospel proclaimed in our members' ongoing teaching, learning, scholarship, and community involvement. The gospel is at the center of Calvin's academic courses taught by committed, Christian professors who believe deeply in God's truth and see it revealed in their specialties. The Calvin Institute for Christian Worship has become a focal point for churches around the world interested in building worship capacity and knowledge. Calvin also offers a variety of worship and adoration opportunities to students. Students are invited to daily chapels, Sunday-evening services, dorm worship, and foreign-language chapels. Services are planned and prayed over with the intent of being Christ-focused as well as inclusive and inviting for our students, who feel at home using a variety of worship styles.

III. Board matters

A. Board officers

Board officers for the 2017-2018 year are Mr. Craig Lubben, chair; Ms. Mary C. Bonnema, vice-chair; Ms. Janice Buikema, secretary; Ms. Sally Vander Ploeg, treasurer (vice president for administration and finance); and Ms. Sharolyn Christians, assistant secretary (executive assistant to the president).

B. Board membership

The following nominations for new delegates from the regions are presented for election to the Calvin College Board of Trustees.

1. Region 4

Dr. Albert M. Wolters resigned during the summer of 2017 after serving one year of his first term. The board presents the following slate of names to the classes in Region 4 for a vote to name the trustee to be presented to Synod 2018 for ratification:

Ms. Andria Barends is a 2011 business-finance graduate of Calvin College. She is a member of Bethany CRC in Fenwick, Ontario, where she helped to launch a group for 18- to 30-year-olds. She also leads a Bible study group for teenage girls and has served on the pastor search committee. Ms. Barends is a project manager for United Floral Distributors. In nominating her, the classis feels that she would represent the voice of the younger generation on Calvin's board.

Rev. Willemina L. Zwart is a 1993 graduate of Calvin College and went on to Geneva College to earn a master of arts degree in higher education. She received her M.Div. degree from Regent College and completed the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy at Calvin Theological Seminary. Rev. Zwart is the pastor at Good News CRC in London, Ontario. She has served on several classis committees and is currently serving on the Classis Chatham church planting team.

2. Region 10

Rev. Michael D. Koetje was appointed to a one-year term during the summer of 2017 to fill the vacancy of Mr. R. Scott Boot. The board presents the following slate of names to the classes in Region 10 for a vote to name the trustee to be presented to Synod 2018 for ratification:

Mr. Ron Baylor is a 1977 graduate of Calvin College and received his J.D. degree from Wayne State University. He is a member of Third CRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He is a principal attorney at Miller Canfield in Kalamazoo, serving as group leader of their Energy and Environmental practice. Mr. Baylor has served on the Calvin College alumni board as well as on the college's board of trustees.

Rev. Chad Pierce is a 1993 graduate of Calvin College and is a member and pastor at Faith CRC in Holland, Michigan. He earlier served as head pastor at Jamestown Reformed Church in Jamestown, Michigan. Rev. Pierce has been the president of council and has served on several denominational boards and committees for the Reformed Church in America. He is currently an adjunct professor in the Religion Department at Calvin College.

Additional board membership updates will be included in the Calvin College supplemental report to synod.

IV. Finances

The college remains grateful for God's faithfulness through preparing for and executing its financial restructuring plan, finalized in July 2016. Calvin's outstanding debt is \$76.5 million as of September 1, 2017, and the college is reducing its principal each year through an amortization schedule.

Calvin is also working on a schedule to make campus maintenance more cost-effective. This is just one piece of the financial reform outlined in the *Calvin 2019* strategic plan.

The college has also spent much time this year studying and analyzing the impact of new tax-law changes for higher education. The college was grateful to see that many provisions that would have been detrimental to the cost of higher education were removed from the proposed tax bill, and we are hopeful that charitable contributions will not be negatively affected by the increase in the standard deduction. We are also assessing the impact of the tax changes on our bond pricing.

Calvin continues to be mindful of declining high school graduate numbers in Michigan, some neighboring states, and the CRCNA. The college continues to reach out to new student populations that it believes will thrive in Calvin's rigorously academic, Reformed Christian community. Calvin is continuously monitoring predictive enrollment numbers and is committed to budgeting within its means and maintaining a balanced budget.

V. Academic initiatives

Calvin's academic offerings are robust and wide-ranging, and every department offers strong teaching, learning, and programming to benefit students and to contribute scholarship to the world at large. The following highlights detail select developments since the college's previous report to synod.

Calvin's new master of accounting program launched in fall 2017. The college has long been influential in the field of accounting, and the market for postgraduate accounting education is strong. This new degree is a natural fit for Calvin and is designed to benefit traditional Calvin students (through a five-year bachelor's/master's program) as well as graduates of Calvin at other institutions who have already completed an undergraduate degree.

For its 2018 rankings, *U.S. News & World Report* has once again ranked Calvin College first in the category of Midwest regional colleges. While the college was honored to rank first for 2017 as well, the spot was then shared with a peer institution. This year Calvin has sole placement in that ranking. Calvin shows promise in retaining its excellence, as Calvin's incoming class of 2021 brought a 3.75 average high school GPA, the highest average GPA on record for an incoming class of students.

Calvin alumnus, former Calvin professor, and renowned philosopher Alvin Plantinga won the 2017 Templeton Prize, one of the world's largest annual awards to an individual. This prestigious award honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works. Plantinga joins an esteemed group of 46 prize recipients including Mother Teresa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the Dalai Lama.

In January 2017, Calvin professor of astronomy Larry Molnar presented to the American Astronomical Society his prediction that a binary star (two stars orbiting each other) that he is monitoring will merge and explode around the year 2022. Throughout 2017, this impressive research, which Molnar worked on with Calvin students, gained national and international attention.

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 following faculty promotions and reappointments with tenure, effective September 1, 2018:

Kristine E. Johnson, Ph.D., associate professor of English

Yoon G. Kim, Ph.D., professor of engineering

Heather K. Koole, Ph.D., associate professor of speech pathology and audiology

Kara C. Sevensma, Ph.D., associate professor of education

Stacey M.B. Wieland, Ph.D., associate professor of communication arts and sciences

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 Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin College
Michael K. Le Roy, president

Faith Formation Ministries (Dr. Syd Hielema, team leader)

“Helping churches grow faith for life”

I. Introduction

Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) launched at Synod 2015 as a new denominational initiative, and we are now marking our third birthday as we continue a five-year ministry-building project. Faith Formation Ministries encourages and equips local Christian Reformed ministry leaders in their calling to shape intentional, lifelong faith formation in their context. Our vision is to deepen church culture and faith formation practices so that all generations have an intentional and resilient faith. We form partnerships with CRC pastors and ministry leaders (paid or unpaid) who are responsible for setting direction in faith formation. We serve them by listening, by developing relationships, and by providing coaching and resources to design and build a framework for lifelong faith formation that fits their setting.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

FFM’s building process is very interactive. We are continually listening to feedback we receive from church leaders as we serve them, and this feedback is shaping our ongoing growth. This past year one pastor observed, “I have followed FFM from its very beginnings, and I have realized that its greatest benefit has been that it has given me, our elders, and other leaders a *vocabulary of faith formation*, the terms and concepts that we need in order to reflect upon and develop strengthening strategies for our congregation’s faith formation.”

That pastor’s observation made a strong impression on our team. It clarified for us that our calling is *not* to add more programs to congregations that are often already overly programmatic, but rather to encourage fresh ways of understanding and supporting congregational faith-formation callings. This works itself out as follows:

1. A common default in congregations is to see faith formation as a combination of Sunday worship and a variety of programs that are offered throughout the week (i.e., worship plus programs equals congregational faith formation).
2. We believe that biblical teachings concerning faith formation suggest a different paradigm: Jesus lives within the church to bless the world (a presence that can be named by reflecting on “church culture”), and this presence is strengthened as believers engage in spiritual practices.
3. The previous point is rather abstract. We have sought to make this concrete through some of the following means:
 - a. We recognize that conceptual change happens gradually through many repetitions. Thus we use every means available to get our message out: blog posts, free resources, classis presentations, workshops, cohorts, informal conversations. One of the proverbs we live by states that “People need to hear a message seven times before they realize they’ve heard it at all.”

- b. We provide nonprogrammatic resources that support the paradigm shift we are shepherding, especially online toolkits and “Ten Ways” tools. These resources are concrete embodiments of our theology of faith formation and are filled with practical, user-friendly ideas for strengthening congregational faith formation. These free resources are being very well received.
4. Because (as mentioned above) the common assumption is that faith formation equals worship plus programs, we have discovered that a central calling for our ministry is to educate congregational leaders in how to make use of our resources. In other words, the process of shepherding a ministry paradigm shift includes educating our partners in how to engage this shift. We have learned that this cannot be rushed; we need to be persevering, consistent, serving as respectful listeners as we provide leadership. We are encouraged by the ways in which congregational leaders are engaging with FFM, and we are encouraged that we play a role in working out the Ministry Plan, *Our Journey 2020*.

III. Connecting with Churches: *Our Journey 2020* (Ministry Plan)

FFM’s calling to connect with churches is being carried out in two distinct ways:

A. Building capacity for connection

As a new ministry, we are in the process of building an infrastructure for connecting with churches. This process has included these components:

1. Making presentations and leading workshops at classis meetings to inform congregational leaders of the ways in which our new ministry can work with them in their congregations.
2. Hiring a youth ministry catalyzer, Ron deVries, who is putting in place a classis-based Youth Ministry Champions network. These champions serve as vision-casters and strategic encouragers in their classes. Currently about half of CRC classes have a champion in place.
3. Hiring a children’s ministry catalyzer, Mimi Larson, to begin networking with congregational leaders and to connect them with resources.
4. Using every means available to us (see above) to acquaint church leaders with the ways FFM can work with them in their ministries.

B. Making connections with churches

Our team of regional catalyzers connects with pastors and other congregational leaders to listen to their joys and struggles and to provide various kinds of support for their faith formation callings. These connections occur in several ways:

- Engaging in hundreds of one-on-one conversations.
- Providing workshops or training in local congregations.
- Writing blog posts on specific areas of faith formation. We were encouraged to see that five of our blog posts made the “top 17 of 2017” list on the CRC Network.
- Gathering cohorts focused on a specific area of faith formation and shepherding yearlong projects with a congregation’s cohort team.

- Hosting online workshops on specific topics.
- Gathering 4-6 pastors and other leaders on conference calls focused on specific faith formation themes.

Our team of fifteen members (FTE = 6.4) feels both privileged by the task we have been entrusted with and overwhelmed by the magnitude of our calling. In our short history we have experienced the Lord's goodness again and again, and we are eager to see in what ways he will lead us in the coming year.

IV. Conclusion

Building a new ministry necessarily involves a variety of significant challenges that are simply part of the growing pains that come with newness. We long for synod's prayers, encouragement, and advice on matters like these:

1. After three years, FFM is 80 percent built, and we are working hard to secure funding for the final 20 percent. On a "grand scale" we have not yet arrived in the hearts of donors (both individuals and church offerings), and we recognize the need both for us to work hard at this and for the CRCNA through synod to support this process.
2. The Board of Trustees of the CRCNA approved a proposal for FFM to continue some of the curriculum development work of Faith Alive in modified form, but this proposal is an unfunded mandate. Because ministry shares are not sufficient to complete this task, donations and other revenue sources are being sought.

Our entire FFM team finds it a rich privilege to be entrusted with developing a new ministry for the Christian Reformed Church, and we are encouraged by the initial responses to our service. We find ourselves thanking the Lord daily for his faithfulness present in the CRCNA as we "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry (Rev. Sarah Roelofs, director)

I. Introduction

Today 144 of our ordained clergy (over 10% of our total clergy) serve full- or part-time as endorsed chaplains. In addition, many other current and retired pastors serve without our official endorsement on college campuses, in hospitals or hospice ministries, police and fire departments, and so forth. Through these pastoral care activities, the church reaches into the lives of countless individuals and families that it would otherwise not reach.

A growing number of individuals are choosing to prepare for and to seek endorsement as chaplains each year. We anticipate that the number of endorsed chaplains will continue to grow by 5-10 percent each year for the foreseeable future. Despite having one of the ministry's smallest budgets at a little over \$300,000, by the grace of God our chaplains have been able to provide ministry that would otherwise cost over \$10 million. Though called by the local church, chaplains are employed by the institutions they work for rather than being financially supported by their church or classis. We encourage the church to continue to allocate resources to support our chaplains' continuously growing ministry.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry has experienced several changes over this past year. Our community mourns the deaths of two past directors: Rev. Harold Bode and Rev. Herman Keizer, Jr. In addition, our ministry recognized the retirement of director Rev. Ronald Klimp and administrative assistant Beverly Koetje. Rev. Sarah Roelofs became the new director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry in April 2017. Rev. Roelofs previously served as an acute-care hospital chaplain, Air Force Reserve chaplain, and board-certified member of the Association of Professional Chaplains. Mr. Matthew Hubers began working full-time in January 2018 in an expanded role as communications specialist for Chaplaincy and Care. Mr. Hubers has been working for many years as a hospice volunteer coordinator and has a degree in communications. Rev. Roelofs and Mr. Hubers will support our endorsed chaplains and prospective chaplains seeking endorsement. They will work diligently with the chaplaincy advisory committee to evaluate and revise our current communication materials and formulate adaptive communication strategies along with updating policies and procedures.

II. Ministries of the Office of Chaplaincy and Care

A. *Ministry that reflects our calling*

1. Faith formation

Endorsed chaplains are normally required to have a master's degree in pastoral care or theology 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 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

Many of our chaplains serve in leadership roles in various professional organizations. These include 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. Currently we have three chaplains serving as CPE/Pastoral Counseling Education supervisors and two chaplains in supervisory CPE training. A number of other chaplains serve as directors of departments or independently manage counseling or chaplaincy ministries. Two of our Army chaplains are trainers at the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School at Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina. One of our Navy chaplains serves as the senior Chaplain of the United States Coast Guard, advising the Command and managing all Coast Guard chaplains. These achievements are remarkable for a relatively small denomination and represent significant influence in God's world.

3. Global mission

Our chaplains enter into and influence populations, cultures, and faith groups all over the world, stretching from prisons to the highest levels of government. They influence the institutions in which they serve by calling them to ethical standards of care and concern. They also have the unique opportunity to influence individuals and families in crisis and spiritual distress, who are often searching for meaning beneath and around the circumstances they face. Chaplains represent the presence of God in such circumstances. They have extensive training in how to minister to such individuals, regardless of their faith background. When appropriate, they share their own faith story. With over 144 active chaplains and dozens of retired chaplains touching numerous individuals and their families in crisis on a daily basis, we have significant potential for introducing and strengthening faith.

4. Loving mercy and doing justice

Chaplains offer help and show mercy in almost all of their interactions. Chaplains often serve as key members of ethics committees or give moral advice to the organizations in which they work. Many chaplains in other institutions are respected for their observations and insights regarding 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. Few other voices have access to such important cultural arenas.

5. Gospel proclamation and worship

All CRC chaplains are called by a local church, which oversees their life and doctrine. Most have preached in their calling church and in other area churches. Some have served on their church council, at classis, or as delegates to synod. Some serve in arenas where they offer worship leadership. Others 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.

In addition, our chaplains lead in religious education and worship opportunities in places where the church might otherwise not be visible—from hospital chapels to veterans facilities, long-term care facilities, prisons, college campuses, Army field tents, air bases, and aircraft carriers.

B. Collaborative efforts

Issues that chaplains address often bring them into conversation and collaboration with the offices of Candidacy, Resonate: Campus Ministry, Pastor Church Resources, Safe Church Ministry, and Disability Concerns. This ministry also collaborates with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) endorser and chaplains, chaplain certifying agencies, and other faith group endorsers to advocate for chaplaincy issues in the United States and Canada.

C. Diversity and development of future ministry

Currently 36 of our endorsed chaplains are female (25%). Thirteen of our current chaplains represent ethnic diversity. Most of these people have come into chaplaincy in the past few years. Eleven more ethnically diverse individuals are on our list of recent inquiries/applicants. Based on current applicants and students showing an interest in chaplaincy (20 of which are female and 21 of which represent ethnic diversity), we expect this trend to continue.

III. Connecting with churches

In addition to the ministries mentioned above, the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry provides spiritual care resources and stories about chaplaincy to the various print and digital communications outlets available to churches. We also require chaplains to connect with our ministry and their calling churches by having them formulate a Covenant of Joint Supervision (CJS) to be signed by the chaplain, church elders, and director of Chaplaincy and Care. The CJS is reviewed for renewal every five years along with the chaplain's endorsement renewal. This covenant specifies expectations for the church to support and supervise the life and doctrine of the chaplain, and for the chaplain to report regularly on his or her activities. This usually includes participating in a worship event at least once a year—often on Chaplaincy Sunday in November. For this event we also 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.

IV. Recruitment and training

We have seen a growing interest in chaplaincy on the six to eight college and seminary campuses that we visit each year. We are expanding this interest by interacting with students and by encouraging chaplains (who often accompany us) to tell their rich and moving stories of service to individuals in crisis situations. We are interacting with churches and classes to help create opportunities for these stories to be heard.

We are currently working with 32 students (in college, seminary, or CPE) and more than 83 other inquiring individuals, assisting some of them in their education financially and through mentoring. In 2017 we provided 10 grants totaling \$28,282 to students and prospective chaplains. 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 (including our current chaplains) to continue to contribute to this fund.

Our annual conference will convene June 7-9, 2018, 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: 144 (full-time, 97; part-time, 32; endorsed and seeking employment, 15); in the United States, 125; in Canada, 19
2. Military chaplains: 17 on active duty in the United States; 2 on active duty in Canada; 4 in the U.S. National Guard and Reserves
3. Ten chaplains were endorsed in 2017: Jeffrey Meyer, *Jung Un Park, *Arianna Tolsma, *Jantje (Femke) Visser-Elenbaas, *Jaci Walcott, Adie Johnson, Trent Elders, *Jacob Lapre (student candidate for the military), Bernie Haan, *Sarah Hoogendoorn
(*Provisional endorsement: still awaiting completion of a training component, a job offer, a call from a local church, and/or classis examination/approval.)
4. Eight of our chaplains retired from service in 2017: Rev. J. George Aupperlee, CH (CDR) Roger Bouma, Rev. W. Dean Dyk, Rev. Ronald Klimp, Rev. Dr. Mark Knoper, Rev. Carol A. Robinson, Chaplain Grace VanStaalduinen, CH (LCDR) Douglas J. Vrieland
5. Military chaplains who have served in the past year, or are currently serving, overseas: Jonathan Averill, Richard Hill, Tom Walcott, Perrin Warner, Lloyd Wickers, Sang Joon (Tim) 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 two three-year terms. Members of the board of directors are Mr. James Brewer (2018), Mr. Brad Bruinsma (2020), Ms. Chery De Boer (2019), Mr. Jack Meyer (2020), Mr. Kenneth Stienstra (2019), and Mr. Scott Ritsema (2018).

The board requests that synod appoint Mr. Brewer to a second three-year term. Mr. Ritsema is completing his second term and is not eligible for reappointment. The board requests that synod appoint one board member to a first term of three years from the following slate of nominees:

Mr. Steven Triezenberg is a member of Calvin CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has served as a pastoral search committee member, deacon, treasurer, and executive committee member. He has also served the Christian Counseling Center as a board member and treasurer. Mr. Triezenberg is a graduate of Calvin College and Grand Valley State University and is employed as a C.P.A. with the accounting firm Monroe, Sweeris, and Tromp in Grand Rapids.

Mr. Howard Van Den Heuvel is a member of Plymouth Heights CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has served as an elder and as a cadet counselor. He is an attorney and is principal of Van Den Heuvel Law, PLLC in Grand Rapids. He has served as legal counsel for multiple churches, pastors, and Christian organizations as well as for individuals and groups regarding religious liberty and freedom of speech issues. Mr. Van Den Heuvel is a graduate of Calvin College and Thomas Cooley Law School and specializes in business law, real estate, criminal, and general civil litigation.

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 2017 fiscal year (June 30, 2017), a total of \$17,990,490 in interest-bearing Investment Certificates held by investors was outstanding. Interest rates vary from 0.75 percent to 2.50 percent, with a weighted average

of 2.35 percent. The variance in interest rates reflects the terms of the certificates and market conditions at the times the certificates 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, 2017, the Loan Fund had \$17,563,541 in loans and interest outstanding. Loan delinquencies do occur from time to time, but they are closely monitored and are very low. The fund maintains a loan loss reserve to help cover potential losses. The fund is blessed to have experienced minimal loan losses in its history.

D. Financial operations are also reflected in the following data:

	2017	2016	2015
Cash and equivalents	\$6,102,071	\$14,315,282	\$13,096,796
Net loans and interest receivable	\$17,563,541	\$20,560,566	\$21,470,300
Other assets	<u>\$70,606</u>	<u>\$298,138</u>	<u>\$0</u>
Total assets	\$23,736,218	\$35,173,986	\$34,567,096
Certificates and interest payable	\$18,044,395	\$27,666,950	\$27,105,990
Net assets	<u>\$5,691,823</u>	<u>\$7,507,036</u>	<u>\$7,461,106</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	\$23,736,218	\$35,173,986	\$34,567,096

E. A summary of the audited financial report as of June 30, 2017, appears in the *Agenda for Synod—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 states where legal approval to offer them has been obtained.
- B. Gifts and bequests made to the Loan 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 Ms. Alice M. Damsteegt, customer service specialist, and Mr. David E. Veen, director.

VI. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. David E. Veen, 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 appoint Mr. James Brewer to a second term and appoint one new member to the board of directors of the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S. from the slate of nominees presented to serve a first term of three years.

Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.
David E. Veen, director

I. Introduction: Pastor Church Resources

Synod 1982 approved the formation of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR). Included in the original mandate were three key initiatives—namely, regional pastors within each classis, mentors for newly ordained CRC ministers of the Word, and pastoral relations committees in local congregations. The regional pastor and mentor initiatives continue to be key components of our work. The pastoral relations committees occasionally were helpful but generally proved problematic and thus are no longer promoted.

Synod 2016 approved a name change to *Pastor Church Resources*, reflecting the broad array of initiatives gathered in the ministry of PCR. It is worth noting that while the range of ways in which PCR seeks to accomplish its work has increased and developed, the original mandate continues to serve as an apt description of our work: PCR seeks to provide encouragement and support that fosters health and flourishing. It also attends to relationships that are strained and broken. As much as possible, our energy is directed toward the positive. Our current vision/mission statement reads as follows: “Pastor Church Resources serves pastors, churches, and classes as they seek to promote healthy relationships, encourage one another in ministry, and discern next steps in seasons of growth, transition, or challenge.”

A review of PCR from its beginning in 1982 (and the history of the Ministerial Information Service, beginning in 1972) reveals a common thread: concern for the well-being of pastors and their families, concern for the well-being of congregations, and concern for the challenges that are intrinsic to the relationship of pastor and church. Synod has addressed these concerns in a variety of ways over the years, introducing the regional pastor program and the mentoring program, encouraging continuing education and sabbatical time for pastors, promoting pastor peer groups, studying the calling system, experimenting with pastor exchanges, introducing term calls, revising Church Order Articles 16 and 17, and encouraging the use of minister and church profiles and support for pastor-search committees to provide better “fit” capability. More recently, attention to the systemic health of classes and the resourcing of classis functionaries has been added, as well as the capacity for vocational assessments.

Our efforts are directed toward strengthening the health of pastors, congregational leaders, and the classis that surrounds them. All of this attention to the well-being of pastors and churches provides the context for the individual programs, personal interactions, and consultations that PCR staff undertake. While we often deal with situations of strain and brokenness, we do so as tenderly and truthfully as we can, trusting that the Spirit of God is at work ahead of us, with us, in us, and through us—and will continue to be at work after us. Our desire to resource pastors and churches so that they may flourish is an attempt to reflect our God, who resources the church with all the gifts necessary for flourishing.

Staffing notes: We have been blessed to welcome Ms. Rachel Schelhaas as administrative coordinator since January 2017. In the summer of 2017, Derek Atkins left his role as Connections coordinator, and Rev. Scott DeVries joined us as Connections manager in January 2018.

Rev. Norm Thomasma retired in March 2018 after serving the ministry of PCR for sixteen years. Norm's steady and wise pastoral leadership has been a rich blessing to the CRC. In February 2018, PCR welcomed Rev. David Den Haan as a ministry consultant.

II. Reflecting on our calling – servant leadership

In the desire of the CRCNA to see congregations flourish, the ministry of Pastor Church Resources plays a role in supporting, training, encouraging, and challenging congregational pastors and congregational leaders. This work occurs in a variety of ways and situations: through direct interactions with individual pastors and council leadership, systemically by way of interactions with classis functionaries, and with the encouragement of Clasis Renewal. The typical entry point for engaging congregations—no matter what challenges may be under way—is by way of PCR's work with those serving in leadership roles.

III. Connecting with churches (as it relates to *Our Journey 2020*)

A. Ongoing ministry initiatives

1. The staff of PCR respond to various questions and requests from congregational leaders. This includes **consultation/intervention** in times of difficulty or transition; we suggest resources when congregations are adding staff or considering a change in organizational structure, and we help with processes by which challenging congregational conversations can be planned and implemented. In 2017, PCR had such interactions with over 200 pastors, 125 congregations, and 20 classes. Much of this work is accomplished over the phone or through email, but PCR staff also work on-site with congregations and classes 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 (EPMC). The work of PCR is explained, and relationships are initiated in a context of community.
3. On behalf of synod, Pastor Church Resources 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.
4. **Specialized Transitional Ministers (STMs)** are seasoned pastors trained to help congregations deal with challenges and opportunities during a transition between pastors. PCR endorses pastors for this ministry and supports them through the cultivation of peer learning groups, through

annual training events, and through helping to connect them with churches seeking an STM. At this time, there are some 20 STMs either endorsed by PCR or discerning whether the STM role is a good fit for them.

5. PCR maintains a list of **supply pastors**, most of whom are retired. Inclusion on this list is voluntary, and pastors desiring to be on this list can contact PCR. Supply pastors serve congregations for a limited time during periods of vacancy.
6. PCR extends its work through **regional pastors** at the classis level who provide support, encouragement, and counsel to pastors and spouses (including commissioned pastors and spouses). 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. Regional pastors gather biennially for a conference of encouragement, support, and training. The next conference is slated for November 5-7, 2019.

Note: PCR is proposing protocols with respect to the appointment of regional pastors and the appointment of mentors (for newly ordained ministers of the Word in the CRC). Regional pastors and mentors have been part of the CRC landscape since the decision of Synod 1982, but they currently are not mentioned in the Church Order. The proposal can be found in Appendix A to the Council of Delegates report in this agenda.

7. **Sustaining Congregational Excellence (SCE)** began in 2007 to support and encourage smaller congregations in a variety of ways. Since then, 74 percent of all eligible smaller congregations (or 88% of smaller Canadian churches and 72% of smaller U.S. churches) have participated in SCE programming—*over 500 churches*. It was decided in December 2017 that SCE opportunities for churches would come to an end as of June 30, 2018. Over the years, budget reductions resulted in less programming available for churches, and continuing this programming became no longer feasible. Churches looking to implement new ministries may apply for an Ignite grant (see crna.org/Ignite).
8. **Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE)** provides grants for pastor peer groups and biennial conferences for pastors' wives. Since SPE's inception in 2003, *nearly 850 pastors* have participated in 278 peer groups. The next conference for pastors' wives (male spouses have not shown interest in such events) will be held in September 2018 in Calgary, Alberta. The most recent pastor couple retreat was held in April 2017.
9. **Reading Ministry Contexts** is a segment of leadership training provided by PCR staff for Calvin Theological Seminary students preparing for their first fieldwork assignments. The goal is to encourage observation through the use of various lenses and to attend to the work of God's Spirit already under way in a particular setting. In this way, a posture of humility can encourage leaders to develop their listening skills.

10. In the **Pastor Search** process, PCR assists search teams in the basic procedures of calling a new pastor. The PCR training tool *More Than a Search Committee* is a recommended starting point, and it can be downloaded from the PCR webpage (crcna.org/pastor-church-resources) or ordered through Faith Alive (faithaliveresources.org). It provides guidance for the various steps of a healthy search process. As of June 2017, **Minister Profiles** are accessible to search teams through a special portal into the denominational database. There is some capacity for filtering, and PCR staff provide support in navigating the portal. This new process has proven effective in giving search teams direct access to profiles. **Church profiles** are being posted on the Church Positions page of the Network, where pastors can review those materials with a degree of anonymity. PCR staff also support pastors during seasons of discernment.

Note: The **Ministerial Information Service** (MIS) committee is currently “on hold.” For over 40 years, its members met regularly to connect searching churches with potential pastors. The recent transition to direct access for search committees now largely fulfills this main function of MIS. Occasionally search teams will ask for additional input, and MIS members provide such input on an ad hoc basis. While the future of this committee is somewhat unclear, their ongoing work remains appreciated. Current MIS members include Rev. Mike Abma, Rev. David Koll, Rev. Kathy Smith, Rev. Everett Vander Horst, and representatives of the PCR staff. The future of this team will depend on how effectively the direct-access minister and church profiles meet congregational needs.

11. **Vocational Ministry Assessment**—In collaboration with Chaplaincy Care Ministry, Resonate Global Mission, the Candidacy Office, and Calvin Theological Seminary, PCR’s ministry assessment consultant, Rev. Samantha DeJong McCarron, resources and arranges for various vocational assessments. These assessments, conducted by professionals in various locales, help ministry leaders understand themselves, their calling, and the context in which they are likely to flourish. To date, over 200 pastors have engaged in the assessment process, and 125 have specifically worked with the ministry assessment consultant. These persons include leaders who are just entering ministry, those in a time of midlife discernment, those focusing on developing their own leadership, and those approaching retirement.
12. **Training tools** developed by PCR and related ministries include *More Than a Search Committee*, *Evaluation Essentials*, and *Effective Leadership in the Church*. Congregations can access these materials by downloading them at the PCR website (crcna.org/pastor-church-resources) or by ordering printed copies through Faith Alive (faithaliveresources.org). PCR has also developed a one-page tool titled “Resilience to Risk” for congregational self-reflection. Drawing on recurring patterns that emerge in congregational consultation, this tool can help to forewarn congregational leaders when their church is trending toward risky conditions—such as difficulties in the pastor/congregation relationship. Becoming aware of such trends can prompt earlier and more effective responses.

13. **Healthy Church Survey process**—Beginning with a CRCNA Board of Trustees initiative in 2002, an instrument for describing a healthy congregation was developed. The Healthy Church Survey process is guided by trained coaches who administer the Healthy Church Survey, with the goal of energizing a congregation through reflective conversations about the future of their church and about paths toward more faithful and effective ministry. In addition, a shortened version of the Healthy Church Survey has been adapted for use as a tool that classis church visitors can use to develop richer conversations with the churches they visit.
14. A **Continuing Education (CE) for Pastors Task Force** has been formed. The group seeks to bolster a culture of ongoing learning and formation in ministry for pastors in the CRC. Over the past year, the group has worked on developing a CE for Pastors website where resources can be shared. As that becomes available, the group will continue to refine and update resources regularly and will explore other avenues and partnerships to support ongoing learning among pastors.
15. The work of **Classis Renewal** encompasses two broad categories. The first is direct engagement with specific classes to support them in renewal and/or restructuring. In the past year, our office has given varying levels of coaching and consultation support to 14 specific classes in this regard while also seeking to build relationships with leaders in all 48 classes. We also hosted or participated in multiple gatherings, such as a two-day Classis Summit with four classes and various gatherings of functionaries. The second category involves building up supportive infrastructure for the ongoing health and effectiveness of classes. We have been developing more resources and stronger communication plans to support functionaries of classis, and we have been participating in denominational efforts to better strengthen relationships among churches, classes, and denominational ministries/agencies.

B. Special ministry initiative projects

1. Connections project

At this time of writing, Connections is at the halfway mark of a 3.5-year project focusing on regional resourcing. Congregations in three regions (southern Ontario, the U.S. Midwest, and southern California) and twelve classes are engaging with a variety of ministry topics of their choosing with the goal of enhancing ministry. Regional staff provide opportunities for gatherings and coaching as well as a myriad of resources for those topics. Some of the three-year project goals were met in the first year. In 2017, staff connected with 328 churches and/or ministry leaders. Classes outside the project are asking how they too can participate. Connections is leading a significant shift in how the denomination will resource its congregations. Funding for Connections is provided by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.

2. Spiritual vitality project

After an experimental 16-month spiritual formation journey undertaken by 16 CRC pastors, a rich variety of learnings were gathered to produce the *Pastors' Spiritual Vitality Toolkit*. Within the first month, the online

toolkit was accessed by a wide range of individuals—from CRC pastors to students at Fuller Theological Seminary to a professor at Azusa Pacific University. While the toolkit is focused on pastors, it serves as a great resource for all believers who seek to learn habits of mind and heart toward spiritual growth in self and community. The Spiritual Vitality Project was funded by a grant from the Pastoral Excellence Network—a Lilly Endowment Inc. organization.

3. SPE clergy couple retreat

In April 2017 the first retreat for clergy couples (in which both spouses are ordained) brought 11 of the then 25 clergy couples together for encouragement and support while they explored their unique roles and partnerships in ministry. Much appreciation was expressed for the event, as was a desire for other such events. However, due to declining financial resources, these retreats have been discontinued from SPE programming.

4. Flourishing in Ministry

In summer 2017 nearly 350 CRC pastors participated in the Flourishing in Ministry Study conducted by Notre Dame University and funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. The purpose of the study is to provide data to pastors on their well-being. Participating pastors receive an instant and confidential report—which PCR does not see. Periodically a denomination-wide report is prepared. Findings of the summer 2017 survey can be found at this address: https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/crcna_flourishing_in_ministry_report_-_aug.17.pdf

The report indicates that CRC pastors experience slightly higher levels of well-being than the average pastor in the study (with over 10,000 participants surveyed) in the areas of job fit and spiritual well-being. Emotional exhaustion and financial strain appear to be significant difficulties for participating CRC pastors.

Pastors are able to complete the survey every six months in order to track their well-being. PCR will engage in this study for some years and will use the data to shape their ministry and their resourcing of pastors.

IV. Conclusion

Over the past few years, PCR's work has focused as much as possible on being proactive in working toward the well-being of pastors and churches. Synod 2012 asked PCR to develop ways in which it could get involved "more quickly in situations where tensions are developing within a congregation" (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 755). The "Better Together" initiative (2013-2015) was a first significant step. The recommendations from that report continue to be implemented by both PCR and Classis Renewal. In 2015, after a two-year pilot project, Vocational Ministry Assessments became available for pastors. Almost two years were spent on the Spiritual Vitality for Pastors Project (2015-2017) resulting in the *Pastors' Spiritual Vitality Toolkit*. A Flourishing in Ministry Study began in summer 2017 and will continue for some years to come. Learnings from the ongoing data will be key to PCR's work with pastors and congregations and the request made by Synod 2012.

There is no formula to ensure pastoral health or congregational health; no formula can protect against strains and stresses in relationships. We encourage healthy practices such as spiritual disciplines, Sabbath-keeping, and

ongoing conversations between pastors and church councils that are both gracious and candid.

Most of all, we encourage a spirit of hospitableness, in which pastors seek the flourishing of a congregation, and congregations seek the flourishing of a pastor. To have the best interests of the other in view, and then to use available resources for the well-being of the other, makes for a way of being church together that reflects the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This requires a posture of graciousness, a commitment to prayerful support and encouragement, and a willingness to be both honest and kind.

Who knows but that the church has been chosen to shine for such a time as this?

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 employees' retirement plans are governed by the U.S. Board of Pensions and the Canadian Pension Trustees. These boards meet several times per year, usually in joint session. Separate meetings of the boards are held as needed.

A. *U.S. Board of Pensions*

Mr. Thomas Dykhouse is completing his second term on the U.S. Board of Pensions in 2018 and is eligible for reappointment to a third three-year term. Completing service on the U.S. Board of Pensions is Mr. Kurt Knoll. The board recommends the following slate of nominees for election to a three-year term:

Mr. Gary Bos is a practicing orthopedic surgeon serving a second term as elder at Faith Alive CRC in Yakima, Washington. He spent most of his career in academic medicine, where he gained administrative and financial management experience. Gary has been an elder in Christian Reformed churches in Ohio and Oregon as a result of career moves. He currently is a member of the Council of Delegates, representing Classis Columbia, and he serves on the CRC Foundation board.

Mr. Darrel Raih of Sioux Center, Iowa, has been the president of American Investment and Trust for the past 25 years, where he currently manages over 650 million dollars in assets. He also leads a team of professional financial advisors in the areas of endowment and foundation management, as well as in areas of corporate retirement planning and individual wealth management. Mr. Raih is a graduate of Dordt College and earned an MBA degree from the University of South Dakota. He holds various security licenses, including Series 7 and 63 licenses. Mr. Raih is active in his church, First CRC of Sioux Center, which includes previous service as president of the council. He is also involved in a number of local boards and foundations.

B. *Canadian Pension Trustees*

Mr. Henry Eygenraam and Ms. MaryAnn Kokan-Nyhof are completing their second term on the Canadian Pension Trustees and are eligible for reappointment to a third three-year term. Completing service on the Canadian Pension Trustees is Rev. Kevin te Brake. The board recommends the following single nominee for election to a three-year term:

Rev. Michael VanderKwaak of Abbotsford, British Columbia, is executive pastor at New Life CRC in Abbotsford. He received his B.S. degree in engineering from Dordt College in 1986, and prior to starting his work in pastoral ministry in 1993, he was an electrical engineer in the telecommunications industry. He graduated with an M.Div. from Trinity Western Seminary in

Langley, British Columbia, and completed the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy at Calvin Theological Seminary. More recently, Rev. VanderKwaak has completed his credentialing as an associate certified coach with the International Coaching Federation and provides leadership coaching.

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 as well as 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, 2017, 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	692	268	960
Ministers receiving benefit payments	583	149	732
Spouses and dependents	173	41	214
Withdrawn participants with vested benefits	111	34	145
Total	1,559	492	2,051

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, and 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 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 \$133.6 million for the U.S. plan (as of December 31, 2016) and \$45.5 million for the Canadian plan (as of December 31, 2016). 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, 2017	December 31, 2016
United States (U.S. \$)	\$112,213,000	\$99,665,000
Canada (Can. \$)	61,102,000	51,277,000

Dividends, interest, and appreciation in the value of the plans' holdings, along with contributions to the plans, 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 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 2018 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 Empower Retirement, and Great-West Trust serves as custodian of the plan's assets. For Canadian participants, Sun Life Financial Group manages and serves as custodian of the plan's assets.

As of December 31, 2017, the balances in these plans totaled approximately \$37,387,000 in the United States and \$5,391,000 in Canada. As of that date, there were 347 participants in the U.S. plan and 84 in the Canadian plan, categorized as follows:

	United States	Canada
Active	234	80
Inactive	113	4

C. Nonretirement employee benefit programs

Oversight of the denomination's nonretirement employee benefit programs is provided by the Council of Delegates.

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 338 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 225 pastors and employees of local churches, 112 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and one retiree. 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 645 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 272 pastors and employees of local churches, 208 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and 165 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 Pension Trustees and the U.S. Board of Pensions and to Mr. John H. Bolt

when matters pertaining to insurance and pension or retirement plans are discussed.

B. That synod designate up to 100 percent of a minister's early or normal retirement pension or disability pension for 2018 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 and re-appoint one member to a third three-year term on the U.S. Board of Pensions beginning July 1, 2018.

D. That synod by way of the ballot elect one nominee to a first term and reappoint each of two members to a third three-year term on the Canadian Pension Trustees beginning July 1, 2018.

Pensions and Insurance

John H. Bolt, director of finance and operations

Timothy Leadership Training Institute/Combined Training Unit

I. Introduction

One year ago, the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA affirmed a plan to combine the management of Timothy Leadership Training Institute, Global Coffee Break, and Educational Care. The integration of these ministries will optimize resources and cultivate further growth of nonformal adult education and training. A set of shared values and a name for the joint organization are presently under development. Temporarily this new group will be called the Combined Training Unit (CTU).

CTU is a cohesive organization with individual programs that share a set of five core values. The education and training we offer is biblically based, interactive, accessible, of high quality, and committed toward transformative change in individuals, churches, and communities.

1. *Timothy Leadership Training* works with international and local ministry partners to provide essential training to church leaders worldwide, equipping them to advance the kingdom of God in their congregations and communities.
2. *Global Coffee Break* provides small group Bible discovery for evangelism and discipleship. Our program focuses on equipping small group leaders and participants throughout the world to discover Jesus together through the Word.
3. *Educational Care* is a program that both encourages and assists educators and schools faced with limited resources. Training provides opportunities to develop skills and educational strategies that honor God, his creation, and the children in teachers' classrooms.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

CTU serves the church by providing programs that support servant leadership. Timothy Leadership Training prepares pastors and lay leaders in churches, Educational Care trains day-school teachers and administrators, and Global Coffee Break equips small group leaders within congregations. Through our programs, CTU is committed to providing accessible training for the development of these leaders within schools and churches.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2020*

CTU connects with the church both locally and internationally. Each of our programs provides training that sustains congregations and ministries in discipleship, growth, and outreach.

A. *Timothy Leadership Training*

Celebrating 20 years of ministry, the Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) program has been introduced in over 50 countries and translated into 20 languages, with 10 additional translations under way.

1. Partnerships

In order to provide training to church leaders worldwide, TLT has partnered with organizations including Back to God Ministries International, Calvin Theological Seminary, Resonate Global Mission, World Renew,

Verre Naasten (an organization in The Netherlands), IDEA Ministries, Providence CRC (Holland, Mich.), and other organizations, churches, and ministries. In collaboration with these partners, training materials have encouraged faith formation within leaders and their communities. Ministry leaders are equipped to strengthen their churches through faithful preaching and teaching, to encourage congregational care and stewardship of resources, and to connect everyday work with worship. TLT breaks down barriers with training groups that express diversity of denominational affiliation, gender, age, and ethnicity. In the past fiscal year over 473 basic trainers and 428 advanced trainers were certified in the TLT program.

2. Ministry Plan

As TLT continues into the future, we are honored to walk alongside national partners in Zambia, Peru, Malawi, and Cambodia. We expect to see these established hubs multiply, and we anticipate new training hubs developing in the Central African Republic, India, Bolivia, and Ukraine.

B. *Global Coffee Break*

Coffee Break equips small group leaders to facilitate Bible discovery in small groups in many countries. Coffee Break leaders use questions and conversation to explore the Bible. This type of learning creates an atmosphere that empowers group members to actively engage the Bible and learn study methods. Learning and transformation multiplies as people explore and share together in a small group. This simple method has gospel impact because it brings together experienced Christians and people who have never read the Bible before to discover Jesus together.

1. Global reach

Coffee Break is active in 17 countries with English, Korean, Spanish, and Hindi speakers. The materials are used by congregations, church planters, missionaries, and college campus ministries.

2. Ministry Plan

In the coming year, Global Coffee Break will continue to provide leader training, workshops, and other activities to recruit and engage new leaders and churches. New studies in English as well as new translations into Korean, Spanish, and other languages will be released. We are also launching an internationally focused line of Discover Your Bible studies that are written in simplified English for easier understanding and translation around the world.

C. *Educational Care*

Educational Care focuses on classroom teachers—people who influence children on a daily basis and the administrators who support them. Through this program we seek to help Christian school teachers around the world develop a self-understanding of what it means to be a Christian educator, to understand God’s call on their life, and to develop a passion for being a lifelong learner.

1. Ministry Plan

Since 2014, over 2,000 teachers from 20 countries have participated in the Educational Care program. The materials are available in eight languages, and six more translations are in progress. Going forward, we are exploring working with additional school systems in Jordan, China, Ethiopia, and Burkina Faso.

2. Growth

A key piece of work for Educational Care in the coming year will be the development of a funding platform to enable continued growth of the program.

Thank you for your prayers and financial support that have enabled our ministries to make an impact on thousands of people throughout the world in the past year. We look forward to continuing to partner with organizations and congregations as we seek to train leaders at home and around the world.

Timothy Leadership Training Institute/
Combined Training Unit
Gary J. Bekker, director

Back to God Ministries International

I. Introduction

For nearly 80 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 shares the gospel with people in nearly every country of the world through online and digital media, apps and print resources, and traditional radio and TV programming.

A. *Mission*

The mission of Back to God Ministries International is to share the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church worldwide by the following means:

1. We proclaim 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.
2. Our commitment to working with and through local churches and denominations helps us see churches as both sending and receiving, serving and being served. We commit to a prayerful, thoughtful, and wise allocation of resources.
3. Under the direction of Rev. Kurt Selles, BTGMI works with excellent international staff and ministry team leaders who provide direction in the production of culturally relevant programs and related ministries for gospel proclamation.
4. We carry out ministry in ten major world languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Over the past year BTGMI has continued to provide evangelism and discipleship resources in these languages for people seeking to know Christ and grow in faith.
5. A comprehensive website, BackToGod.net, helps congregations and individuals engage in our worldwide witness. Web visitors will also find information about BTGMI outreach and links to our 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 Our Calling

A. *Faith formation*

BTGMI continues to provide faith formation resources in the English language under the brand **ReFrame Media**. BTGMI produces audio, print, and

digital discipleship resources that help shape the faith of North American audiences and English-speaking people throughout the world. BTGMI also provides faith formation multimedia resources in Arabic, Chinese, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

1. Through ReFrame Media we produce 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, are available in print, on the web at ThisIsToday.net, by email subscription, via Facebook or Twitter posts, and through digital apps. We print and distribute nearly 175,000 *Today* booklets six times each year, and more than 160,000 people have signed up to receive the *Today* daily email; in addition, over the past year app users have downloaded 255,000 *Today* devotional series readings to their personal digital devices.

Today devotions are received by more than 13,500 prisoners throughout North America. We receive numerous comments from inmates whose lives have been changed by God through *Today*. William, who is serving a life sentence, shared, "*Today* . . . inspires me in God's Word each and every day." William facilitates a faith and character program for a group of 120 men serving time and shares the day's devotional reading with his class every morning.
 - b. **Kids Corner** is an audio adventure for children 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 Family-Fire.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 a collaborative online magazine in which we consider how popular culture and its cultivators interact with God's story. Rooted in the Reformed tradition, we recognize that all of culture falls within God's sovereignty and that by his common grace believers and unbelievers alike are capable of creating beautiful things. At *Think Christian* (thinkchristian.reframemedia.com) we recognize that God's truth can sometimes be glimpsed in unlikely places, and our aim is to disciple people within the church who follow pop culture. We also proclaim the gospel to pop-culture fans who are not Christians.

f. *Church Juice* works with congregations to offer free resources and in-person training to help churches communicate better with their congregation and communities. 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, via 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, 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 to help them grow in their walk in the Word.
 - a. On December 13, 2017, BTGMI signed a new partnership agreement with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt (Synod of the Nile) (EPCE) and with Words of Hope to expand ministry in the Arab world. By partnering with the EPCE, which has a fraternal relationship with the CRC, BTGMI will come alongside their radio and print outreach to develop online, social media, and digital apps of faith formation resources from a Reformed perspective.
 - b. Two new resources in Chinese include a one-year devotional book, *Everyday Word of Wisdom*. A second booklet, *Jesus Moments*, available in print and through social media, is the testimony of a Chinese student who found the Savior through WeChat (Chinese Facebook). This resource is available to congregations and campus ministries that minister to the more than 300,000 Chinese students attending North American universities. One student texted our staff: "Can you give me more of the *Jesus Moments* booklets? I love this gospel booklet and want to share it especially with unbelievers." In addition, beginning in 2018 the Chinese *Today* devotions will be written by Chinese authors rather than being translated from English editions.
 - c. In Haiti more than 450 new believers are enrolled in our Bible study by correspondence course, in partnership with at least 17 local churches. We just released a new series of studies and hope to enroll an additional 500 participants in 2018.

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. International ministry leaders include Pastor Jerry An (Chinese), Rev. Steven Koster (English), Dr. A.K. Lama (Hindi), Rev. Masao Yamashita (Japanese), Rev. Hernandez Lopes (Portuguese), Rev. Sergei Sosedkin (Russian), and Rev. Guillermo Serrano (Spanish). In addition, Mrs. Hetty Johan is serving as interim leader for our Indonesian ministry; French ministry coordinators include Rev. Marc Nabie in Burkina Faso, Rev. Jacky Chéry in Haiti, and Mr. Rabo Godi in Niger. We are searching for a person to give leadership to the

new Arabic ministry partnership with the EPCE, and we anticipate that this person will be in place by the time Synod 2018 convenes.

1. As Rev. Guillermo Serrano nears retirement, BTGMI is working with him and with key Spanish leaders to provide a smooth transition. The team met in Santiago, Chile, in October 2017 to develop a transition strategy, which includes a commitment to continuing Ministerio Reforma's core programs through building a team ministry with a strong partner in a Spanish-speaking setting. Rev. Serrano will most likely continue as a consultant and program host after his retirement.
2. Rev. Masao Yamashita took on additional leadership responsibilities to expand media outreach in partnership with the Reformed Church in Japan. Initially the new team is producing *The Church in My Town*, monthly video programs, to introduce through social media how the local church welcomes seekers and contributes to the local community. The goal is to remove cultural barriers for people who have never stepped into a church.
3. Chinese ministry leader Jerry An produced several videos for church leaders seeking to grow in sharing the gospel from a Reformed perspective. One video, translated into four languages, celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. A second video includes prominent Chinese leaders discussing the impact of that event on the Christian faith then and its implications for media ministry today. A third video, to be released in 2018, shares interviews with renowned contemporary thinkers such as Emily Brink, George Marsden, Richard Mouw, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and others. The goal is to deepen the understanding of Reformed thinking in China by sharing these videos with Chinese churches and leaders.

In addition, Pastor An hosted or helped facilitate four symposia for church leaders in Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States to promote the use of media for gospel outreach.

4. Additional BTGMI international leadership training events:
 - French ministry leader Rev. Marc Nabie expanded Timothy Leadership Training Institute events in West Africa.
 - In India and nearby countries, Rev. A.K. Lama led leadership training events for pastors, church leaders, media producers, and VBS teachers.
 - Rev. Sergei Sosedkin and his team provided leadership seminars for Russian-speaking students, future church leaders who are attending universities in Russia and Ukraine.

The goal of these training events is to equip leaders for sharing the gospel in the context to which God has called them.

C. *Global mission*

Through media, 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 answers

to life's difficult questions. We regularly receive responses from people around the globe who testify that they heard about Jesus for the first time through media resources produced by BTGMI.

For example, Edvard from St. Petersburg, Russia, found our faith articles on our Russian website www.kbogu.ru. This site name, which means "to God," is one of the top results when Russian-speaking people search the Internet for religious content. Edvard responded, "I wanted to know about God and Christianity, so I started googling. Your online offerings are my favorite. I particularly like your section where you reply to your readers' questions."

Singh, a young man from Saraj, India, heard the name of Jesus for the first time on our Hindi radio program. As he kept listening, Singh came to know Jesus as the Son of God and his Savior. Though Singh is the only believer in his community, he shares the gospel with whoever will listen.

1. BTGMI employs more than 182 indigenous staff members working around the world. BTGMI has a ministry presence in 80 countries through production and discipleship centers, broadcast locations, and resource distribution. In addition, BTGMI reaches people in at least 186 countries through Internet and mobile app resources.
2. BTGMI international ministry teams have developed 29 ministry websites in ten languages supported by 51 social media sites. BTGMI produces 47 radio/audio programs, 19 TV/video programs, and eight mobile device resources.
3. We distribute nearly a million printed devotional booklets each year in five languages. The number of print daily devotions has decreased as we are able to reach more people in more places digitally through email, Facebook, and smartphone apps. More than 3 million people globally receive our digital devotions every day.
4. Networks of more than 4,000 prayer partners in North America and throughout the world pray regularly for people who respond to our media outreach.
5. The impact of BTGMI media outreach cannot be fully quantified by numbers; however, we track a few statistics that represent the impact of our ministry:
 - a. Over the past six months we've experienced nearly 19 million unique visits to our websites and social media pages.
 - b. In this same time period we have registered nearly 1.2 million social media interactions to messages posted by nine of our language ministries.
 - c. In some remote places around the world, where people do not have access to the Internet, our staff have developed more than 300 listener communities in which approximately 4,200 people have come together to listen to our broadcasts, discuss the content, and pray with one another.

6. 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. Resonate Global Mission—collaborative ministries in Japan, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. We also work in partnership with Resonate and World Renew in Haiti.
 - b. Christian Reformed congregations—media outreach assistance for new church plants as well as established congregations seeking to use electronic media for ministry.
 - c. CRCNA Faith Formation Ministries, Calvin Theological Seminary, Sustaining Congregational Excellence, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Safe Church Ministry, Disability Concerns, World Renew, and The Network.
 - d. Korean Council—publication of Korean-English *Today* devotions.
 - e. Timothy Leadership Training Institute—cooperative leadership training worldwide.
 - f. Words of Hope—partnership in Indonesian, Hindi, and Arabic ministries and in the production of the English-language program *Groundwork*.
 - g. Good Books Educational Trust Ministries—media outreach and discipleship in northern India and the Himalayan region.
 - h. Reformed denominations worldwide—joint-ministry partnerships in Japan (Reformed Church in Japan), Brazil (Presbyterian Church of Brazil), Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church), and the Arab world (Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt [Synod of the Nile]). In addition, we partner with evangelical congregations in Eastern Europe, Africa, and India and surrounding countries, and with house churches and Christian ministries in China.
 - i. Christian universities in Russia and Brazil.

D. Mercy and justice

While the mission of BTGMI is primarily global media missions, our ministry teams and partners have opportunities to provide comfort and assistance to those who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and disadvantaged. We also address issues of social justice through our various programs in several languages.

1. In addition to audio and online programming, our ministry partners in India practice a holistic approach to life. From our ministry center in Lo-hardaga, the team ministers to women and children in poverty, providing a health clinic, tutoring for children living in nearby slums, and computer-skills training for women. This outreach meets many of the practical needs of our listening audience and of members of the local community.

2. Every week at least 30 followers of our Chinese ministry apps engage in a live dialogue through a social media site we have developed for visitors looking for help when they are feeling hopeless and may be suicidal.
3. A similar *Family Fire* team of five prayer partners in North America responds every week to as many as 200 English speakers worldwide who are experiencing pain and brokenness in their lives. Because a strong home life is crucial for forging healthy families and individuals, *Family Fire*, produced by ReFrame Media, also provides online resources and ebooks that address healthy relationships as well as divorce, domestic abuse, and suicide, with coordinating instructional and inspirational posts on facebook.com/FamilyFire.
4. With the goal of teaching and encouraging Christ-followers to live out their faith, ReFrame Media also produces the *Think Christian* online blog and the *Groundwork* audio program, offering discussions on issues related to biblical justice.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

The core mission of BTGMI is gospel proclamation through a variety of media, sharing the gospel with people wherever they are in the world. To stay current, BTGMI continually seeks out culturally relevant and effective ways to proclaim the gospel and call people into relationship with God. Some examples:

1. To provide a more effective way to proclaim the gospel, BTGMI is relocating its Spanish ministry to a place where Spanish is the main spoken language. In addition, the new ministry leader will be indigenous to the local culture.
2. As culture in general moves toward using less paper, BTGMI is expanding its use of digital outreach for sharing the gospel by developing new apps, expanding email distribution opportunities, and increasing social media connections. Our activity in all of these areas has more than doubled over the past year.
3. BTGMI also participates in large scale events that offer opportunities for gospel proclamation. In October 2017 our Russian ministry team initiated an event in Ukraine that grew to include 40 local churches working together to plan a day-long celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. An estimated 300,000 people attended the open-air street festival for worship and biblical messages. The event, also intentionally designed to include persons with physical disabilities, was live-streamed and covered by both mainstream and Christian media.

BTGMI Russian ministry leader Rev. Sergei Sosedkin commented, "It was humbling to be part of this opportunity to share the gospel as people caught the vision and made it their own. That has always been my hope for our ministry: to work in tune with the needs of the local people, and to multiply the effect as churches work together to proclaim the gospel."

As God gives us opportunities to make an impact on people's lives, we are thankful to see the ways in which people pass along the blessing to others.

Pedro, a teacher in Chile, wrote the BTGMI Spanish team, “To teach high-schoolers is difficult today. We lack practical examples. But your TV program provides good examples that target the needs of young people—like addictions, vocations, relationships. I have used your programs to lead some young people to the Christian faith, since the programs include that component too. Thanks very much for your ministry.”

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. Connecting with churches

A. To more effectively serve local CRC congregations through better collaboration with other denominational agencies, our ministry board decided in early 2017 to relocate the main U.S. BTGMI offices from Palos Heights, Illinois, to the CRCNA denominational offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Palos Heights property, adjacent to Trinity Christian College, was sold to the college. The agreement was signed on December 13, 2017, with BTGMI completing its transition of operations to the Grand Rapids offices in subsequent months. At the time of writing this report, numerous opportunities have already demonstrated the benefits of increased proximity for collaborative work with the CRC agencies and ministries. These joint efforts will combine resources in order to better provide what local congregations need for ministry and outreach.

B. BTGMI resources to assist local churches in ministry

1. See the list of ReFrame Media resources in section II, A, 1 above. See also BackToGod.net for biblical resources in additional languages.
2. Examples of BTGMI resourcing local churches over the past year
 - a. *Church Juice* launched a new Facebook support group for church communicators and leaders that includes invitations to free webinars. The first webinar took place on November 17, 2017, with 35 attendees who learned about guiding principles and best practices in prioritizing church announcements.
 - b. Pastor and church leader resources
 - A portion of ReFrame Media’s biblical messages are included on Preachingandworship.org, an online collection of “curated resources for preachers” made possible through Lilly Foundation Inc., Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, and others.
 - ReFrame Media has produced 19 ebooks with downloadable pdfs. Several are also available in print for group discussion or personal growth. Topics include forgiveness, 10 rules for fair fighting (for couples), Lent and Advent series, a study of the seven deadly sins, how to address bullying, and more.
 - At the Inspire 2017 conference one pastor shared how he used ReFrame Media’s booklet on forgiveness to counsel a person struggling with this matter.

c. Resources to engage youth

- KidsCorner.net provides online audio dramas and Bible stories, devotions, activities, and parent resources to help disciple children ages 6-12.
- *Kids Corner* is launching *Kids in Action*, a new pilot series for youth, featuring fun, fast-paced, five-minute videos that tell stories about kids and teens doing God's work in the world.
- Faith CRC in Pella, Iowa, used the ReFrame Media/*Groundwork* ebook *7 Deadly Sins* to engage their youth group in lively discussions.

d. Additional resources to keep churches informed about how God is using our worldwide media ministry to transform lives through gospel proclamation, discipleship, and strengthening the local church:

- videos, bulletin inserts, and ministry update letters
- church resources available at BackToGod.net/churches

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant Rev. Kurt Selles, director of Back to God Ministries International, the privilege of the floor when BTGMI matters are discussed.

B. That synod encourage congregations to use BTGMI media materials to support their own local ministries and outreach.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Back to God Ministries International
Kurt Selles, director

Resonate Global Mission

I. Introduction

On July 1, 2017, Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions joined together to create a new agency called Resonate Global Mission.

Vision: To bring the gospel to people, neighborhoods, communities, churches, and the world to embolden them in participating in God’s mission and faithfully proclaiming and living out the good news of Jesus.

Mandate: To give leadership to the denomination in its task of bringing the gospel holistically to the people of North America and the world and drawing them into fellowship with Christ and his church. The mandate of the agency has three aspects. The agency shall

- encourage and assist congregations and classes in their work of evangelism and discipleship.
- initiate, support, and guide new-church development and other evangelistic and discipling ministries.
- develop Christian leaders.

Each one of us is a missionary. We all have a calling; we all have a voice. As a single mission agency, we are now better able to equip the Christian Reformed Church for that calling—for living and sharing the good news, so that it goes out in every direction like an expanding, amplifying sound.

We continue the good work of Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions while discerning how God is leading the Christian Reformed Church and how we might respond to the challenges of mission work in new ways. Consider this brief summary of the past ministry year:

- served the entire globe with 14 regional teams
- worked with more than 8,000 new believers who came to faith in Christ
- participated in forming more than 600 new communities of faith around the world
- helped to support and sponsor more than 140 missionaries and 250 volunteers in service around the world
- partnered with 39 new churches in North America, including 10 new churches that started in the past year
- supported campus ministries on more than 35 campuses
- provided access for ministries and churches to training, coaching, resources, education, and funding

II. *Our Calling:* Global mission

Resonate’s work is organized by three desired outcomes—shaped by our synodical mandate. The first is *mission-shaped congregations*, which means Resonate wants to start and strengthen churches to see an increasing number of congregations shaped by God’s mission and making disciples who live in the way of Jesus. The second is *missional leaders*, which means Resonate wants to see an increasing number of leaders equipped to participate in God’s mission of saving the lost and renewing all things. The third is *holistic*

mission networks, which means Resonate wants to see an increasing number of relationships uniting God’s people in their work for spiritual and social transformation.

Wherever Resonate is present, we ask what the Holy Spirit is doing in mission. This leads us to discern ways in which God is already working through churches, organizations, and individuals. We seek to join in with the work of the Holy Spirit, to walk with our partners in ministry toward each of these outcomes.

A. *Mission-shaped congregations*—an increasing number of diverse, locally rooted, and globally connected congregations and ministries bearing faithful witness to Christ’s reign and actively making disciples who live in the way of Jesus.

Like many places around the world, North America is a rapidly growing mission field. The fastest-growing religious group in the United States and Canada is the “nones”—people who aren’t part of any religion. Resonate partners with churches at home and abroad in ministry by fanning the flames of mission and outreach in each congregation. Our work to help congregations around the world become mission-shaped includes the following:

1. Church planting

Starting new churches is a vital part of Resonate’s ministry. New churches are the most effective tool we have to reach new groups of people. Resonate is investing in recruiting, training, coaching, encouragement, and resources for new churches.

2. Strengthening churches

Our local congregations are one of the richest resources for mission. Resonate helps established churches discover and unleash God’s plan for their time and place. Resonate is investing in revitalizing and renewing churches.

3. Discipleship

The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of Christians worldwide, calling them into a deeper life of faith. Resonate is investing in discipling and training Christians who are discovering God’s plan for their lives.

4. Evangelism

The work of church planters and missionaries has grown the global church in amazing ways, but more than 1.5 billion people still have not heard the gospel! Resonate is investing in training people to witness and proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ.

Example and story: Set Free at Strong Tower

Ernest Umoh knows firsthand many of the struggles that come with moving to North America. When he saw a growing refugee population in West Michigan, he quickly identified an opportunity to respond to a need that often goes unnoticed. And he began to be shaped by the mission God was calling him to.

“Here in West Michigan we have so many Muslim communities,” said Umoh. “People from Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, and Tanzania . . . and no one was really working with them actively, inviting them to Christ, or preaching the good news.”

Umoh has sensed God’s call to be an evangelist since the time of his youth in Nigeria. His fearless attitude of “going where the Spirit leads him” has gotten him into dangerous situations on more than one occasion. His sincere care and giving heart have helped him connect with many Muslim refugees who are not only excited to hear the gospel but are also in desperate need of assistance.

Today Umoh pastors Strong Tower Ministries in Wyoming, Michigan. This ministry is truly mission-shaped—it provides services to newcomers in the community, such as driving people to doctor appointments and organizing Bible studies.

Umoh is excited to see how Strong Tower’s partnership with Resonate can help to expand and amplify its local ministry to global ministry back in eastern Africa. “We can use those who have been led to Christ through Strong Tower as partners in planting churches back in their home country!” explained Umoh. “We want to make sure that Strong Tower is international, not just local.”

Strong Tower exemplifies what it means to be “mission-shaped,” and our prayer at Resonate is that we can walk with many more congregations that want to be locally rooted and globally connected—that’s why Christian Reformed mission work is so important.

B. Missional leaders—an increasing number of diverse leaders equipped to participate in God’s mission of saving the lost and renewing all things.

Now more than ever, our world needs people—people who can lead and people who can transform the communities where they live and work. Resonate partners with churches, providing access to training and tools they will need to live out the gospel, so that both current and future leaders can discover what God has planned for them. Our work to raise up missional leaders includes the following:

1. Campus ministry

Resonate engages universities and colleges in ministry on more than 35 campuses across North America. Resonate is investing in training and supporting campus ministers to be a faithful presence on campuses and to help students discover God’s will for their lives.

2. Leadership development

We are all missionaries, and our mission field is all around us! Resonate is investing in identifying and equipping individual leaders and teachers worldwide through initiatives like seminary education and by training leaders to work alongside others in their communities—whether in North America or overseas.

3. Global mission education

Our staff members walk alongside congregations to encourage them in fulfilling God’s mission. Resonate is investing in training mission committees, forging partnerships, and working with young adults whom God is calling to mission work.

Example and story: Seeing the possibilities in Uganda

Living in a northern region of Uganda, Jane Ejulo was the only one in her family who professed faith in Christ. She felt overwhelmed and was often in despair.

“When we first met Jane, she was a depressed and discouraged woman,” remembers Mwaya Wa Kitavi, regional mission leader with Resonate for eastern and southern Africa. “She did not have the confidence to share her faith with anyone.” She didn’t think of herself as a missional leader.

A leadership training event changed Jane Ejulo. She joined others from her church in a Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) event led by Kitavi. When she attended the first training, “Caring for God’s People,” in 2011, it changed her life.

During the TLT event, Jane realized she was not alone in her struggles. What’s more, she gained the confidence to begin planning for change. When she returned home after the workshop, she got started on her action plan: to teach her children and husband how to pray and to lead them in daily Bible studies.

Jane Ejulo’s faithful witness eventually helped to bring all five of her children to faith in Christ. By sharing her faith in her family, she gained confidence to share her faith with a small group of people in her community. Encouraged by these life-changing results, Jane was ready to tackle her next problem. She attended more workshops with Kitavi and continued gaining skills as a leader with a mission.

Today Jane Ejulo is a TLT master trainer and a missional leader, sharing with others in nearby communities what she has learned about new life in Christ.

“I say thank you to [Resonate Global Mission] and my TLT facilitator,” she says. “I cannot express the joy I feel. I am very grateful to God that he used them to come to my district and church. This is how God located me and improved my life. I pray that God will continue to send them to locate other people like me.”

C. Holistic mission networks—an increasing number of diverse and inclusive local networks that unite God’s people to work for the spiritual and social transformation of their communities.

Joining God’s mission is hard work that an individual or organization cannot do alone. That’s why Resonate is forging partnerships with other ministries and listening closely to the Holy Spirit through prayer and discernment. Partnerships multiply ministry! “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”—this reminder from Ecclesiastes 4:12 is helpful in motivating churches to work together. Holistic mission networks drive the work of the church and connect what’s happening locally, in a church’s neighborhood, with God’s mission worldwide. Our work of connecting churches in holistic mission networks includes the following:

- Coaching leaders of holistic mission networks to help local churches come together and accomplish more than they could alone.
- Sending holistic mission network developers and community chaplains to work in partnership with local congregations.
- Developing new experiments and methods of mission work so that networks around the globe can learn from one another.
- Connecting pastors, church planters, and ministry leaders who need support with people who have vital resources to offer, such as experience, coaching, and encouragement.

Example and story: Networks Transform Communities in Mexico City

Pablo and Sherri Canche are at work on a holistic mission network strategy in Mexico City, Mexico. In general, the evangelical church in Mexico has been characterized by a divide between faith and everyday life, between what happens on Sunday and what happens throughout the rest of the week. Holistic mission networks are helping to change that.

In its initial stages the work of Pablo and Sherri have focused on developing trust with pastors and leaders from a variety of churches and ministries. As their network has matured, they have started to see the people within it reaching out and changing their community.

Holistic mission networks also reach across barriers that divide Christians. Perhaps the most surprising is an open door that Pablo and Sherri have found with some Pentecostal pastors.

“I met a Pentecostal pastor, and promised I would visit his church,” recalls Pablo. “The following week, we went out for breakfast. We spent the whole morning sharing stories and praying together.”

The Pentecostal pastor had been very active in preaching that having faith in God will make you prosper (prosperity gospel). He was struggling with this teaching but was frustrated and lacked material to teach a better way of life. He began searching, reading, and seeking help. When he came across the Reformed perspective, with teaching that was sound and biblical, God convicted him that what he had been teaching was not the gospel.

So, where could he meet Reformed Christians? Holistic mission networks made it possible for him to find help.

“As I listened to his story, I could feel his pain,” Pablo describes. “I told him that I am a Reformed pastor. I presented an overview of our Reformed worldview and introduced the holistic mission network concept. As I explained it, he said: ‘This is what I was looking for.’”

Being a part of a holistic mission network helped this pastor realize that it is important to have the right teaching and the right practice, which demands our service involvement in the local community. That is the impact the Christian Reformed Church can have: connecting with people, listening to their fears, and encouraging them in their calling to spread the gospel.

At Resonate, we have learned that our grounding in Reformed theology is one of our most valuable contributions to the wider body of Christ. We have found that this kingdom worldview often provides a platform for Christians from different faith communities to work together in holistic mission networks.

III. *Our Journey 2020: Connecting with churches*

Resonate Global Mission is connecting with churches in two primary ways that are built into the organization. Regional Mission Teams serve to connect us in the mission field, and mission support staff mobilize people in our congregations and equip them for service.

A. Regional Mission Teams

Regional Mission Teams are Resonate’s local presence in regions around the world—six in North America, and eight internationally. Each team is made up of missionaries, pastors, and others doing embedded ministry within the region. Each uses their skills and talents to give leadership in their

area of expertise. These teams are not only spreading the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ but also multiplying ministry by cultivating new ministry leaders and developing new partnerships.

Eastern Canada: Rich Braaksma
Western Canada: Kevin DeRaaf
Eastern U.S.: Marco Avila
Great Lakes: Amy Schenkel
Central U.S.: Peter Kelder
Western U.S.: Ben Katt
Central America: Steve Holtrop
Eastern and Central Asia: Paul Yu
Eastern and Southern Africa: Mwaya Wa Kitavi
Europe: Steve Van Zanen
Mexico and Caribbean: Luis Pellecer
Middle East: Name withheld
Southern and Southeast Asia: Joyce Suh
West Africa: Ron Geerlings

Example and Story: I Forgot, but God Didn't

When you ask God to do something ten years into the future, you might forget about that request. But God will not.

That's what James Kim found when he received an unexpected email from Resonate Global Mission asking if he had interest in planting a church.

Kim first considered the idea of becoming a church planter in 2006, when he was studying at Calvin Theological Seminary and was exploring what that path might entail. But he wanted to gain some congregational ministry experience first.

"I wrote down in my prayer journal, 'Lord, I want to serve a local congregation for ten years before planting a church in the United States,' so I asked for his blessing to help me find a church to prepare me for planting a church in ten years," said Kim.

Not long after writing that prayer, he received a call to serve at Trinity CRC in Anchorage, Alaska, and six years later he was called to New Hope CRC in Spokane, Washington. Then in May 2016—exactly ten years after jotting down that prayer—Kim received an email about planting a church.

"The ministries I was a part of were such a blessing to me, and I had forgotten about my prayer [from 2006]," said Kim. "But God hadn't."

Kim ultimately said yes to church planting, and in August 2017 he and his family moved from Washington state to Syracuse, New York. Already Kim recognizes that God has equipped him to tackle opportunities for ministry in Syracuse.

Marco Avila, Resonate's regional mission leader in the Eastern United States, is excited to come alongside Kim and draw on knowledge gained from past church plants to help this new church succeed. By pairing experienced and connected regional leadership with passionate church planters like Kim, we hope to see this new ministry take shape along with other new church plants and ministries on the horizon.

"What I really like about James's ministry is his comprehensive vision," said Marco. "He has an open mind about ministry, and I think that will help him engage with the wide variety of people in his community."

B. Mobilizing congregations

Resonate comes alongside churches and individuals that want to take a more active role in the global church. Our staff work to help each person in the Christian Reformed Church explore their calling in mission. Whether a congregation seeks to make a difference in their neighborhood or somewhere far away, Resonate has tools to help engage and activate the church's mission potential.

1. Engaging younger generations

Resonate provides opportunities to work alongside Christian leaders around the world. Young members of the CRC can explore their calling through these opportunities—and grow in their relationship with Christ. Short-term volunteer opportunities provide discipleship for young adults that includes mentorship as well as local and international service experiences.

2. Cohort of missionaries

Resonate provides college-age participants with a yearlong experience in which they are immersed in a new culture and serve with local mission organizations. These participants, or missionaries, live out their faith by worshiping with the international church, learning from community leaders, and loving God and their neighbors.

3. Preparing missionaries and volunteers for service

Hundreds of Christian Reformed members serve as missionaries and volunteers with Resonate, and our orientation team is there to make sure they are prepared and connected to their sending and supporting churches. Resonate staff prepare missionaries and volunteers in spiritual care, conflict management, relationship development, support-raising, diversity and antiracism, communication, and other topics important in cross-cultural living.

4. Missions advocates

Missions advocates serve as church-appointed volunteers who fuel interest for the church in international missions and act as a link between the congregation and the ways its members are engaging in God's mission in the world.

5. Church renewal

Resonate staff and coaches work with Christian Reformed congregations through initiatives like Go Local, which cultivate change and renewal. Through these initiatives we seek to help churches discover God's plan for their congregation and their community.

6. Church communication and engagements

Resonate shares how God is working through emails, mailings, and online postings that share news, prayer requests, and resource ideas to communicate about best practices. Our staff connect with classis committees, present at classis meetings and other events, and also preach at local church worship services.

Example and Story: Seeing and Sharing the Passion of Sierra Leone

Richard Britton will always remember the prayers he heard during church services and before training events in Sierra Leone. Those were prayers in which, simultaneously, everyone standing in the room would shout enthusiastically, each person praying their own praises and petitions, moving through various topics at the direction of a leader.

“I loved the passion that I saw people show while praying like this, and I admired the love for Christ I saw in the leader and the people praying,” said Britton.

Britton was in Sierra Leone this past summer for five weeks for a cross-cultural internship with Calvin Theological Seminary. He soon realized that the passion displayed in these prayers also translates into other areas of the church.

He saw examples of that in the action plans people made after taking part in the Timothy Leadership Training—such as pastors setting goals to double their church size or to organize a talent show for young people.

“When I heard those plans, I had no doubt in my mind that the leaders were going to go through with them,” added Britton.

Britton spent almost all of his time in Sierra Leone and in the neighboring country of Liberia with Rev. Istifanus Bahago, a missionary from the CRC of Nigeria supported by Resonate Global Mission. Again he was impressed by the passion he witnessed.

It encouraged me that someone is that passionate about serving the Lord,” said Britton. “Rev. Bahago was just so invested in everyone, taking time to talk and giving advice.”

Although Britton went to West Africa with a mix of anxiety and excitement, he was able to draw on some of his own experience of serving in his home community to help prepare him for the trip.

As Britton continues his studies, he looks forward to seeing how God will use his experience with Resonate. That’s one of the reasons Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions joined together—to allow for more opportunities to serve in God’s mission around the world and at home.

Resonate Global Mission
Zachary J. King, director

Aboriginal Ministries (Canada)

In the past few years, the work of our Aboriginal Ministries entities within Canada have been walking an even more intentional journey of reconciliation than in the past because of an increased focus across the country prompted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3). As a result, the CRC's Aboriginal ministries—our Urban Aboriginal Ministry Centres in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Regina, Saskatchewan; and Edmonton, Alberta; together with the Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee (CAMC) (www.crcna.org/aboriginal/canadian), which supports healing, reconciliation, and restored relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada—have had greater focus and purpose. Through compassionate community building, awareness raising, and advocacy, ministry with Aboriginal persons in Canada continues to grow increasingly faithful and strong.

The Urban Aboriginal Ministry Centres, funded by the Christian Reformed Church, help to meet the spiritual and social needs of Aboriginal Canadians to help them live dignified and harmonious lives. These ministry centers 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.

1. The **Winnipeg Indigenous Family Centre** has been involved in the work of reconciliation for over forty years. It is deepening its work in counseling services and contextualization of ministry. In order to minister to a growing population of people engaged with the ministry, the center is expanding its facility. Renovations began in 2017. In addition, the centre has revised policies and other documents as steps toward gaining status as a charitable organization. The year 2018 will see us participate in a plan to review ours and other Canadian centers' practices during 2019.

Staff members are grateful for the children who come to the kids' camp. In many cases these children have challenges that most of our church children do not face: uncertainty in their home, connections to Child and Family Services that are frightening and confusing, difficulties at school brought on by poverty and trauma. "Still they show us that they are resilient, beautiful, strong, hopeful. We celebrate them, and we celebrate the people who invest in them."

The staff are also grateful for the beauty and other benefits enjoyed through our beading and moccasin-making circles. As (mostly) women gather and learn to apply ancient handcrafts in a new way, they visit and talk and share and heal. There is a lot of beauty in what they make as well. All of the proceeds from sales of the moccasins go toward funding this program.

2. The **Indian Metis Christian Fellowship (IMCF)** in Regina, Saskatchewan, provides a drop-in ministry and daily prayer ceremony. The ministry is known for its ability to contextualize the gospel and for growing a deeper understanding of what is meant by Indigenous spirituality. From hosting funerals and being present for key family events, the ministry leaders walk a journey together with community members in times of joy and crisis.

The weekly distribution of donated clothing, beds and other household items, a bicycle repair ministry, and weekly meals served to the community are just some of the ways in which ministry takes place in the name of reconciliation to the people in Regina. IMCF is funded partially through the CRCNA but is also in constant partnership ecumenically with other Christian faith traditions in an effort to raise both funds and volunteers.

3. The **Edmonton Native Healing Centre** continues to use the Blanket Exercise to educate both Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks about three times every two weeks. The center is also becoming more involved in “End Poverty Edmonton” and is growing ecumenical ties with other churches across the city through a local Mustard Seed ministry. Our work is possible because of the faithful support of the CRCNA and its commitment to building relationships with Indigenous peoples across North America.

CAMC’s board, which consists of the Urban Aboriginal Ministry Centre directors and key volunteers from the CRCNA and other ecumenical partners (Reformed Church in America and Presbyterian Church Canada), urges churches to continue to grow in understanding and structuring their ministry toward ongoing reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples. Resources, studies, and other tools continue to be made increasingly available, with more significant content developed this past year regarding missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. CAMC’s key hope is for all churches to access the many tools and resources available as reconciliation becomes a stronger theme in the churches.

Together with the Centre for Public Dialogue and Kairos, CAMC is coordinating use of the Blanket Exercise workshop throughout Canada. The workshop has provided many CRC leaders and other members with an opportunity to understand the injustices faced by First Nations people in the history of Canada, especially with regard to land claims. Advocacy for Aboriginal rights is another important component of Aboriginal ministry in Canada. In addition, efforts toward Indigenous education reform carried out by the Committee for Contact with the Government/Centre for Public Dialogue (www.crcna.org/publicdialogue) involve working with a broad coalition of churches and Indigenous organizations to encourage public awareness and action in Indigenous education. (See also the report by the Committee for Contact with the Government.)

Committee for Contact with the Government/Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue (Mr. Mike Hoogeterp, research and communications manager)

I. Introduction

The Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG), operating as the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, is a justice and reconciliation ministry of the Christian Reformed churches in Canada. In 2018, CCG celebrates 50 years of seeking justice and speaking hope in the name of Christ in Canadian public affairs. Building on that heritage, the Centre for Public Dialogue works to encourage active Christian citizenship, studies critical issues facing Canadian society from a Reformed perspective, and interacts with legislators in a constructive manner. Our focus issues are currently refugee rights and Indigenous justice.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

We seek to work with local churches in an effort to live into the call to seek God's justice and peace in every area of life. We do this in the following ways:

1. Providing liturgical and devotional resources connected to Indigenous justice and refugee rights via our website and social media. In 2018 we're particularly honored to work with the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society to provide a Lenten challenge for reflection and action for justice for Indigenous children.
2. Gathering local church members to tell stories and think together about Christ's call to justice through our *Do Justice* blog (dojustice.crcna.org), on which we collaborate with the Office of Social Justice. We recently heard from a university-age CRC member reflecting on his experience with *Do Justice*: "In a time when my doubts around the CRC had grown, my perspective shifted when I saw [in *Do Justice*] how dedicated CPD was to recognizing and attempting to heal inequalities." Young people make up the largest portion of our *Do Justice* audience: about one-third of our readers are under age 34, and almost 50 percent are under age 44.
3. Working closely with the Canadian Ministries Justice Mobilizer, Cindy Stover, to develop and animate learning opportunities on biblical justice and Christian citizenship. Together with World Renew, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and the Office of Social Justice, we have produced *Biblical Advocacy 101*, which has now been reprinted a number of times and is in high demand on our websites. This resource provides biblical grounding and helpful how-to steps for citizen action.

B. Mercy and justice

We assist local churches in loving mercy and doing justice as follows:

1. Communicating with government, through direct interaction with policy makers and shapers from our office in Ottawa, Ontario, and in mobilizing Christian citizens to speak to their elected representatives. In 2018 we are pleased to be working closely with World Renew, the Mennonite Central

Committee Canada, and Citizens for Public Justice to encourage local citizen interaction with Members of Parliament on wait-time issues related to Canada's refugee sponsorship system.

2. Responding to requests for information from churches and members on current issues of concern. For example, we provided connections to resources and ideas on constructive responses to recent changes in the Canada summer jobs program.
3. Working with CRCNA partners to bring justice-themed workshops to churches. These include *Journey with Me: Refugee Stories Change Lives*, the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, and *Living the 8th Fire*—a small group curriculum for churches wishing to learn more about Indigenous justice. We are particularly excited to be working closely with Cindy Stover to bring two new workshops to congregations in 2018, provisionally named *Demystifying Biblical Justice* and *Citizen Advocacy*, respectively. These resources will feature prominently in a number of events around the country that will celebrate CCG's 50th anniversary.

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. As such, the work and partnerships mentioned above are an element of gospel proclamation and are motivated by a conviction that justice and worship are integrated. This conviction also motivated a collaborative effort with CRC Worship Ministries and the Institute for Christian Studies to convene the conference “For Such a Time as This: Worship Meets Justice and the Arts in Turbulent Times” (Oct. 2017).

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2020 (the Ministry Plan)*

A. *Engaging younger members*

Our communications efforts, led by an interministry justice communications team, are often targeted at reaching youth and young adult church members. For example, our social media ambassadors program has helped us improve connectivity in key CRC centers such as Edmonton, Alberta, where we gained a significant number of followers recently, placing Edmonton among our top cities where our Facebook followers live. This is a healthy dynamic, considering the high concentration of CRC churches in Ontario and West Michigan. Mobilization efforts are also targeted to youth and young adults by bringing justice and reconciliation workshops to campus ministries, and by efforts to shape advocacy training workshops for youth and young adults.

B. *Assisting churches within their local contexts*

As noted above, we are working with partners to encourage citizen advocacy at the local level regarding refugee issues. When local churches and advocates share with their Member of Parliament their stories of struggle and joy with refugee sponsorship, they are likely to get help and support from that MP, and at the same time they are able to demonstrate a gospel-inspired commitment to the welcome of refugees. We are excited to meet with MPs in Ottawa who have heard from their CRC constituents!

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.
- break barriers of communication, architecture, and attitude.
- 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). Our vision together 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’s five-year plan for 2014 to 2019 has four 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 engage with and minister with 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

We work on the faith formation of God’s people primarily through our partnership with Friendship Ministries, which focuses especially on faith formation with persons who have intellectual disabilities. Though Friendship is a separate ministry from the CRC, DC’s director, Rev. Mark Stephenson, serves on the Friendship Ministries board and executive committee and

assists Friendship in the development of their inclusive small group curriculum *Together* (togethersmallgroups.org). DC also promotes the sale of Friendship Ministries materials and the formation of Friendship groups.

1. Applied metrics for faith formation (goal, measure, count)

- a. DC faith formation goal for 2018: People with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities grow together in faith.
- b. Measure: People with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities engage together in Bible study.
- c. Count: Ideally, measure the number of people (esp. CRC people) engaged in Friendship groups and *Together* Bible studies—or, if that data is not available, the number of traditional Friendship and *Together* groups. If such data is not available, count sales of all Friendship curricula. Friendship Ministries provided Disability Concerns with the following figures (Dec. 2017), but the denominational identity of persons involved is unknown:

Friendship Groups (approximate)

United States: 885

Canada: 150

Latin America and other: 300

Individuals (estimated)

United States: 12,000

Canada: 3,500

Latin American and other: 3,500

2. DC's emphasis for Disability Week 2018 will encourage churches in forming and nurturing inclusive small groups.

B. Servant leadership

1. Applied metrics for servant leadership (goal, measure, count)

- a. DC servant leadership goal for 2018: Persons with and without disabilities will engage in disability advocacy in CRC and RCA churches.
- b. Measure: People with and without disabilities engage in all levels of leadership in churches, and churches have at least one disability advocate who helps the church move toward the biblical vision for the church in which everybody belongs and everybody serves.
- c. Count: Number of disability advocates serving CRC and RCA churches and engaging in training opportunities, including CRC/RCA-DC-sponsored training and connection events and learning communities; number of people using DC resources (books and webpages). In 2017, 429 church disability advocates and 37 regional disability advocates served Christian Reformed churches and classes. About 125 CRC people (plus people from other denominations) attended disability ministry training and connection events. Faith Alive sold 1,020 copies of six titles related to disability and ministry. The DC web and network

pages had 62,322 pageviews—up 8.8 percent from 2016 and up 63.9 percent from 2015.

2. The CRC DC Advisory Committee and the RCA DC Guiding Coalition serve as one team that advises both ministries. DC staff consult regularly with other CRC staff on issues related to disability and ministry. In addition, agency disability advocates, who are CRC agency and educational institution staff, meet occasionally to discuss ways in which all CRC ministries can engage with people who have disabilities.
3. Annually, CRC and RCA DC ministries gather disability advocates to equip them for ministry in CRC classes and churches. In addition, throughout the year we gather regional groups of disability advocates from the CRC and RCA to meet face to face and electronically to support and encourage one another. These groups are gathered in the following regions: eastern Canada, western Canada, eastern U.S., western U.S., Michigan, Illinois/Indiana, and midwestern U.S.
4. As of January 2018, DC has a full-time director and a part-time church and volunteer associate (totaling 1.2 FTE).
5. DC volunteers and staff help to equip church leaders by speaking at churches, classis meetings, conferences, webinars, and seminary classes, and by consulting with church leaders about engaging people with disabilities in church life.
6. CRC and RCA DC provide our award-winning quarterly newsletter, *Breaking Barriers*, to CRC and RCA churches. *Breaking Barriers* 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 mission*

In addition to the worldwide outreach made possible by our web and Network pages, our director, Rev. Mark Stephenson, and his wife, Bev, taught about disability and ministry to east African church leaders in August 2017 at Theological Education Africa—a conference for African pastors and theological educators sponsored by Resonate Global Mission.

D. *Mercy and justice*

The mercy and justice aspect of our denomination's calling tends to animate and drive the day-to-day work of Disability Concerns. A person with a disability must live not only with an impairment but also with the discrimination that favors able-bodied people (ableism) and marginalizes and stigmatizes anyone living with an impairment. Therefore, DC strives to promote and foster relationships, communities, and societies where everybody belongs and everybody serves.

1. Applied metrics for mercy and justice (goal, measure, count)
 - a. Goal: People in churches learn to think and act biblically about disability.

- b. Measure: Churches engage in ministry with, for, and by people with disabilities and their families; seek diversity of ability in their fellowships by reaching out to all people in their communities; and advocate for the full and effective participation of people with disabilities in church and society on an equal basis with others.
- c. Count: We count progress toward this goal quantitatively and qualitatively.

Quantitatively, we look at numbers in the accessibility section of the annual *Yearbook* survey. For example, 308 CRC congregations (28 percent) worship in barrier-free facilities, and another 640 (59 percent) have partially accessible facilities; so a total of 87 percent of CRC church buildings are fully or partially accessible. In addition, 553 (51 percent) churches have barrier-free sound, and 442 (40 percent) have barrier-free books/materials in print. Further, 561 churches (51 percent) offer transportation for people who cannot drive themselves, and 35 percent of congregations have adopted a church policy on disability.

Qualitatively, DC tells stories of people in CRC and RCA churches who are engaging in disability advocacy, and churches are moving from ignorance and pity to caring for, friendship with, and service by people who have disabilities. We share these stories especially in *Breaking Barriers*, on our Network pages, and in CRC Communications and *Banner* articles.

2. Of the four offices identified in the CRC Church Order, our work aligns most closely with the work of deacons, who are called to “be compassionate to those in need and treat them with dignity and respect” and to “be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society.” Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC) and CRC DC have partnered together so that communities and churches will be enriched and strengthened by the inclusion, the diversity, and the gifts of people with disabilities, thus contributing to the spiritual, social, emotional, and physical well-being of persons/families with disabilities.
3. CRC DC, Race Relations, and Safe Church Ministry produced and led a three-hour training for churches on growing in hospitality and diversity.
4. Our director serves on the board of Pathways to Promise, a parachurch organization that helps churches minister to people who have mental illnesses and their loved ones. A CRC/RCA DC team, the Mental Health Task Force, focuses on ministry with people who have mental illnesses. The task force produced a resource guide with training resources in 2016, “Guide for a Clergy Leave of Absence for Mental Health Reasons” (www.crcna.org/clergyleaveguide), which has been and continues to be presented at classis and other meetings. In 2017, the task force curated resources on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. For 2018, the task force is preparing resources for ministry with youth who have mental health challenges.
5. RCA and CRC Disability Concerns ministries are members of the Inter-faith Disability Advocacy Coalition, which works on public policy priorities in Washington, D.C.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

1. DC provides worship leaders with a variety of online resources including litanies, prayers, and sermons. In appropriate settings we have been promoting the large print edition of the hymnal *Lift Up Your Hearts*.
2. DC consults with worship leaders on the best ways to include people who have disabilities in the church's life, including worship life. For example, Pastor Dave Vroege of All Nations CRC in Halifax, Nova Scotia, approached Disability Concerns to ask for ideas. A member, Hannah, wanted to have her baby son, Noah, baptized, but her anxiety about being in front of church made her hesitant. Disability Concerns got back to him with some suggestions. After the baptism, Vroege wrote, "Your suggestions were so helpful in equipping us for this baptism. We did a practice run, and we had the baptism in our evening service, in which there are far fewer people. It was a joy for the mom, for her extended family, and for all of us there."

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2020* (Ministry Plan)

Ministry with youth: DC provides a variety of resources for congregations to engage children and young people with disabilities in all of congregational life. Currently the Mental Health Task Force is working on resourcing congregations for ministry with youth who have mental health challenges.

Ministry in communities: DC places the highest priority on a network of church and regional disability advocates, connecting our work directly to churches and classes by identifying and equipping local people to minister within their local context. These ministry leaders help churches and classes 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. For example, DC worked with other ministries to organize a community conversation in Oak Park, Illinois, to discuss how faith communities and public/private organizations can best support the faith journeys of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Faith Formation and Leadership: See sections II, A and II, B above.

Identity: In the Reformed understanding of vocation, all of God's people are called to serve in God's kingdom as God has gifted them. For this reason we cast the vision of everybody, including people with disabilities, belonging to and serving God in church and community.

Race Relations (Dr. Reginald Smith, 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 through continued and growing partnerships and collaborations with denominational agencies and specialized ministries. Race Relations is privileged to continue its responsibilities in (1) antiracism and racial reconciliation initiatives that provide education, training, and resources; (2) the Inspire regional gatherings; (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 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 Churches between Borders. In partnership with the Centre for Public Dialogue and the Office of Social Justice we have also collaborated in conducting the Blanket Exercise throughout the year. First developed in Canada, the Blanket Exercise is an interactive telling of the shared history of Indigenous peoples in North America. This is a history from a perspective not often heard, and it speaks to the profound urgency of reconciliation. The Blanket Exercise has been contextualized for use in the United States as well.

Other partnerships and interactions include the following:

1. With Ebenezer CRC, Berwyn, Illinois, and with the Human Resources office (for new denominational staff) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, we engaged in Cultural Intelligence Building, which focuses on four concrete skill areas—knowledge, motivation, interpretation, and behavior.
2. We partnered with other ministries to develop a CRC Statement on Racism.
3. We developed a partnership with Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation (CORR) for churches interested in strategies and work against systemic racism.
4. We held book signings and panel discussions in Chicago and Grand Rapids focusing on Chris Meehan's *Growing Pains: How Racial Struggles Changed a Church and School*.
5. We conducted workshops on the Blanket Exercise at Inspire 2017 (CRC denominational conference) in Detroit, Michigan; at First CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan; and in Hamilton, Ontario.

6. We held Dance of Racial Reconciliation: Level 2 training in Sacramento, California.
7. We led a Widening the Circle event in Hamilton, Ontario.
8. On social media we ran stories on CRC Black History month and about the experiences of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Hispanic peoples.
9. We held a Facebook Live conversation on the gospel and race.
10. We held a third annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration at Millbrook CRC in Grand Rapids with three local multiethnic churches.
11. We facilitated Dance of Racial Reconciliation training in the Dominican Republic.
12. We held a Stand against Racism event in collaboration with Calvin College.
13. We conducted Lunch and Learn conversations on Debby Irving's book *Waking Up White* at the denominational offices and in a neighborhood setting in Grand Rapids.
14. We supported sending minority students from three CRC churches to Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C.
15. We developed leadership cohorts with six ethnic groups to grow more leaders.
16. We developed a new diversity training workshop with the Human Resources office.
17. We sponsored four students attending CRC-endorsed institutions under the Race Relations Scholarship Program. More information is available, including application forms, at crcna.org/race/scholarships.

In addition, the Office of Race Relations provides bulletins and bulletin covers for All Nations Heritage celebrations held on the first Sunday in October each year. Many of our materials are translated into several languages.

The racial climate has intensified over the past year. 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 that has been made 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 crcna.org/race and at facebook.com/crcracrelations.

Safe Church Ministry (Ms. Bonnie Nicholas, director)

I. Introduction

Safe Church Ministry helps build communities in which the value of each person is honored and people are free to worship and grow free from abuse—and where abuse has occurred, the response is compassion and justice that foster healing.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Mercy and justice

Safe Church Ministry reflects the calling of the CRCNA in its focus on God’s mercy and justice as a core part of our identity: “Hearing the cries of the oppressed, forsaken, and disadvantaged, we seek to act justly and love mercy as we walk humbly with our God.” Many who have remained silent are beginning to be heard through the growing #MeToo movement. People in our own church families are also finding their voices, sharing their own painful experiences of harassment and abuse. Listening to these voices helps us understand abuse as misuse of power, a grave injustice with devastating consequences. The floodgates have been opened, a seismic culture shift is in the making. How can we, as CRC congregations, be prepared to respond? Safe Church Ministry works to equip congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response so that we can meet this opportunity.

B. Leadership development

The sustainable strategy for Safe Church Ministry is to invest in volunteer leaders and coordinators as we partner with every classis and congregation sharing our vision for ministry. We align with the CRC’s servant leadership goal: “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.” In 2018 our focus is to further develop the position of Safe Church classis coordinator and expand this model into new areas. This model has worked well in British Columbia for many years, where it has led to good working relationships between safe church team members, classis functionaries, and churches; it has also led to increased educational opportunities around abuse-related issues. Increased awareness and understanding at all levels are critical for effective abuse prevention and response.

C. Faith formation

Because, “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,” as stated in the CRC’s faith formation goal, Safe Church has established a partnership with Dove’s Nest to offer the Circle of Grace program. This excellent program for children and youth affirms the Lord’s great love for each of us and his presence with us at all times. It equips children and youth in creating a safe environment for themselves and others, and it can help us raise a new generation that embodies respect for all people and the sacredness of all relationships.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2020*

Most of our resources for church leaders and church communities can be found online—free of charge. Safe Church can now be found on Facebook (@SafeChurchMinistry) and also retains an active presence on The Network, posting top stories in 2017 (#1 and #6). Over 500 people subscribe to our bi-monthly e-newsletter, and over 20 receive a monthly prayer guide and have committed to pray for Safe Church Ministry.

Safe Church staff facilitated and attended various training events in 2017 in Michigan, Ontario, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Montana. We also funded three mini-grant projects in Ontario, Iowa, and Alberta. In addition, our office recorded hundreds of direct interactions with churches and individuals. These interactions included assistance with policy questions, team development, awareness, and prevention; we also provided consultation in over fifty abuse-related situations.

At the time of this writing Safe Church Ministry is staffed by one full-time director and one half-time associate. We are assisted by a volunteer advisory committee of six members, and we seek to maintain diversity on this committee with regard to location, nationality, gender, ethnicity, skills, and interests.

Safe Church Ministry is greatly assisted by its volunteer safe church team members, who act as resources and catalysts in their own congregations and classes. Team members help implement safe church policies and offer educational opportunities to prevent abuse. They walk alongside others by providing a listening ear, offering support, and pointing to resources when abuse has occurred.

Team members benefit greatly by serving on an active team that is organized and supported by the classis through the establishment of a Safe Church classis coordinator. Synod has repeatedly reminded all classes in the denomination of “the vital importance of a safe church team,” noting that “a safe church team is an important part of the pastoral care that the church offers to its members” (*Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 559). There is a great need for all of us to be equipped in abuse awareness, prevention, and response! Pray with us for more people to find their calling in serving with us in safe church ministry.

I. Introduction

The Office of Social Justice (OSJ) exists to help the CRCNA address the root causes of hunger, poverty, and oppression 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 encouraging congregations to be hospitable, helpful participants who understand the U.S. immigration system and how to advocate for a more just system, and learning together about Indigenous justice, human trafficking, and peacebuilding worldwide. 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 with legislators.

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, this office aims to be a catalyst that energizes and organizes our denomination for more appropriate, effective, and efficient action on behalf of and with people who are poor and/or 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 people who are 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 upside-down kingdom where the last are first, the least are important, the poor can meet their needs, and the oppressed find justice (Mic. 4:4; Matt. 20:1-16; Luke 4:14-21).

III. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

1. In partnership with Faith Formation Ministries, OSJ developed three “Ten Ways” tools, easy-to-use resources that give churches accessible ways to follow the call of Christ in various areas of our lives: *Ten Ways U.S. Churches Can Welcome Immigrants*, *Ten Ways to Do Justice*, and *Ten Ways to Care for Creation*.
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 curricula, *Church between Borders* or *Journey with*

Me, into their education calendars or have taken part in the Immigrants Are a Blessing, Not a Burden campaign.

3. Our Climate Witness Project, on which we are working in partnership with World Renew, engaged with more than 530 congregational members in more than 77 CRC churches across the United States and Canada to respond to the biblical call to love our neighbors and be good stewards of creation through film screenings, legislative meetings, and energy efficiency.

B. *Servant leadership*

1. Several CRC leaders, including our director and racial justice team leader, received a grant to travel to the Middle East with Churches for Middle East Peace to strengthen our partnerships for justice and peace in the region, in response to Synod 2017's call. We are grateful for the faithful witness to justice and peace for both Israelis and Palestinians that we can engage in through coalitions like Churches for Middle East Peace.
2. *Do Justice*, our blog in partnership with the Centre for Public Dialogue, provides a space for diverse, Reformed, thoughtful voices in the denomination to dialogue about issues of justice and faith today. The blog specifically elevates the voices of marginalized people on justice issues. Through our *Do Justice* columnists initiative, eight carefully chosen CRC and RCA writers from across North America have regularly shared the ways they are wrestling with the call to do justice in their local contexts. This year we surpassed our goal to increase the diversity of *Do Justice* writers to 33 percent people of color. In response to Synod 2017, we also added Rev. Kate Kooyman to our editorial team and began to add footnotes pointing to Reformed theological statements on articles covering contentious issues.

C. *Global missions*

1. In response to Synod 2012's Creation Stewardship Task Force recommendations, we documented the effects of human-induced climate change on our global neighbors in Bangladesh, in preparation for a video resource for congregations. This resource will be a follow-up to the success of the *Climate Conversation: Kenya* video series that we produced several years ago.
2. We helped to lead a peacebuilding conference in Wukari, Nigeria, which led to a peace accord in a community that has long been divided by conflicts driven by resource disputes and religious differences.

D. *Mercy and justice*

1. The world has more displaced persons and refugees than at any time since World War II. Since 1997, OSJ has been tasked by the CRC with engaging our U.S. churches to welcome, resettle, and defend the rights of refugees. We do this through our participation in Church World Service's Refugee Program and by contracting with PARA/Bethany Christian Services to contact churches around the United States. OSJ has actively promoted awareness of and advocacy for refugee issues since the synodical study of 2007 raised the topic to a significant level of urgency. This year, in response to new U.S. government policies on refugees and an

attack on Muslim worshipers in Quebec City, we helped to organize CRC ministry leaders in releasing a statement on these events that became one of the most-viewed *CRC News* items of the year. CRC members responded enthusiastically to the connected action alerts, with almost 200 people in both the United States and Canada reinforcing our denomination's long-standing commitment to refugees by urging their elected representatives toward continued refugee support.

2. This year we continued our work on abortion by producing Sanctity of Human Life Sunday materials, promoting three action alerts related to abortion and sharing articles about abortion through our social media outlets. Dozens of congregations from both sides of the border ordered Sanctity of Human Life bulletin inserts.
3. Through our Climate Witness Project, CRC members in both the United States and Canada had over 100 legislative meetings with their elected representatives to urge strong action on climate change as a matter of creation stewardship and love for our neighbors.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

1. Our Advent devotional series—a joint effort of OSJ and World Renew—continues to be our most widely read and shared seasonal publication, with over 2,000 subscribers.
2. In response to Synod 2016's decision, we produced our first bulletin inserts for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. The inserts were very popular—so much so that we had to reprint them twice!
3. Our Immigrants Are a Blessing, Not a Burden campaign added a litany that congregations can use to reflect on the biblical theme of the blessing of the stranger.
4. We offer fresh content for worship and prayer every week through *OSJ Prayers*, a weekly email featuring the most pressing justice issues around the world and written prayers appropriate for individuals, small groups, and congregations. *OSJ News* is our monthly newsletter for CRC justice seekers. This popular newsletter is delivered electronically to nearly 3,500 recipients, supplying a unique Christian Reformed perspective on social justice news and events. Our immigration list remains our largest issue-based list with over 1,800 subscribers. To subscribe to any of our publications, visit crcna.org/Justice and click on "Newsletters."

IV. Connecting with churches

1. We provide focused training and leadership development through the Blanket Exercise, the *Church between Borders* curriculum, and restorative justice trainings.
2. OSJ naturally engages younger generations, but we also anticipate strong connections with all generations through our *Changed for Life* short-term missions curriculum, our immigration workshops in bilingual and immersion schools, our growing readership of *Do Justice*, our Climate Witness project, and our social media coverage of timely issues. Young people

make up the largest portion of our *Do Justice* audience: about one third of our readers are under age 34, and almost 50 percent are under age 44.

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 tenth year with a shared full-time coordinator. We have also added a staff member to support the CJM project. 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 refugee crises and other events.

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.

World Renew

I. Introduction

A. *Mandate*

In 1962, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) approved the formation of a diaconal agency. The stated mandate of this new corporate organization was “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.”

The agency, rooted in local and classical diaconates, has since prayerfully worked to join God in his work among people who live with extreme poverty and who experience hunger and injustice. Recognizing that “God is able to make all grace abound toward [us], that [we] . . . may abound to every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8, KJV), the CRC looks “to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb.12:2), as the great “Story Changer” of our own lives and the world. We are witnesses every day to God’s grace among people who live in adversity, rewriting their stories with the abundant hope and courage that only the Lord can give.

B. *Mission and ministry*

For 55 years, World Renew, the diaconal agency of the Christian Reformed denomination, has continued 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. By God’s grace, and with the support of churches and individuals in North America, World Renew was able to provide contextual opportunities to those who were most affected by hardship in 2017. They were often able to improve their lives for the long term through World Renew’s integrated community development programs.

By collaborating with 63 Christian churches and outreach organizations, World Renew assisted 250,946 people in 21 developing countries with opportunities to improve their health, agricultural practices, literacy, income earning, and leadership skills. World Renew also assisted 349,054 people who experienced disaster in 21 countries. In total, an agency that represents a denomination of about 200,000 members served 600,000 people in need in 33 countries last year, responding to disasters and providing long-term, community-based interventions. These efforts included addressing systemic justice issues such as human trafficking, gender justice, ethnic and religious discrimination, protecting vulnerable children, land rights, conflict resolution, and trauma healing.

Since its inception, World Renew has not received ministry shares from the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Rather, the agency primarily depends in faith on the generosity and sacrifice of God’s people through their donations and offerings to carry out compassionate ministry in communities of poverty. Through its membership in international alliances, World Renew leveraged nearly \$20 million in gifts it received from generous individuals and churches in 2017 into \$36 million in ministry. This work was supported by 3,072 volunteers who donated 256,404 hours of their time and gifts to people in need, equivalent to the work of 128 full-time employees for one year.

World Renew’s holistic approach to its mandate, mission, and ministry contributes in varying degrees to each of the fivefold calling of the Christian

Reformed Church: faith formation, servant leadership, global mission, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation and worship. Because of the integrated nature of World Renew's work with the whole person, it flows into these five areas even as it contributes principally to mercy and justice ministry as well as servant leadership development. World Renew's work is not only integrated; it is a 360-degree collaboration by the church of Jesus Christ with Christian partners who help people in need, advocate for justice, train local leaders, and develop biblically based community values that strengthen the message of the local church in North America and around the world.

In 2017, World Renew continued to fulfill its mission to "engage God's people in redeeming resources and developing gifts in collaborative activities of love, mercy, justice, and compassion" through its ministry. While the stories of men, women, and children around the world were marred by poverty, disaster, and injustice, the practical ministry of World Renew presented people with opportunities for remarkable transformation. Difficult stories written on the hearts and lives of people who had little hope for change have been rewritten because of your involvement in this mission of justice and mercy in 2017. Thank you for contributing faithfully and generously in so many ways to bringing in God's coming kingdom through World Renew. We praise God, who graciously calls us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world so that through our actions others may see the Savior's abundant love for them.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

1. North America

a. Church and family education and classical support

In 2017, World Renew continued to build on existing relationships with churches and schools and created new connections with educators and church members. As in previous years, World Renew board delegates or staff attended a classis meeting, by-and-large once per year, to discuss World Renew's local and global work. Through these conversations, representatives also informed classes and churches about the agency's work and heard where classes and churches would like World Renew's ministry to focus. It is worth noting that these interactions during classis meetings are becoming increasingly difficult to try to schedule as some classes are changing the focus of their agenda.

World Renew also continued to develop relationships with deacons through cofacilitating workshops at various classis and congregational meetings and providing information about interacting in both local and global communities. Several of these When Helping Harms workshops on this topic were offered last year.

Throughout 2017, World Renew's church relations team made opportunities to meet personally with churches. Staff, board delegates, and ambassadors met with deacons, council members, and pastors. There were also many opportunities for church relations team members to speak during church services and share about World Renew's work in connection with an offering. Our goal is to speak personally with each congregation in the CRC by 2020.

The church relations team continued to create an extensive list of workshops that are available to churches and subchurch groups across North America. Topics for these workshops included evaluating mission trips, understanding poverty, living out justice, learning about disaster response, and walking with refugees. There are currently seventeen workshops available for churches and subchurch groups to use. The team has been developing a list of regionally available speakers for churches, subchurch groups, schools, and individuals. The response to these offerings has been very positive.

b. Christian schools, colleges, and universities

Dynamic, vibrant, and growing connections between Christian Schools International (CSI) institutions and World Renew are forming and bearing fruit educationally, spiritually, and financially. In 2017 more than twenty schools used World Renew's gift catalog for learning and raising support. World Renew staff made many academic presentations on poverty and disaster in elementary, middle, and high schools. Staff facilitated workshops at several educator's conventions in 2017. The King's University in Edmonton, Alberta, has a staff that is jointly supported by the university and World Renew for leading its Micah Center. World Renew's Canada director also continues to teach a course on community development at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

In response to a request from schools, World Renew is facilitating another educator's learning event in July 2018. Students, particularly those in the senior grades, are involved in applying justice and advocacy initiatives as they work through *Live Justly*, a study guide available in U.S. and Canadian versions. World Renew will continue to deepen these partnerships and facilitate learning opportunities in the year ahead.

c. Refugee office, Canada

In Canada, World Renew's refugee program has the great privilege of supporting sponsoring churches and groups across the country as they welcome refugees to our country through refugee resettlement. We are inspired by the work of these dedicated sponsors. They pray for families overseas, donate significant amounts of money, drive family members to appointments, furnish apartments, pick up newcomers from the airport, walk alongside new mothers, celebrate birthdays, grieve deaths, liaise with local settlement agencies, join their voices together in advocacy efforts on behalf of the world's most marginalized peoples, and more.

In 2017, World Renew's refugee office witnessed a tremendous outpouring of support from churches and community partners. We were blessed to play a part in welcoming 261 refugees to Canada last year and to share in the joy of helping families resettle in a new homeland. We also recognize and mourn that the plight of many refugees does not come to the world's attention.

A total of 37 Christian Reformed churches in five provinces participated in refugee sponsorship in 2017. World Renew is grateful for the many ways that these churches extended a generous welcome to the displaced individuals and families who sought safe refuge in Canada.

World Renew's refugee program staff also partnered in the launch of new advocacy initiatives in 2017, such as the World Refugee Day Toolkit and a Facebook Live event on the topic of refugees. In addition, many new training and informational resources were developed, such as a comprehensive new sponsorship guide and a resettlement handbook released in early 2018.

2. International volunteer opportunities

Nearly 770 international volunteers experienced robust opportunities to participate in justice and compassion ministries with World Renew in 2017. Their presence in communities of poverty and disaster was a catalyst for change in their own hearts and in the hearts of the people they lived and worked with. Their testimonies are a powerful witness to the formation of faith in the context of global ministry.

As they used their time and skills to serve alongside God's children in a country or region that was not their own, men, women, and young people enlarged their understanding of community in the body of Christ and discovered new ways to hear God's affirmation and direction.

World Renew's service opportunities place people in relationships where they can build each other up, learning and sharing together. By relating to those who live in poverty as God's fellow imagebearers, people of faith truly serve others. While serving, they grow in Christ, who changes stories by his grace.

B. *Servant leadership*

As the corporate expression of the office of deacon in the body of Christ, World Renew's task is to address the pain 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 one of the primary goals of World Renew's activities.

1. Global Volunteer Program

World Renew's Global Volunteer Program offers opportunities for collaborative learning to people who have a heart to serve others through international internships and long-term volunteer placements. This includes engaging groups in church partnerships, discovery tours, intergenerational church-based work teams, college teams, and semester programs as well as youth and young adult opportunities in North America and around the globe.

World Renew's Global Volunteer Program placed 753 volunteers in ministry positions in 2017, offering a variety of opportunities to serve and learn while deepening their relationships with Christ and others.

International opportunities for student and youth groups provided volunteers with one-week service-learning trips. This includes Embark discipleship programs (formerly Serve with a Purpose) and short-term opportunities for individuals and teams.

Young adults also engaged in college semester programs and a three- to six-month immersion opportunity. Medium- and long-term placements, internship opportunities, and professional development opportunities for adults are available in communities overseas.

David Nightingale was one of four young men who joined the Global Volunteer Program in Malawi, working through World Renew's partner, Nkhoma Synod of CCAP, to develop education and health programs. The project was called Azibambo Atali Akukula, which means "Tall Men Growing" in the local language.

"During the four months I spent in Malawi, I believe that God not only worked through me to affect others, but in me as well," Nightingale said. "He challenged me and stretched me in ways I couldn't have imagined, and through it all I came to know him better. Although I had doubts and fears, he was my rock and my shield. He used me to his glory and honor, and I have been changed because of it. Through new relationships, ideas, and experiences, I believe that God is molding me and making me into the man he wants me to be, and preparing me for the life he created me to live."

2. Disaster response volunteer programs

a. International relief managers

When disasters strike, people who live in poverty suffer because they are most vulnerable. In 2017, World Renew placed 16 international relief managers (IRMs) in six countries affected by disasters. IRMs managed complex logistics in a wide variety of projects that helped disaster survivors get back on their feet and build greater resilience over time to respond to loss in the future.

Internationally, World Renew assisted 349,054 people affected by natural and human-caused disasters in 22 countries in 2017. This included persons affected by war in Syria, Lebanon, and South Sudan; thousands who experienced drought and famine in eastern and southern Africa; Haitian communities hit by hurricanes; families continuing to recover from the 2015 Nepal earthquake; and people still affected by the 2013 typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

Last year, IRMs coordinated life-saving food and emergency distributions and managed latrine-building projects among South Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda. They provided food assistance and moved families back into permanent housing in Haiti. International volunteers continued to supervise home reconstruction work in Nepal, and saw communities in the Philippines, where World Renew made a long-term commitment after Typhoon Haiyan, build back stronger and begin to flourish again.

b. Disaster Response Services volunteers in North America

World Renew's Disaster Response Services (DRS) volunteers gave their time and talents to help clear debris, assess needs, and rebuild homes after disasters in North America last year. More than 2,300 DRS volunteers from the United States and Canada connected with nearly 11,000 low-income, elderly, or disabled disaster survivors, providing over 8,800 families with cost-free labor, support, and resources to help them recover from a flood, fire, tornado, or hurricane in 2017.

World Renew DRS volunteers are general and skilled laborers, building estimators, construction supervisors, plumbers, electricians, cooks, site managers, and regional, project, and area managers who donate their specific experience and skills to the ministry.

Last year, DRS volunteers gave almost 205,000 hours of their time in more than 45 disaster-affected communities in North America, repairing and rebuilding 284 homes, helping 32 families with cleanup and debris removal, assessing the needs of more than 2,500 households through personal interviews, training facilitation, and building the capacity of local long-term recovery groups.

World Renew DRS volunteers represented 32 different denominations in 2017 in addition to individuals from over 350 CRCs and members of the Reformed Church in America, a partner with World Renew DRS in domestic disaster response. Over 136 total volunteers were new to DRS: of these, two-thirds were from the United States, and one-third was from Canada. More than 550 volunteers were under 18 years old, and over 335 were adults under 30 years old.

3. International development programs

A strength of World Renew's international development programs is their implementation by servant leaders from Christian partner groups and churches in local communities. World Renew works with partners in ways that strengthen their capacity to lead transformational development in their community and region. This includes strengthening organizational and board capacity, coaching in nonprofit management and good governance, facilitating monitoring and evaluation, and promoting accountability and transparency.

Leaders who follow Jesus Christ, reflecting the heart of a servant in their communities, are better able to mobilize local congregations to become catalysts for change and justice. World Renew works to empower its partners, pastors, and laity so that they are equipped and networked to conduct their own development, following the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit.

C. *Global mission*

While World Renew's work around the world falls primarily into the mercy and justice calling, it is work that is infused with global mission. In ministry and mandate, the organization works in concert with other CRC agencies, as well as church and denominational partners, to accompany each other into the daily living of local communities. Through World Renew's unique ministry with churches and denominations that touch people who live with poverty, hunger, disaster, and injustice around the world, the well-being of such people improves and God's kingdom expands.

One example of global mission working hand in hand with mercy and justice through World Renew in 2017 was in Kibubwa, Tanzania, where the village of Butyama was one of the poorest in the region. This community also had one of the highest rates of child marriage, domestic violence, and girls out of school. Women, uneducated and with few options, were oppressed: they were not permitted to speak in public, own land, run their households, or participate in parenting decisions.

World Renew and a Christian partner, the African Inland Church of Tanzania (AICT), were working in the Kibubwa area in a five-year project to improve leadership, literacy, agriculture production, savings, and gender justice. In 2017 the partners began to work with villagers to address critical

gender issues in Butyama. With no Christian church in the area, the villagers held to traditional, animist beliefs and did not believe in God.

Community members began to discuss and analyze issues affected by gender discrimination in their village. They studied a text from *Our World Belongs to God*: “together, male and female, single and married, young and old—every hue and variety of humanity—we are called to represent God, for the Lord God made us all” (para. 11). The villagers learned the biblical principle that men and women are both imagebearers of God.

The study was a powerful testimony to God’s presence among them because, in addition to establishing community-based development projects through World Renew and AICT, the Kibubwa area now has several Christian churches as well. Many people have come to salvation, abandoning their traditional beliefs and turning to Christ. Through the church, local communities have benefited from development projects including community banks, agriculture training, a community health center, and clean water wells for household use.

The residents of Kibubwa are now more open to learning and changing their behavior. They speak openly together about the spiritual transformation they have experienced and its effect on their marriages, family relationships, and community life. Francesca and James Nyamitegeza were two of the first converts to Christianity in Butyama. As the couple grew in their relationship with Christ, they became leaders in the church and community. James has become an elder and evangelist, and Francesca is a women’s group leader. They are also champion farmers who teach other farm families new agriculture techniques through demonstration farming.

As their transformation journey progressed, James started treating Francesca differently. He learned that they were equal before God, and he started to show her respect. He proudly introduced Francesca to visitors and showed her affection in public. James invited her into conversation and gave her the opportunity to make decisions. He also started helping her with difficult household chores like collecting water and splitting firewood. James allocated Francesca her own plot of land and autonomy to make decisions about the income she earned from selling the produce she grew.

Francesca and James are now Christian marriage and family role models in Butyama and the Kibubwa area. They are a testimony to the ministry of justice and mercy that is inherently infused with global mission and transforms hearts and lives in an individual, marriage, family, community, and region.

World Renew, through partnerships with AICT and 63 other local organizations in 2017, has been used by God to open people’s eyes to new worldviews, vision, values, and community assets. Thank God for this ministry that opens doors through the demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. Mercy and justice

The CRCNA formally acknowledges mercy and justice as an integral part of its mission, vision, and calling. In World Renew’s global ministry of poverty alleviation and disaster response, mercy and justice are inseparable in experiencing the shalom that God intends for all relationships between people and God, their neighbors, and creation.

World Renew’s mandate and mission recognize that God’s mercy and justice sustain the motivation and movement for changing the story of a

troubled world to something better. He graciously chooses to use us and his church worldwide to accomplish this.

1. International community development

In 2017, World Renew touched the lives of a quarter million people in 1,447 impoverished communities worldwide. World Renew's community-based programs in agriculture, health, literacy, income earning, and leadership training helped families and individuals improve their way of life where basic services like health, education, employment, and food security are scarce and out of reach.

World Renew's development programs are carried out collaboratively in communities with Christian agencies and organizations that are strengthened in their structural, board, and financial skills through coaching and 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, integrating a biblical worldview in their community development programs and promoting active citizenship that contributes to more just societies. One example is a peer education program for out-of-school youth in Senegal and Nigeria.

World Renew has supported health and rights training for young adults in Senegal and Nigeria for the past four years. The \$2.3 million project helped school dropouts increase their income, end risky behaviors, and fend off violence and sexual abuse. The project has changed the lives of nearly 10,000 young adults in 153 youth groups, as well as parents and other community members in 186 parent groups since 2013.

"I was promised in marriage when I was a baby," said Hassana. "My fiancé approached my family to fulfill the agreement when I was 17. I was upset. I did not love the man. I talked with my peer group about it, and they helped me approach my parents and our community leaders. We discussed the downfalls of early marriage. Thank God, I was released from the arrangement."

The village council also started a process to ban forced marriage and adopt the idea that every girl has a say in what becomes of her life, changing the future of young women and their relationships into the future. The four-year program ended in 2017, but World Renew is continuing to offer crucial health and vocational education to out-of-school youth in Nigeria and Senegal in 2018.

In 2012, World Renew began a five-year program aimed at stabilizing food production in Bangladesh, Honduras, Tanzania, Mali, and Mozambique. The program aimed to enhance food security, stimulate sustainable economic growth, and strengthen a community's ability to set priorities and implement community-initiated plans. In Mozambique, World Renew collaborated with the Diocese of Niassa to address food security using farm field schools where they could demonstrate and teach appropriate technologies and test new methods alongside traditional ones. Farm field schools rely on demonstration farming, knowing that the time and effort invested will be repaid in farmers' ready adaptation of methods they can see with their own eyes.

Mario Merezio farms in the community of Lumpia, Mozambique, and he overcame initial resistance to the conservation agriculture methods offered by World Renew and the Diocese of Niassa. The 43-year-old father of six says, “I had serious problems increasing my production, and I wanted the opportunity to learn new techniques.”

A few of the new methods that caught his attention included using mulch as a groundcover and using manure as a crop cover and nitrogen-fixer. Mario tried both techniques and called the results “amazing.” However, the results also caused a problem for Mr. Merezio.

Traditional farming practice in Lumpia held that farmers should clear out their entire farm at the beginning of each agricultural season. But Mr. Merezio was using the technique of total groundcover with mulch. “While preparing the field last season, I had to collect grass and maize stalks along the road in order to cover my ground 100 percent,” he said. “Because of that, my sanity was questioned by community members thinking I was crazy!”

As the season progressed, the same people who called him crazy began to ask Mr. Merezio for advice because, he laughed, “My field was doing way better than theirs!” Mr. Merezio says the number of people who are willing to learn his methods grows daily, and he extols the virtues of the farm field school to all.

“In the past, we farmers had to struggle on our own, with no one to answer questions or assist us. Now, working with extension agents and lead farmers, we have the opportunity to share our doubts and achieve a common goal—to have enough food for our families and the community. On behalf of my farmer colleagues,” he said, “I would like to take this opportunity to thank God for all of the knowledge and techniques brought to us by this program.”

2. Disaster response

a. International disaster response

Global humanitarian needs reached unprecedented levels in 2017, with multiple disasters and persistent conflicts leaving millions of people vulnerable. Many of these families were unable to access the most essential necessities such as food, water, and a safe place to sleep. Women and children were disproportionately affected by these crises.

Thanks to the support of churches and individuals, World Renew was able to make God’s grace visible among nearly 350,000 people living in 20 countries who are living through war, drought, famine, or rebuilding after a natural disaster.

Civil war in South Sudan forced more than a million people to flee to Uganda as refugees. Many of those who remained in their own communities face extreme food shortages due to severe drought worsened by violence. Children are particularly at risk of malnutrition and its debilitating effects. World Renew has provided life-saving food assistance to families in South Sudan and has built latrines in Uganda to help prevent the spread of disease.

After years of recovering from the 2010 earthquake, Haitians were again devastated by disaster when Hurricane Matthew hit in October 2016. Homes were destroyed, crops wiped out, livestock killed, and

lives forever changed. World Renew worked with affected communities to begin the journey of recovery, providing food assistance and support to rebuild homes and livelihoods.

Rebuilding takes time, and after two major earthquakes in 2015, entire communities in Nepal were buried under rubble, and thousands were left homeless. Many months later, some of the most vulnerable people—women and children, people living with disabilities, and the elderly—were still living in makeshift shelters. World Renew has helped many of the most vulnerable families rebuild their homes and regain an important sense of dignity and privacy in 2017.

When a disaster happens, World Renew’s response ensures that communities are stronger and more resilient than before. Five years after Typhoon Haiyan battered the Philippines, many communities are continuing to experience economic growth and greater cohesion and are better prepared for future storms. By committing to work with communities in the Philippines and other locations for the long term, World Renew is fostering change that lasts.

b. Disaster Response Services in North America

World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) provided volunteer-based assistance to disaster-affected communities across the United States and Canada in 2017. Survivors who were low income, disabled, elderly, or otherwise unable to recover on their own received help and were able to return to safe, secure housing. The volunteers who helped in these situations were from 32 denominations in addition to the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. They assisted almost 9,000 North American homeowners with repair and rebuilding last year. David, a resident of Denham Springs, Louisiana, whose home was flooded in August 2016, was one of the people World Renew DRS helped last year.

“I held on all night. I was afraid I would be swept away,” David said when he accidentally entered a World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) walk-in center while looking for a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) office. DRS volunteers at the center were helping flood survivors connect with their local recovery group, Rebuild Livingston. A DRS volunteer named Evelyn Knetsch asked David if he would like to fill out an assessment survey. Eventually he said yes.

David told Evelyn that he was sleeping on an air mattress on the floor of a friend’s home because his house was gutted and unlivable. The sleeping arrangement was not good for David’s back, but he could not afford a new bed. Evelyn connected David with a caseworker in his community who made it a priority to get him a suitable bed.

At the end of the survey process, Evelyn and David prayed together. “When I came here, I was sure there was no God,” David said. “Now I think there may be a God after all.”

David and most of the residents in Denham Springs, about 40,000 households, had experienced the worst U.S. disaster since Superstorm Sandy in 2012. Rebuild Livingston, the long-term recovery group in the area, asked World Renew DRS to conduct a needs assessment in January 2017. DRS volunteers interviewed more than 1,400 individuals and

families there. This was a record for a countywide World Renew DRS needs assessment: it involved more participants than any assessment taken after Hurricane Katrina or Superstorm Sandy.

“Most people who have been through a disaster do not know where to turn for assistance,” said Bob Laarman, director of World Renew DRS. “It is also difficult for local recovery groups to figure out who in their community needs help and what those needs are. This is where World Renew DRS comes in. We can act as a bridge between local recovery organizations and survivors who are at great risk of falling through the cracks if they don’t receive additional help.”

World Renew DRS volunteers meet with disaster survivors to help communities like Denham Springs make sure that survivors like David who need help recovering are not forgotten. Determining who needs help with rebuilding provides a foundation for World Renew and other organizations to make plans for home reconstruction. It is also a way that the hope of Christ shines through the smoke and debris of people’s lives after a disaster, changing their story to one of recovery, hope, and faith.

3. Mobilizing churches for justice

As a CRC agency, World Renew shares in the calling to mobilize congregations to faithfully and effectively pursue “God’s justice and peace in every area of life.” In 2017 more than 200 North American churches were involved in addressing justice issues in relation to climate adaptation, peace building, and refugee and immigration policies.

a. United States

U.S. Congregational Justice Mobilization (CJM) in 2017 partnered with the CRC Office of Social Justice and over 135 congregations, especially on the topics of caring for creation and immigrant and refugee rights, to learn more about pressing issues, to pray for change for the people who are most affected, and to advocate for policy change.

On the topic of creation care, volunteers helped World Renew produce short documentary video pieces to highlight the impacts of climate change in Bangladesh and to bring calls for change from Bangladesh leaders to North American citizens. We partnered with Citizens for Public Justice, Climate Caretakers, and Young Evangelicals for Climate Action to participate in the 2017 Conference of Parties 23 meetings for climate solutions and engaged over 500 advocates to follow the negotiations, take action, and pray. We also started a project with the CRC’s Worship Ministries office and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to crowdsource a new collection of worship resources on creation care with justice. In the past year three congregations in the CRC achieved Energy Star certification.

More than 70 CRC congregations and groups took specific action on immigration. Activities included praying in worship services for recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and learning more about their situation, and church members engaged in advocacy with DACA recipients for change to the U.S. immigration system. There were also discussions on refugee rights and 40-plus *Church between Borders* educational workshops. A group of 40 individuals from

four congregations also traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in legislative meetings and learn more about the global migration crisis.

b. Canada

World Renew in Canada works with the CRC Office of Social Justice, the Centre for Public Dialogue, Diaconal Ministries Canada, and the Canadian ministries director's office to jointly support a part-time justice mobilizer position. This position focuses on analyzing the current engagement of congregations in social justice and their future interests and on ways to walk alongside congregations, encouraging them to build justice work (advocacy, etc.) into their congregational fabric.

Last year World Renew concluded the Good Soils Campaign, an effort funded through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) and the Gates Foundation, encouraging Canadian citizens to lobby their Members of Parliament to increase funding for programs that support small-scale farmers around the world. The Canadian World Renew director and board members participated in the advocacy action. Because of these acts of solidarity, CFGB funding was renewed and included allocations for food security programming.

World Renew supported Canadians with resources to further advocate for just domestic and international policies. The small group study guide, *Live Justly*, was adapted for use in the U.S. and Canada to further facilitate advocacy efforts in local congregations.

In national and state or provincial government contexts, World Renew participated in approaching political leaders through the agency's directors in the United States and Canada on issues that touch the mission, vision, and values of the denomination and the people we work with. These issues include refugee concerns, immigrants, creation caretaking, religious discrimination, and racism.

c. International justice

World Renew's work in development and disaster response in communities of poverty is based in biblical justice. In justice education we create opportunities for teaching and learning that are implemented through existing church networks and advance basic human and civil rights. These include advocacy action, servant leadership, good governance, peace building, and trauma healing. Our long-term work in Nigeria includes justice activities in building peace among disparate groups.

Over the past decade religious extremists have fueled Christian/Muslim conflict in Nigeria. The conflict has undermined much of the meaningful spiritual, economic, agricultural, social, educational, and political development there. The animosity has resulted in destruction of property, massive displacement of people from their homes, and violent deaths. In Makurdi, Nigeria, people from a variety of backgrounds gathered for a peace-building consultation, with the goal of restoring calm in several places where the need for sustainable peace following extremist violence was urgent.

The consultation was attended by Christian and Muslim religious leaders as well as traditional, political, and local government officials. The participants' aim was to transform four years of bloody and destructive conflict into a lasting peace.

The participants acknowledged the value of peace and the dangers of violence. “No one will build peace for us,” they said. “We must own the process for ourselves, for our children, and for our grandchildren to know real peace.” One religious leader said, “I am filled with joy to be here. Peace has found a stool to sit on. Our prayer is that everyone here will leave with a gift to take home to give to our people.” Another participant, who was shot in the stomach during the Wukari conflict four years ago, said, “I said and did things in anger and pain that I am now sorry for. Now I must forgive and work for peace.”

We thank God for the support of this event by CRCNA agencies and ministries such as World Renew, Resonate Global Mission, and the Office of Social Justice. The peace-building consultation produced several important steps toward sustainable peace. First, Christian and Muslim representatives agreed to advocate for a political power-sharing arrangement that fairly represented all religions in the area. They acknowledged that this process would take time and education but was very necessary.

Both Muslim and Christian groups agreed to participate jointly in ending inflammatory preaching in mosques and churches. They also agreed to identify and resist outside preachers who came to stir up and divide the people. Traditional, Christian, and Muslim leaders decided to build a mechanism to encourage people who were displaced by the conflicts to return home, ensuring their safety and assisting them in rebuilding their destroyed properties. We thank God that we do all of this as we await a new heaven and a new earth, a time when, as Revelation 21 says, God will dwell with his people and wipe every tear from their eyes.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

World Renew’s integrated programs in development and disaster response represent the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, ministering to people in need with practical interventions in community development, justice education, and disaster response that point to the saving grace of Jesus’ 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, oppressed, 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 our faith, often bringing the first glimpse of salvation into hearts, homes, and communities where fatalism and spiritual poverty reign.

By working with churches and partners globally, 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 Resonate Global Mission throughout the CRC’s efforts worldwide, opening the door to a greater ministry presence through development and disaster-response programming.

In Sierra Leone a World Renew partner, Christian Extension Services (CES), has been working long-term to provide food for the body and the spirit among communities where poverty is a way of life. In 2017, Rev.

Istafanus Bahago, a leadership consultant with Resonate Global Mission in Sierra Leone, exclaimed, “CES is the John the Baptist of our communities!”

Four years ago, CES began working in the mostly Muslim village of Medina after residents asked for assistance in improving their community. CES helped them organize a leadership team called a Village Development Committee. The committee identified growing more rice as their most urgent need, and CES began to assist them with a sustainable agriculture and food security program. The project provided villagers with seed and training to help them improve their rice production.

After several successful harvests, the Medina development committee approached CES with their next project: constructing a community grain-processing and storage building. The villagers agreed to provide local materials such as sand, stones, and wood. CES agreed to provide the roofing, cement, paint, and doors. The building was completed in 2017, and it stands as a proud testimony to the positive changes taking place in Medina where the people are learning to collaborate to achieve their common goals.

CES staff inspected the building last fall. It was full of the rice the community had harvested, and there is space for a future rice-milling machine. The development committee members told CES that the project not only met their need for secure grain storage but also encouraged unity among the community members as they contributed and worked together to complete the project.

In September 2017 a group of twenty Muslim villagers from Medina stood up in a community meeting with CES and World Renew and sang a Christian song. They then requested a church and a pastor. The next month, Resonate staff met with a group of more than forty community members, some of whom had already decided to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Praise God that we serve the One whose kindness leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2020*

A. World Renew church relations program

1. Offerings

World Renew does not receive ministry shares from Christian Reformed churches but depends on the generosity of members and congregations who give toward four synodically designated offerings each year. In 2017 these denominationally approved offerings took place on World Hunger Campaign Sunday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and DRS Sunday. World Renew also recommended additional offerings in Canada for refugee concerns, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and maternal and child health, and in the U.S. for DRS, the Foods Resource Bank, and Free A Family®.

2. Reaching and growing into constituency beyond the CRC

In 55 years of ministry, World Renew has engaged with and blessed many people around the world, from participants to constituents to other members involved in the work. It therefore continues to be necessary that the work of this CRC agency is shared, structurally and intentionally, with people beyond our denomination.

In 2017, World Renew continued to develop a strategic planning and research initiative to increase denominational diversity among constituents and partners. As a result, World Renew saw an increased number of churches outside the CRC linking into World Renew's programs and projects. For example, World Renew is a member of several international collaborative networks, including the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, the Foods Resource Bank, ACT Alliance, and Integral Alliance. These networks provide access to funding and grants from donors beyond the CRC who also support other member organizations.

3. Events

Throughout 2017, World Renew's church relations team was involved in over fifteen conferences and workshops, including the Global Leadership Summit, the Hunger Walk, the Calvin College Faith and International Development Conference, Jubilee, the Wild Goose Festival, and conventions for Christian Schools International.

World Renew is a long-time member of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), whose national convention was held in Detroit, Michigan, in 2017. In October, CCDA hosted 3,000 attendees who have interest and involvement in community development. World Renew collaborated with the CRC Office of Social Justice in a successful evening networking event. World Renew also offered a standing-room-only workshop on trauma healing and a session on the role of the deacon in community development.

4. Church engagement highlights

Through the development of Global Engagement Opportunities (GEO) materials, World Renew provided more ways to come alongside churches to help flesh out their global engagement strategy and develop opportunities that fit their local capacity and vision. This program is meeting the needs of congregations as they work toward uncovering how God wants them to interact globally.

The process of initiating the GEO program also involved developing more flexible connection tours for our field staff. In 2017 several of these tours were facilitated for World Renew's frontline workers in Latin America, Asia, and Africa who interacted, engaged, inspired, and connected with churches, schools, groups, and individuals across Canada and the U.S. In 2018 more planned connection tours will continue to provide a variety of opportunities for international field staff to share their work and build relationships with partner churches and supporters around North America. Additional opportunities such as workshops, simulation activities, resources, and speaking engagements are also planned to continue to engage churches and individuals in World Renew's international ministry.

B. Communities First Association

World Renew partners with Communities First Association (CFA) in North America as they coach, consult, and train faith and church leaders. These leaders are passionate about engaging people in God's redemptive work where they live by using Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD).

In 2017, CFA developed and then engaged more than 500 individuals in a poverty simulation. The participants represented 30 churches, five

denominations, and several faith-based, nonprofit organizations. In addition, CFA began to collaborate with Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, last year to introduce seminarians to ABCD immersion. The partnership is expanding in 2018.

CFA is quickly becoming the resource through which community developers from across the United States receive nationally recognized experiences in ABCD. CFA is helping local churches and educational leaders in North American communities uncover the grace of God's gifts and presence where they are.

IV. Board matters

An important support to World Renew's ministry is our board. The primary function of the board is to set World Renew's vision and mission and to encourage and track the accomplishment of that vision.

World Renew's governance structure is made up of delegates from each CRC classis in addition to as many as 27 members-at-large, who together constitute the Board of Delegates of World Renew.

The delegates are a vital communication link with classes and churches. They select member national boards, with up to seven members on the U.S. board and up to nine members on the Canada board. The two boards together form the Joint Ministry Council, which provides governance for World Renew as a whole.

Board of Directors of World Renew-Canada

Raymond Prins, president
Rebecca Warren, vice president
Marguerite Ridder, secretary
Jason DeBoer, treasurer
Rita Klein-Geltink, pastoral advisor
Jerry Aydalla
John De Groot

Board of Directors of World Renew-U.S.

Hyacinth Douglas-Bailey, president
Roy Heerema, vice president
Chuck Adams, secretary
Barry J. Haven, treasurer
Ramon Orostizaga, pastoral advisor
Erika Izquierdo
Monica Grasley

A. Board nominations, reappointments, terms completed

1. Canada member-at-large delegate

The board of World Renew requests that synod appoint the following nominees to a three-year term as Canada member-at-large:

Mrs. Julie Vanden Heuvel is an active member of Covenant CRC in Calgary, Alberta, where she currently serves as a church school coordinator, and where her husband, Matt, serves as pastor. She has traveled to several countries to see the work of World Renew, including Haiti and Uganda, where she was inspired by our intentional efforts to help local leaders develop their

capacity. In her work in regulatory compliance, and in a family business, Mrs. Vanden Heuvel exercises her strong gifts in administration. She has also used her administration abilities in a variety of volunteer roles, including Alpha ministry, vacation Bible school, young adult ministry, the church education committee, event planning for a Uganda partnership with World Renew, Stephen Ministry, and Bible Study Fellowship.

Mrs. Margaret VanOord is an active member of Fredericton CRC in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where she currently serves on the worship committee and previously volunteered to teach church school and GEMS. She and her husband, Dirk, have extensive experience with World Renew's Disaster Response Services (DRS), having served on forty DRS teams in various roles, including the work of on-site managers. This experience, along with their recent trip to Kenya and Tanzania to see World Renew's work there, has inspired Mrs. VanOord to share with area congregations what God is doing through World Renew staff and partners.

2. Reappointment of Canada members-at-large

The following Canadian delegates are completing their first term on the board and are recommended for a second three-year term: Mr. Jason DeBoer (Hamilton area), Mr. David Schuurman (Redeemer University student representative), Mr. Thomas Gnanayudam (Toronto area), and Ms. Ko Spysma (British Columbia area).

3. Reappointment of Canada classis members

The following Canadian delegates are completing their first term on the board and are recommended for a second three-year term: Mr. George Lubberts (Classis Alberta South / Saskatchewan) and Mr. Richard Smit (Classis Eastern Canada).

4. Canada members completing terms

World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following board members on completing their second term of service: Mr. Albert Hummel (member-at-large), Mr. John DeGroot (Classis Chatham), Ms. Suzanne Christie (Classis Toronto), and Pastor Rita Klein-Geltink (pastoral advisor).

5. U.S. delegate appointment

The board of World Renew requests that synod appoint the following as U.S. delegates to a first three-year term: Ms. Carol Van Klompenburg (Classis Central Plains) and Mr. Edward Yoon (Classis Ko-Am).

6. Reappointment of U.S. classical members

The following U.S. delegates are completing their first term on the board and are recommended for a second three-year term: Ms. Shirley Van Heukelem (Classis Rocky Mountain) and Mr. Richard Vander Ziel (Classis Minnkota).

7. Reappointment of U.S. member-at-large

The following member-at-large has completed a first term on the board and is recommended for a second three-year term: Mr. Gregg Robbert.

8. U.S. members completing terms

World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following board members completing their service on the board: Ms. Joy Anema (Classis

Columbia), Mr. Lyman Howell (Classis Chicago South), Ms. Sara Swanson (Classis Northern Illinois), Mr. Dennis Preston (Classis Arizona), and Ms. Marilyn Harms (Classis Central Plains).

B. Financial matters

1. Salary disclosure

In accordance with synod’s mandate to report the executive levels and the percentage of midpoint, World Renew reports the following:

Job level	Number of positions	Number below target	Number at target
18	2	1	1
16	4	0	4
15	9	5	4

2. Detailed financial information

Detailed financial information and budgets will be submitted to synod by way of the *Agenda for Synod 2018—Financial and Business Supplement*.

C. Human Resources management

World Renew values program excellence. As such, it relies on its human resources (HR) function to provide HR support to functional and ministry teams. Further, it relies on diverse, professional, and skilled staff to meet the goals around its vision and mission.

World Renew has a rigorous recruiting process and has successfully hired more than 11 highly skilled staff this year. We continually expand our recruitment activities to ensure we meet both our diversity and our professional learning goals, especially given that our agency is a learning organization. To that end, we promote professional development and learning and continue on the journey of competency development across the organization.

World Renew is also 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), 62 percent are held by women.

Annual performance reviews are routine for all World Renew staff. This 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 just over \$36 million from all sources in the United States and Canada. Of this funding, nearly \$22.5 million came from churches and individual donors. These funds were then leveraged into greater ministry dollars through grants, partnerships, and other collaborations.

Just over \$1 million was received through government grants last year, and more than \$6 million came from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for emergency disaster response and food security programs internationally. World Renew also received just under \$4 million in grants from

organizations in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, and almost \$3.5 million from investments and other income.

World Renew directed \$11.8 million of its 2017 financial resources toward our core international development programs, and \$15.6 million went to disaster response. Just over a quarter-million dollars was used for community development in North America, and \$1.6 million was directed to constituent education.

World Renew used about 12 percent of its resources for general management and fundraising purposes in 2017—meaning that 88 percent of the money you entrusted to World Renew directly helped 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. Hyacinth Douglas-Bailey, president of World Renew-U.S.; Mr. Raymond Prins, 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 Council of Delegates 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 – Mission Statement

The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees presents this report to Synod 2018 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.

Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) has been involved in the training and teaching of students for ministry for 142 years since 1876 and was the first agency or institution developed by the Christian Reformed Church.

The seminary's mission statement reads as follows: "As a learning community in the Reformed Christian tradition that forms church leaders who cultivate communities of disciples of Jesus Christ, Calvin Theological Seminary exists to serve the Christian Reformed Church in North America and wider constituencies by preparing individuals for biblically faithful and contextually effective ministry of the Word and by offering Reformed theological scholarship and counsel."

II. Reflecting on Our Calling (CRCNA Ministry Priorities)

Over the past few years, Calvin Theological Seminary faculty, with input and final approval from the CTS Board of Trustees, produced a "Vision Frame" document that includes our mission statement (*What are we doing?*) and continues as follows:

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 Dig (formerly Facing Your Future), a program for high school students, to its resident and online education programs followed by continuing education programs and resources, Calvin Theological Seminary is training leaders.

Global Mission—The world is at our doorstep. Every year over 20 different nations (this past fall 38% of our students came from 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.

Mercy and 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, which helps to form preachers and teachers of the gospel. In addition, for more than a decade our Center for Excellence in Preaching has served church leaders in one-on-one settings and has logged thousands of website resource users every month.

III. Connecting with churches: *Our Journey 2020*

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 faculty in fall 2017 began a new way for all entering M.A. and M.Div. students to fulfill their contextual learning requirements through internship hours that are embedded in churches during the ministry year. The office of Vocational Formation, led by Geoff Vandermolten, continues to develop partnerships to help bridge the classroom and the church. The following organizations and churches are part of this concurrent, contextual learning approach: Beacon Hill Assisted Living, Blythefield

CRC, Brookside CRC, Calvary CRC–Wyoming, Church of the Servant CRC, Church of the Servant CRC–BES, Corinth Reformed Church, Covenant CRC, Discovery CRC, Fuller Avenue CRC, Good Shepherd Presbyterian, Heritage CRC, inSpirit CRC, Kelloggsville CRC, LaGrave Avenue CRC, Lee Street CRC, Madison at Ford CRC, Madison North CRC, Madison Square CRC, Mayfair CRC, Monroe Community CRC, Plymouth Heights CRC, Ridge Point Community Church, RiverRock CRC, Second Byron Center CRC, South Grandville CRC, Woodlawn CRC, and Grace Reformed Church, as well as churches involved with our distance-learning students.

On February 9, 2018, CTS faculty hosted an afternoon session with multiple stakeholders to hear again how Calvin Seminary could shape its curriculum and teaching for the church.

Finally, Calvin Theological Seminary presents continuing education opportunities throughout the year that are open to pastors and lay leaders alike. Many of these opportunities are presented through the Center for Excellence in Preaching led by director Rev. Scott Hoezee.

IV. Additional program and ministry highlights

We continue to be blessed by strong support for our Distance Education Master of Divinity Degree program. In fall 2017 a new group of seven 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 2018 spring semester, five new students began the program, bringing total enrollment in the program to 64. The launch of the distance education M.Div. degree 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 2017-2018 academic year of 277 degree-seeking students, with 63 new students, including 33 M.Div. students (26 residential and seven 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 from the Center for Excellence in Preaching compares the first full year of visits, pageviews, 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
2017	290,000	1,350,000	14,900

Through the Center for Excellence in Preaching we received a sustainability grant (2018-2021) from Lilly Endowment Inc. for \$250,000 that will be matched by the Center’s budget. This follows a four-year \$500,000 grant program from Lilly that funded an average of twelve Peer Learning Groups of pastors each year. The groups discussed the challenges of preaching in the twenty-first century and explored best practices to meet those challenges. The learning harvested from these groups has many implications for seminary pedagogy, and the new grant program will build on that learning and

seek to incorporate it into the life of the seminary and in faculty engagement with alumni.

Calvin Theological Seminary recently received a sustainability match grant (2017-2019) from Lilly Endowment Inc. for \$125,000 in order to build on several of the goals from our 2013 grant of \$250,000 under the Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers initiative. Both grant periods are three years.

The sustainability proposal builds on three of the four components in the original grant:

- research that more fully documents our reality of student debt and its contributing factors
- the importance of financial literacy to better equip future ministers
- greater financial assistance for our students

The two themes of the sustainability grant narrative are (1) stewarding the ecosystem health of Calvin Theological Seminary and (2) a “wellness plan” for CTS: more students, more funding, less debt.

We were also pleased to encourage the work of the CRCNA this year as they were invited to submit a grant proposal under the National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. We had several meetings with their grant developers, offering input from our work, and were pleased to write a letter of support for their grant submission to Lilly Endowment Inc. titled “The CRCNA Financial Shalom Project.” We are even more pleased that they have been awarded this grant, and we look forward to possibilities of collaboration in the next three years to pursue financial shalom in our respective places of ministry.

The seminary was blessed with a number of key appointments during the past year. We welcomed Dr. Young Ahn Kang (from South Korea) as visiting professor of philosophical theology for a two-year term that began in summer 2017. In addition, we welcomed Dr. Gary Burge as visiting professor of New Testament for a two-year term that also began in summer 2017. We also welcomed Dr. Robert Keeley to serve for one year as visiting professor of discipleship and faith formation while also serving as director of distance education at the seminary. Dr. Keeley has been affirmed for an additional two-year appointment.

Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary were also glad to see an interim theological librarian appointment transition to a regular appointment for Mr. Gerone Lockhart.

We are currently in the fifth year of the Church Renewal Lab with Rev. Keith Doornbos as project program director. The pilot 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. The Church Renewal Lab is currently working to serve the wider church including the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

On September 8, 2015, Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary were blessed to open prison doors by beginning classes at Handlon Correctional facility as part of the Calvin Prison Initiative. Twenty new students from within the prison system came together to begin a five-year bachelor’s

degree program accredited through Calvin College. A total of 57 students are enrolled in this program. The 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 transform not only the students in the classroom but also the prison system as these students are deployed within it. In addition, we testify that professors and Calvin College and Calvin Seminary students are changed and affected by their involvement in the lives of the students at Handlon.

We are grateful for partnerships with congregations and pastors in the training of our students. Fifteen of our 23 Formation Group Leaders are pastors (the other eight are seminary faculty members). They include Mike Abma, Mariano Avila, Lynn Barger Elliott, Dave Beelen, Gary Burge, Don Byker, Pete Byma, Doug Fauble, Marc Holland, James Jones, Ann Kapteyn, Ken Nydam, David Poolman, Denise Posie, David Rylaarsdam, Jeff Sajdak, Henry Schenkel, Heather Strooboscher, Dave Struyk, Matt Tuininga, Mary VandenBerg, Karl Westerhof, and Cory Willson.

We are also grateful to pastors and others for recommending great students for the Dig program (formerly Facing Your Future). We celebrate the continuation of this opportunity to train young people and expose them to ministry. During the summer of 2017, 24 high school students experienced theological education at the seminary, followed by ministry in the Chicago area as well as in Toronto, Ontario.

Finally, Calvin Theological Seminary anticipates being able to report (via supplement) on a comprehensive evaluation visit by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). The ATS evaluation committee is scheduled to be on campus in March 2018. If you have any comments concerning Calvin Theological Seminary’s qualifications for continued accreditation, please send them in writing to the president or board chair of Calvin Theological Seminary (3233 Burton St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546) and/or to the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (10 Summit Park Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1110).

V. Administration

The seminary administration includes Rev. Jul Medenblik, president; Ms. Margaret Mwenda, chief operating officer; Dr. Ronald J. Feenstra, academic dean; Rev. Geoff Vandermolten, director of vocational formation; Mr. Robert Knoor, director of development; Rev. Jeff Sajdak, dean of students; and Ms. Sarah Chun, associate dean of students.

VI. Faculty

The seminary faculty continues 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, participate in 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.

At its February meeting, the board took the following action:

The board noted the upcoming retirement of Dr. Michael Williams; acknowledged his years of faithful service to Calvin Theological Seminary (1995-2018); conferred on him the title of Martin J. Wyngaarden Senior Professor in Old Testament Studies, *emeritus*, effective upon his retirement on July 1, 2018; and requests that synod acknowledge this action with gratitude to God.

VII. Board of Trustees

The board met in plenary session in October 2017 and via conference call in February 2018. It anticipates a plenary session in May 2018.

The board officers are Mr. Sidney Jansma, Jr., chair; Rev. Curt Walters, vice-chair; and Ms. Teresa Renkema, secretary.

Trustees Mr. Keith Oosthoek (Region 4), Pastor Sergio Castillo (Region 5), and Rev. Scott Elgersma (Region 6) have completed one term of service and are eligible for reappointment. The board recommends that synod reappoint each of these members to a second three-year term.

Completing a second term on the board are Rev. John Dykhuis (Region 7), Rev. Timothy Ouwinga (Region 8), and Rev. Timothy Howerzyl (Region 10). Rev. William Sytsma (Region 9) by way of exception served on the CTS board one year beyond the second term. In addition, completing terms on the board as at-large regional board members are Dr. Karen DeMol (Region 8) and Ms. Teresa Renkema (Region 11). We are very grateful for their service and wise counsel to the seminary and to the church.

The following nominees (with the exception of regional at-large nominees) have been submitted to the classes in their respective regions for a vote. The results of those elections will be presented to Synod 2018 for ratification.

Region 7

Ms. Susan Keesen, a member of Hope Fellowship CRC in Denver, Colorado, is a retired senior business executive and attorney who has previously served as an at-large Calvin Seminary Board member for her expertise in law and finance. In that capacity, she eventually served as board secretary and as chair of the development and finance committee. Ms. Keesen currently serves her community as a board member for Christian Living Communities. She also serves on the classical interim committee of Classis Rocky Mountain.

Ms. Theresa Rottschafer, a member of Maranatha Fellowship CRC in Farmington, New Mexico, is an ESL (English as a Second Language) and English Language Development (ELD) K-5 teacher. She has previously served on the CRCNA Board of Trustees and on the CRC Board of Publications. Ms. Rottschafer has also served as an elder in her church. She attended Reformed Bible College and graduated from Calvin College. She has taught in Christian and public schools in Illinois and New Mexico, and she presently teaches in a public school in the Farmington area.

Region 8

Rev. Robert Drenten is pastor of Immanuel CRC in Orange City, Iowa, and has served as a pastor since 1988. He has served twice on the Dordt College Board of Trustees (1993-2000 and 2007-2012). Rev. Drenten has also served as stated clerk of Classis Northern Michigan and is currently serving as stated clerk of Classis Heartland.

Rev. David Huizenga is the lead pastor of Bridgewood CRC in Savage, Minnesota. He currently serves as president of Empowerment Institute, a nonprofit organization developing resources for coaching and consulting, and other resources to mobilize churches in their regions for advancing the kingdom. Rev. Huizenga has served on CRCNA Prayer Summit leadership teams. He also serves on a five-state board for Alpha Course USA.

Region 9

Mr. Paul Boersma has had several leadership positions in his home church, Brookfield (Wis.) CRC, including that of elder and as a leadership team member and adviser for a local church plant. He is presently on the church's vision committee. He has served the broader church at several classis meetings and as a delegate to synod. He graduated from Calvin College and from the University of Michigan, where he earned a master of science degree. As a civil engineer, he is employed as the associate vice-president of a global engineering and construction firm. He has experience on several professionally related committees and has served in an advisory capacity at the Milwaukee School of Engineering, where he was also an adjunct faculty member.

Ms. Carol Wynstra is a member of Kenosha (Wis.) Christian Reformed Church, where she has served as a Sunday school teacher and superintendent, a prayer and Bible study group leader, and a member of the church council's leadership team. She presently serves as chair of the worship committee and as a deacon, and was a deacon delegate to Synod 2017. She attended Dordt College and Carthage College, from which she graduated with a degree in education. She also earned college level certificates in her field of work. She is retired from her position in the field of domestic and international transportation, where she worked with transportation contracts and also on cost monitoring and transportation procedures development.

Region 10

Rev. Marc Nelesen is a pastor at Georgetown CRC in Hudsonville, Michigan. He graduated from Trinity Christian College with a degree in philosophy and from Calvin Theological Seminary with M.Div. and Th.M. degrees. He also earned a Ph.D. from Western Michigan University. Rev. Nelesen has served on the CRCNA Regional Pastor Task Force and as a board member for Special Ed Ministries and for a community learning and daycare center. He presently serves on the Clinical Pastoral Education Professional Advisory Board and on the Pine Rest Vision Team for Classis Georgetown.

Rev. David J. Prince is the pastor of New Hope Community CRC in Kincheloe, Michigan. He graduated from Calvin College with a degree in business economics and from Calvin Theological Seminary with an M.Div. degree. He served his local church as a deacon before becoming a pastor. His service to the broader CRC includes his present role as stated clerk for Classis Northern Michigan and participation as a delegate to three synods. Prior to entering ordained ministry, Rev. Prince worked as a fundraising consultant to several CRC-affiliated ministries.

Region 8 at-large

Mr. John Vander Haag is a member of the Sanborn (Iowa) CRC, where he has served as a deacon and an elder. He graduated from Dordt College with a degree in business and is presently CEO and president at Vander Haags,

Inc. Mr. Vander Haag has served in his community as a member of the Sanborn Christian School board, the Dordt College Advisory Council, and the Northwest Iowa Community Foundation board. He presently serves on the board of Western Christian High School in Hull, Iowa, and on the board of Barnabas Foundation.

Dr. Charles Veenstra is retired from Dordt College as a professor of communications. He is a member of First CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa, and has served his local church as an elder, a deacon, and a church education teacher. He has served his broader community and the Christian Reformed Church as a Christian school board member, as part of a classical student aid committee, and as a delegate to synod. Dr. Veenstra was a member of the *Christian Scholar's Review* board of trustees and is currently president of the International Listening Association.

The board will present a slate of nominees for the Region 11 at-large position by way of its supplemental report to synod.

VIII. Students 2017-2018

The composition of the seminary's student body indicates a growing national and ethnic diversity. The following statistics from fall 2017 indicate the impact the seminary is having beyond the Christian Reformed Church:

Denominational affiliation

Christian Reformed: 105 (45%)
Non-Christian Reformed: 129 (55%)
Presbyterian: 55
Other Reformed: 27
Baptist: 6
Other/None Listed: 41
(30+ total denominations)

Geographical information

U.S. students: 127 (54%)
Canadian students: 19 (8%)
International students, other than Canadian: 88 (38%)
Korean: 53 (23%)
Chinese: 10 (4%)
Other: 25 (11%)
Total countries represented: 19

Student body

Male students: 188 (80%)
Female students: 46 (20%)

Programs and students enrolled

M.Div.: 125
M.A.: 23
M.T.S.: 19
* EPMC: 30
Th.M.: 39
Ph.D.: 28
Hybrid/Distance Learning: 64 (this number does not reflect residential students who also take a hybrid/distance class)

Certificate/diploma: 1
Unclassified: 12

* Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy

Nondegree students

It should be noted that we currently have 25 students in Handlon Correctional Facility who are also considered noncredit students of Calvin Theological Seminary. In addition, we have 57 students who are part of the joint Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary program known as the Calvin Prison Initiative. We also have a total of 64 students registered in our two Spanish-language certificate programs.

IX. 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 synod, with gratitude to God, acknowledge the years of faithful service of Dr. Michael Williams and note the new title conferred on him by the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees: Martin J. Wyngaarden Senior Professor in Old Testament Studies, *emeritus*, effective upon his retirement on July 1, 2018.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Council of Delegates and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees
Teresa Renkema, secretary

Worship Ministries (Rev. Joyce Borger, director)

I. Introduction

Worship Ministries desires that every worshipping community in the Christian Reformed Church in North America experience Spirit-filled gospel proclamation and worship that is directed to God, is biblically based and theologically Reformed, and is characterized by creativity, discernment, spiritual vitality, the faith formation of all worshipers, and a call to serve others.

Launched in 2015, Worship Ministries is still in the process of building its structure. To that end, our advisory team is transitioning to include regional representatives that cover all six of our ministry regions with three additional at-large members. In addition, we are requesting representatives from each classis to help us further engage with the local church. These classis representatives will connect with the regional representatives and staff primarily via online meetings and individual email and calls so as not to incur travel expenses.

Desiring to further support worship leaders and congregations, and knowing that we have a wealth of gifted and qualified worship musicians, theologians, planners, and artists in our denomination, we are creating a system of endorsed coaches. Worship Ministries' endorsed coaches will be individuals who already have teaching/coaching/mentoring experience and through a short application process will be identified as individuals accessible by the local church. We intend that through our endorsement of these individuals, churches will be able to find someone with the expertise they need and will contract with that person directly.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

Whenever we gather for worship, we communicate what we believe about God and our relationship with God, others, and the world around us. As such, in our gathering for worship, we form the faith of those present. For many, this is the only opportunity the church has for faith formation. In other words, what we do in worship—the words we say, the prayers we offer, the songs we sing, the elements we include, the visual space itself—matters significantly for the faith formation of many who are in attendance.

This past year Worship Ministries addressed the topic of faith formation and worship through a workshop at Inspire 2017 and via regular blogs and articles in *Reformed Worship*. Many of our peer learning groups also chose to read books related to the formative power of worship and intergenerational worship. We have addressed youth and worship through two webinars that are recorded and available on *The Network*, and we continue to support the Children and Worship program. This year we also celebrated the release of a Spanish version of the Children and Worship curriculum. This translation is supported by the Reformed Church in America and is available through Faith Alive.

B. Servant leadership

Our worship leaders and planners are servant leaders, shaping the faith life of congregants, providing pastoral care in the act of worship, leading

small groups, and shepherding congregations through seasons of growth, conflict, sorrow, and change. Worship Ministries tries to create opportunities for leadership growth that are both specific to their craft and general in nature. We have done this through offering webinars on particular topics and specific books for study in our peer learning program. We have also supported a pilot project with a cohort of eight CRC worship leaders working on a fully online, one-year Certificate in Worship Leadership from Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

C. *Global mission*

Worship Ministries has had the opportunity to directly support the work of our global mission partners by participating in and supporting the Prayer Summit and by leading a class at the Theological Education in Africa conference held in Tanzania in 2017.

D. *Mercy and justice*

Scripture clearly teaches that there is a direct connection between loving mercy, doing justice, and engaging in worship that is acceptable to God. Justice continues to be a major theme in our work. Worship Ministries joined with denominational justice partners in planning and leading a conference at First CRC in Toronto, Ontario: “For Such a Time as This: Worship Meets Justice and the Arts in Turbulent Times.” In response to a specific request, we also gathered resources for lamenting in worship following situations of abuse. We are also collaborating with the Climate Witness Project on crowdsourcing new worship resources related to creation care.

E. *Global proclamation and worship*

1. *Reformed Worship*

One of the key ways the CRCNA has supported worship in our congregations for over 30 years is through the quarterly journal *Reformed Worship* (RW). RW is produced by Worship Ministries and has 1,600 subscribers to the print magazine; in addition, 623,864 unique users visited the RW website (reformedworship.org) in 2017, logging over a million pageviews. Further, RW has 5,167 followers on Facebook, and 5,789 subscribers receive our monthly e-newsletter. RW’s impact is ecumenical and reverberates around the world, with subscribers from the United Kingdom and countries throughout Asia and Africa. We are grateful to the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for their gracious support of this journal over the years—and specifically for making it possible to hire Mr. Kai Ton Chau as an associate editor this past year.

2. *Peer learning groups*

Eighteen peer learning groups are meeting in the United States, Canada, and Ukraine, with more than 110 participants representing 22 North American CRC churches, one college group, and a number of pastors in Ukraine. This continues to be a great opportunity for continuing education as well as for the creation of networks and relationships that offer support beyond the life of the group. We are hoping that many more CRC churches will make use of this opportunity next year.

3. Webinars

One of the most cost-effective and accessible ways to provide learning opportunities is through online webinars. This past year we offered nine different webinars with 214 participants. Each of these events has been recorded and is available free online at any time, allowing access to this excellent content for viewers ranging from committees that meet at night to individuals who were unable to attend live events. The webinars cover a variety of topics, from leading a worship team, developing visuals, and planning worship for and with persons with cognitive impairments, to considering the interplay between worship and work, exploring multi-ethnic worship, and discovering “How the Heart of God Shapes Worship.”

4. Denominational support

Worship Ministries also supports the CRCNA denominational office and other denominational ministries by providing worship leadership, planning, or specific resources upon request. This includes planning and coordinating the worship services at synod and the creation of worship resources to coincide with the Council of Delegates’ statement about our hurting world, released in fall 2017.

III. Connecting with Churches: *Our Journey 2020* (the Ministry Plan)

A. *The local church*

We continue to connect with the local church through various networking opportunities. We have planned networking events in West Michigan, Chicago, and Toronto, as well as at the Calvin Symposium of Worship, giving worship leaders an opportunity to meet each other. These networking opportunities are meant to act as a jump-start for local worship leaders to form relationships that can help sustain them in their ministry through the sharing of resources, advice, and encouragement.

Worship Ministries also has an active Facebook page with 283 members. This site has become a great place to ask ministry questions and to find resource ideas from actively engaged, knowledgeable members.

This past year we witnessed the creation of a learning community made up of five worship leaders from churches in Michigan and California. A worship leader asked a question on social media that another leader was also wrestling with. Worship Ministries staff were able to connect these two leaders with the worship leaders of two other churches who had asked the same question in the past. The group started meeting monthly online, initially talking about specific strategies used to address the original question and soon morphing into a time for mutual learning and sharing of ideas. Worship Ministries will continue to encourage such learning communities as they pop up and grow organically.

We are very grateful for our advisory committee/regional representatives, who provide connections to the local church, helping us find ways to create networks among and to equip worship leaders across the CRC. We look forward to the creation of an additional network of classis representatives that will help us further fulfill our mandate.

B. Other partners

Worship Ministries is blessed to have worked with a variety of other partners in the past year. Key among them is the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, which, in addition to supporting a number of projects financially, supplies us with insightful conversational partners and provides us opportunities to continue to grow and wrestle with larger questions that affect the CRC. Most recently we participated in a consultation on the relationship between income inequality, congregational life, and the practices of Christian worship.

We had an opportunity to lead a workshop for the Presbyterian Church in Canada at their national gathering and together planned “Worship as Journey: A Day of Learning and Renewal with Steve Bell and Ken Medema.” We look forward to collaborating more with this denomination.

We celebrated the launch of the Center for Congregational Song this past fall. This binational ecumenical organization’s purpose is to support congregational song by equipping song leaders and musicians in their leadership of congregational song, and to encourage the writing of new songs that are textually and musically excellent. Following that launch we collaborated with the center, Ken Medema, and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in providing an event for further networking among writers, publishers, and worship leaders. It is our hope that songwriters in the CRC will benefit from the work of this center and that we will continue to sing a new song.

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,” accessible 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.

II. Committee membership

The following people currently serve on the Candidacy Committee: Pastor James Jones (2018/1), Rev. Susan LaClear (2018/1), Rev. Joel Kok (2018/2), Rev. Mark Hilbelink (2019/1), Rev. Andrew Vander Leek (2019/1), Dr. LaVerne Jordan (2019/2), Rev. Fernando Valencia (2019/2), Rev. Ashley Bonnes (2020/1), Rev. Changguk “Joseph” Byun (2020/2), Rev. Jul Medenblik (*ex officio*, as the Calvin Theological Seminary representative), Mr. Colin Watson, Sr. (*ex officio*, representing the executive director), and Rev. David Koll (nonvoting staff).

Rev. Susan LaClear and Pastor James Jones are completing their first terms on the committee and are willing to serve a second term. Rev. Joel Kok is completing his second term and is not eligible for reappointment. Therefore the Candidacy Committee presents to synod the following slate of names for appointment to fill this vacancy:

Rev. John A. Algera was ordained in 1979 and has spent his ministry career serving Madison Avenue CRC of Paterson, New Jersey. Rev. Algera has been a key missional leader in his region and has mentored many persons throughout the years. He has served on the classical ministry leadership team of his classis for over a decade, in addition to serving in many other regional roles. As he anticipates retiring this year, he is eager to offer himself for the work of the Candidacy Committee.

Rev. Henry Jonker was ordained in 1974 and retired in 2011. He served four congregations in various regions of Canada during his thirty-seven years of full-time ministry and has been actively engaged in various classis roles, including that of stated clerk. He has served several terms as a synodical deputy. He has served as a delegate to synod seven times, and he chaired the advisory committee to Synod 2004 regarding the report of the Committee to Provide Guidelines for Alternate Routes to Ministry. More recently, he served for about 1.5 years as a transitional pastor and currently serves as an alternate synodical deputy. He was a member of the first Candidacy Committee appointed in 2005, and he served as chair for three years of his seven-year term. He maintains a desire to serve the church and to offer his experience and historical background in the work of the Candidacy Committee.

III. Review of the committee's work

A. *Development of the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy*

The Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) continues to be a well-used route to candidacy. More and more of our candidates are now attending seminaries other than Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS). In fact, this year we see a historic shift as almost 60 percent of our candidates enter through the EPMC program (up from 40 percent in the past two years).

The Candidacy Committee continues to encourage students to consider Calvin Theological Seminary as they select a seminary, but a large variety of factors comes into play in students' decision making in this regard. This year there are a record number of EPMC candidates, with the percentage of EPMC candidates now greater than that of CTS candidates. We are grateful for the flexibility shown by Calvin Theological Seminary in the development of this trend. We are also grateful for the work done by the seminary in the administration of the EPMC program.

We anticipate in the coming year some probing conversations between members of the CTS community and members of the denominational Candidacy Committee as we together seek to discern reasons for the trends we are noticing, possible responses to them, and ways to ensure that the needs of the denomination are met. 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*

A prominent feature of our reports to synod for the past three years has dealt with the implementation of a requirement that all potential candidates have a monthly vocational mentor relationship for at least two years, rooted in a local community of faith, and that they have an active engagement with a classis during that time. The Candidacy Committee proposed this process to Synod 2015 and received approval for implementation, with the understanding that it would apply to all candidates presented to synod, beginning with Synod 2018 (see *Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 590-91).

This year represents the first year in which candidates being presented for approval by synod have met the requirement of this new process. We are tremendously grateful for the many mentors and classis representatives who have made this possible. We pray that each of the candidates will be able to reflect on this program as one that was positive and formative in their preparation for ordained ministry.

Further developments of this program are needed and will be under way. We are building and maintaining a roster of all students moving toward candidacy for the years 2019 and beyond. We have developed and are refining report forms and tools for use by mentors and classes. We are working with Calvin Theological Seminary to plan what we hope will become a yearly training opportunity for leaders engaged in the mentoring task. We remain open to the churches and to synod for comments and suggestions about this significant task.

C. *Church Order Article 23 initiatives*

Synod 2015 received an overture raising various questions about implementation of Church Order Article 23, with requests for clarification. The overture was referred to the Candidacy Committee. The Candidacy Committee prepared an extensive response, offered to Synod 2016 as a report

titled “Clarification regarding Church Order Article 23.” Synod responded by approving the work of the committee and instructing the committee to do further work. Synod 2017 continued this initiative by passing the following motion (*Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 689-90):

That synod instruct the Candidacy Committee to propose to a future synod a reformatting of and potential changes to Church Order Articles 8, 23, and 24 and their Supplements, also making appropriate use and mention of a document called the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, in order to enhance the clarity and brevity of the Church Order.

Our committee’s response to Synod 2017 is contained in the Appendix to this report. Because the response is extensive, we are suggesting that the changes it suggests be proposed to Synod 2019 for approval. This will also give us time to prepare updates to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook as well as to the “Journey Toward Ordination” document.

D. Committee on Continuing Education for Pastors

A special committee was appointed by Synod 2015 in order to chart a course toward enhanced services for continuing education for pastors. The committee’s report, presented to Synod 2016, included an ambitious list of motions and initiatives (see *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 849-51). Central to the report was a proposal to form a standing committee to attend to the various initiatives and to the general priority of continuing education for pastors. Synod 2016 adopted the following in this regard:

That synod instruct the Candidacy Committee to appoint an administrative team from such ministries as Pastor Church Resources, Calvin Theological Seminary, and the Candidacy Committee to coordinate initiatives and to seek volunteer help for what would become the new Continuing Education Committee, which would be commissioned to attend to nurturing the practice and culture of continuing education of pastors and ministry staff within the CRC, as described in section VII, I of the report.

(Acts of Synod 2016, p. 850)

The Candidacy Committee is pleased to note that an administrative team and committee were appointed in 2016, and their names were reported to Synod 2017. The group has met a few times since Synod 2017 and will report on their progress to Synod 2018 by way of the report from Pastor Church Resources. We are grateful for their efforts, and we anticipate that good progress will be made in the coming years as we seek to build a culture of continuing education for our pastors and staff.

E. Other initiatives

The Candidacy Committee is pleased to participate in a number of new and continuing initiatives that support the church in preparing persons for pastoral ordination in the Christian Reformed Church. We present the following list to enable synod to note the scope of the work and to prompt the church to rejoice in the many projects being done to serve the church:

1. An assessment project to help aspiring and current pastors discern ministry fit was launched in 2016 after completion of a pilot phase. The project is a joint effort of Pastor Church Resources, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, Calvin Theological Seminary, Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, and Resonate Global Mission. (For more details, see the report of Pastor Church Resources.)

2. The Korean Institute in Ministry (KIM) is now in its twelfth 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 Leaders Institute in Ministry (ELIM), 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 ministers of the Word or commissioned pastors. This program was piloted a few times under the title “Welcome to the CRC” and is now developing into a more robust program modeled after KIM.
4. Each spring the Candidacy Committee coordinates and implements a process in which persons are ultimately presented to synod for approval as candidates for minister of the Word.
5. Pastors entering service in the Christian Reformed Church participate in a Candidacy Committee-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.
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.
7. We have been very grateful to participate in a joint RCA-CRC project, led by Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, that offers Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) to pastors and candidates via a congregation-based, distance-learning format.
8. The Candidacy 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 will prompt us all to pray for and to support candidates ready to enter ministry as they find their way.
9. A new section has been added to the Candidacy Committee webpage that seeks to facilitate the efforts of persons discerning whether they are called to ordained pastoral ministry (see crcna.org/candidacy/vocational-discernment). The section makes use of a new brochure, produced in partnership with Faith Formation Ministries and titled *Ten Ways to Discern a Call to Ordained Pastoral Ministry*.
10. The Candidacy Committee webpage now provides easy access to the many resources offered by the Candidacy Committee and used in the processes toward ordination. Over seventy documents, reviewed and updated on a regular basis, are available to support the work of candidacy in the local and regional church. (See the “Journey Toward Ordination” page at crcna.org/candidacy.)

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 one is present, when the Candidacy Committee report is discussed.
- B. That synod by way of the ballot appoint one new member to the Candidacy Committee from the slate of nominees presented and reappoint Rev. Susan LaClear and Pastor James Jones to second three-year terms.
- C. That synod adopt the following recommendations concerning Church Order Articles 8, 23, and 24 and their Supplements (see Appendix):
1. That Synod 2018 propose the newly formatted Church Order Articles 23-24, as presented in section III of the Appendix, to Synod 2019 for adoption.
 2. That Synod 2018 propose the newly formatted Supplements to Church Order Articles 23-24, as presented in section V of the Appendix, to Synod 2019 for adoption.
 3. That Synod 2018 instruct the Candidacy Committee to reformat the Commissioned Pastor Handbook to reflect the proposed changes to Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements and to present the updated handbook to Synod 2019 for approval.
 4. That Synod 2018 approve the revision of Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, sections e and f as follows (with new text indicated by *italics*):
 - e. Suspension/deposition of elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors *not serving in senior or solo pastor roles*.
[Note: This new language should carry through in items 1) and 2) of section e as well.
 - f. Suspension/deposition of ministers *of the Word and commissioned pastors serving in senior or solo pastor roles*.
[Note: This new language should carry through in items 1), 2), and 3) of section f as well.]
 5. That synod instruct the Candidacy Committee to include notice of a criminal background check and a psychological assessment as requirements in the learning plans for commissioned pastors serving in a senior or solo pastor role.
 6. That Synod 2018 propose the newly formatted Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F, as presented in section IX of the Appendix, to Synod 2019 for adoption. The Candidacy Committee anticipates presenting the required modifications to the "Journey Toward Ordination" document as described in sections VIII and IX of the Appendix for approval by Synod 2019.
 7. That Synod 2018 call the churches to take note of and pray for wisdom amid the tensions and challenges related to expectations and processes required for ordained ministry, and that synod invite congregations to offer their own suggestions and thoughts regarding these matters either through communications with the Candidacy Committee or through overtures to synod.

D. 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

Report to Synod regarding Reformatting and Updating Sections of Church Order

Executive Summary

Synod 2017 received and approved a number of proposed changes to the Church Order and Supplements regarding the office of commissioned pastor. These actions came in response to an overture and to reports from the Candidacy Committee to Synod 2017 and Synod 2016 with regard to advice and direction for the use of this office (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 318-28, 423-24; *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 685, 688-90; *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 262-75; *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 848-49).

Among the various motions approved by Synod 2017 was the following (*Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 689-90):

That synod instruct the Candidacy Committee to propose to a future synod a reformatting of and potential changes to Church Order Articles 8, 23, and 24 and their Supplements, also making appropriate use and mention of a document called the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, in order to enhance the clarity and brevity of the Church Order.

This report responds to that request of Synod 2017, outlined as follows:

- I. Introduction and overview
- II. A review of Church Order Articles 23-24 with notes and proposals for modification
- III. Proposed Church Order Articles 23-24
- IV. Current Church Order Supplements for Articles 23-24 with notes and proposals regarding changes
- V. Proposed Church Order Supplements for Articles 23-24
- VI. Comments on updating the Commissioned Pastor Handbook
- VII. Other matters pertaining to the office of commissioned pastor
 - A. Proposed adjustment to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84
 - B. Background check and psychological assessment
- VIII. Review and comments on Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F
- IX. Proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F
- X. Looking to the future of commissioned pastor use and administration
- XI. Recommendations

I. Introduction and overview

Synod 2017 approved the concept of reformatting and making potential changes to Church Order Articles 8, 23, and 24 and their Supplements following a request from the Candidacy Committee to work toward greater clarity and more logical flow in these articles. The processes for affiliation of pastors from other denominations (addressed specifically in Church Order Supplement,

Article 8, E-F) show signs of the “patchwork” nature of these materials, with additions and changes having been made at various times. This is true to an even greater degree in Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements.

The uses and regulations of the office of commissioned pastor (earlier called *ministry associate*, and before that, *evangelist*) have developed greatly over the past three decades. Early on, some regulations developed out of concerns that the limits of the office of commissioned pastor be clearly defined so as not to diminish the importance of the accredited theological education required for the office of minister of the Word. More recent synodical decisions have expanded the role of commissioned pastor to honor it as an important office of the church while also distinguishing it from the office of minister of the Word.

Along with the goals of improving clarity and flow for Articles 8, 23, and 24 of the Church Order, a further aim is to make greater use of a document called the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. This document has been developed over the past several years as a catalog of synodical statements, advice, guidelines, and regulations pertaining to the office of commissioned pastor. The Church Order relies on other similar documents such as the Rules for Synodical Procedure (referred to in Church Order Art. 46), the document pertaining to affiliation of non-Christian Reformed congregations (referred to in Church Order Supplement, Art. 38-c), the “Journey Toward Ordination” document (describing the various processes for ordination, and referred to in Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, E), the components of the EPMC program (described in Church Order Supplement, Art. 6, A), and the “Manual for Synodical Deputies” (referred to in Church Order Supplement, Art. 38-c). As the Candidacy Committee has developed and offered the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, they have found that it serves the church and is appreciated.

As understood by the Candidacy Committee and included as part of the instruction by Synod 2017, the strategy to make “appropriate use and mention of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook” in the proposed reformatting of these Church Order articles and their Supplements will hopefully contribute to both the brevity and the clarity of the Church Order. We pray that our work will be well received by and useful to the church. As will be seen in our recommendations, the changes proposed need to be made in a deliberate fashion to allow for maximal input. Thus we suggest that all the suggested changes herein to the Church Order and Its Supplements be proposed by Synod 2018 to Synod 2019 for adoption.

The following sections of this report explain the rationale for a variety of changes in our Church Order relative to the office of commissioned pastor, and relative to the process for calling pastors from other denominations. The hope is that these newly formatted sections of the Church Order and Its Supplements will serve the church with greater clarity. In addition, the changes as proposed will result in and require greater use of the document known as the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. Should this strategy be approved by Synod 2018, a future synod will have opportunity to approve follow-up editing needed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

II. A review of Church Order Articles 23-24 with notes and proposals for modification

(In the following table, *italics* indicates newly proposed text and/or text yet to be approved by synod.)

Current Articles 23-24	Comments	Proposed Articles 23-24
<p>Article 23-a a. Commissioned pastors shall be acknowledged as such in their calling churches. Normally, their work on the church council shall be limited to the ministries in which they serve as commissioned pastors.</p>	<p>The current Article 23-a would become Article 23-c. The current Article 24-a would become Article 23-a. This would accomplish the advantage of defining the office as the first concern of the Church Order articles dealing with the office of commissioned pastor.</p>	<p>Article 23-a a. The task of the commissioned pastor is to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, church education, pastoral care, evangelism, and other ministries in order that believers may be called to comprehensive discipleship and unbelievers may be called to faith.</p>
<p>Article 23-b b. Ordinarily, the office of commissioned pastors who serve in emerging congregations will terminate when a group of believers becomes an organized church. However, upon organization and with the approval of the newly formed council and the classis, commissioned pastors may continue to serve the newly organized church until an ordained minister of the Word is installed or until they have served the newly organized church for a reasonable period of transition. Commissioned pastors who continue to serve a newly organized congregation beyond this reasonable period of transition must seek the permission of classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.</p>	<p>The current Article 24-b would become Article 23-b. This placement would continue the logic of beginning by describing the function and accountability of the office. The current statements of Articles 23-b, 23-c, and 23-d, and the Supplement to Article 23-d deal with concerns that the office of commissioned pastor not be used in situations requiring ordination as a minister of the Word. These potential scenarios would be referred to in the new Article 24-a as "synodically approved rules for such an arrangement," and in the Supplement to Article 24-a references to these scenarios would be made to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, where they would be cited as "synodically approved regulations" pertaining to the transitioning of a person from a commissioned pastor role to a senior/ solo leadership role in an organized church (positions normally reserved for ministers of the Word). The Commissioned Pastor Handbook would also raise the value of learning plans toward ordination as minister of the Word in contexts where this would be possible. The new proposed Article 24-e (currently called proposed Article 23-f) would address this strategy.</p>	<p>Article 23-b b. Commissioned pastors shall function under the direct supervision of the council, giving regular reports to it and being present at its meetings, particularly when their work is under consideration.</p>

<p>Article 23-c c. Commissioned pastors may also serve in organized congregations along with a minister of the Word and may serve as chaplains in institutional settings in the community. Commissioned pastors who have served an organized congregation along with a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, continue serving that congregation as a solo pastor after the minister of the Word has left.</p>	<p>Note that the current Article 23-a would become Article 23-c. See comment under Article 23-b for explanation why the current Article 23-c would be moved into the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.</p>	<p>Article 23-c c. Commissioned pastors shall be acknowledged as such in their calling churches. Normally, their work on the church council shall be limited to the ministries in which they serve as commissioned pastors.</p>
<p>Article 23-d d. Commissioned pastors may be called to serve as solo pastors in organized congregations if the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, ascertains that such congregations are from a ministry context where the standards for pastoral preparation required by Articles 6, 7, or 8 are not presently practical.</p>	<p>See comment under Article 23-b for explanation why the current Article 23-d would be moved into the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.</p>	
<p>Article 23-e e. Commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their consistories and classes.</p>	<p>The current Article 23-e would become Article 24-b (see below). However, the word <i>consistories</i> would be replaced by the word <i>councils</i>. This change would bring this Church Order statement into greater consistency with proposed Articles 23-b and 23-c.</p>	
<p>Article 23-f f. <i>Commissioned pastors may be called to a position in which the call is for a specific term contingent upon accountable progress toward completion of the requirements for ordination as a minister of the Word. Approval of the classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies, is required as to the terms of such a call and the accountability of progress in the proposed learning plan.</i></p>	<p>Article 23-f (at left) is being proposed by Synod 2017 to Synod 2018 for adoption. If approved, we recommend that it be designated as Article 24-e (see below) to fit in better with the logical flow of Church Order regulations pertaining to commissioned pastors.</p>	

Current Articles 23-24	Comments	Proposed Articles 23-24
<p>Article 24-a a. The task of the commissioned pastor is to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, church education, pastoral care, evangelism, and other ministries in order that believers may be called to comprehensive discipleship and unbelievers may be called to faith.</p>	<p>The current Article 24-a would become Article 23-a. It makes sense to begin the section on commissioned pastors with a description of the task of the office.</p> <p>The proposed new Article 24-a deals with scenarios described in detail in the current Articles 23-b, 23-c, and 23-d and in the Supplement to Article 23-d.</p> <p>The wording of the proposed Article 24-a sufficiently calls attention to the reality that it is unusual for a commissioned pastor to serve in a solo or senior leadership position in an organized church, and synod has established regulations regarding this situation, which would be explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.</p>	<p>Article 24-a a. <i>Commissioned pastors may serve in a solo or senior leadership position in an organized church only with the permission of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, following the synodically approved rules for such an arrangement, which are explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.</i></p>
<p>Article 24-b b. Commissioned pastors shall function under the direct supervision of the council, giving regular reports to it and being present at its meetings, particularly when their work is under consideration.</p>	<p>The current Article 24-b would become Article 23-b.</p> <p>The current Article 23-e would become Article 24-b. Placed at this point, it would become part of a list of subarticles that would guide the church with regard to unusual uses of the office of commissioned pastor, and circumstances in which commissioned pastors would transition or retire. Note that the proposed Article 24-b uses the word "councils" rather than "consistories" in order to maintain consistency with terms used in the proposed Articles 23-b and 23-c.</p>	<p>Article 24-b b. Commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their councils and classes.</p>

<p>Article 24-c c. A commissioned pastor who has reached retirement age may, upon the judgment of classis, be given the title of commissioned pastor emeritus.</p>	<p>Article 24-c (at left) is being proposed by Synod 2017 to Synod 2018 for adoption. If approved, we recommend that it become Article 24-d (see below).</p> <p>The proposed new Article 24-c would lead to material approved by Synod 2017 for placement in the Church Order Supplement. The material from Synod 2017 and other material approved by previous synods regarding release of a commissioned pastor would be placed in a section of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook and referenced in the Church Order Supplement, Article 24-c.</p>	<p>Article 24-c c. A commissioned pastor position may be eliminated and a commissioned pastor may be released only with the concurrence of the classis that approved the position, with attention to the rules and processes approved by synod.</p>
<p>Article 24-d d. A commissioned pastor emeritus may, upon the judgment of classis, retain the authority to perform official acts of ministry. Supervision of a commissioned pastor emeritus shall remain with the church last served unless transferred to another congregation under the authority of the classis involved.</p>	<p>Article 24-d (at left) is being proposed by Synod 2017 to Synod 2018 for adoption, but we propose that it be designated as a Supplement to the proposed Article 24-d (at right), because it explains the workings of the general category of commissioned pastor emeritus (see Supplement, Article 24-d in section IV below).</p> <p>The proposed Article 24-d is proposed as Article 24-c by Synod 2017 to Synod 2018 for adoption.</p>	<p>Article 24-d d. A commissioned pastor who has reached retirement age may, upon the judgment of classis, be given the title of commissioned pastor emeritus.</p>
	<p>The proposed Article 24-e is proposed as Article 23-f by Synod 2017 to Synod 2018 for adoption. If approved, we recommend that it be designated as Article 24-e to fit in better with the logical flow of Church Order regulations pertaining to commissioned pastors.</p>	<p>Article 24-e e. Commissioned pastors may be called to a position in which the call is for a specified term contingent upon accountable progress toward completion of the requirements for ordination as a minister of the Word. Approval of the classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies, is required as to the terms of such a call and the accountability of progress in the proposed learning plan.</p>

III. Proposed Church Order Articles 23-24

(*Italics* indicates newly proposed text and/or text yet to be adopted by synod.)

Article 23

a. The task of the commissioned pastor is to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, church education, pastoral care, evangelism, and other ministries in order that believers may be called to comprehensive discipleship and unbelievers may be called to faith.

b. Commissioned pastors shall function under the direct supervision of the council, giving regular reports to it and being present at its meetings, particularly when their work is under consideration.

c. Commissioned pastors shall be acknowledged as such in their calling churches. Normally, their work on the church council shall be limited to the ministries in which they serve as commissioned pastors.

Article 24

a. *Commissioned pastors may serve in a solo or senior leadership position in an organized church only with the permission of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, following the synodically approved rules for such an arrangement, which are explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.*

b. *Commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their councils and classes.*

c. *A commissioned pastor position may be eliminated and a commissioned pastor may be released only with the concurrence of the classis that approved the position, with attention to the rules and processes approved by synod.*

d. *A commissioned pastor who has reached retirement age may, upon the judgment of classis, be given the title of commissioned pastor emeritus.*

e. *Commissioned pastors may be called to a position in which the call is for a specified term contingent upon accountable progress toward completion of the requirements for ordination as a minister of the Word. Approval of the classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies, is required as to the terms of such a call and the accountability of progress in the proposed learning plan.*

IV. Current Church Order Supplements for Articles 23-24 with notes and proposals regarding changes

Church Order Supplement, Articles 23-24 (In the text below, <i>italics</i> indicates additions or new text, and strikethrough indicates deletions.)	Explanation of proposed changes
<p>Supplement, Article 23-a</p> <p><i>General Regulations</i></p> <p>The office of commissioned pastor is applicable to a variety of ministries, provided that these ministries fit the <i>following</i> guidelines adopted by Synod 2001:</p>	<p>The guidelines adopted by synod are referred to in the current Supplement to Article 23-a but are not quoted. This causes confusion, so we propose that they now be quoted and referenced.</p>

<p><i>"The office of evangelist 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. . . . 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."</i></p> <p>(Acts of Synod 2001, p. 506)</p> <p>[*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.]</p> <p>and that the other Church Order and synodical regulations for the office of commissioned pastor are observed. These include ministries such as education, evangelism, pastoral care, music, and ministries to children, youth, adults, and others within or outside of the congregation.</p>	<p>With the addition of the text quoted from the <i>Acts of Synod 2001</i>, the text here (at left) would not be necessary, so it would be omitted.</p>
<p>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 <i>these</i> 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.</p>	<p>The simple substitution of the word <i>these</i> for <i>the</i> would be a helpful change.</p>
<p><i>Examinations for the office of commissioned pastor must follow the guidelines established by synod as described and recorded in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.</i></p>	<p>The addition of this statement would help in calling attention to the reality that, along with approval of a job description, an examination must be held—and a protocol has been established for such examinations.</p>
<p><i>The Commissioned Pastor Handbook shall be consulted regularly, as it offers guidelines and regulations approved by synod. These include the protocol for examination, the creation of job descriptions, and the standards and qualifications to be met by those seeking to be ordained as commissioned pastors.</i></p>	<p>This new summary statement in the proposed Supplement to Article 23-a would provide a helpful way to draw attention to the Commissioned Pastor Handbook with regard to these aspects of examining and ordaining prospective commissioned pastors.</p>

<p>Before a person who will serve as the solo pastor of an emerging or an organized church is examined for a position as a commissioned pastor, that person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee. Ordinarily the learning plan would include an introduction to the CRC Church Order, CRC history, CRC ministry, CRC creeds and confessions, Reformed hermeneutics, and an introduction to the discipline and art of preaching.</p>	<p>These statements would be removed from the Church Order Supplement and placed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. They would be referred to in the proposed Church Order Supplement, Article 24-a, which we would suggest be the place where the Church Order would deal with the practice of commissioned pastors serving in solo leadership roles in emerging and organized churches.</p>
<p>At some point prior to any examination for ordination of a commissioned pastor being considered for a solo pastor position in an emerging or organized church, the classis must ascertain that a learning plan has been approved by the classis and agreed to by the Candidacy Committee, and synodical deputies must affirm through a written report that such approvals have taken place.</p>	<p>The second of these two paragraphs was added by Synod 2017. With the instruction of Synod 2017 to review and suggest modifications to this Supplement of the Church Order, it seems wise to place this paragraph in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. It would then be referred to in the proposed Supplement to Article 24-a.</p>
<p>The candidate shall also sustain a classical examination. The concurrence of synodical deputies is not required for the examination of a candidate for the office of commissioned pastor. The classical examination shall include the following elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Presentation of the following documents <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) A council recommendation from the church in which the appointee holds membership b) Evidence (diplomas, transcripts, etc.) of formal general education and of specialized training in the ministry area to which the candidate is being called c) A copy of the letter of appointment from the church that is requesting ordination of the candidate as commissioned pastor d) A copy of the candidate's letter of acceptance 2) Where applicable, presentation of a sermon <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) In an official worship service, preferably on the Sunday preceding the meeting of classis and in the church to which the candidate for ordination has been called, the commissioned pastor shall preach a sermon on a text assigned by classis. Two members of classis shall be present to serve as sermon critics. b) A copy of the sermon shall be provided to the classical delegates. In the presence of the commissioned pastor, the sermon critics shall evaluate the sermon and the commissioned pastor's manner of conducting the entire worship service. 3) Examination in the following areas <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Knowledge of Scripture b) Knowledge of Reformed doctrine c) Knowledge of the standards of the church and the Church Order 	<p>The process for preparation of and examination of a candidate for the office of commissioned pastor would be removed from the Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, clearly laid out in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, and referred to in the proposed Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a.</p>

<p>d) Practical matters regarding Christian testimony, walk of life, relationships with others, love for the church, approach to ministry, and promotion of Christ's kingdom</p> <p>The classis shall ensure that the candidate meets the standards of character, knowledge, and skill adopted by Synod 2004 (<i>Acts of Synod 2004</i>, p. 619) and inserted below:</p>	
<p>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:</p>	<p>This statement would be removed from the Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, placed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, and referred to in the proposed new Supplement to Article 24-b.</p>
<p>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:</p>	<p>This statement would be removed from the Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, placed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, and referred to in the proposed new Supplement to Article 24-b.</p>
<p>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:</p>	<p>This statement would be removed from the Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, placed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, and referred to in the proposed new Supplement to Article 24-c.</p>
<p><i>Elements of a Good Job Description</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A description of the functions and responsibilities that are ministerial in nature (see the first paragraph of Church Order Supplement, Article 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: <p style="text-align: center;">(<i>Acts of Synod 2012</i>, p. 741)</p> <p>(Amended <i>Acts of Synod 2013</i>, p. 557; 2017, p. 689)</p>	<p>This statement would be removed from the Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, placed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, and referred to in the proposed Supplement to Article 23-a.</p>
<p><i>Standards to be Met by Those Seeking to be Ordained as a Commissioned Pastor</i></p> <p>An examination for the office of commissioned pastor will require that all commissioned pastors meet the church's standards for character and knowledge, whereas the standards for skill competence will relate specifically to the particular commissioned pastor's area of calling and expertise:</p> <p>Qualifications for a Commissioned Pastor Character The commissioned pastor is . . .:</p>	<p>This extensive section of the current Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a is not quoted here (at left) in its entirety. This section on "standards" and "qualifications" would be placed in its entirety in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook and referred to in the proposed Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a.</p>

<p><i>Release of a Commissioned Pastor</i> <i>A commissioned pastor who is released from a calling church may, upon the request of the commissioned pastor or the calling church, and with the approval of the classis, be assisted by the classis with a system of evaluation and assistance analogous to that described in Church Order Article 17 for ministers of the Word.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Acts of Synod 2017, p. 685)</i></p>	<p>This statement would be removed from the Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, placed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, and referred to in the proposed new Supplement to Article 24-c.</p> <p>Even though it is a new addition to the 2017 Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, the work of reformatting these articles and supplements leads us to advise placing these words in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook with clear direction in the proposed new Supplement to Article 24-c to refer to that handbook.</p>
<p>Supplement, Article 23-c The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define chaplains ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to chaplains ordained under Article 23.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Acts of Synod 2003, p. 613)</i></p>	<p>This statement identified with the current Article 23-c would sensibly be identified with the proposed Article 23-c. It seems wise to keep this statement in the Church Order Supplement because it is brief and because it raises the profile of the ministry of chaplains who are ordained as commissioned pastors.</p>
<p>Supplement, Article 23-d <i>Guideline for calling a commissioned pastor to an organized congregation</i></p> <p>The ministry context is ordinarily one in which cultural differences (e.g., ethnic, social, economic, educational, language) between the congregation and its ministry context on the one hand, and the dominant culture of the denomination as expressed in the seminary, other leadership development entities, and broader denominational life on the other hand (a) present significant obstacles to raising up indigenous leadership in ways that are sustainable by the respective congregations and communities, and (b) have resulted in limited or non-availability of competent indigenous leaders trained for ministry via one of the prescribed routes for ministry of the Word.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Acts of Synod 2008, p. 520)</i></p>	<p>This statement would be removed from the Church Order Supplement and referred to in the section of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook referring to commissioned pastors serving in senior or solo leadership roles, as described in the proposed new Church Order Article 24-a.</p>
<p>Supplement, Article 24-a <i>Commissioned pastors may transfer into positions of solo leadership in an established church only in specified circumstances as approved by synod and described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. A classis may decide to make such appointments contingent upon a learning plan agreed to by the commissioned pastor, the calling church, and the classis, as described in Church Order Article 24-e. It is mandatory in all cases in which a commissioned pastor serves in a solo leadership position in an emerging or organized church that such a person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee, as described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.</i></p>	<p>This new statement, to be connected to the proposed Church Order Article 24-a, points to the protocol and practice of the church regarding ways in which commissioned pastors may serve in senior or solo leadership positions in established (organized) churches. The various scenarios currently described in Church Order Articles 23-b, 23-c, and 23-d, and in the Supplement to Article 23-d all pertain to this matter. The directives of synod in these articles would not change—the only change would be that they are presented in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook rather than in the Church Order and Its Supplement.</p>

<p>Supplement, Article 24-b <i>On occasion a commissioned pastor working in a position outside of a local congregation may desire to transition to a different calling church. This scenario and other transitions for commissioned pastors are addressed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.</i></p>	<p>This statement is similar to notes that are currently in the Supplement to Article 23-a. This new statement is broader and would point to various decisions and statements of synod related to transitions and supervision of commissioned pastors.</p>
<p>Supplement, Article 24-c <i>Synod has offered, on various occasions, guidelines regarding the elimination of an approved commissioned pastor position and the release of a commissioned pastor. These guidelines are found in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.</i></p>	<p>This statement is similar to notes that are currently in the Supplement to Article 23-a. This new statement is broader and would point to various decisions and statements of synod related to transitions and supervision of commissioned pastors.</p>
<p>Supplement, Article 24-d <i>A commissioned pastor emeritus may, upon the judgment of classis, retain the authority to perform official acts of ministry. Supervision of a commissioned pastor emeritus shall remain with the church last served unless transferred to another congregation under the authority of the classis involved.</i></p>	<p>This statement is proposed by Synod 2017 to Synod 2018 for adoption as Church Order Article 24-d, but we propose that it be designated as a supplemental statement because it explains the workings of the general category of <i>commissioned pastor emeritus</i>.</p>
<p>Supplement, Article 24-e <i>In various cases a commissioned pastor may desire or be encouraged to seek ordination as a minister of the Word, following the process prescribed in Article 6, including the required education. Though not expected in all circumstances of persons serving as commissioned pastors, a plan toward candidacy as a minister of the Word may be beneficial for the pastor and the church. Local ministries in partnership with their classis and synodical deputies may consider the advisability of constructing such a plan, and of using a renewable "term call" for such cases as a way to hold the commissioned pastor accountable to making progress in the plan.</i></p>	<p>This new supplemental statement explains the reasoning behind the proposed Article 24-e. The practice of using the commissioned pastor ordination as a "bridge" toward ordination as a minister of the Word has been tried already in a number of circumstances, and the churches and pastors involved have spoken well of it.</p>

V. Proposed Church Order Supplements for Articles 23-24

(Italics indicates additions or new text.)

Supplement, Article 23-a

The office of commissioned pastor is applicable to a variety of ministries, provided that these ministries fit the following guidelines adopted by Synod 2001:

"The office of evangelist 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. . . . 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.]

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 *these* 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.

Examinations for the office of commissioned pastor must follow the guidelines established by synod as described and recorded in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

The Commissioned Pastor Handbook shall be consulted regularly, as it offers guidelines and regulations approved by synod. These include the protocol for examination, the creation of job descriptions, and the standards and qualifications to be met by those seeking to be ordained as commissioned pastors.

Supplement, Article 23-c

The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define chaplains ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to chaplains ordained under Article 23.

(Acts of Synod 2003, p. 613)

Supplement, Article 24-a

Commissioned pastors may transfer into positions of solo leadership in an established church only in specified circumstances as approved by synod and described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. A classis may decide to make such appointments contingent upon a learning plan agreed to by the commissioned pastor, the calling church, and the classis, as described in Church Order Article 24-e. It is mandatory in all cases in which a commissioned pastor serves in a solo leadership position in an emerging or organized church that such a person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee, as described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Supplement, Article 24-b

On occasion a commissioned pastor working in a position outside of a local congregation may desire to transition to a different calling church. This scenario and other transitions for commissioned pastors are addressed in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Supplement, Article 24-c

Synod has offered, on various occasions, guidelines regarding the elimination of an approved commissioned pastor position and the release of a commissioned pastor. These guidelines are found in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Supplement, Article 24-d

A commissioned pastor emeritus may, upon the judgment of classis, retain the authority to perform official acts of ministry. Supervision of a commissioned pastor emeritus shall remain with the church last served unless transferred to another congregation under the authority of the classis involved.

Supplement, Article 24-e

In various cases a commissioned pastor may desire or be encouraged to seek ordination as a minister of the Word, following the process prescribed in Article 6, including the required education. Though not expected in all circumstances of persons serving as commissioned pastors, a plan toward candidacy as a minister of the Word may be beneficial for the pastor and the church. Local ministries in partnership with their classis and synodical deputies may consider the advisability of constructing such a plan, and of using a renewable “term call” for such cases as a way to hold the commissioned pastor accountable to making progress in the plan.

VI. Comments on updating the Commissioned Pastor Handbook

The Commissioned Pastor Handbook is a document that presents the various Church Order statements and actions of synod related to the office of commissioned pastor. The handbook is updated each year or as needed to reflect the work of synod.

The Commissioned Pastor Handbook was updated in the summer of 2017, indicating the various changes to the Church Order approved by Synod 2017. Because these changes are far-reaching, and because some of them need to be ratified by Synod 2018, a further and more robust update of the handbook will be needed after Synod 2018.

In addition, with regard to the proposed changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements described earlier in this report, the reformatted and updated Commissioned Pastor Handbook would include sections on the following:

- protocol for examination (from current Supplement, Article 23-a)
- suggestions regarding a job description (from current Supplement, Article 23-a)
- qualifications/standards for those seeking ordination (from current Supplement, Article 23-a)
- scenarios in which a commissioned pastor may move into a position as a senior or solo pastor of an organized church (from the current Church Order Articles 23-b, 23-c, and 23-d and the Supplement to Article 23-d)
- learning plans and a mandatory process related to senior or solo leadership positions for commissioned pastors
- transitions for commissioned pastors (from statements by Synods 2016 and 2017)
- elimination of a position and release of a commissioned pastor (from statements currently in Supplement, Article 23-a, and from guidelines and advice offered by Synods 2016 and 2017). This section could also include some wisdom offered in Church Order Article 17 (release of ministers of the Word) that may be analogous and helpful in the release of commissioned pastors. Any new such statements would be presented to synod for approval.

The Candidacy Committee anticipates that if and when the reformatting of Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements is approved, it should be ratified by the following synod. That synod could then also instruct the Candidacy Committee to update the Commissioned Pastor Handbook in a way that would serve the church well, and to present the newly formatted handbook to the next following synod.

VII. Other matters pertaining to the office of commissioned pastor

A. *Proposed adjustment to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84*

As discussed within the Education and Candidacy Advisory Committee at Synod 2017, the Candidacy Committee believes it would be wise to conduct a review of the entire Church Order with regard to the office of commissioned pastor in order that clarity can be served, and that the developments and uses of the office can be recognized.

One specific area of concern is the Church Order articles on the admonition and discipline of officebearers (Art. 82-84). In the early use of the office now called commissioned pastor, the office was thought of as closely associated with the office of elder. In more recent practice, the office is often more similar in function to the office of minister of the Word, especially in the cases of persons who serve in senior and solo leadership roles in an organized or emerging church.

The Candidacy Committee believes that these concerns could be addressed by rephrasing the references to offices mentioned in Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, sections e and f. As a result, the church, locally and regionally together, would be better equipped to hold accountable commissioned pastors who serve in senior or solo pastor roles. Commissioned pastors who serve in associate roles would remain accountable in the same fashion as are elders and deacons.

The Candidacy Committee proposes rephrasing the Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, sections e and f as follows (with new text indicated by *italics*):

e. Suspension/deposition of elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors *not serving in senior or solo pastor roles*

[*Note: This new language should carry through in items 1) and 2) of section e as well.*]

f. Suspension/deposition of ministers *of the Word and commissioned pastors serving in senior or solo pastor roles*

[*Note: This new language should carry through in items 1), 2), and 3) of section f as well.*]

B. *Background check and psychological assessment*

Another area of concern related to the office of commissioned pastor is that of ensuring that the persons being proposed for ordination to this office have undergone a criminal background check and have been psychologically evaluated as to their health and readiness for ordained ministry. Certainly such a concern could apply also for the offices of deacon and elder, and for all persons who serve the church in leadership roles. Yet the focus of this report is on the office of commissioned pastor.

We would note that a number of our congregations, in fact, have protocols in place for background checks on nursery attendants and volunteers who help in any capacity with youth ministry. Some churches also have a practice of psychological evaluation for any staff they may hire.

We believe that the witness of the church in our current age calls us to have a standard process in place, at least with regard to ordained pastoral staff. Thus we propose that the mandatory learning plan for commissioned

pastors who serve in senior or solo pastor roles include the two elements of background check and psychological evaluation. If synod so approves, then the description of the required learning plans could be adjusted in the appropriate section of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

The Candidacy Committee is willing and able to assist local churches and classes in implementing this requirement.

VIII. Review and comments on Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F

As has been previously noted, Synod 2017 included Article 8 in the instructions to the Candidacy Committee to “propose to a future synod a reformatting of and potential changes to Church Order . . .” (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 689).

The Candidacy Committee suggests bringing greater clarity to the description of the process and the values that guide the affiliation of a pastor already ordained in another denomination. These guidelines are described in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F. The following chart presents those sections of the current Church Order Supplement and offers comments.

Note: The document “Journey Toward Ordination,” referenced in the Church Order Supplement materials and comments below, was approved by Synod 2005 and guides the Candidacy Committee and the church in implementing the synodically approved processes for ordination. The Candidacy Committee proposes that some items currently in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F be moved to the “Journey Toward Ordination” document. If this strategy is approved, the changes required in the “Journey Toward Ordination” document will be presented to Synod 2019 for approval.

Current Church Order Supplements, Article 8, sections E and F	Comments
<p><i>E. Calling Ministers from Other Denominations</i> 1. A church may consider calling a minister of another denomination only if it has put forth a sustained and realistic effort to obtain a minister from within the Christian Reformed Church or the Reformed Church in America. This shall apply only to a church which continues to have a viable ministry. (<i>Acts of Synod 2005</i>, p. 742)</p>	<p>This section makes clear that before looking outside of the CRC or RCA a “sustained and realistic effort” is made to obtain a minister from within the CRC or RCA.</p>
<p>2. A minister of another denomination desiring to be declared eligible for a call to a Christian Reformed church shall make application to the Candidacy Committee. Once the application has been filed, the procedures prescribed by the Candidacy Committee in the “Journey Toward Ordination” document shall be followed.</p>	<p>This section directs interested pastors who are already ordained in another denomination to contact the Candidacy Committee. This will provide them with appropriate information about our process and the options available to them.</p>
<p>3. A council shall not nominate a minister from another denomination for a call without the approval of its classis and the Candidacy Committee.</p>	<p>This section offers clear instruction to CRC church councils to refrain from nominating (and thus certainly to refrain from calling) a minister from another denomination without the approval of classis and the Candidacy Committee.</p>

<p>4. The need for calling a minister of another denomination shall be acknowledged when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The minister to be called has such extraordinary qualifications that the church recognizes that it would be important for the denomination to acquire the minister's service, or, b. The need of a particular congregation for a pastor is so urgent that it can be met only by calling a minister from another denomination, or, c. The minister is a new-church developer and is being called to start a new church, or d. There is a need for indigenous leadership in a multicultural or ethnic minority church. 	<p>This statement about "need" has been discussed in various Candidacy Committee reports to synod over the past few years. It presents some challenges relative to discerning who qualifies, but it nonetheless provides some guidance. Sections 4, c and d provide clear and objective examples, while sections a and b are somewhat vague and subject to interpretation.</p> <p>We note confusion or redundancy in the current Church Order Supplement in that section F below is titled "Determination of Need." Yet guidelines regarding "need" appear here in section E.</p> <p>The Candidacy Committee proposes that all reference to "need" in Church Order Supplement, Article 8 be placed in section F and that the criteria as specified be moved into the document "Journey Toward Ordination" (already referenced as the authoritative guide in Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, E, 2).</p>
<p>5. At the scheduled colloquium doctum, the applicant or nominee shall present a testimonial from the council or classis or presbytery by the Candidacy Committee, concerning the applicant's or nominee's purity of doctrine and sanctity of life. (It is conceivable that just because the applicant is loyal to the Word and the creeds that the minister is adjudged persona non grata by their own ecclesiastical assemblies and that the minister would not be granted such a testimonial. Should such be the case, a careful preliminary investigation must be made by the classis in consultation with the synodical deputies. The report of this investigation, if satisfactory to the classis and synodical deputies, will serve under such circumstances in lieu of the testimonial.)</p>	<p>This statement describes a document and a judgment that is said to take place "at the scheduled colloquium doctum." In fact, the matter of concern should be and is addressed before the scheduled colloquium doctum.</p> <p>The new process approved by Synod 2006 calls on the Candidacy Committee, in concert with the local classis through the Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT), to gather such testimonials, to ascertain that a person is loyal to the Word and the creeds, and to investigate the dynamics at play if the person is persona non grata in their current or former ecclesiastical assembly.</p> <p>The wording of the Church Order Supplement here should be changed to conform with processes approved and updated by synod.</p> <p>The Candidacy Committee recommends that this statement be updated and moved to an appropriate place in the "Journey Toward Ordination" document.</p>
<p>6. The following criteria shall be applied for approving or disapproving the proposed nominee or applicant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. soundness of doctrine b. sanctity of life c. knowledge and appreciation of Christian Reformed practice and usage 	<p>This statement offers guidelines for the colloquium doctum and serves to guide the work of the CMLT, of an appointed mentor, and of the Candidacy Committee as they prepare a person for the colloquium doctum.</p> <p>The Candidacy Committee proposes that this statement be amended and included in Supplement, Article 8, E as section 4.</p>
<p>7. When ministers from other countries are being proposed for nomination or request an examination to be made eligible for call, the Candidacy Committee shall use the following additional criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ability to speak, or learn, the English language b. ability to adjust to the American/ Canadian situation c. age limit of forty years (as a general rule) 	<p>The criteria cited in this statement are also expressed in the synodically approved "Journey Toward Ordination" document.</p> <p>The Candidacy Committee suggests that these criteria can be adequately preserved by having them appear only in the "Journey Toward Ordination" document, with the exception of item 7-c, which it would seem wise to remove.</p>

<p>8. The proposed nominee or applicant, having sustained the examination and having received the approbation of the synodical deputies, may now be called or declared eligible for call, as the case may be. No further examination or colloquium doctum will be required.</p> <p>(Adapted from <i>Acts of Synod 1984</i>, pp. 642-43)</p>	<p>The Candidacy Committee proposes that this statement remain in Supplement, Article 8, E and be identified as section 5.</p>
<p><i>F. Determination of Need</i> 1. Synod directs the Candidacy Committee to take specific and special note of the “need” factor when requested to give their advice to the councils and/or classes in the calling of ministers from other denominations and in declaring ministers from other denominations available for call in the Christian Reformed Church at their own request.</p>	<p>This statement would be modified slightly. The Candidacy Committee proposes that the “need” criteria currently in E, 4 be alluded to here and placed in the synodically approved “Journey Toward Ordination” document.</p>
<p>2. Synod requires of the councils and/or classes such written specification of the “need” for approving such ministers and their calling as will satisfy the Candidacy Committee in their decision, which written specification shall then become part of the report of the Candidacy Committee to be submitted for synodical approval.</p>	<p>The required written specification of “need” described here is already referred to in the “Journey Toward Ordination” document.</p>

IX. Proposed changes to Church Order Supplements, Article 8, sections E and F

Below is a chart offering the proposed new wording and reformatting of Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F, with explanatory comments.

Proposed Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F	Comments
<p><i>E. Calling Ministers from Other Denominations</i> 1. A church may consider calling a minister of another denomination only if it has put forth a sustained and realistic effort to obtain a minister from within the Christian Reformed Church or the Reformed Church in America. This shall apply only to a church which continues to have a viable ministry.</p> <p>(<i>Acts of Synod 2005</i>, p. 742)</p>	<p>This statement remains unchanged.</p>
<p>2. A minister of another denomination desiring to be declared eligible for a call to a Christian Reformed church shall make application to the Candidacy Committee. Once the application has been filed, the procedures prescribed by the Candidacy Committee in the “Journey Toward Ordination” document shall be followed.</p>	<p>This statement remains unchanged.</p>
<p>3. A council shall not nominate a minister from another denomination for a call without the approval of its classis and the Candidacy Committee.</p>	<p>This statement remains unchanged.</p>

<p>4. At the completion of the affiliation process the classis, with permission from the Candidacy Committee, shall conduct a colloquium doctum inquiring into the applicant's soundness of doctrine, sanctity of life, and knowledge and appreciation of Christian Reformed practice and usage. Synodical deputies must be present, and a successful examination will require the approval of classis and the concurrence of the synodical deputies.</p>	<p>This statement includes the content of Supplement, Article 8, E, 6 and makes clear that synodical deputies are to be present at the colloquium doctum and that their concurrence with the classis decision is required. It also describes the reality that the Candidacy Committee authorizes moving into a colloquium doctum (a change approved by Synod 2006 but never worked into the Church Order Supplement). If Synod 2018 so desires, more specific guidelines for the colloquium doctum can be prepared for inclusion in the "Journey Toward Ordination" document and proposed to Synod 2019 for approval.</p>
<p>5. The approved nominee or applicant may now be called or declared eligible for call, as the case may be. No further examination or colloquium doctum will be required. (Adapted from <i>Acts of Synod 1984</i>, pp. 642-43)</p>	<p>This statement is virtually the same as the current statement in Supplement, Article 8, E, 8 but is shortened for sake of clarity.</p>
<p><i>F. Determination of Need</i> 1. Synod directs the Candidacy Committee to take specific and special note of the "need" factor when requested to give their advice to the councils and/or classes in the calling of ministers from other denominations and in declaring ministers from other denominations available for call in the Christian Reformed Church at their own request.</p>	<p>This statement is the same as the current statement in Supplement, Article 8, F, 1.</p>
<p>2. Synod calls all parties concerned to review the criteria for "need" offered in the "Journey Toward Ordination" document (section III, C, A).</p>	<p>This statement would serve as an update to Supplement, Article 8, F, 2, drawing attention to the "Journey Toward Ordination" document, where all the statements about "need" would appear. The "need" criteria, formerly listed in Supplement, Article 8, E, 4, are proposed to be placed in the "Journey Toward Ordination" document.</p>

X. Looking to the future of commissioned pastor use and administration

Most of this report has dealt with developments of the office of commissioned pastor. This office was first officially recognized by synod in 1978, and incorporated into the Church Order with the designation *evangelist*. The designation was changed in 2003 to *ministry associate* and then in 2012 to *commissioned pastor*. A brief history of this office and its development from 1978 through 2010 is presented in the *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* by Dr. Henry DeMoor (pp. 122-25). DeMoor concludes his historical retrospective by observing, "It is widely recognized that many more changes may be in the offing as the 'fourth office' continues to evolve." This report, prompted by the actions of Synods 2016 and 2017 relative to the office of commissioned pastor, represents a significant example of the continuing evolution of the office of commissioned pastor.

There are various tensions that we believe the church is trying to maintain through this office. As a Candidacy Committee serving the church in the development of this office, we seek to honor those tensions, some of which we identify as follows:

- respecting local/regional control of the office versus the need for consistent practices among those who are ordained to this office

- maintaining the value of required accredited theological education for our pastors versus facilitating the use of the gifts and nonaccredited learning styles recognized as valuable in grassroots and diverse pastoral ministry
- recognizing there is an “ordination point” appropriate at the end of a theological training period, and yet there is also a great value even within the theological training period to performing ordained pastoral ministry

These and many other tensions challenge us in our development of this office as a denomination and as a Candidacy Committee. We are noticing that increasing numbers of our candidates for minister of the Word have actually been doing ordained ministry as commissioned pastors while completing their candidacy requirements. Our seminary and many others have developed distance-learning degree programs and are facilitating this “learning while doing” trend. Thus, our new uses and ways of administering the office of commissioned pastor include ways for “bridge ordination” to take place in some transitions to the office of minister of the Word.

As we look to the future, we suspect there will be continuing ambiguity and the need for adaptability in our administration and use of the office of commissioned pastor. Some have suggested that we need two official categories of the office (one for senior/solo pastoral positions and another for all other positions) with two distinct sets of expectations along the way. Our current practice recognizes the need for certain expectations of persons filling senior/solo pastoral positions, but it stops short of dividing the office clearly into two groups. We might observe as an aside that the office of minister of the Word is perhaps even more varied when it comes to roles and expectations relative to many different possible callings (for example, local church pastors, chaplains in various fields, missionaries, professors of theology, and more).

Related to this development is the challenge of how to distinguish between expectations for commissioned pastors versus expectations for elders, deacons, and even nonordained ministry leaders in the church. This report suggests it is time to make clear that, at least for commissioned pastors in senior/solo pastoral positions, it is appropriate and important to be vetted with a psychological evaluation and a background check. But when should we as a denomination ask whether such a check and evaluation be a standard expectation for all offices and leaders in the church?

Many other examples could be given regarding the tensions and questions facing us in the continuing development of the office of commissioned pastor, as well as in the ongoing development of all leadership expectations in the church. Our polity appropriately recognizes that many of these decisions should be made at the local church level, and perhaps also in partnership with the local classis. Yet for very important matters we do decide to recognize at the synodical and denominational level that certain expectations be met to ensure integrity in spiritual leadership and a holy witness of the church in a broken world.

We ask the church to pray for the Candidacy Committee as it continues to reflect on and provide leadership in these matters. We also invite congregations to offer their own suggestions and thoughts, either through communications with the Candidacy Committee or through overtures to synod.

XI. 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 one is present, when this report is discussed.

B. That Synod 2018 propose the newly formatted Church Order Articles 23-24, as presented in section III of this report, to Synod 2019 for adoption.

C. That Synod 2018 propose the newly formatted Supplements to Church Order Articles 23-24, as presented in section V of this report, to Synod 2019 for adoption.

D. That Synod 2018 instruct the Candidacy Committee to reformat the Commissioned Pastor Handbook to reflect the proposed changes to Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements and to present the updated handbook to Synod 2019 for approval.

E. That Synod 2018 approve the revision of Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, sections e and f as follows (with new text indicated by *italics*):

e. Suspension/deposition of elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors *not serving in senior or solo pastor roles.*

[*Note:* This new language should carry through in items 1) and 2) of section e as well.]

f. Suspension/deposition of ministers *of the Word and commissioned pastors serving in senior or solo pastor roles.*

[*Note:* This new language should carry through in items 1), 2), and 3) of section f as well.]

F. That synod instruct the Candidacy Committee to include notice of a criminal background check and a psychological assessment as requirements in the learning plans for commissioned pastors serving in a senior or solo pastor role.

G. That Synod 2018 propose the newly formatted Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F, as presented in section IX of this report, to Synod 2019 for adoption. The Candidacy Committee anticipates presenting the required modifications to the "Journey Toward Ordination" document as described in sections VIII and IX of this report for approval by Synod 2019.

H. That Synod 2018 call the churches to take note of and pray for wisdom amid the tensions and challenges related to expectations and processes required for ordained ministry, and that synod invite congregations to offer their own suggestions and thoughts regarding these matters either through communications with the Candidacy Committee or through overtures to synod.

I. Introduction

According to our Ecumenical Charter, “the CRC recognizes its ecumenical responsibility to cooperate and seek unity with all churches of Christ in obedience to the gospel.” The charter goes on to define four categories of relationships that express our ecumenical partnership with others. First, there are churches with which the CRC has a particular affinity, and they are called *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship*. Second, there are churches with which the CRC is in a stage of exploration for a closer relationship; they are called *churches in dialogue*. Third, some relationships are more distant and episodic and yet important to the CRC as part of the global Christian family; they are called *churches in other ecumenical relationships*. These three classifications are at times referred to as *bilateral ecclesiastical relationships*. Fourth, there is a category of relationship that applies to our participation in *ecumenical organizations*. In this category our interconnections are at times referred to as *multilateral relationships*.

The Ecumenical Charter also states that “the CRC’s ecumenical responsibility is expressed locally (between and among neighboring congregations), regionally (among churches in a given geographical area), and denominationally (among churches nationally and internationally). While it is the purpose of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to guide, on behalf of synod, relationships among denominations, it is the committee’s hope that these relationships enhance the ways in which all of us participate in ecumenical relationships at the local and regional levels, as the charter suggests.

Finally, as the name of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee indicates, there are two distinct and important focal points to our work: the *ecumenical* relationships, as mentioned above, are between the CRC and other Christian traditions; the term *interfaith* refers to interactions between the CRC and non-Christian faith traditions. Just as this distinction is important for the committee in its work, we trust that it serves for individuals and congregations as well.

II. Membership and meetings

The members of the EIRC for the current year ending June 30, 2018, are Rev. Andrew Beunk (2020/2); Rev. Anthony Elenbaas (2019/2); Rev. Emmett Harrison (2019/2); Rev. InSoon Hoagland (2020/1); Ms. Lenore Maine (2019/1); Rev. Karen Norris (2018/2); Ms. Ruth Palma (2020/1); Dr. Jim Payton (2018/2), chair; 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., director of ministries and administration, share additional ecumenical duties.

The EIRC met in October 2017 and January 2018. A conference call meeting is scheduled to be held in April 2018.

III. Nominations for membership

Dr. Jim Payton and Rev. Karen Norris are completing their terms of service on the committee. Because of their faithful work, the EIRC recommends that synod express its gratitude for their service.

Rev. Kathy Smith and Rev. John Tenyenhuis are completing their first term on the EIRC, and, given their contributions and willingness to continue, the EIRC recommends that synod reappoint Rev. Smith and Rev. Tenyenhuis to second three-year terms.

In keeping with the synodical guidelines and requirements for diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, geographical location, and ordination, the EIRC presents a slate of two names for election to the Eastern Canada position and a single nominee for the Western Canada position.

Eastern Canada position

The EIRC recommends that synod appoint one member to a first term from the following slate of nominees:

Dr. Joan DeVries lives in Toronto, Ontario, and has served four CRC congregations as senior or interim pastor. She previously served as a dean at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, where students come from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds and denominational affiliations, and she continues there as an adjunct professor. Dr. DeVries has represented the CRC on the Faith and Witness Commission of the Canadian Council of Churches. In 2016 she was part of a bidenominational (CRC and Presbyterian Church of Canada) working group that planned liturgies for joint celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. She is also, and has been in other locations, an active member of her local ministerial, which promotes coworking and collegiality among various denominations in a geographic region.

Dr. William T. Koopmans, currently senior pastor at Hope CRC in Brantford, Ontario, served previously on the EIRC from 2006-2012 (and as chair from 2007-2012). He filled the role of interim ecumenical officer for the CRCNA in Canada from 2012-2014, including membership on the Canadian Council of Churches governing board. Dr. Koopmans served on the executive committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches from 2010-2017 and is currently a member of the Committee for Dialogue with the Presbyterian Church in Canada. He would be pleased to be able to continue to contribute to the CRCNA's ecumenical work as a member of the EIRC.

Western Canada position

The EIRC recommends that synod appoint the following single nominee to a first term:

Mr. James Joosse is a member of Inglewood CRC in Edmonton, Alberta, where he serves as elder and chair of council. His work in ecumenism includes service on the board of a local ecumenical association in western Edmonton called the Westmount Christian Council, which represents Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Church of Canada, Anglican, and Lutheran congregations. He also served on the board of the Classis Alberta North Cuba Connection Committee, which has the mandate of cultivating relationships between the churches of the classis and the churches of the Iglesia Reformada de Cuba. In addition, Mr. Joosse has served on the board of governors of The King's University and on the World Renew board, and

he presently is on the board of The King's University Foundation. He practiced law in the province of Alberta for 35 years before retiring in 2015.

IV. Bilateral relationships

The CRC maintains a relationship of *ecclesiastical fellowship* with 25 denominations and partners with 11 *churches in dialogue*. In addition, we have four partners in the category of *churches in other ecumenical relationships*. Of these three categories combined, we have 22 partners on the African continent; four partners in Central and South America (including the Caribbean); two partners in Europe and one in India; six partners in Asia, Australia, and Indonesia; and five partners in North America. A complete list is available on the "Relationships" page of the EIRC website (crcna.org/EIRC).

A. New developments

1. Recent actions

Synod 2017 approved designating the Christian Reformed Church in Sierra Leone as a *church in dialogue* with the CRC. The CRC in Sierra Leone responded gratefully that their request was met with this action. In addition, following the 2017 meeting of synod at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, delegates from eight African denominations who had come to synod stayed for a consultation with representatives from Back to God Ministries International, Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, the Office of Social Justice, Partners Worldwide, Resonate Global Mission, Timothy Leadership Training Institute, and World Renew. The focus of this consultation identified ways in which our partnerships could deepen; the specific need for pastor training (at a level less intensive than formal seminary education) continues to be explored by means of continuing conversations.

2. Recommendation

The EIRC recommends that synod designate the Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic as a *church in dialogue* with the CRCNA. The background, grounds, and guiding Memorandum of Understanding for synod's consideration are found in Appendix A.

B. Reports

Interchanges with two bilateral partners in *ecclesiastical fellowship* call for specific mention. In addition, CRCNA representatives had conversations with several other partner churches and represented our denomination at the annual meetings of various partners.

1. The Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA: Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika)

With two delegates from the GKSA at our 2017 synod and Executive Director Timmermans' attendance at the GKSA synod early in 2018, our relationship has been blessed by frequent communications and joint activities (the post-synod consultation in Palos Heights, Ill., and the Global Prayer Safari led by Mwaya Wa Kitavi of Resonate Global Mission in South Africa). The GKSA is experiencing decline in overall membership, and, while one segment of their apartheid-era daughter churches has not reunited (Synod Soutpansberg), other segments have reunited, bringing a

cultural and linguistic diversity to their denomination. A significant report focusing on unity within their denomination came to their 2018 synod, but decisions on key issues (for example, the recommendation to use English instead of Afrikaans in their assemblies) were deferred. In addition, it was unsettling to hear a report from a representative from the Afrikaans Protestant Church—a denomination being considered for inclusion in ecclesiastical relationship with the GKSA—knowing that the Afrikaans Protestant Church allows only white members.

2. The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

The EIRC learned that the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia has changed their ecumenical relationship with us, as explained in their letter to the EIRC: “that due to the growing diversity within the CRCNA, as well as the fact that there has been little in the way of practical contact or ministry work together over many years, it was time to change the relationship to one of ‘correspondence.’” From accompanying materials, it appears that their term *growing diversity* relates more to *diversity of positions* than *diversity of people*. The EIRC has decided to continue the conversation with this denomination but suggests no corresponding change in relationship at this time.

3. Other conversations

Oftentimes we find informal opportunities to engage with leaders of ecumenical partners in the course of their travels or ours. This past year, Dr. Timmermans was able to meet with leaders of the Synod Soutpansberg (South Africa), the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO), and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The EIRC was also able to meet with ministers from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt (Synod of the Nile). These opportunities strengthen our ecumenical relationships.

One continuing conversation bears special mention: our relationship with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The planned combined meetings of the general synod of the RCA and the synod of the CRCNA in June 2018 are just one evidence of cooperation. A group of leaders from each denomination meets quarterly throughout the year, attending to joint church planting and other ministry efforts; a new effort relating to church revitalization and plans for joint activities will be reported by way of the Council of Delegates. The RCA’s ecumenical officer, Monica Schaap Pierce, attended a meeting of the EIRC, and the RCA’s Canadian regional synod office staff have begun working from the CRC offices in Burlington, Ontario. In addition, staff from both denominations met together in the past year, providing opportunities for those fulfilling similar positions to build relationships. Finally, a new possible joint endeavor is mentioned in section VI of this report (*Interfaith activities*) below.

4. The following delegated ecumenical representations occurred during this past year:

- a. To the general assembly of the Reformed Church in Japan, Rev. Paul Yu.
- b. To the general synod of the Reformed Church in America, Rev. Peter Borgdorff.

- c. To the synod of the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, Dr. Steven Timmermans.
- d. To the synod of the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika, Dr. Steven Timmermans.

V. Multilateral relationships – ecumenical organizations and dialogues

We belong to a number of ecumenical organizations, including the Canadian Council of Churches, Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A., the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Global Christian Forum, the National Association of Evangelicals, Sojourners, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Reformed Fellowship. With the observance of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, two of these groups held significant meetings at which the CRC was represented.

A. World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

Our delegation to the World Communion of Reformed Churches' General Council 2017 in Leipzig, Germany, this past summer included Dr. Mary Buteyn, Rev. Anthony Elenbaas, Rev. Emmett Harrison, and Ms. Lenore Maine. Also attending while serving the WCRC in various ways were Dr. Peter Borgdorff, Dr. William Koopmans, and Rev. Kathy Smith. The delegation found it amazing to see the breadth of diversity and experience among the churches gathered as together they worshiped, sang, and prayed with fellow Christians from around the world in more than six languages. Our delegation found the discernment and decision-making process frustrating at times. Because the WCRC's general council meets only once every seven years, conference organizers did not have recent history of organizing the event to guide the planners. Two major documents were signed over the course of the general council meetings. They were not, however, discussed at any point during the general council meeting itself, but rather were the culmination of recent work of the WCRC and of some directions set at the previous council meeting in 2010. The first historic document signed was the "Wittenberg Witness," an agreement between the WCRC and the Lutheran World Federation and their members to work more closely together. The second document signed was the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith (JDDJ)—included in the EIRC report to synod last year. Its signing at the general council meeting was a strong symbolic action pointing to the opportunity for new conversations at the regional and local levels between Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Methodist churches about living into a deeper sense of unity and seeking theological understanding of one another's traditions. The general council concluded with the election and installation of a new executive committee, which, for the first time, included no one from the CRCNA, and the election of a new president, Rev. Najla Kassab of Lebanon, the WCRC's first female president.

B. World Reformed Fellowship (WRF)

The World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) held a meeting in October 2017 for its members from around the world in Wittenberg, Germany. Dr. Mary Buteyn and Rev. David Kromminga represented the CRCNA. The meeting was the occasion of the installation of the WRF's new director, Dr. Davi Gomes, who leads a Presbyterian university in Brazil. There was also a sizeable contingent from Scotland and South Africa. Indonesia, Kenya,

Australia, Korea, the Netherlands, Malawi, France, India, and England were also among those represented. The gathering was eclectic, sometimes reminding our delegates of an academic conference, but with little opportunity to respond to the presenters. At other times, reported our delegates, it was more like a reunion of Reformed Christians who knew each other from other conferences or contexts. Parts of the conference struck an inspirational tone. Considering that the CRCNA joined the WRF only a year earlier, in 2016, it was important to assess the benefits of belonging, particularly by means of this worldwide gathering. Members of the WRF are from more conservative groups in the Reformed family of faith and represent a grouping of Reformed and Presbyterian churches that are not and would not likely be part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Nonetheless, our delegates noted that it would be good to maintain connections via the WRF; on the African continent, for example, the WRF can help us connect with other Reformed churches and work on building relationships.

C. The EIRC appoints representatives and observers to many of these multi-lateral ecumenical organizations and to other ecumenical efforts:

1. Mr. Colin Watson, Sr., serves as the CRCNA's representative on the board of directors of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and Sojourners. He also represents the CRC, alternating with Dr. Steven Timmermans, to meetings of Christian Churches Together and the Global Christian Forum.
2. Dr. Darren Roorda represents the CRCNA to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) and, with Rev. Anthony Elenbaas, represents the CRC to the Canadian Council of Churches.
3. Rev. Tim Wood serves on the board of KAIROS, an effort linked to the Canadian Council of Churches.
4. Dr. Matthew Lundberg serves as the representative on a commission of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A.
5. Dr. Peter Choi, Dr. Ronald Feenstra, and Dr. Susan Rozeboom serve as representatives of the CRC in its participation in the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue.
6. Dr. Peter Schuurman represents the CRC on the Commission of Faith and Witness of the Canadian Council of Churches.

D. *The United States Roman Catholic–Reformed Dialogue*

The Christian Reformed Church is a participant in the United States Roman Catholic–Reformed Dialogue. The round of dialogue focusing on issues that are ecclesiological in scope has recently concluded. Appendix B includes a summary report of that dialogue.

The EIRC is also aware that our CRC brothers and sisters with histories or roots in Latin America understand the Roman Catholic Church through very personal and sometimes painful lenses. To that end, the EIRC has pledged to work with *Consejo Latino*, a group of Hispanic CRC leaders, to communicate the results of the dialogue in a way that addresses the concerns of these brothers and sisters.

VI. Interfaith activities

The Interfaith subcommittee of the EIRC continues its work. Membership includes Dr. Bernard Ayoola, Ms. Priscilla Brink, Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollemans, Ms. Jessica Joustra, Dr. Jim Payton, Rev. Greg Sinclair, Dr. Steve Timmermans, Rev. Femke Visser-Elenbaas, and Dr. Cory Willson. At times the committee serves to identify major trends or happenings. But more frequently it learns about local interfaith activities and seeks to provide encouragement. Equipping CRC members for interaction with Muslim neighbors is provided through Resonate Global Mission's Salaam 2.0 project.

Dr. Jim Payton, chair of the EIRC and member of the Interfaith subcommittee, has also been serving as the ecumenical representative on the RCA's Commission for Christian Unity and on a related task force seeking to shape the RCA's interfaith and interreligious efforts. Preliminary information indicates that the RCA's General Synod 2018 will receive recommendations that the RCA pursue a strategy for engaging in and equipping members for interfaith engagement and to do so jointly with the CRC. The EIRC is in favor of such a combined effort. In the likelihood of such recommendations being adopted by the RCA's general synod, it would be appropriate for our synod, by means of the relevant advisory committee, to receive a companion recommendation added to the EIRC's series of recommendations. Should more information about the RCA's plans become available, it will be provided via the EIRC's supplemental report to synod.

VII. Synod 2017 matters

A. By adopting the Belhar Confession as a *contemporary testimony*, Synod 2017 instructed the executive director, "with the assistance of appropriate individuals, to include footnoted comments with the Belhar Confession to provide biblical and confessionally grounded clarity to the parts of the Belhar that are widely recognized to cause disagreement and alarm" (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 708). The following persons assisted in the task: Rev. Andrew Beunk, Dr. Lyle Bierma, Ms. Jessica Joustra, Dr. William Koopmans, and Dr. Jim Payton. Footnotes accompanying CRCNA web-based presentations of the Belhar Confession are now available online at crcna.org (search "belhar confession").

B. During Synod 2017 a concern arose in connection with mention of the Belhar Confession as "a gift from the churches in the global south" (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 707) with regard to how many churches in the global south have adopted the Belhar Confession. The question was not immediately answered. The EIRC would like to respond via this report. The Belhar Confession comes to us from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (est. 1994)—a denomination with approximately 700 congregations and over a million members. They are the union of two denominations: the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (est. 1881) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (est. 1951). The Dutch Reformed Mission Church authored and adopted the Belhar Confession in 1986. Two additional denominations in the global south have adopted the Belhar Confession: the Evangelical Reformed Church in Africa (ERCA) in Namibia and the Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic.

C. Last year synod gave EIRC an additional year to address the topic of a possible new category of affiliation by which a congregation or groups of them outside the United States and Canada could associate with the CRCNA (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 684). A report will be submitted by way of the EIRC's supplemental report to synod.

VIII. Closing comments

We continue to explore the interfaith dimensions of our mandate; our interactions via all four ecumenical categories are many. We are heartened when we hear stories of local congregations pursuing ecumenical relationships and embarking on interfaith interchanges. We look forward to new ways of addressing interfaith matters with the RCA.

Recognizing that our relationships and even word choices have an impact on how local congregations seek the unity of the church, the EIRC has shifted its terminology. In the past, terms such as *fraternal delegates* have been used to describe representatives from other communions with whom we have ecumenical relationships. Because the connotation of *fraternal* (relating to *brotherly* relationships) can be construed as limiting, the EIRC has chosen instead to use the term *ecumenical delegates*.

IX. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Dr. Jim Payton, chair, and Dr. Steven R. Timmermans (ex officio) when matters relating to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee are discussed.

B. That synod express its gratitude to Rev. Karen Norris and Dr. Jim Payton for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC, noting in particular Dr. Payton's service as chair and as representative to the RCA's Commission on Christian Unity.

C. That synod by way of the ballot elect two new members from the nominees presented to serve on the EIRC for a first term of three years, effective July 1, 2018.

D. That synod reappoint Rev. Kathy Smith and Rev. John Tenyenhuis to second three-year terms.

E. That synod designate the Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic as a church in dialogue with the CRC (see Appendix A).

Grounds:

1. The CRC in the Dominican Republic made this request to the CRCNA.
2. The CRC-DR began as an indigenous church in response to *Back to God Hour* Spanish broadcasts and has continued to develop in partnership with Resonate Global Mission (formerly Christian Reformed World Missions) over the past four decades.
3. The accompanying Memorandum of Understanding is an appropriate guide for partnership via the *church in dialogue* category.

F. That synod take note of the completion of the assignment "to include footnoted comments with the Belhar Confession" (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 708) and express its gratitude to those who provided assistance.

G. That synod take note of the EIRC's decision to use the term *ecumenical delegate* in place of *fraternal delegate* in the future.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee
Jim Payton, chair
Steven R. Timmermans, executive director (*ex officio*)

Appendix A

The Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic

I. Background

The Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic (CRC-DR) started as an indigenous church, not as a result of direct missionary efforts. In the mid-1970s, members of a small unaffiliated church were listening to *Back to God Hour* Spanish broadcasts and liked what they heard. They decided to take on the name "Iglesia Cristiana Reformada" and sent letters to the Back to God Hour offices in Palos Heights, Illinois. Those letters were forwarded to Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) missionaries in Puerto Rico, and Rev. Arnold Rumph visited the new church in 1975. CRWM resident missionaries Ray and Gladys Brinks arrived in 1981, and the engagement progressed with a solid missiological strategy of church and leadership development within a partnership model that has continued to this day.

Today the denomination has more than 200 congregations, consistent ministries, and a stable leadership and structure. At present, Steve and Sandra Brauning of Resonate Global Mission are the only CRCNA staff in the country. Their role with the CRC-DR is to support, encourage, and provide resources to help in various types of development. The denomination has a small but capable administration, just one full-time person, and a very dedicated executive board of volunteers serving two-year terms. In addition, most of the denomination's pastors are bivocational.

II. Recommendation

That synod designate the Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic (CRC-DR) as a church in dialogue with the CRCNA; the attached Memorandum of Understanding (see Addendum below) is designed to guide the partnership.

Grounds:

1. The CRC in the Dominican Republic made this request to the CRCNA.
2. The CRC-DR began as an indigenous church in response to *Back to God Hour* Spanish broadcasts and has continued to develop in partnership with Resonate Global Mission (formerly Christian Reformed World Missions) over the past four decades.
3. The accompanying Memorandum of Understanding is an appropriate guide for partnership via the *church in dialogue* category.

Addendum
Proposed Memorandum of Understanding

Memorandum of Understanding between
La Iglesia Cristiana Reformada en la República Dominicana, Inc. (ICRRD)
and
the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA)

La Iglesia Cristiana Reformada en la República Dominicana, Inc. (RNC 4-0105299-7), headquartered at Calle 4#6, Km. 13 de la Autopista Duarte, Distrito Nacional, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America, headquartered at 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, have sustained a collaborative relationship for more than 42 years. The first contacts were in 1975, the year in which the first congregation of the ICRRD was constituted. In 1981 the ICRRD celebrated its first national assembly, and in 1983 the ICRRD was legally incorporated in the Dominican Republic, accompanied by missionaries of the CRCNA agencies World Renew and Christian Reformed World Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission). The collaboration has been in shared holistic ministries including programs of leadership development, church growth, construction projects, community development, health, justice, and more. Since the 1980s, working agreements and formal annual contracts have guided the collaboration in these areas of ministry.

This memorandum of understanding intends to establish a relationship as *churches in dialogue*, with the intention of continuing and increasing our connections and of promoting topics of common interest.

Therefore, we agree to the following:

1. Together we will develop transformational ministry among the neediest, giving them means to sustain their lives, and we will aim to provide hope in Jesus Christ. Most often partnership in development will involve World Renew.
2. We will work together proclaiming the gospel, by all necessary means, to reach all places. Most often partnership in gospel proclamation will involve Resonate Global Mission.
3. We will encourage the interchange between leaders and pastors for the intercultural and common learning of all parties involved, developing relationships and contacts (for example, with *Consejo Latino* of the CRCNA) and sending/receiving delegates to each other's annual assemblies.
4. We will explore other areas of collaboration and exchange in a wide range of ministries and resources (for example, access to the CRCNA's Digital Library) with which each denomination has been blessed.
5. We will explore possibilities for the exchange of pulpit and table¹ and mutual recognition of membership.

¹ This could bring the relationship from *church in dialogue* status to *ecclesiastical fellowship* status.

6. We will annually review together this Memorandum of Understanding, providing revisions as appropriate.

Signing this is an act of agreement with all the points of this Memorandum of Understanding.

Lic. Bernardino Wilson **Date**
President, ICRRD

Steven Timmermans **Date**
Executive Director, CRCNA

Appendix B

The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World

The Report of the Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue of the US, Round Eight (2012-2017)

Context: For the last four decades and more, delegates of Reformed communions in the United States have been in ecumenical dialog with delegates of the Roman Catholic communion representing the United States Council of Catholic Bishops. The Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue of the United States has featured eight rounds of dialogue on various topics. The Christian Reformed Church in North America joined the Dialogue at the outset of the Seventh Round, which focused on the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Discussion of sacraments gave rise to discussion of ministry, ordination, and church, such that ecclesiology seemed to be the natural topic to appoint for Round Eight. Round Eight, on ecclesiology, was completed in 2017, the report of its work being *The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World*.

Summary Overview: The remarkable achievement of the Seventh Round of Dialogue was “The Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism,” which each of the communions participating in the Dialogue officially and formally received, ratified, and now own. This explicit agreement to recognize one another’s administration of Baptism put a certain urgency upon the communions to explore together, with fresh eyes, the topic of *church* specifically from *the perspective of ministry*.

The remarkable achievement of the Eighth Round of Dialogue is not an official action-item for participant communions, such as “The Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism” was. Rather, the remarkable achievement is progress – if not *huge*, still *distinct* progress – on the path toward receiving and formally recognizing one another’s communions – Reformed and Roman Catholic – as *church*. This progress is captured in the delegates’ report of their work, *The One Body of Christ*, which (as its Introduction notes) sets forth “an ecclesiology formulated by attending closely to the *practice* of ministry and the *exercise* of oversight in church bodies.”

Lamentably, and in sad keeping with 500 years of painful division, our communions – Roman Catholic and Reformed – fall short of formally, officially, and warmly *recognizing* one another as *church*. **The remarkable gift mutually given and received in this round of Dialogue is the mutual**

acknowledgment of one another's ministries: we observe and gladly "recognize in one another the work of God, the presence of Jesus Christ, the movement of the Holy Spirit, our mutual service to a broken world, and our fidelity to the gospel that we all profess" (*The One Body of Christ*, p. 70).

The mutual acknowledgment quoted above is made in the final pages of *The One Body of Christ*. The document anticipates this claim with a discussion of shared theological affirmations about the nature and mission of the church (Chapter 1) as well as discussion about the practices of ministry, ordination, and oversight (Chapters 2 and 3). The posture of all such discussion is this: to discover that, ultimately, **there is more that unites us than divides us in our striving to participate faithfully in Christ's ministry to the church and to the world.**

To experience the work of this dialogue on its own terms, and to get a flavor of what it might contribute to our denomination, our pastors and our congregations, two elements of the document are excerpted below. The first is a Study Guide provided in the full, and the second is a list of recommendations, or 'invitations,' to our respective denominations, pastors, and congregations.

Gifts Received: A Study Guide for *The One Body of Christ*

Gifts among Gifts

This document *The One Body of Christ* repeatedly draws upon the language of "gift" in exploring the work of the Triune God through the church, its mission and ministry, and through the *episkopé*¹ of the Roman Catholic and Reformed communions. This language represents a shift from any posture of dispute and divisiveness to a posture of prayerful openness and thanksgiving. From our work together, we bring forward not only the pain of division and hope for a future, but also deep gratitude for a multitude of gifts mutually recognized.

The document identifies:

- The Church itself as gift of God (16, in light of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*).
- The gift of baptism (17-18, 25).
- The Holy Spirit as gift-giver, the one who gives a variety of gifts to the baptized, the people of God (19, 20, 21, 64).
- The complementary gifts of Word and Sacrament (14-16, 64).
- The recognition and validation of the gifts of those called to ministry at ordination (26), and the gift of authority in ministry (24, 26).
- The gift of common liturgical practices in ordination celebrations (26-27).
- The gifts of God's ordained ministry acknowledged in each other through informal and mutual ways (30-32).

¹ Many Christians speak of the ministry of oversight in the church using a formal ecclesial term for such oversight, namely, *episkopé*. Although this term is not commonly used in Reformed communions, both Roman Catholic and Reformed communions exercise *episkopé*, that is, oversight.

- The gift of the three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon (24).
- The gift of oversight, *episkopé*, as pastoral ministry (20, 34, 57, 67, 68, 71).
- The gift of the experience of an international communion found in the Roman Catholic Church (60).
- God's gifts of both unity and diversity (19-22, 55, 61, 66, 67).

Gifts to One Another

Our gratitude for gifts is also directed to one another. Near the beginning of *The One Body of Christ* is an expressed hope to identify gifts we might acknowledge in one another (9). More particularly, this is a hope that we might “develop a perspective that opens us to receive the gifts of the other as we take a step toward eventual recognition of one another as churches” (56). In the Conclusion, this is echoed in a recommendation to our communions: that “all our churches reflect on the gifts we received from one another through this exploration” (71).

What are some of the gifts received from one another for which we give thanks to God? The participants in the dialogue began the work of identifying gifts that each side of the dialogue has seen and experienced in the other's traditions and practice. We valued the gifts we have identified and received from each other, and provide here representative reflections:

Some gifts the Roman Catholics have identified in and received from the Reformed tradition:

1. The emphasis on collegiality in the Reformed exercise of oversight.
2. The involvement and leadership of non-ordained (“lay”) persons.
3. An emphasis on the proclamation of the Word in the liturgical assembly.
4. The sense that we are truly sisters and brothers in faith.

Some gifts the Reformed have identified in and received from the Roman Catholic tradition:

1. The personal ministry of bishops in the Catholic exercise of oversight.
2. The notion of episcopacy/oversight as a spiritual and pastoral vocation.
3. A focus on the sacramental as an essential part of our shared vocation.
4. The need to be intentional in caring for God's gift of unity.

Gifts that we, as ecumenical partners in dialogue, mutually identified and share from this dialogue:

1. This dialogue has helped all of us understand and celebrate the church, ministry, and ordination as gifts of God, received through Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit for the sake of God's mission in the world.
2. Similarly, this dialogue has helped all of us reclaim the integration of Word and Sacrament—as central elements of the liturgy, critical aspects of ministry, and as complementary conceptions of the church.
3. In this dialogue we have experienced the life-changing potential when we come together in prayer and honest conversation. New perspectives and approaches become possible through relationship.
4. In this dialogue we have been blessed with a willingness to go deeper, push harder, and pray more to “acknowledge” and to “recognize” one another—doing the difficult but rewarding work needed to appreciate another's point of view.

5. In this dialogue we have grown closer to one another through an openness to listen and hold the pain that comes from centuries of division and derision. Taking the work of reconciliation seriously means dealing with these uncomfortable issues.

After reflecting on *The One Body of Christ*,

1. What additional gifts would you identify in the churches other than your own?
2. What are the gifts of dialogue, of the conversation?
3. What concerns or questions linger for you after exploring *The One Body of Christ*?
4. From the recommendations found on page 72, what might you or your church do?
5. What are the gifts from one another that we thank God for?

* * * * *

Concluding Recommendations

For all who wish to benefit from the fruit of this dialogue, we recommend:

1. That all of our churches reflect on the gifts we have received from one another through this exploration of the mission of the church and the church's ministry.
2. That all of our churches acknowledge that many of the church dividing issues from the Reformation era, such as those related to ministry and especially the office of the bishop, no longer pertain to the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church.
3. That all of our churches acknowledge and affirm the functional ministry of oversight (episkopé) in the Reformed churches, a ministry that is pastoral, not merely administrative, in its oversight.
4. That all of our churches acknowledge and affirm the collegial and conciliar nature of oversight in the Catholic church.
5. That all celebrate our shared understanding that the purpose of ministry is service to both church and world.
6. That all acknowledge that, although it is expressed differently, we share the conviction that the act of ordaining marks a distinctive change in the one ordained vis-à-vis the community and that this is deeper than a change of function.
7. That as we tell the story of the church, we incorporate the insights of this study.
8. That ministers from other churches be invited to be present as witnesses at ordinations and installations, just as the previous round of dialogue has encouraged for the sacrament of baptism.
9. That Reformed ecclesiastical bodies and bishops in local communities find ways to meet together, to learn from one another, to identify convergences in their practice of serving their communions, and to collaborate in service to the world.

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. Current committee members are Dr. Robert Schoone-Jongen, chair (2018/2); Dr. Paul Bremer (2019/2); Dr. Kristin Kobes DuMez (2019/2); Dr. John Bolt, (2020/1); Dr. Denice Fett (*ex officio*), secretary.

II. Archives staff

Dr. Denice Fett is the curator of the archives housed in Heritage Hall on the campus of Calvin College; she 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; Ms. Janet Sheeres, interim editor of *Origins*; and Ms. Jessica Vos, student assistant. They are assisted by volunteers Mr. Phil Erffmeyer, Mr. Ed Gerritsen, Mr. Ralph Haan, Ms. Helen Meulink, Ms. Clarice Newhof, and Ms. Jeannette Smith.

III. Significant archival work during 2017

A. *Christian Reformed Church Archives* (other than the microfilming of congregations' minutes)

1. Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions records (50 cubic feet), much of it dealing with administration and outreach
2. Records from Classis Grand Rapids East (6 cubic feet), containing correspondence and other assorted materials
3. Records from Jewel CRC in Denver, Colorado (4 cubic feet)

B. *Calvin College Archives*

1. Records from the Office of Alumni Development, and the personal files of Michael Van Denend
2. Correspondence, minutes, and other materials from the Office of Vice President for Administration and Finance (16.5 cubic feet)

C. *Dutch in North America Collections/Manuscript Collections*

1. Added four cubic feet to the papers of Dale K. Van Kley, a former professor of history
2. Added 11.6 cubic feet to the papers of Howard J. Van Till, an emeritus professor of physics
3. Papers and materials of Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, a former professor of philosophy (3.2 cubic feet)
4. Pease/Haven family papers, including the correspondence of Allen D. Pease, who served in the U.S. Civil War; and the papers of Peter Haven, who served in the U.S. Army in Korea

IV. Publications by *Origins*

We continue publishing semiannual paper copies of *Origins*, which is self-funding. Heritage Hall's website is no longer supported and has been moved to the college's library website as part of the library collections. The new address is library.calvin.edu/guide/collections/hh. Many of the electronic resources made available on Heritage Hall's website can now be found there.

V. Recognition

A. The committee recognizes individuals who will celebrate significant anniversaries during 2019.

74 years, 1945-2019	James W. Van Weelden
71 years, 1948-2019	Carl G. Kromminga, Sr.
70 years, 1949-2019	Albert J. Vanden Pol
69 years, 1950-2019	Lugene A. Bazuin Martin D. Geleyense Dick C. Los Lammert Slofstra
68 years, 1951-2019	Leonard J. Hofman Jacob Kuntz MyungJae Lee John T. Malestein
67 years, 1952-2019	Ralph D. Baker Herman Leestma Richard D. Sytsma Rits Tadema Benjamin Ypma
66 years, 1953-2019	Harry G. Arnold William A. Huyser Bassam M. Madany Bernard J. Niemeyer Kenneth R. Slager John W. Van Stempvoort Theodore Verseput
65 years, 1954-2019	Alan A. Arkema Louis F. Baker Marvin Beelen Ralph W. Bronkema Earl D. Dykema Sidney H. Rooy Anthonie Vanden Ende
64 years, 1955-2019	Andrew J. Bandstra Rodger J. Buining John Bylsma 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

63 years, 1956-2019

Theodore L. Brouwer
John Cooper
Sidney Cooper
Milton R. Doornbos
Norman E. Jones
James R. Kok
Jacob A. Quartel
Clarence Van Essen
John G. Van Ryn

62 years, 1957-2019

Wilbur L. De Jong
Peter P. Kranenburg
Eugene W. Los
Harvey A. Ouwinga
Eugene F. Rubingh
Arnold (Arend) Rumph
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

61 years, 1958-2019

Raymond G. Brinks
Ralph A. Bruxvoort
Sidney Draayer
Donald J. Griffioen
Kenneth L. Havert
Allan H. Jongsma
Henry T. Karsten
John Koopmans
Theodore Medema
Edward P. Meyer
Alvin A. Mulder
Bernard W. Mulder
Garrett H. Stoutmeyer
Leverne K. Tanis
Jack L. Vander Laan
Arie G. Van Eek

60 years, 1959-2019

Allen J. Bultman
John G. Groen
John J. Hoogland
Melvin D. Hugen
Walter Swets
John Timmer

55 years, 1964-2019

Peter J. Boodt
Ramón C. Borrego
James E. De Vries
Vernon F. Geurkink
Morris N. Greidanus
Richard A. Hertel
Jerry J. Hoytema
John G. Klomps
Herman Salomons
Harlan G. Vanden Einde
John Van Til
Julius Vigh
Peter S. Yang

50 years, 1969-2019

Brent A. Averill
Paul J. Bergsma
Peter Borgdorff
Harvey A. Brink
Jerry D. Buwalda
Merlin N. Buwalda
Wieger De Jong
Hendrik De Young
Willem D. Dirksen
William Dykstra
Ronald G. Fisher
Nelson J. Gebben
Alvern Gelder
Jack M. Gray
Marvin W. Heyboer
Harold Hiemstra
Gerald J. Hogeterp
Raymond Hommes
Gary P. Hutt
John K. Jansen
Robert L. Jipping
Henry Katerberg
Neville L. Koch
Roger A. Kok
W. Wayne Leys
Alvin J. Machiela
John D. Natelborg
Robert D. Ritsema
John A. Rozeboom
C. Harry Salomons

Paul D. Stadt
William A. Stroo
Kenneth D. Van De Griend
Rodney Vander Ley
Dale W. Vander Veen
Larry Van Essen
Dirk Velthuisen
Stanley J. Workman

B. We report the following anniversaries of ministries that will occur during 2019:

25 years, 1994-2019	Las Vegas, NV – Yung Kwan Redlands, CA – The River Brantford, ON – Hope Saugatuck, MI – Saugatuck
50 years, 1969-2019	Abbotsford, BC – Living Hope Maryland Heights, MO – Trinity Yakima, WA – Faith Alive Silver Spring, MD – Silver Spring Waterdown, ON – Bethel
75 years, 1944-2019	Luverne, MN – Luverne
100 years, 1919-2019	Orland Park, IL – Orland Park Wyoming, MI – Faith Community Lansing, IL – New Hope Ministries Wellsburg, IA – Second
150 years, 1869-2019	Holland, MI – East Saugatuck

VI. Reminders

We ask congregations that have observed anniversaries during 2017 or will observe anniversaries during 2018 to send copies of commemorative materials (booklets, historical sketches, video recordings, photographs, etc.) to the archives.

During 2017, official minutes from seventy-seven Christian Reformed congregations and three Christian school organizations were received and microfilmed. The film copies were stored in our vault and, as always, originals were returned to the respective churches. Of the 851 active, organized congregations, 661 have participated in the records microfilming effort. Once a congregation is ten years old, we begin contacting them about the program. There are 776 congregations that meet this threshold, which means we have 85 percent participation. Although this is a high percentage for such projects, the staff strives for 100 percent participation. Two churches have had their records microfilmed for the first time: Covenant Life CRC in Grand Haven, Michigan, and Christ Community CRC in Tualatin, Oregon.

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). 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, Hamilton, Niagara, and Zeeland. These five classes are particularly 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 with the churches in that classis. During this past year communications have been sent to each of these representatives thanking them for their services throughout 2017 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 the privilege of the floor to a member of the Historical Committee when matters pertaining to the mandate of the committee come before synod.

B. That synod recognize Dr. Robert Schoone-Jongen, who is completing his second term, and express gratitude for his contributions and service.

C. That synod appoint a new member to a first term of three years from the following slate of names:

Dr. James A. De Jong is a president emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary, an ordained minister, and an author. He taught at Trinity Christian College, Dordt College, and Calvin Theological Seminary. He is a member of Plymouth Heights CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Professor Herman DeVries, Jr., is the Frederik Meijer Chair in Dutch Language and Culture at Calvin College. He has been teaching Dutch and German at Calvin College since 1997. He also serves as president of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies. He was baptized in West Evergreen CRC (Chicago, Ill.), was raised in Bethel CRC (Lansing, Ill.), and has been a member of First CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.) for the past twenty years.

D. 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 to Archives, Calvin College, 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402; fax: 616-526-7689; or crcarchives@calvin.edu.

E. That synod encourage the following classes, all of which have at least one member congregation more than ten years old that has not had its minutes duplicated, to contact the archives to have this done: 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, Northcentral Iowa, Northern Illinois, Northern

Michigan, Pacific Northwest, Quinte, Red Mesa, Rocky Mountain, Southeast U.S., Toronto, Wisconsin, and Yellowstone.

Historical Committee

John Bolt

Paul Bremer

Denice Fett (*ex officio*), secretary

Kristin Kobes DuMez

Robert Schoone-Jongen, chair

DENOMINATIONALLY RELATED AGENCIES

Dordt College

Greetings to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church. We are grateful to God for the partnership of our mutually beneficial ministries.

Enrollment at Dordt College is at an all-time high this year, consisting of 1,534 students. For the class of 2017, the career outcomes rate is 99.7 percent, showing that Dordt students are consistently entering jobs and graduate schools. For the second year in a row, Dordt was ranked number 1 in student engagement by the *Wall Street Journal*. This means not only that our students are inspired in the classroom but also that they are foremost at recommending Dordt to their peers. This is an immense encouragement to us, as we seek to advance the college's mission to train effective kingdom citizens.

Martin Luther once said, "God himself milks cows through him whose vocation that is." For the Reformers, all callings were equally holy: whether priest or ploughman, monk or milkmaid. Continuing in that spirit, Dordt began its new Pro-Tech program this year, offering two-year associate of science degrees in manufacturing technology and farm operations. With Pro-Tech, students shape culture and bring reconciliation by working with their hands: feeding cattle, bending metal, and programming machines. We believe that the kingdom advances by Christians working in all areas of life, especially vocations that are often undervalued. Pro-Tech equips people to serve where God has called them.

Pro-Tech combines paid internships and technical education with a complete on-campus experience, unlike any other program in the country. It also plays to the region's strengths as a manufacturing and agricultural hub. We welcomed our first 28 students this year, and we are in the process of building a brand-new Agriculture Stewardship Center to facilitate this fresh form of learning.

The Center for the Advancement of Christian Education (CACE) at Dordt College continues to promote and innovate Christian education at all levels. CACE collaborates with schools in sharing the best practices in Christian education. This past year CACE also became the exclusive United States distributor of Teaching for Transformation (TfT). TfT is a school-wide development program that concentrates on creating practical opportunities for students to work with people and meet genuine needs.

Next year will mark the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort, our college's namesake. To celebrate, Dordt College is partnering with the city of Dordrecht in the Netherlands. The celebration will include a conference sponsored by the Andreas Center, titled "The Promiscuous Love of God: Reencountering Dordt at 400 and Beyond." There will be an art gallery, video series, and a learning vacation, in which alumni and friends of Dordt will travel to the Netherlands. The ceremonies at Dordrecht will open in November 2018 and close in May 2019, mirroring the original synod calendar.

We ask that you pray for us as we seek to be faithful to the task of training up kingdom citizens. Dordt remains committed to Christian education at all levels (as exemplified by CACE) and in all formats (as in our Pro-Tech and graduate programs, which are at record enrollment). We pray that all of our

educational work is continually permeated with the spirit and teaching of Christianity.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Dordt College

Erik Hoekstra, president

Institute for Christian Studies

During the 2017-18 academic year, the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) marked its fiftieth anniversary with a year of Jubilee celebration. The first celebratory event took place on November 11, 2017, when 160 friends and supporters of ICS attended a reception to celebrate this milestone in our history. This event also marked the occasion of Dr. Douglas Blomberg's retirement as president of ICS, and of Dr. Ronald A. Kuipers's beginning in this leadership role. On May 11, 2018, the ICS Convocation will provide another opportunity to celebrate this Jubilee anniversary and will include a formal investiture of Dr. Kuipers as ICS president.

We are grateful that God has blessed the work of ICS for the past five decades, and upon that faithfulness we firmly focus our attention on the task of continuing to serve God in the decades ahead. While we continue to face budgetary challenges, we have been encouraged by the continued and generous commitment of our CRC churches and support community. Some highlights of the ongoing work of ICS in 2017-2018 follow.

Our M.A. and Ph.D. degrees continue to be a focus of our commitment to Christian scholarship at the highest levels. Currently our full-time enrollment stands at 17 junior members (students): six in the M.A. program, 10 in the Ph.D. program, and one in the master of worldview studies program. In May 2017 we celebrated the graduation of seven students: one Ph.D., four M.A., and two M.W.S. In May 2018 we anticipate celebrating the graduation of at least five accomplished junior members: two Ph.D. and three M.A. Across our total offering of 14 courses, we have 61 course registrations—a figure that includes students enrolling in single courses from the Toronto School of Theology and through our distance education courses.

This year we also continued to develop and deliver our *Wayfinding* program in its continuing adult education format. The program is led by Dr. Gideon Strauss, ICS's associate professor of worldview studies, who has designed a suite of courses in both hybrid and distance formats that aim to help women and men explore the intersection of their faith and their personal and vocational identity, providing them with practical tools by which to discern where God might be leading them in both their career and life journeys. We are gratified to report that several of the courses developed for this program now qualify toward the achievement of the Ontario Christian School Teachers Certificate. This year, sixteen students have taken these courses in various formats.

From June 23 through July 15, 2017, Rebekah Smick, associate professor of philosophy of arts and culture, led twelve students in the second ART in Orvieto program—a four-week residency in Italy that allows artists and authors to explore the relationship between art, religion, and theology. This year Rebekah has also designed and successfully recruited for a third such program, which will take place from July 15 through August 4, 2018. These flexible educational programs help us fulfill our commitment to provide learning opportunities to the wider community beyond the academy.

To further extend the reach of our educational offerings, we continue to forge partnerships with Christian undergraduate institutions and community service organizations. On September 30, 2017, ICS signed a historic memorandum of understanding (MOU) with The King's University (TKU)

in Edmonton, Alberta. The MOU licenses both institutions to begin exploring the possibility of affiliating. The initial scope of discussion includes the development of shared programs, a financial agreement, and a study of governance structures in order to give full effect and meaning to an eventual affiliation. Both partners wish to maintain an integrated ICS/TKU campus in Toronto, Ontario, in order to preserve ICS's hard-won authority by charter from the Government of Ontario to grant master's and Ph.D. degrees, and to allow The King's University to pursue its mission in Christian education on a broader national stage. Other partnership conversations with undergraduate institutions include ongoing planning for an M.A. in leadership (with a focus on educational leadership) with two university colleges in Ontario.

ICS junior members successfully fundraised and planned an undergraduate student workshop on the theme "Creation: An Interdisciplinary Perspective." In total, nine undergrads shared papers at the workshop, with ICS faculty and students offering personal responses to each paper. The students came from Calvin College, Gordon College, Greenville University, Memorial University, and Tyndale University. Junior members are planning a second undergraduate workshop to be held May 24-26, 2018, on the theme of "Philosophy of/as Storytelling."

Teaching excellence goes hand in hand with disciplined research. Our senior members continue to make a significant contribution to research by giving academic papers at conferences and by publishing articles in popular and academic journals. This year six faculty members made 19 presentations at academic and popular conferences, published six papers in academic journals, published two pieces in popular publications, and published one book.

ICS's Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics (CPRSE) continues to collaborate with other community organizations to pursue quality research and to curate public dialogue on high-interest questions about life and society. This year's highlights of CPRSE activity include the following:

- Year two of the Faith and Settlement Partnerships project, a two-year Partnership Development Grant funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), led by the Centre for Community-Based Research in Kitchener-Waterloo and in collaboration with the CRCNA's World Renew. This project sought to discern best practices for partnerships between faith-based groups and settlement agencies in the work of welcoming immigrants and refugees to Canada, and has produced several case studies and toolkits to aid professionals and volunteers who seek to forge and strengthen relationships between faith groups and settlement agencies.
- Launch of the podcast *Critical Faith*, now available from iTunes, Google Play, and other digital media delivery services. Early episodes include talks by and interviews with Dr. Neal DeRoo, SSHRC Canada research chair and associate professor of philosophy at The King's University, and Kate Hennessy, granddaughter of Dorothy Day, who shared reflections from her memoir *Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved by Beauty*.
- CPRSE director Dr. Ronald Kuipers served as both a panelist and workshop leader for "Engaging Communities through Research," a two-day conference held in November 2017, at Conrad Grebel University

College, geared toward helping faith-based campuses pursue community-based research projects.

- The CPRSE also helped plan and execute the CRCNA-sponsored event “For Such a Time as This: Worship Meets Justice and the Arts in Turbulent Times,” held at First CRC in Toronto, Ontario, in October 2017. This one-day workshop for worship leaders included a presentation of the play *Just Faith?* (a knowledge mobilization product of a previous CPRSE research project on attitudes toward the relationship between justice and faith in the CRC), performed by students from Toronto District Christian High School. CPRSE associate director Hector Acero Ferrer also led a group dialogue after the performance of the play.

It has been a busy and productive year. Thank you for standing with us in our mission these past fifty years. We look forward to our continued partnership in the years ahead. We want to thank you especially for the continued generosity you have shown us this year. This commitment to our students and our vision for Christian higher education encourages and strengthens us as we work to fulfill our mission to be an effective Christian witness in the world of higher education and beyond.

May God grant you wisdom and discernment in your work during Synod 2018.

Institute for Christian Studies
Ronald A. Kuipers, president

The King's University

In September 2017, King's enrolled a record-high **820** students to study and be a part of our community for the 2017-18 academic year. It is encouraging to see five consecutive years of positive enrollment growth. Much of our strategic planning is centered on ways to further increase student enrollment. This includes program expansion in key areas (natural and social sciences), enhancing student services by providing university-level student skill development, fostering faith formation and spiritual development, and improving scholarship options to assist in recruitment and retention. Thank you for continuing to partner with us on this exciting journey.

King's is excited to now offer a new four-year bachelor of arts degree in sociology. This program provides students with the opportunity to study the intricate social relationships of our world from a Christian perspective and to apply what they learn to their career, community, family, and life. King's also has three other academic program proposals that are at various stages of development or approval. A four-year bachelor of science degree in kinesiology has been submitted to the Campus Alberta Quality Council, and work continues on a four-year bachelor of science interdisciplinary studies program and a three-year bachelor of arts in general studies for students who intend to pursue post-graduate education. We hope that the continued growth in the programs we offer will support enrollment growth.

King's continues to make considerable contributions to the academic community and to society at large through scholarship and research. This year King's celebrated having its first named Canada Research Chair, philosophy professor Dr. Neal DeRoo, demonstrating that the Government of Canada's granting agencies recognize that "King's is doing top-quality, world-class scholarship," according to King's vice-president academic and research, Dr. Hank Bestman. The King's University recently received another prestigious national honor when associate professor of English and dean of arts Dr. Arlette Zinck was selected to receive the 3M National Teaching Fellowship, an award given to just ten professors throughout Canada each year.

Over the past year, professors at King's produced over 250 pieces of scholarly work including books, journal articles, and more. Some recent projects of note include looking at how faith communities are engaging in environmental sustainability in Canada, conservation agriculture in Kenya, religion in Canadian classrooms, and back pain and spinal-disc tissue degeneration. To read more about these projects and others, visit the research portal at www.kingsu.ca/research.

To further extend the reach of our educational offerings, we continue to partner with other institutions and community service organizations. In September 2017, The King's University signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto, Ontario. The MOU licenses both institutions to begin exploring the possibility of affiliating. The initial scope of discussion includes the development of shared programs, a financial agreement, and a study of governance structures in order to give full effect and meaning to an eventual affiliation. Both partners wish to maintain an integrated ICS/TKU campus in Toronto, in order to preserve ICS's hard-won authority by charter from the Government of Ontario

to grant master's and Ph.D. degrees, and to allow The King's University to pursue its mission in Christian education on a broader national stage.

The Leder School of Business at King's recently became a member of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). AACSB International is a global association of leaders in education and business dedicated to supporting and advancing quality business education worldwide. King's membership signifies the intention of the business school to pursue the highest quality business program. The long-term goal is to become fully accredited through the association, which will position the King's business program in the top 10 percent internationally. The King's business program is also now fully equipped to prepare graduates to seamlessly enter a Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA) certification program.

The gifts we receive from our supporting community are profoundly important for our institution. We are incredibly thankful to the Christian Reformed Church in North America for confirming the value of the work that is being done at King's by giving generously through ministry shares and other offerings. You are significantly enriching the lives of our students as they are equipped for service in all areas of life. To read inspiring stories about how your gifts make a difference at King's, please visit www.kingsu.ca/supporters/impact-stories.

Your commitment to our students and to King's mission to provide "university education that inspires and equips learners to bring renewal and reconciliation to every walk of life as followers of Jesus Christ, the Servant-King" is deeply appreciated. On behalf of the entire King's community, we would like to express our sincere gratitude.

The King's University
Melanie Humphreys, president

Kuyper College

Founded in 1939 by passionate parishioners and leaders within the CRC who were committed to train women and men for practical engagement in ministry, Kuyper College (first named the Reformed Bible Institute and, later, Reformed Bible College) has faithfully lived out its motto, *ora et labora*—“pray and work.”

Ora et labora has been evident in every season of our institution—at its inception, in its growth, and through its changes and challenges—for prayer permeates and punctuates our work. Without the activity and intersection of prayer and work, we would not be able to accomplish our mission “to equip students with a biblical Reformed worldview to serve effectively Christ’s church and his world.”

This past year has seen a vivid demonstration of the Kuyper community drawing together to pray and work with increased awareness of the changing needs and expectations in higher education and the workplace. We have prayed and worked for our leadership transitions, faculty and staff changes, graduating students, steady enrollment, significant contributions, elimination of external debt, new hybrid and online course offerings, and reaffirmation by accreditors. God has graciously answered our prayers and acknowledged our work.

We often describe our students as people whose hearts hurt for the world, for they long to step into areas of brokenness and need, serving as social workers, teachers, leaders in ministry, and leaders in business. We aim to help our students be **ready** for their careers, **rooted** in a biblical Reformed worldview that is integrated in their faith and life, and **called** by God to serve every square inch within the church and the world.

At Kuyper, we are helping our students be workplace ready with professional skills by offering more practicums, internships, and new specializations in areas such as social media and marketing and leadership studies. In addition, we are serious about our students’ being rooted in a biblical Reformed worldview that touches real people and real issues, so we have hosted several of our courses at urban locations, such as Madison Square CRC, Rising Grinds Café, and the Grand Rapids Center for Community Transformation. We have also implemented a new Vocation and Calling Formation program because we are committed to enabling our students to discern how they are called to serve God and others.

These initiatives could not happen without the incredible dedication, skill, and spirit of innovation embraced by our faculty and staff. Nor could these initiatives happen without the support of women and men within the CRCNA who generously pray, work, and give to help us further our mission. We are thankful for our partnership with the CRCNA, and we look forward to more tangible ways to serve Christ’s church and his world together.

Kuyper College
Patricia R. Harris, president

Redeemer University College

Greetings from Redeemer University College! We are thankful for this opportunity to share with you the ways God has been at work at Redeemer in 2017 and 2018 and to look ahead to the exciting opportunities in store for us.

In this academic year Redeemer has explored how it can be as essential to the life of its communities as the salt and light in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—the campus theme for the year. For Redeemer, higher education is a process of discipleship through learning. Growth in Christ and education go hand-in-hand, fostering Christian leaders who make an impact in a rapidly changing world.

Redeemer continues to invest in its programs and its students. Having launched a new core curriculum, a Centre for Christian Scholarship, and a media and communications program in 2016, followed by the Centre for Experiential Learning and Careers in 2017 and the Urban and Intercultural Ministry program in March 2018, Redeemer is well on its way to achieving the goals of the Redeemer 2020 Strategic Plan. With the Urban and Intercultural Ministry program launched this past spring, Redeemer has brought all of the strategic plan's initiatives into the implementation phase.

Redeemer's 2020 Strategic Plan, funded by the *Re* Campaign, will ensure the long-term strength of university education from a Reformed Christian perspective in Ontario. Through the 2020 plan, Redeemer is securing a stable financial foundation for the future, raising its profile, and renewing its academic program. Redeemer also continues efforts to meet the \$20 million goal of the *Re* Campaign. With \$17.3 million in gifts and pledges already received, we are thankful for God's amazing providence.

In September 2018, students will begin their studies in the new Urban and Intercultural Ministry program, which will prepare them for ministry in tough places, for work overseas for a nongovernment organization, and for seminary. Redeemer's Centre for Experiential Learning and Careers (CELC) continues to partner with employers to help students connect their sense of calling with a career. As the CELC continues to build cooperative offerings for the Urban and Intercultural Ministry program, the center is also working to triple the number of programs with cooperative offerings and facilitating experiential learning opportunities in every program.

The Redeemer Centre for Christian Scholarship continues to flourish, increasing the impact and reach of research from a Christian perspective. Through research grants and lecture series, Redeemer is fostering scholarship directly related to issues of major public concern. On September 26, Redeemer will host Christian thinkers David Brooks and Anne Snyder for "The Road to Character," a panel and keynote exploring lives that aren't just about our goals to "get there," but about who we'll be when we arrive. Learn more about this event and others that Redeemer is holding in the coming year at redeemer.ca/events.

In addition to the exciting initiatives of its 2020 Strategic Plan, Redeemer is expanding and renewing its health and life sciences labs. The lab renewal project includes a pathogen research lab, an aquatic toxicology lab, a renewed chemistry lab, and an expanded human kinetics lab. The new lab spaces will prepare students for advanced research opportunities in their programs and for postgraduate studies and careers in environmental and

human health, biochemistry, and kinesiology—some of the fastest-growing fields of employment and areas in which Redeemer students are being prepared to make a lasting, God-honoring impact.

Donors make every year of education at Redeemer possible. This past February, the Redeemer campus honored the faithful support of the donor community with a week-long series of events called The Gratitude Project. The celebration gave Redeemer students, faculty, and staff an opportunity to thank donors, including those in the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church, who make Christian education for the next generation of leaders possible. We are so grateful for the Christian Reformed Church's incredible financial support to Redeemer, and we know that individual church members who believe in our mission are having a lasting impact on our students.

In the search for a new college president, the Redeemer board, through its President Search Committee, continues to work through the candidate vetting and interview process. There has been strong interest from suitable candidates, which is very encouraging. Most importantly, the board remains committed to hiring an effective, gifted leader to take the university to the next stage of its institutional life. Throughout this process, we welcome your prayers for the work of the search committee and for God to reveal his will to us.

Redeemer has reached a number of milestones in the 2017-18 academic year. Our alumni and students continue to do amazing things, big and small, with salt and light presence that points to our ultimate hope in Jesus Christ. As we look forward to what the coming academic year will bring, we are grateful for the ongoing support of Christian Reformed congregations and individuals.

Redeemer University College
Fred Verwoerd, interim 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 Trinity. 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 and denominational meetings, to serving as a resource for local congregations, to preparing students to be leaders in the church. Our partnership with the CRC is a valuable and mutually beneficial one!

We continue to offer three broad types of educational offerings: a traditional undergraduate program, an adult degree completion program, and a graduate program. Starting with the fall 2017 class of students, we employed enhanced sophisticated enrollment strategies both in terms of analytical science and visit experiences. And, by God’s grace, we enrolled our largest freshman class in four years at a time when many colleges are struggling to hold steady.

It is no secret that higher education is a tumultuous “industry,” and Christian higher education is even more turbulent. Concerns range from cost to value, from changing demographics to cultural pluralism.

At Trinity, we have witnessed this in our overall enrollment numbers as well as in the makeup of our students. In faith, we adjust and adapt to our cultural moment. We believe deeply that the market for biblically informed Christian higher education remains robust. We labor joyfully to present a winsome and compelling case for Trinity’s attractive programs and people. Technology changes and strategy adjusts, but the core of this good work remains firm: to educate women and men for godly living, to train them with both excellence and in wisdom, and to be part of God’s good work in the world. Trinity has been, is, and always will be a college for God, for good, and for the world.

Here are a few “snippets” from the past year at Trinity (and you are welcome to contact us to find out more: trnty.edu/contact-us/).

- Ninety-six percent of our recent graduates have found employment or are in graduate school (for example, University of Michigan, Calvin Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Washington University, St. Louis).
- We announced that Trinity will be purchasing the Back to God Ministries International building and making it part of a newly enhanced campus welcome experience.
- We joined with institutions such as the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and the University of Illinois in becoming the eighth University Partner at the country’s largest entrepreneurial startup incubator, 1871, in downtown Chicago. Trinity is committed to the place that God has called us to serve.
- We are revising our core curriculum to better seek interdisciplinary collaboration, and over the past year we have introduced sixteen new majors, many of them having significant cross-disciplinary components.

- We received, again, external affirmation that our programs are of top quality. For example, Trinity has had a 99 percent NCLEX pass rate for the past three years in nursing and offers the top-rated B.S.N. program in Illinois; we have the top CPA passage rates among any college or university in Illinois; and we have been named a “College of Distinction” in education.
- Last fall we launched a new website, updated branding, and a new tagline: “The World Needs You.” These efforts are especially directed toward our student recruiting.
- We saw record noncampaign-year giving from a noncampaign-year record number of donors.
- We are working on an updated strategic plan and comprehensive master plan.

These achievements do not happen without you and your support in every facet of the college. As we look forward to another year of faithful leadership, we respectfully but boldly ask for your continued prayers, encouragement, students, and finances so that Trinity Christian College can continue—and continually improve—its faithful service to God’s good world.

We invite you to learn more about the things that are happening at Trinity! You can easily do so via our website (trnty.edu) or on our various social media channels (links are available on our website).

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. We look forward to many future years of deep and rich partnership with the church.

Trinity Christian College
Kurt D. Dykstra, president

Communities First Association

Communities First Association (CFA) is a national, faith-based organization committed to community transformation through the multiplication of skillful leaders in asset-based community development, economic development, and equity [ABCD(E2)]. A diverse collective of professional community developers, 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 peacemaking and holistic transformation.

We have worked very hard this past year in the creation of professional learning tools, resources, and experiences that support leaders 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.

This past year we also curated and developed the Poverty Simulation, which allows participants to develop a holistic, inclusive definition of poverty, recognizing that we all live on the spectrum of spiritual, emotional, physical, relational, and/or fiscal poverty. This realization through the simulation process flattens the formerly hierarchical ways in which we approach people experiencing fiscal poverty, recognizing that we are all impoverished in some ways, and as such, have capacity to be in solidarity with one another as we are working to be transformed through our own impoverished circumstances. For more information on how we are working to process holistic poverty, please visit vimeo.com/150857646. To see some of the impact of the work we are doing, please visit tinyurl.com/y8j77vuh.

To date, we have implemented the Poverty Simulation in Illinois, California, New Jersey, and Michigan in partnership with organizations such as Americorps, the Reformed Church in America, the Village of Oak Park, Illinois's 19th-Century Club, and Christ Church of Oak Brook (Ill.). We anticipate launching the simulation at several libraries, congregational networks, universities, and seminaries in the upcoming year as well. This learning instrument has been vital to the realization of our solidarity and complicity in the construct of poverty in our world.

CFA participated as a consultative partner in the development of the strategic plan for the CRC Office of Race Relations this past year. Leading learning segments in systems thinking, community transformation narrative, and collective impact, CFA assisted in documenting the current conditions of the agency and offered recommendations on strategies for moving forward. It was a joy to partner with Dr. Reggie Smith and his team in this capacity, and we look forward to outcomes that will develop.

CFA has been invited to play an integral role in the work of Crosspoint Multiplication, a Chicago-area expression of Resonate Global Mission. We have been a part of the team to design and articulate what the transformational network looks like in the region. We have also been a part of the team

assisting in the articulation of the Crosspoint strategic plan, examining questions like “What does church planting look like in 2018 in our region?” We will continue that work into 2018 as we host a global team in Chicago led by Amy Schenkel in May to examine similar questions.

In support of leaders participating in continued learning, we continue to offer a full menu of learning opportunities. From our posturing class that examines how we “show up” in spaces of collaboration and community, to our redesigned coaching model that examines the ways dominant culture informs our discernment processes (and to what extent it should), 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.

As CFA reflects on the significance of ABCD(E2), 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(E2) might be supportive in urban transformation and economic development. As such, CFA continues to replicate models for economic development and social entrepreneurship as a part of what it means to be an accountable practitioner of ABCD(E2). We continue to engage in teaching and learning opportunities with partners vested in social enterprise, taking opportunities to share our learning.

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 that after much prayer and discernment 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

Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC) is actively implementing a new strategic plan developed and approved in 2017 in conjunction with the board of directors, DMC staff, and strategic stakeholders. The process involved a detailed review of DMC's vision, mission, policies, and processes, and was a helpful exercise in providing focus and direction for the organization in moving forward.

The new strategic plan reminds us that DMC is primarily an organization created and supported "by the deacons of Canada for deacons," focusing on helping deacons fulfill their calling/mandate as spelled out in the CRC Church Order and in the Charge to Deacons as articulated in the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons (2016).

Within our context, deacons are church members who are officially ordained by CRC churches to administer mercy and Christian love to all people. They examine and understand a community's gifts and assets, assess needs, promote hospitality, collect and disburse resources for benevolence, and develop programs of assistance. They also animate congregations to engage with their neighbors, live stewardly, and promote justice. However, as stated in the study report to Synod 2013, "Diakonia Remixed: Office of Deacon Task Force" (III, 1): "It is not simply the case that the church *has* deacons, but rather it is the case that the whole church *is itself called to diakonia*, which we understand as God-glorifying service that is rendered to the world in obedience to Christ." Therefore, while DMC primarily positions itself to assist ordained deacons; we also work hard at assisting nonordained deacons (all those involved in *diakonia*).

With this in mind, we have slightly revised our vision statement: "Relying on the Holy Spirit, Diaconal Ministries Canada exists to inspire, empower, and equip deacons as they animate congregations (1) to engage communities, (2) to live stewardly, and (3) to promote mercy and justice." As deacons include words of encouragement and hope in their work, they demonstrate in word and deed the care of the Lord himself.

DMC staff are available to work with deacons in every Canadian CRC. They help deacons understand their roles and live into their callings within the church and its community. They are also available to assist others involved in God-glorifying service, doing their best to connect annually with every CRC across Canada. As a side note, DMC staff have also recently engaged in conversations with CRCNA staff in the United States about engaging in some joint ventures. We will likely have more information to share on this development next year.

DMC (Diaconal Ministries Canada) has a robust agenda and is working hard to ensure it is an influential and effective resource for deacons and the broader community of *diakonia*. We covet your prayers and invite you to visit our website (diaconalministries.com) to become familiar with the vast array of resources available.

Diaconal Ministries Canada
Ron Vanden Brink, national director

Dynamic Youth Ministries

Calvinist Cadet Corps

I. General information

The Calvinist Cadet Corps continues with the goal of providing Christian men with a structure, program, and materials uniquely designed to help boys grow spiritually in all areas of life—devotional, mental, physical, and social. Over the past year we experienced a slight decline in the number of North American clubs. Several of these became inactive when their churches closed, several stated they did not have enough boys to continue, and some could not find another person to lead the group when a previous leader retired. On the other hand, we continue to have clubs start in churches that have never previously had a Cadet program or where their club has been inactive for a number of years. We never run out of reasons for which to thank God for his providential care.

II. Looking back

Camp Elk Run, our International Cadet Camporee of 2017, was held in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Over 1,200 men and boys (significantly more than projected) spent a week together, learning how God is seeking us. While some previous camporees may be remembered for the adverse-weather impacts they suffered, this camp will remain noted as a week of tremendous spiritual growth for many of the attendees.

For over 65 years, cadets have been stating our motto of “Living for Jesus.” We are grateful for all of the leaders who have preceded us. We have a rich tradition in the Christian Reformed Church, and the CRC accounts for 75 percent of our North American clubs.

III. Looking ahead

Our theme for the 2018-19 season is “Be a Blessing,” a theme we are sharing with the GEMS Girls Clubs for the coming year. This theme is based on 2 Corinthians 9:8: “God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” As an organization richly blessed by God, we look forward to being able to learn how to go out and be a blessing to others.

In today’s world, in which so many boys do not have a significant adult male in their lives, Cadets remains dedicated to the goal of connecting Christian men with boys, leading by example in what it means to live a Christlike life. We move forward, changing enough to remain relevant, yet remaining firmly grounded with our Reformed roots.

We are grateful for all of the prayer and support we receive from Christian Reformed churches. We appreciate the ability to work alongside the CRC, as together we train the younger generation and help them grow, in Christ, into the future leaders of families and congregations.

Calvinist Cadet Corps
Steve Bootsma, executive director

I. Introduction

GEMS Girls' Clubs (Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior) believes that every girl matters to God. We also believe that every girl is created with purpose and kingdom potential, and at GEMS we want to help her find it! In a safe, exciting environment girls learn about God, his Word, and his world—ultimately discovering who they are created to be.

II. Highlights from 2017

- In 2017 nearly 25,500 girls gathered for club meetings and events in 39 states, nine provinces, and 13 additional countries around the world. Eighteen percent of these girls do not regularly attend church, and without GEMS they would have little to no exposure to God and his Word. The ministry is thankful to the Christian Reformed Church for continuously supporting these efforts.
- GEMS' focus on discipleship is strong, and the impact local clubs are having on communities continues to be significant. A ministry-wide study of 1 John 2:6 has sparked a ripple effect of service projects and action steps as girls grow to understand how to walk in Jesus' steps.
- Nearly 4,500 women committed to showing up each week to mentor our GEMS girls through their local GEMS club. What a huge blessing!
- GEMS is also humbled by the fact that over half of the 20,000 girls who receive the ministry's two award-winning magazines each month do not attend a local club. This means that the Bible lessons and biblical content are making an impact on a growing number of girls from a variety of backgrounds.

III. Goals and news for 2018

We are being prayerful, careful, and very strategic. Here's a sampling of what we hope to accomplish:

- Grow our GEMS clubs by 18 percent in 2018.
- Expand our influence in Kenya and beyond. We are grateful for Dr. Munyiva Kitavi, who is serving as a GEMS training manager on the field in Kenya, where we have been active for nearly two years. Munyiva is busy training counselors and forming new GEMS groups. In addition, she hosted the first GEMS conference in Kenya this past fall!
- Mentor well. Our desire is to continue to invest in our counselors in creative and relevant ways as they pour into this next generation of girls. Beginning in July 2018 we will launch GEMS ReFresh, an online membership site where counselors everywhere can be trained and equipped remotely to best understand how to reach today's girls.
- Serve our girls with excellence, creating a place to belong for all. In nearly 60 years, the message of GEMS has not changed—Jesus. Jesus alone is and will always be the way, the truth, and the life. But we are exploring new *methods*. We're seeking funding to develop a GEMS mobile app. Wouldn't it be incredible if every girl, in every language, could hear the good news of Jesus?!

Grow. Expand. Mentor. Serve. Changing our world, one girl at a time. For sixty years, GEMS has been honored to faithfully serve Christian Reformed congregations throughout the United States and Canada. Thank you for entrusting so many of your women and girls to our care.

GEMS Girls' Clubs
Cindy Bultema, executive director

Youth Unlimited

Imagine a generation of students with a clear understanding of God's purpose for their life, knowing they are made by God, for God, and to serve God. Youth Unlimited strongly believes that the local church is a primary means through which God reveals himself to this world. We know that the responsibility of ministering to students today is not easy or for the faint of heart. Therefore we exist to encourage, support, equip, and partner with Christian Reformed congregations in the discipleship of students. We strive to accomplish this mission through the creation of short-term SERVE mission trips for church youth groups. Each of these SERVE experiences is hosted by a local church that desires to live missionally, empowering students to assist them in building bridges between their church and neighboring community.

A student's experience on SERVE will challenge them to step out of the daily temptations of everyday life and give them the space to focus on God. For students at SERVE, each day includes time for personal devotions, worshiping, praying, serving, and small-group discussion on how to apply faith into daily life. As the students serve on behalf of Jesus Christ through the local church, they are given a picture of what and how God intends a local church to be. Many students return home with ideas to enhance their own church's missional outreach.

In 2018, Youth Unlimited is excited to have twenty-five Christian Reformed congregations hosting a SERVE experience—four of them for the first time! It will take about one hundred church youth groups to carry out the missional opportunities of these SERVE host churches. While the students serve Jesus on behalf of the local church, they will also spend the week studying Scripture from the book of Luke.

This past year provided the opportunity to welcome new staff members to the Youth Unlimited team. Jen Rozema assumed the role of U.S. SERVE director in fall 2017, and Rick Zomer came on staff this winter as the new executive director of Youth Unlimited. They join the existing team of Canadian and U.S. staff members who have been preparing for the upcoming SERVE season.

Youth Unlimited appreciates partnering with Christian Reformed congregations to disciple students. May God find us faithful to be living into such a great calling!

Youth Unlimited
Rick Zomer, executive director

Friendship Ministries

Friendship Ministries is an international/interdenominational ministry that provides resources to support faith formation and congregational inclusion with individuals who have intellectual disability.

We have published five units and two mini-units in our online *Together* curriculum. In addition to providing existing Friendship groups with the quality Bible studies they are accustomed to, *Together* includes a parallel track of studies for use by any traditional adult small group that would like to include one or more persons with intellectual disability. This curriculum uses a unique multimedia format that has been highly praised by leaders and participants.

Friendship Ministries provides opportunities for people with intellectual disability to be baptized and to make profession of faith using our resource *Expressing Faith in Jesus*. We have a line of print resources to help our friends grow in faith, including our core Bible study curriculum and studies on the Ten Commandments and the 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.

There are more than 300 Friendship programs in Christian Reformed churches in Canada and the United States, and many of these programs 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 1,300 Friendship programs in 28 countries.
- Friendship groups are in more than 75 denominations.
- Friendship serves approximately 19,000 people who have intellectual disability.
- Through *Ministerio Amistad*, the Spanish arm of Friendship Ministries, there are almost 300 programs in Latin America.

We collaborate with the CRC:

- We are working closely with CRC Ministry Support Services to develop our new curriculum.
- 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.

Additional services we provide:

- 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

At Partners Worldwide we believe God wants everyone to flourish. But for far too many, poverty steals that opportunity. With 800 million people around the world facing extreme poverty today, the end of poverty may seem impossible. Nevertheless, we cling with hope to the vision the prophet Isaiah foretold of a flourishing world (Isa. 65:17-25).

While the challenges are significant, the world is in fact closer than ever before to ending poverty. Today just 10 percent of the world remains in extreme poverty. At Partners Worldwide, we believe business is a holy calling and the way to end poverty for good. Through business, we can create jobs and economic opportunities—sustainably lifting families out of poverty while creating hope for the future.

For over 20 years we have worked to end poverty through business so that all people have the opportunity to live an abundant, flourishing life. We do this by building long-term partnerships with volunteer business affiliates and local institutions in communities facing high unemployment. In over thirty countries around the world, we provide entrepreneurs and business leaders with mentoring, training, access to capital, and advocacy tools. These four strategic activities catalyze job creation and local economic development while encouraging businesspeople to pursue their calling to do God's work.

In 2016-17 we reached more entrepreneurs, farmers, and business leaders than ever before. Our global network of partners created and sustained 156,428 jobs, served 131,376 businesses or farms, and graduated 14,433 people from business or agricultural training. In addition, over 1,000 volunteer mentors generously gave of their time—a value of over \$780,000!

While we celebrate these results, we remember that each number represents individuals and their families who are uniquely created in the image of God. Their testimonies and stories of transformation affirm the life-changing impact of our work.

Another highlight of 2017 was cohosting Sea to Sea, a bicycling mission to end poverty, with World Renew. Last summer over 135 individuals participated in the ride. For ten weeks riders ages 14 to 81 biked over 4,000 miles across North America and raised a total of \$1.3 million to support the work of Partners Worldwide and World Renew! We were amazed at the passion and dedication of the riders, and we were honored to partner with World Renew in this effort.

As we look to the year ahead, we remain committed to fighting poverty through business so that all may have the opportunity to flourish as God intends. Please pray for guidance and wisdom as we continue to pursue this calling. With God's leading, a proven model, and a global network of supporters including the CRCNA, we know that ending poverty is possible. We eagerly anticipate how God will use all of us, working together, to make that a reality. It is a blessing to work with the CRCNA in this effort, and we are grateful for your faithful partnership over the years.

Partners Worldwide
Doug Seebeck, president

STUDY COMMITTEE

The Synod Review Task Force (SRTF) reported to Synod 2017 that it expected to complete its work by September 15, 2018, in time for its report to be distributed to the churches and classes in advance of Synod 2019. We are pleased to report that the work of this task force continues to be on target for that time schedule.

The establishment of the SRTF was approved by Synod 2016 (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 826-27). Following the parameters of composition and membership delineated by synod, the committee was formed with the following members: Rev. Ronald Chu, Ms. Nelly Eyk, Rev. Sheila Holmes, Ms. Karen Knip, Dr. William Koopmans (reporter), Rev. Thea Leunk (chair), Ms. Dee Recker, Ms. Jeanette Romkema, Rev. Kathy Smith (recording secretary), Mr. Jose Tagle, Dr. Steve Timmermans (staff), and Mr. Kraig Van Houten.

The mandate of the SRTF 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" (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 49). The background for this mandate evolved out of the work of the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture (TFRSC) that was established by Synod 2011. Included in the final report of the TFRSC in 2015 was a recommendation to form a subsequent task force to conduct a meaningful review of synod. The timing of this work was arranged to correlate with the transition from the Board of Trustees to the Council of Delegates.

The SRTF has embraced the calling to work in ways that are participatory and broadly consultative, collaborative, and informed by the experiences and practices of other churches in the Reformed tradition and beyond through ecumenical and interchurch dialogue.

Synod Review Task Force

Ronald Chu
Nelly Eyk
Sheila Holmes
Karen Knip
William Koopmans, reporter
Thea Leunk, chair
Dee Recker
Jeanette Romkema
Kathy Smith, recording secretary
Jose Tagle
Steve Timmermans, staff
Kraig Van Houten

OVERTURES

Overture 1: Establish a Standing Translation Committee that Reports to Synod regarding Bible Translations

I. Background

New translations of the Bible used to be reviewed and recommended to synod by a special Liturgical Committee (renamed the Worship Committee in the 1990s), which reported directly to the CRC Board of Publications (later Faith Alive). In the late 1990s the committee was effectively disbanded. Since then, synod has approved three translations of Scripture—all in different ways.

In 2006 the CRC Board of Publications requested that synod make a decision on the Today's New International Version (TNIV) of the Bible, since it wanted to know which translation to use in its Sunday school curriculum (*Agenda for Synod 2006*, p. 177). The advisory committee recommended "that synod designate the TNIV version of the Bible as acceptable for use in CRC worship services" on the grounds that it closely followed the already-approved NIV (1984) translation with updated language, and this recommendation was adopted (*Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 651).

In 2007 Classis Columbia overtured synod "to designate the English Standard Version (ESV) as acceptable for use in CRC worship services" (*Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 426). The advisory committee recommended "that synod designate the English Standard Version (ESV) as acceptable for use in CRC worship services" on the grounds that it followed the American Standard Version (ASV; approved by Synod 1926) and the Revised Standard Version (RSV; approved by Synod 1969) with updated language; this recommendation was also adopted (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 596). A few months after this approval, the ESV was released in a new edition with some revisions. The ESV underwent further revisions in 2011 and 2016. None of these revisions have been reviewed by a synodical study committee.

Much more interesting is the story of synod's approval of the New Living Translation (NLT), which sheds significant light on just how complex the process can be. The NLT was published in 1996 and revised and republished in its second and third editions in 2004 and 2007. In 1999, shortly after the standing committee responsible for reviewing Bible translations had been dissolved, Classis B.C. North-West overtured synod "to study the New Living Translation (NLT) to determine whether it should be permitted for use in worship services in our churches" (*Agenda for Synod 1999*, p. 437). The advisory committee recommended that synod accede to the overture and appoint such a committee; however, this motion was defeated (*Acts of Synod 1999*, pp. 556-57). According to those who were present for the discussion, the motion was defeated largely because the synodical delegates did not see

the value of appointing a translation committee to study a single translation, and the intention was that when more translations of Scripture were awaiting review, such a committee would be reappointed to look at all new Bible translations once again.

However, this did not happen. So in 2006 (the year that the TNIV was adopted on the floor of synod without a study committee), Classis Toronto sent an exhaustive overture containing the whole history of CRC-approved Bible translations. The overture asked synod to “declare the New Living Translation (NLT) to be acceptable for use in worship services in the Christian Reformed Church” (*Agenda for Synod 2006*, p. 525). The advisory committee recommended that synod not accede to the overture from Classis Toronto on the ground that the NLT had not been reviewed by a study committee, and made a further recommendation that “synod direct the Board of Trustees to establish a Translation Committee to review, study, and make recommendations regarding the use of new Bible translations in the churches” in response to requests from churches. Both recommendations were adopted (*Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 652). In 2007 (the year the ESV was adopted on the floor of synod without a study committee), CRC Publications reported that the Board of Trustees had decided to go in a different direction:

The Board of Trustees has decided that it would not establish this committee as an ongoing entity but that committees should be appointed as the need arises for specific translations. The Board of Trustees then decided to ask CRC Publications to appoint such a committee to review the New Living Translation of the Bible to develop a response to the overture from Classis Toronto. The CRC Publications board will be appointing a committee to do this work.

(*Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 202)

In 2008 the NLT Evaluation Committee submitted a full report to synod, having exhaustively studied the NLT. The committee pointed out the NLT’s strengths and weaknesses, suggested how it could be used well, and recommended that synod designate the NLT as acceptable for use in CRC worship services, noting some reservations about the paraphrased nature of parts of the translation. This recommendation was affirmed by the advisory committee and adopted by synod, making the New Living Translation the most recent version of the Bible approved by synod.

It is worth noting, however, that in its report on the NLT, the committee included the following addendum:

Although it is beyond the mandate of the present committee to evaluate the CRC’s procedures by which translations are designated acceptable for use in worship services, the committee does wish to comment briefly on the process by which the English Standard Version (ESV) was awarded that status by Synod 2007. The committee notes with regret that the ESV was not referred by synod to an evaluation committee. Instead, in immediate response to an overture and by recommendation of an advisory committee, it was designated by Synod 2007 as being acceptable for use in CRC worship services (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 596). That process, we believe, ought not to be viewed as precedent for the evaluation of other versions. The CRC has had a long and justifiable history of submitting translations to closer committee scrutiny prior to their receiving official designation within our denomination. Similar diligence ought to be maintained in the assessment of all versions.

(*Agenda for Synod 2008*, p. 48)

It seems as though the CRC has been comfortable up until this point simply approving translations that were revisions of earlier translations (TNIV

from NIV in 2006, ESV from RSV and ASV in 2007), but the NLT Evaluation Committee urged that such unstudied adoption no longer continue.

The Bible translation industry has changed dramatically in the 21st century, and the ways it has changed can be confusing for churches to navigate. Outdated translations used to be replaced by new translations (the ASV was replaced by the RSV, the RSV was replaced by the NRSV and later the ESV; the NAB was replaced by the NASB; the Living Translation was replaced by the New Living Translation). But now translations simply make revisions while keeping the same translation name (the NLT was published in 1999, then revised in 2004 and 2007; the ESV was published in 2001, then revised in 2007, 2011, and 2016). The NIV has adopted a model similar to that of the NLT and ESV, and its latest revised text was published in 2011. This can all be very confusing to churches, as updated editions are constantly being released and translations available from bookstores and publishers grow farther and farther away from the Bibles in a church's pews. In addition to all this, the Bible translation market is saturated with translations that have not been vetted by synod. The ongoing work of Bible translators is important to incorporate new discoveries in biblical and archaeological studies as well as changes in the English language, but keeping up with all these changes and comparing versions is a monumental task for local churches. This task is complicated even further by uneven and, at times, questionable online resources, which churches are not equipped to navigate. It is important that churches be given the resources they need to make informed decisions about the appropriate use of Bible translations in worship.

II. Overture

In light of this, Classis Huron overtures synod to establish a standing translation committee that will report to synod regarding Bible translations, and that this committee begin its work with a review of the New International Version (2011) and the English Standard Version (2016) translations of the Bible and make recommendations regarding their use in worship.

Grounds:

1. The NLT Evaluation Committee, in an addendum to its report, stated, "The CRC has had a long and justifiable history of submitting translations to closer committee scrutiny prior to their receiving official designation within our denomination," and suggested that evaluation committees be appointed to review all new translations as requested by churches rather than having translations debated and adopted on the floor of synod (*Agenda for Synod 2008*, p. 48).
2. A translation committee would be able to provide churches with up-to-date information about current Bible translations by reviewing significant changes in translations that have already been synodically approved, and by subjecting new translations to justifiable scrutiny.
3. While the 2011 NIV represents a continuation of the work of the Committee on Bible Translation (whose prior work was approved by synod in 1980 and 2006), this new edition differs in some significant ways from those approved by synod.
4. The TNIV and ESV were never properly vetted by synod.

5. The NIV and ESV are already being used by many CRC congregations and by English-speaking congregations in many denominations around the world.
6. The 2011 NIV and 2016 ESV have effectively replaced all previous editions of these translations, which are no longer in print.
7. The approval of “Bible versions suitable for use in worship” is one of the primary tasks of synod, according to Church Order Article 47.

Classis Huron
Vic Vandermolen, stated clerk

Overture 2: Address Patterns of Abuse of Power That Violate the Sacred Trust Given to Leaders and Recognize How These Hinder Due Process and Healing

Outline

- I. Summary of overture
- II. Overture
- III. Background
- IV. Recommendations
- V. General grounds
- VI. Further support
- VII. Conclusion

Appendix A: Specific Grounds for Recommendations

Appendix B: Brief Explanation of Patterns of Abuse

Appendix C: Confidentiality: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Appendix D: Victims Support Fund

Appendix E: Past Recommendations Adopted by Synod

Appendix F: References and Resources

Note: The Program Committee of synod (officers of last year’s synod) decided to remove an appendix from this overture for reasons of confidentiality as noted in the *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, section V, B, 11 (p. 10).

Scripture Passages That Address Justice

I. Summary of overture

The purpose of this overture is to increase awareness that power is being abused in threatening situations to protect those in power and the institution at the expense of those harmed, resulting in the betrayal of a sacred trust given to church leaders that causes harm to the church, and to offer recommendations to address abuse of power.

Overture recommendations:

- A. Mandate training to raise awareness of abusive behavior
- B. Require a code of conduct for pastors
- C. Require training for restorative practice and principles
- D. Encourage training at seminary level regarding abuse of power
- E. Consider a task force/study committee to address addictions and personality problems, especially pornography and narcissism

- F. Encourage ways to hear more women's voices regarding abuse
- G. Address and evaluate nondisclosure agreements
- H. Encourage classes to implement a CRC victims' fund
- I. Revise Church Order Article 85
- J. Take steps to insure adequate resources for implementation of Safe Church recommendations

General grounds:

- 1. Equip leaders to do no harm
- 2. Equip leaders to follow due process
- 3. Equip leaders to respond in a healthy, healing, and trustworthy manner

When leaders are honest, they acknowledge that these patterns of abuse of power are and have been a problem in the CRC. This overture is not about specific situations in the CRC; it is about addressing patterns.

Appendix A: Specific Grounds for Recommendations (see Overture Recommendations for list)

Appendix B: Brief Explanation of Patterns of Abuse

Define abuse and specifically look at common patterns of abuse of power, recognizing each pattern has many, many ways that it can be used as an abuse of power.

- 1. Secrecy
- 2. Silence
- 3. Control
- 4. Cover-up
- 5. Intimidation/fear/bullying
- 6. Abuse (beyond bullying) – especially spiritual, emotional, and verbal abuse
- 7. Manipulation
- 8. Deception
- 9. Cause confusion and chaos
- 10. Deny, deny, deny
- 11. Minimize and dismiss
- 12. Forgive and move on
- 13. Blame shifting
- 14. Various distortions
- 15. Technicalities
- 16. Empty words

Appendix C: Confidentiality: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The Good: How confidentiality is to be used

The Bad: How confidentiality is misused

The Ugly: How confidentiality is abused

Appendix D: Victims Support Fund

Appendix E: Past Recommendations Adopted by Synod

Recommendations adopted by Synod 2010 from the Abuse Victims' Task Force Report

Recommendations adopted by Synod 2014 from the Office of Safe Church Ministry Report

Appendix F: References and Resources: A list of resources used to support statements made in this overture. There are twenty-seven references throughout the overture with the sources listed in this appendix.

Scripture Passages That Address Justice

II. Overture

Bev Sterk respectfully overtures Synod 2018, requesting all levels to specifically and intentionally raise awareness and address ways power is abused (see Grounds) resulting in due process being thwarted and people who seek justice and support from their church leaders being revictimized and diminished. When abuse of power happens in the church, it is also spiritual abuse! This overture requests classes and synod to **prayerfully and carefully** consider and implement the recommendations in this overture so that patterns of abuse of power can be discerned, confronted, and exposed when they happen, possibly preventing abuse of power from happening in the first place in some situations, and helping bring healing to those harmed by abuse in the CRC.

III. Background (see also *Agenda for Synod 2010* (pp. 475-509), Abuse Victims Task Force [AVTF] Report, I, A; Appendix F, #21)

This overture arises from the recognition that **power is being abused in threatening situations to protect the institution and those in power in churches at the expense of those harmed**. This is sometimes referred to as clericalism.(1) This is the exact opposite of how Jesus and Peter call leaders to respond, as abuse of power is an example of “lording it over” and “domineering” leadership (Matt. 20:25; 1 Pet. 5:3) (Appendix F, #26).

It is a serious and grievous matter when the response by leaders in the church to threatening situations, far too often further harms those already harmed by the original incident, which often but not always involves some level of sexual misconduct and/or abuse. The harmful response by leaders results in further **betrayal of a sacred trust**, the trust that church leaders have been given to protect, support, and seek justice on behalf of those who have been harmed.(2) Church leaders are called to do what is right, even when it is painful and costly to themselves, their colleagues, and the institution. The failure to do what is right, including refusing to hold someone accountable for their misconduct, not only erodes and destroys the sacred trust given to church leaders (especially if the misconduct is by a leader); it also allows the potential for others to be harmed by the same person or type of situation when it is not addressed in an honest, forthright, transparent manner. Healthy confrontation eliminates deception and addresses displacement of responsibility.(3)

When the response to various abuses is inadequate, the patterns of abuse are allowed to continue, and **people continue to be harmed**. The Roman Catholic Church is the most notorious and most public example of how this happens. Addressing abuse of power will require a humility that recognizes we need to be slow in pointing fingers at the Catholics and quick to the difficult and sobering task of self-examination.(4)

The general trend of the established institutional church, including the CRC, is of continued decline in membership*, while the “Dones,” “De-churched,” and Spiritual Refugees (14, 15) continue to grow. Might **abuse**

of power be a key factor as part of the reason why so many faithful are leaving the established institutional church (*Synod 2017, Overture 11)?

This is our watch. We are the problem. We are de-churching people. How we respond will have an impact, positive or negative, dependent on how we choose to address these abuses. The secular spheres are addressing the abuse of power in government and in the workplace. We, as the church, can do no less and must do much more!

IV. Recommendations

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Sex addiction experts say that “clergy malfeasance is rampant,” and some fear that clergy violations involving sexual behaviors are of epidemic proportions.(3; p. 65) It seems that sexual misconduct/abuse or responding to such behavior in the church tends to bring out the worst types of abuses and responses, but it is essential we also recognize that **abuse of power is not limited to sexual abuse, harassment, and misbehavior.**

With this in mind, Bev Sterk overtures synod to adopt the following:

- A. That synod mandate that all officebearers in the CRC have two to four hours of training specifically dealing with abuse, boundaries, ethics, and sexual misconduct/porn*** every year (17, 24). (2010 AVTF, II, D; III, J, K, and L)
- B. That synod require all pastors to sign a code of conduct, detailing specific ethics that they are to follow, similar to other professions.
- C. That synod require that all classes offer training on restorative practice principles every three to five years, as this concept continues to develop and grow and be used positively in many settings where there has been sensitive conflict. We are to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5). God calls the church to be leading the way here, and it seems many leaders are still unaware of these principles (AVTF, II, B; III, D, E, F, and I; also see Synod 2011, Overture 23; Synod 2005 committee report on restorative justice).
- D. That synod encourage Calvin Theological Seminary to pursue adding comprehensive training regarding abuse of power to the requirements of becoming a pastor (2010 AVTF, II, D).
- E. That synod consider mandating a task force/study committee to address narcissistic-type behaviors and other personality problems such as sexual addictions*** in the screening and discernment process for pastors, as these issues continue to increase instead of decline.
- F. That synod encourage practical ways to increase the number of women’s voices in dealing with situations of abuse, since the significant majority of those affected are women.
- G. That synod address confidentiality and nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) on a case-by-case basis, in which the person with less power has the option of continuing it or not, and create a policy to limit NDAs in the future (see Appendix C: Confidentiality: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly).
- H. That synod encourage safe church teams to implement a victims support fund at the classis level (2010 AVTF, II, C; III, G; see Appendix D: Victims Support Fund Suggestions).

I. That synod revise Church Order Article 85, which currently reads, “No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer.” This is inadequate. The proposed revision is indicated by underline: “No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer, or lord it over the priesthood of all believers or over anyone.”

J. That synod take the necessary steps to insure that there are adequate resources to implement the Safe Church decisions made by synod and encourage leadership at all levels to be supportive of the Safe Church Ministry (2010 AVTF, III, N; Synod 2014, recommendation d, 5; Appendix E: Recommendations Adopted by Synod).

The 2010 Abuse Victims Task Force Report (AVTF) is an amazing document and gift to the CRC, and it is crucial to more fully implement the recommendations adopted, but its primary focus is sexual misconduct and abuse. We need to consider intentionally expanding our recognition of abuse of power to beyond situations of sexual misconduct to misuse of power, and misuse of spiritual authority. Abuse of power/lording it over can happen in many other ways besides physical and sexual abuse that are also harmful to those affected by abusive and domineering leadership styles.

Further action is needed on these recommendations to show that we take abuse of power seriously and stop denying, minimizing, and/or resisting that this is a significant problem not just in the world but also in the church/CRC. These recommendations can be a next step, recognizing that a more long-term comprehensive investigative review is also required, as abuse of power and spiritual abuse is a complex issue***.

***It is essential that leaders deeply comprehend the serious negative influence of pornography. Research indicates participation in pornography seriously affects the brain. Research indicates there is a strong correlation between porn and narcissistic behavior. Research indicates that porn is a key cause in over 50 percent of divorces. If this overture did not mention porn and the horrific damage it causes at all levels, it would be negligent in following due diligence. Researchers that have studied porn use for thirty years have found absolutely no benefit to porn, only significant damage, contrary to what the conventional culture would have many believe. Increasing awareness of the epidemic use of porn by people in the church, including by leaders, is about far more than lust. Participation in porn compromises values and desensitizes people to others . . . so porn feeds and fuels abuse, deception, selfishness, objectification of people, misogyny, narcissistic behavior, prostitution, violence against women, human and sex trafficking, etc. Leaders that have a porn problem are compromised to various degrees on walking in honesty, integrity, doing what is right, especially when they will look bad and/or might lose their position of influence, power, and prestige, etc., as a pastor and in the pulpit. Abuse of power can be fueled through the progression of viewing porn to acting out the behavior viewed with porn, which is often very demeaning, degrading, dehumanizing, etc. Pornography is a grievous sin against the God-given dignity of humanity made in his image. Research indicates porn is a huge problem in the church . . . and the CRC is not exempt. The extent of the porn problem requires far more drastic

measures to more effectively address the porn epidemic than has been the case for the last several decades as porn fuels abuse of power, exploitation, and objectification of the very people leaders are called to serve (18, 19).

Quote:

Maybe we should name the elephant in the room – **the reality that mental health professionals like me now assume people are addicted to porn.** It's not the exception, it's the norm. Yes, men who've been formed in the sexualized liturgy of our culture are stuffing the shame and pretending to be ok when it's not ok. . . . Can I tell you how many people have said to me, "I started experimenting a bit in middle school – looking at images, masturbating – **but no one ever talked about this, not my parents, not my school, not my youth group, and never, ever my pastor**" (bold emphasis added). Chuck Degroat, <https://blog.perspectivesjournal.org/2017/12/16/we-need-to-talk-about-sex/>

Recommended resources for research on porn follow:

<https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>
<http://www.covenanteyes.com/blog/> ; <http://www.covenanteyes.com/e-books/>
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/pornography/upload/Create-in-Me-a-Clean-Heart-Statement-on-Pornography.pdf>
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/pornography/index.cfm>
<https://fightthenewdrug.org/get-the-facts/>
<https://www.recoveryranch.com/articles/whats-connection-sex-addiction-narcissism/>; July 12, 2017

V. General grounds (see Appendix A for specific grounds for each recommendation)

A. One of the core principles of the counseling, educational, medical, and social service professions, especially in conflict sensitive situations, **is to do no harm**. When the response of the leaders to a difficult situation is secrecy, silence (i.e., confidentiality and nondisclosures), control, cover-up, coercion, intimidation/fear, bullying, emotional, verbal and/or spiritual abuse, manipulation, deception, creating confusion and chaos, denial, shifting the blame, minimizing and dismissing the seriousness of what happened in many ways, etc. (see Appendix B for a brief description of various patterns of abuse of power), far too often significant further harm is being done to those who have already been harmed in some way.

When various tactics are used by "the powers that be" as damage control, to "neutralize" the situation, effectively protecting those in power at the expense of those not in power, it almost always hinders the healing journey of those who were harmed and can often add to the harm done as well. As Jeremiah shares, "They [leaders] have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying "Peace, peace" when there is no peace" (Jer. 8:11, NKJV). The healing that can happen in one to three years is instead taking ten to thirty years, if not a lifetime, due to the resistance and harmful response by leaders regarding sensitive, threatening types of situations.

The response of the church leadership must be safe. **It's difficult for "spiritual refugees" (15) to trust church leadership because the betrayal of the sacred trust was significant, and a place of trust turned into a place of hurt and pain.** Violations of the due process increase the "spiritual refugees'" burden instead of relieving it. Mistakes in the process further destroy the trust, increasing the harm and damage done, and therefore hindering the healing process, causing the church to fail in her God-given calling to protect and minister to the oppressed(16) (2010 AVTF, III, B and C).

B. Even though the CRC has the Safe Church Ministry, the Church Order, and synod's response to the 2010 Abuse Victims Task Force Report to follow along with the Word of God, **the process for seeking truth, justice, restoration, and restitution can be manipulated** when the "powers that be" use it to their advantage—again, protecting those in power, often at the expense of others who do not hold an office—or have similar influence in some way. Policies can look really good on paper, but, in practice, abuse of power causes due process to be seriously hindered in various ways, adding to the harm already incurred. Abuse of power is not exclusive to the CRC, but neither is the CRC exempt. This is a call for repentance and reform in the CRC, not protectionism or preservation of the institution and/or those in power, but transformation with the help of the Holy Spirit (21) (Appendix E; 2010 AVTF report).

There seems to be a built-in bias in the Church Order to protect the leaders, particularly for false allegations, but that bias also contributes to additional harm and revictimization of those who follow the process regarding legitimate concerns they have. It is very, very difficult to hold leaders accountable for spiritual, verbal, and emotional abuse and abuse of power. There has to be better awareness and training in alternative options available (i.e., restorative practices, victims advocate panels) for a less harmful process for concerns to be addressed.

(See comment by Bonnie Nicholas, CRC director of Safe Church Ministry, on <https://network.crcna.org/elders/when-churches-lose-members>.)

C. We recognize that there will always be incidents of abuse on an individual level, and the hope is that this overture's recommendations will help decrease those to some extent, but **this overture is primarily geared to require specific training to equip and encourage leaders to respond to abusive-type incidents in a healthy, healing, and trustworthy manner**, first for those harmed, their family, and support group, and secondarily for the one who caused the harm, instead of defaulting to a "circle the wagons" response. Also, these recommendations will help equip leaders to recognize when power is being abused by increasing awareness of some of the patterns and tactics so leaders can recognize these patterns in their own responses, as well as in others. We also need to recognize that a more comprehensive investigative review is required as well.

VI. Further support

This overture refrains from mentioning specific situations, with the exception of that of Wesley Heersink, which Wesley's family has given full permission to share here. There is a list of resources (Appendix F) for further

research for those inclined to dig deeper and study this more, and those resources include many specific situations, but the focus of this overture is not a request to address specific details of situations but a request to increase awareness of systemic patterns connected to abuse and hopefully bring healing and address some of the harm through a victims support fund.

Sadly, there are far too many testimonies that support the fact that abuse of power is and has been a problem in the CRC (2, 16, and various CRCNA Network – Safe Church Ministry posts). This overture is in recognition and validation of those who have been harmed in the CRC, and this overture specifically would like to acknowledge and honor the family of Wesley Heersink, himself a victim of sexual abuse in the CRC, who died while fighting for justice on behalf of those abused in the CRC (<https://www.thebanner.org/news/2011/01/abuse-victim-dies-leaves-legacy>). Abuse of power seriously harmed Wesley, causing him immense suffering and pain, and the institutional church failed him in his journey to seek healing and justice. Wesley’s family has been left with much unresolved conflict from the abuse of power that happened through the CRC process. The prayer is that this overture will bring a measure of healing to those deep and painful wounds.

Sadly, many more situations in which power has been abused in the CRC have been silenced in various ways, mainly through confidentiality demands, including nondisclosure agreements and executive sessions that effectively silence those involved in the process, which often allows others to be victimized (see Appendix C: Confidentiality). The solution to this problem is not to silence it and keep it secret. The prayer is that this overture will help us all be more sensitive and loving in how we respond to various abuses and abuse of power in the church, recognizing that part of the solution is to increase awareness of abuse of power, what types of situations trigger it, and how abuse happens.

When leaders are honest, they acknowledge that these patterns of abuse of power are and have been a problem in the CRC.

VII. Conclusion

This overture acknowledges that significant progress has been made through Safe Church Ministry in addressing abuse, especially physical and sexual abuse in the CRC, since the inception of the ministry office. However, the research of various recommendations and concerns brought to the attention of and approved by synod over the years, reveals gaps where recommendations were never implemented. This overture requests that the CRC take the next steps and seriously consider all of these recommendations again and recognize the time has come to implement them in all classes and in all congregations.

Bev Sterk, Lynden, Washington

Note: This overture was submitted to the council of Second CRC, Lynden, Washington, and to Classis Pacific Northwest at its meeting in March 2018, but neither the council nor the classis adopted it. Therefore it is being forwarded to synod by the author.

Appendix A

Specific Grounds for Recommendations

The overture regarding violations of the sacred trust through abuse of power in the CRC requests synod to adopt the recommendations given in the overture, keeping the following specific grounds in mind:

A. Mandate that all officebearers in the CRC have two to four hours of training every year specifically dealing with abuse, boundaries, ethics, and sexual misconduct/porn every year (17, 24).

Specific grounds for this recommendation include that almost all professional positions are required to obtain continuing professional education (CPE), and ethics is often included as a part of that. Professions that require CPE include teachers, counselors, attorneys, accountants, doctors, and nurses in the medical field—and recently, in November of 2017, both the U.S. House and Senate legislated sexual harassment training is required for all politicians, staff, interns, and volunteers. When required continuing education for pastors has been recommended in the past in the CRC, it has been rejected. When leadership chooses not to require continuing education, especially dealing with abuse, boundaries, and ethics, leadership fails to build trust with those who have been harmed by officebearers in the CRC. That this is needed is indeed a sign of the sad state of the church, but failing to make sure that all leaders are committed to this type of training at this point would be negligent. This recommendation is a bare-minimum requirement, as many professions require 20-40 hours a year. It is imperative that all officebearers be required to take this type of training as the various abuses, including abuse of power, are something all leadership must take seriously. It is vital that leadership continues to increase awareness of this type of behavior. There is no executive privilege for leaders to be exempt from ongoing training, and this overture specifically targets addressing various abuses in the church.

B. Require all pastors to sign a code of conduct, detailing specific ethics that they are to follow, similar to those of other professions.

Specific grounds for this recommendation are similar to those stated in Recommendation A. A code of conduct or similar document is required by similar professions, and officebearers can be held accountable to the level of conduct that is not only at the same level as the world, but even a higher level. This is different from the Covenant for Officebearers as that pertains to doctrine. The code of conduct would pertain to behavior. We should be held to a higher standard than the world, and at this point, the world has been doing a better job than the church in dealing with abuse. As one CRC officebearer (also a military veteran) stated: “Abuse of power is bad in the military, but it’s worse in the church.” Whether one agrees with that statement or not, that this could even be possible is unacceptable. Officebearers are to be above reproach.

C. Require that all classes offer training on restorative practice principles every three to five years. This concept will continue to develop and grow and be used positively in many settings where there has been sensitive conflict. We are to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5). God calls the church to be

leading the way here, and it seems many leaders are still unaware of these principles (see also *Agenda for Synod 2011*, Overture 23; and *Agenda for Synod 2005*, committee report on restorative justice).

Specific grounds for this recommendation include that over the years, efforts to raise awareness of restorative practices have been made (2005, 2010), but with little change. A comment was made by a pastor in a CRC leadership meeting that it would be helpful to have a way that bridges the gap between council and judicial code to resolve conflict better. Restorative principles does this. They are a beautiful and powerful way to bridge this gap, and they work because these are universal principles based on Scripture. The justice system and public schools use restorative practices far more than the church does. As mentioned in the recommendation, the church is actually called to lead the way in the ministry of reconciliation per 2 Corinthians 5. Sadly, at this point, restorative practices are mostly ignored in the church. It looks good on paper, but is not happening in practice.

D. Encourage Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) to pursue adding comprehensive training regarding abuse of power to the requirements of becoming a pastor.

Specific grounds for this recommendation include receiving very mixed messages for where CTS is at in addressing various abuses, including abuse of power. A very intentional assessment of the curriculum should be seriously considered to determine how best to address this in a comprehensive manner at the seminary level. This assessment should include interviewing graduates to get an idea of where there are gaps in training that deals with the various abuses.

*E. Consider mandating a task force/study committee to address narcissism and other personality problems such as sexual addictions*** in the screening and discernment process for pastors, as these issues continue to increase instead of decline.*

Specific grounds for this recommendation include the fact that narcissistic-type behavior is on the increase. Porn use also continues to increase. These behaviors feed each other by affecting the same area of the brain. Addictions breed deception, and porn users become increasingly selfish and increasingly objectify, demean, devalue, and dehumanize people, especially women. When these types of problems are not addressed, great harm is done to the unsuspecting and unprotected flock when a pastor is allowed to lead, preach, and counsel with these types of serious character issues.

F. Encourage practical ways to increase the number of women's voices in dealing with situations of abuse, since the significant majority of those affected are women.

Specific grounds for this recommendation include that when women's voices are silenced or not heard, decisions are often made by the men that lack sensitivity to the women's perspective. There is a reason the "good old boys club" is a common phrase, but "the good old girls club" does not have a similar familiarity. The church is called to be a priesthood of *all* believers; the contribution of the women's voice is essential and indispensable, and the mission of the church is hindered when the women are disrespected and silenced. This is not about women having a title; this is about the women's

voices being asked for and listened to, especially on behalf of women who have been harmed. Otherwise the “voiceless” do not get heard. It would be very beneficial for women to connect with a formal female authority that can advocate on their behalf. How can the CRC establish formal channels of input for women and ensure that they are given permission to use those channels? If there is only one woman in the room, do not assume that they have entered the conversation at the same level as the men, as they may not necessarily feel safe enough to voice their thoughts (see Jen Wilkin @ 45 minutes; Advance 2017, General Session #2, ACTS 29 conference; November 2017; <https://vimeo.com/243476316>).

Male pastors will prioritize relationships and conversations with men. Women lose on the relational capital there, because the women’s voice is not allowed to be a part of the conversation. When conversations are exclusively with men, the church loses. If the disciples included the women, then we should take that seriously: “They [disciples] all joined together constantly in prayer, **along with the women**” (emphasis added) (Acts 1:14a).

G. Address confidentiality and nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) on a case-by-case basis, where the person with less power has the option of continuing it or not, and create a policy to limit NDAs in the future (Appendix C – Confidentiality: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly).

Specific grounds for this recommendation include recognizing that non-disclosure agreements have been used in an abusive manner to silence those harmed, and to protect the leaders at the expense of those already harmed and at the expense of those that will be harmed as it is covered up and kept secret. This is abuse of power. God’s way is in the light.

H. Encourage safe church teams to implement a victims support fund at the congregation and classis levels (Appendix D—some suggestions).

Specific grounds for this recommendation include the fact that a victims support fund was mentioned in the 2010 Victims Task Force Report approved by synod and has had limited implementations since then.

I. Amend Church Order Article 85, which currently reads, “No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer.” This is inadequate. The following proposed revision to Article 85 is indicated by underline: No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer, or lord it over the priesthood of all believers or over anyone.

Specific grounds for this recommendation acknowledge that lording it over is abuse of power and betrays the sacred trust given to officebearers. Scripture specifically states that we are not to lord it over anyone (Matt. 20:25; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). This addition intentionally clarifies whom that includes and that it is not limited to officebearers. When leaders exercise dominion (lord it) over those entrusted in their care, this implies a wrong exercise of authority. This serves the interest of the leaders, instead of those they serve, which is abuse of power. *Dominie* is based on the Latin word from which *dominate* and *domineer* are also derived. This is lording it over instead of servant leadership.

Also, this recognizes that the NIV translations of 1 Peter 5:2 use “under your care” and every other version uses “among” or “entrusted.”

“Under” can make leadership more about a hierarchy of power rather than serving other believers.

Jen Wilkin, a speaker, writer, and teacher of women’s Bible studies, states: “Anytime that there is privilege in the form of power, if a person is moral, if a person loves the Lord, the privilege is something they will lay down for those who don’t have it, and if they are wicked, they will use it to beat others down” (from Advance 2017, General Session #2- Jen Wilkin @ 40:40; <https://vimeo.com/243476316>).

J. Take the necessary steps to insure that leadership at all levels support the Safe Church Ministry and that there are adequate resources to implement the decisions made by synod concerning this ministry (2010 AVTF, III, N; Synod 2014, recommendation d, 5).

Specific grounds for this recommendation are that over the last twenty years, since the start of the CRC Safe Church Ministry (formerly Office of Abuse Prevention), only about half of the classes have a safe church representative and about half of the churches have safe church policies. The rate of implementation of recommendations indicates that even though synod says we take safe church seriously and it is a high priority, there is a significant disconnect in practice in the CRC. These decisions of synod are empty words if on paper but for the most part not happening in practice. This is not acceptable. We can and we must do better!

Appendix B

Brief Explanation of the Patterns of Abuse* Listed in Grounds

The following is a list of common patterns where power can be used to “neutralize” situations.⁽⁵⁾ This list is not even close to complete. Each section is just a brief summary of a pattern, and there are a thousand and more ways to use that pattern. Many of these patterns are very intertwined, giving an indication of how power can be abused in almost limitless ways and how those exposing the deeds of darkness, pursuing due process, can run into considerable resistance in doing so.

* What is abuse? The definition of *abuse*: A pattern of coercive control (ongoing actions or in-actions) that proceeds from a mentality of entitlement to power, whereby, through intimidation, manipulation, and isolation, the abuser keeps their target subordinated and under their control. This pattern can be emotional, verbal, psychological, spiritual, sexual, financial, social, and physical. Not all of these elements need be present—for example, physical abuse may not be part of it (from A Cry for Justice website; <https://cryingoutforjustice.com/how-can-i-identify-an-abuser/>).

1. Secrecy: This includes abusing confidentiality through things such as nondisclosure agreements and executive session meetings, in which participants are enjoined to silence (see Appendix C on Confidentiality: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly). This culture of secrecy also includes back-room dealings, manipulation, etc., going on behind the scenes in a “good old boys club” mentality (Ezek. 8). Lack of transparency, keeping abuse and misconduct in the dark, is the enemy’s way per John 3:19-21.

Ephesians 5:11 calls for exposure of what is hidden in the dark; this is God's way. Confidentiality has been used to rationalize the enemy's way of keeping something in the dark, that God wants dealt with in the light. When there are serious concerns and problems being intentionally hidden, this gives a false perception that all is well. Authoritarian styles of leadership often use secrecy to control that things look good from the outside, and they are more concerned about appearance than doing what is right, especially if it is perceived as a threatening situation to leadership.

2. Silence: There is an unspoken code of silence(6) that often goes hand in hand with various types of abuse in the church. This can be manifested in many ways, including misusing confidentiality, which has already been referred to in the section on secrecy. A response of silence includes when leaders refuse to acknowledge, address, respond to a complaint or situation, or when they stonewall and stall, so that "it" will go away. This often "works" because the person who is bringing the situation to the leaders has already been harmed and often does not have much emotional capacity to also deal with resistance from leadership. Whatever happened already has been painful and hurtful for them, and the response often makes it worse. Victims are often already weak and vulnerable, and running into resistance can be too much for them. They have to protect their emotional stability, and so give up. So "sin works."(8)

Victims who share their story are frequently told (by leaders) that they are "slandering" and/or "gossiping." Sometimes leadership will make those harmed sign a nondisclosure agreement as a way to silence the victims. These can be manipulative types of spiritual abuse.

3. Control: Controlling/authoritarian leaders expect submission and loyalty. This can include narcissistic leaders. These leaders feel very threatened by anyone that might expose them and their unhealthy behavior. Narcissism and the systems it breeds is a huge discussion on its own. However, "threatened systems kill their prophets," so it is very difficult for narcissism to be discussed and exposed.(9)

Controlling, narcissistic leadership can use what is called "the silent treatment." It is probably one of the most common forms of emotional abuse used by narcissists when all the above tactics have been tried and have failed. Narcissists use the silent treatment as a form of punishment for not acquiescing to their point of view or as the way to gain the upper hand and control in their relationships. The "silent treatment" can include something as subtle and seemingly slight as refusing to shake your hand, but shaking everyone else's hands. This sends the message "you do not deserve to even be acknowledged" that no one else can hear. The "silent treatment" is also a way to avoid discussing important issues in the relationship and avoid taking accountability for wrongdoings. The silent treatment is intended to make the victim feel unloved, invalidated, and insignificant. The use of the silent treatment is usually about control.(10)

4. Cover up: It is a sad fact that many leaders in organizations, when faced with the choice of protecting an abusive leader or victim, choose to protect the leader (and thus the institution) rather than the victims of that abuse. All too often, victims report that the failure of the leaders to respond well

to their cries for help cause more harm than the original abuse. That is the exact opposite of what God calls his leaders/people to do.

5. Intimidation/fear/bullying: A quick way for churches to NOT have to deal with abuse victims or culpability is to bully them till they leave. This is another tactic that leaders will use and abuse to various degrees. Victims and their supporters are threatened that they will lose their jobs. They are shunned, bullied, discredited, shamed/humiliated, and attacked. If you question or challenge the leaders, there is backlash and repercussions, including being blocked from serving in leadership positions and being shut down. The leaders make victims give up and quit/drop the charges. The victims (and having to deal with the problem) go away.
6. Abuse (beyond bullying)—especially spiritual, emotional, and verbal abuse: Leaders will twist Scripture to silence victims and shut victims and advocates down. Examples include calling the victims and advocates who are seeking justice divisive, gossips, slanderers, unforgiving, demonic, unwilling to submit to authority, etc. Victims and advocates “get thrown under the bus.” Revilers/abusers are addressed in 1 Corinthians 5; irresponsible and abusive shepherds are addressed in Ezekiel 34.
7. Manipulation: Abuse of power is often very subtle and very difficult to discern and prove for various reasons. Sometimes there are master manipulators orchestrating the various types of tactics to protect those in power, possibly themselves. The manipulation can be subtle, indirect and covert, so it can be very hard to discern and prove, but if the one who abused is now perceived as the victim and the victim is now perceived as being abusive, that is a good indication one may be dealing with a master manipulator.(10)
8. Deception: Leaders can reframe the narratives to be very misleading, distorted, and inaccurate, and can twist the meaning of words, etc., similar to propaganda tactics. When confronted, abusive leaders will call their deception a misunderstanding, deny being deceptive, or play word games for what the leader meant.(11)
9. Cause confusion and chaos: Things do not add up. This includes a lack of clarity, inconsistent behavior, mixed messages, etc. (Ps. 55:21). This is sometimes referred to as “gaslighting” or “crazy making.”
10. Deny, deny, deny: If leaders do acknowledge the complaint, the response is often to outrightly deny it. Once this tactic starts, then the leaders put themselves in a position that will make them look even worse, if it is true, and then have to cover up the cover-up. Again, many victims give up when they run into continued resistance from leadership, when they were hoping that the leaders would be helping them seek justice, protection, restitution, or whatever the case might be. This is what some leaders hope for, whether intentionally or not, that this “problem” will go away. This often leaves those who are hurt stuck in their pain and adds years to the healing process, if not decades.
11. Minimize and dismiss: If they can no longer deny the allegations, this is often the next level that leaders will try to use to make the case go away.

Leaders will try to minimize the seriousness of the situation or the harm done in a multitude of ways, using statements such as “Hey, we all sin”; “We each just need to look at our own sin”; “All sin is the same in God’s eyes”; and other “Nobody’s perfect” types of statements(13).

12. Forgive and move on: Victims can be pressured/forced to forgive before they are ready—and if they don’t, then they are perceived as the perpetrators. Even with forgiveness, it is very difficult for those who are hurt to move on when there is very little to no effort by leaders to restore the sacred trust by doing what is right. Leaders can push “forgiveness” in a spiritually abusive way, with the intent to make the person go away and be quiet instead of dealing with the wrongdoings. It is very helpful to understand that forgiveness does not restore trust in leaders; it only opens the door for leaders to restore that trust. It is the responsibility of the leaders, who *must* restore the trust through their accountability and actions, or the sacred trust will continue to erode.
13. Blame shifting: Shifting the blame to the person harmed is a very common pattern. A common example is to blame a woman for being raped because of what she was wearing or because she was drinking. Another common shift is to blame the person exposing a problem and to make that person the problem, instead of the problem itself.
14. Various distortions: Greater fear of legal liability than fear of the Lord; more concern with violating the Church Order than violating the Word of God; the institution becomes primarily about sustaining itself, so people are serving the institution, instead of the institution serving the people(12); those in the pulpit (dominie/clergy) are treated as more important than those in the pew (laity) allowing a “lording it over” leadership style(26) instead of viewing all as the priesthood of all believers; we distort Jesus when we cover up the horrors of abuse within our churches in order to allegedly “protect the reputation of Jesus.”(23)
15. Technicalities: Technicalities, whether legitimate or not, are sometimes used to avoid doing what is right or to avoid dealing with a difficult issue. Technicalities are sometimes used to dismiss or delay an appeal/overture when leaders do not want to deal with the substance of the issue for various reasons. Technicalities are sometimes used as a reason to dismiss any restitution or response to the situation, allowing the leadership to abdicate or postpone its responsibility. This is harmful and hinders due process and hinders the healing of those already harmed. This is the exact opposite of what God calls leaders to do, and its sadly more in line with pharisaical patterns (2 Cor. 3:6).
16. Empty words: Recommendations and decisions look good on paper but are not practiced. Ephesians 5:6 tells us not to be deceived with empty words. Decisions can be made and approved to address something, so the resolution is on paper, but it never gets implemented, and the trust in leadership continues to erode. The CRC has done this with some of the decisions made in the past dealing with abuse and safe church issues. In a recent hearing, a victim impact statement by Olympic gymnast Aly Raisman included “talk is cheap” and “talk is worthless” without

action(25). Congregations, classes, it is past time to implement the Synods 2010 and 2014 decisions.

Almost all, if not all, of these patterns are used by people with a narcissistic-prone personality, but these patterns of abuse of power are not limited to narcissistic leaders.

Appendix C

Confidentiality: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: How Confidentiality Is Used, Misused, and Abused

First, to be clear, confidentiality is a good thing in the right context. There are times and situations for it. However, far too often in institutions we have sacrificed transparency, integrity, discernment, and bringing things into the light, on the altar of confidentiality. Silence, secrecy, and cover-up have deceptively been called “confidentiality.” This deceptive confidentiality has been used far too often to disregard God’s principle of bringing things into the light. It has been used to keep victims silent, which almost always hinders their healing. It has been used to cover up and hide ungodly behavior that is meant to be publicly rebuked and exposed (1 Tim. 5:20), and it allows the abuse to continue and others to be harmed as well.

Certainly, there are privacy concerns and procedures to follow, and reasons why things are done as they are. But when it comes to sexual misconduct, harassment, and unwanted touch and words inside the church, the price for silence is extraordinary—just ask the Catholics.(C4)

There is an almost universal reluctance to deal with certain problems, especially sexual sins, which make us very uncomfortable. Exposure of sinful behavior can cause serious consequences, and human nature prefers a “safe” environment to disclose our dirty deeds, so we won’t have to face the consequences. This is unhealthy and unbiblical. It hinders the healing that discipline brings to the person committing the misdeed, and it hinders the healing of those who have been harmed by such misdeeds.

A key Scripture that reveals how “confidentiality” can be misused and abused is John 3:19-21:

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Alarm bells should be going off in our head if we are hiding something, if we are afraid of what will happen if people know about our behavior. That is a warning that whatever deed we are doing, we probably should not be doing. That is one of the ways the Spirit is helping lead us out of temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).

Confidentiality is a complex issue, and it takes wisdom and discernment to evaluate this on a case-by-case basis. Strict confidentiality is not possible for Christians who practice counseling in the context of a local church; there are limits to our confidentiality in a church setting.(C2)

The good: Yes, there are a few proverbs that talk about keeping things in confidence. This is appropriate as long as it is in the best interests of protecting the vulnerable, the weak, and the voiceless, and as long as they have a voice in that decision and are not coerced into silence. Counselors, lawyers, pastors, and other professions have an expected ethic of keeping things in confidence that have been shared with them. The breaking of confidence can destroy trust. But whether confidentiality should be kept or not depends on whether it is in the best interests of those harmed and of those who have the least power.

The CRC ordination liturgies stress that our leaders “hold in trust those matters confided to them in counsel and confession,” “guiding and counseling in strictest confidence,” “keeping in confidence those matters entrusted to them,” and “hold in trust all sensitive matters confided” to them—over and over and over, confidentiality is emphasized.(C3) That is a good thing in many situations, but in some situations it is not.

The bad: The bad involves misuse of power that is not intentional and can be out of ignorance or negligence. Silence and secrecy labeled as “confidentiality” ironically can destroy the sacred trust that is given to leaders, as the leaders misuse and abuse confidentiality. In some instances, confidentiality has been used at a cost to those who have been harmed and misused at an incalculable cost to the *ekklesia*, to the bride of Christ. As one CRC leader stated, “Confidentiality is killing us.” Another spiritual leader recently wrote regarding the church’s lack of response to the #metoo movement: “Listen, the silence [of the church] is really loud.” So it is time to tear down this often subtle and invisible wall of silence and secrecy that is being used in ungodly ways to protect those in power at the cost of those harmed. This wall has been used to allow offenders not to be held accountable and instead insulates them from the consequences (Prov. 17:15), which sends the message that they and others can commit ungodly conduct and get away with it(C1; p. 126). Others come to believe that they too can engage in ungodly conduct without immediate consequences(C1; p. 128). When churches refuse to hold offenders accountable, they are standing not only against the oppressed and defenseless but also against God(C1; p. 187). Sin that is not confessed and dealt with will always grow worse and worse(C1; p. 125). Sadly, the *ekklesia* is paying the price by the eroding and destruction of the sacred trust when abuse gets covered up.

“Confidentiality” can stunt the growth of the *ekklesia*, the priesthood of all believers, when the rationale is used that the people should not know about something because they might gossip about it. This indicates that the leaders have not helped to teach and equip the *ekklesia* on how to process such information in a mature and responsible way. Treating the *ekklesia* like children stunts the growth and maturity of the bride of Christ. It sounds like a good reason, but it is actually unhealthy. The church needs to take the next steps and train and equip people for how to use wisdom and discernment with the knowledge one has(C7; *Spiritual Abuse Recovery*, Barbara Orłowski; p. 113, footnote 168).

Following is an example of when “gossip” was used as an excuse to silence parents, resulting in decades of suffering for the children who were abused:

I often give the example of an investigation we were involved with a number of years ago where a missionary doctor had been sexually victimizing a number of the missionary children. When one of his victims came forward and disclosed the abuse, the leaders of the mission field brought the other families together and informed them that this doctor had admitted to sexually abusing a child and had been sent home. Unfortunately, the mission leaders also proceeded to tell the families, "We're going to take care of this; we're handling it, and any discussion of the matter will be considered gossip." Most of the parents heeded that directive, and as a result never asked their own children whether they had been abused by this man. Tragically, a handful of the . . . children had been, but it wasn't until 15-20 years later that this information surfaced. The children, who by then were young adults, could not understand, in all of their grief, in all of their trauma, why mom and dad had never asked them about it, had never broached the topic with them. They could have had twenty years of counseling behind them, and a lot of trauma and self-medication could have been avoided had the parents made the inquiry, but because they were following this ridiculous directive not to gossip, they never did. And that wounded the lives of many young people. (<http://www.claireroise.com/2017/05/02/interview-with-boz-part-one/>)

Nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) are often part of an agreement between parties in conflict that each party will agree to not discuss whatever happened. There are times and situations where this might be appropriate, but NDAs tend to be overused. NDAs can be very unhealthy for the one harmed, as not being free to talk about what happened hinders their healing, and the anger and bitterness take longer to resolve, and that hinders other people's healing. Sharing and processing whatever happened is a key part of the healing journey. When the victim is silenced, the healing takes much longer. Silence empowers the abusers. Speaking empowers those who have been harmed. Giving opportunities for those who have been harmed to share their story brings healing, opens doors for justice, and empowers others to share their stories. The church needs to recognize it is to the advantage of those in power to silence these stories, and it is to the advantage of those harmed that these stories are shared. Who are we called to serve? The task of a leader is to show how grace seeks out the lost soul, reawakens the spiritually demoralized, and encourages spiritual growth (C7; *Spiritual Abuse Recovery*, Barbara Orłowski; p. 56, footnote 159).

The ugly: The ugly is abuse of power that is intentional to benefit and/or protect those in power at the expense of others. Abusers thrive on secrecy and silence—it is the tool of the enemy. Secrecy and silence hide the corruption going on in the "old boys club" powers that be. The weak and vulnerable often pay the consequences. Protecting the offender while silencing the victim is injustice under the guise of mercy. The conspiracy of silence in the church may be an invitation for narcissistic leaders to be emboldened to continue their abusive practices (C7; *Spiritual Abuse Recovery*, Barbara Orłowski; p. 29, footnote 28).

"Woe to those who . . . rob the needy of justice and . . . take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless" (Isa. 10:1-2, NKJV).

There are unspoken rules in our society and churches. One such rule is the "do not talk about it" rule, also known as the "code of silence." There is a reason *Time* magazine on December 6, 2017, named "the Silence Breakers"

as the persons of the year for 2017. *Time* recognized how silence has been protecting those who abuse their power at the expense of those harmed.(3)

Good people never pretend to be evil, but evil people pretend to be good(C1; p. 59). There are master manipulators (<https://exploringyourmind.com/7-ways-identify-master-manipulator/>).

The following are some of the ways abuses have been kept secret, and these tactics can be very similar to those mentioned under "The bad."

Nondisclosure agreements: Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees. God is outraged by those who "make decrees" in order to rob the needy of justice. Unrighteous decrees include written policies and procedures, confidentiality agreements and nondisclosure agreements that silence the voices of those harmed and their families to keep things secret, protecting the reputation of those in power(C1; p. 162). Silence seriously hinders the healing of those harmed. Many people have unresolved trauma for decades due to being silenced. Mitch Garabedian, attorney for more than 80 abuse victims of the Catholic church, encouraged his clients to refuse to sign NDAs (Mitchell Garabedian; attorney; Boston; http://www.snapnetwork.org/mitchell_garabedian_interview_with_here_now).

Executive and strict executive sessions: this effectively silences any discussion of the situations. In some situations, it can be used as a gag order and to protect the institution from liability. Again, secrecy is the result, protecting the perpetrator. This is in direct opposition to the Word of God, which says leaders are to be rebuked in public for ungodly conduct, before all as a warning to others (1 Tim. 5:20). Executive sessions do not qualify as public in any way, shape, or form. It seems there is a greater fear of litigation than a fear of the Lord.

Forced forgiveness: the intent can be to get the situation behind the leaders as quickly as possible with minimal damage to the leaders and institution, not what is best for the victim. The leaders are sending the message "You don't matter, your pain doesn't matter, and the injustice doesn't matter. We just want our life and ministry to be undisturbed"(C1; p. 119). The message is "The leader is more important than the victim." Then, once the victim forgives, leaders tell them they cannot talk about the situation anymore, because if they do, that will show they did not really forgive that person. Again, this type of response does not help with healing, as it is spiritual abuse and can add to the harm.

Do not gossip: Talking about abuse is often called gossip. It is not! Gossip is idle chatter. Abuse is not an idle matter. It is a very serious matter, and awareness and education regarding abuse and ungodly conduct need to increase. Ignorance is not acceptable. We need to give people permission to talk about it instead of accusing them of gossiping, as sharing their story is part of the healing journey. When abuse can't be talked about, people feel isolated and alone, instead of connecting with others who have gone through similar experiences. "If a leader can control someone by saying that if they speak about a situation, they're gossiping and that's sinful, well . . . that works with many people. . . . *Oftentimes, the gossip threat is just another way of church leadership silencing people so they can handle it in their own way. It's really all about control*" (emphasis added; Boz Tchividjian – professor of law, founder of GRACE [Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment], <http://www.claireroise.com/2017/05/02/interview-with-boz-part-one/>)

These are some ways Scripture is twisted as scriptural concepts such as confidentiality are distorted and used to silence the victims and empower the abusers. This is the exact opposite of what God calls the church to do. This is spiritual abuse!

Victims cannot heal in silence. An untold story never heals. Let's work toward encouraging open and honest dialog, dignifying victims by listening to their stories.(9)

Anyone, especially believers, who is aware of something being covered up that allows abuse to continue and others to be harmed, has a responsibility to speak up and not stay silent, no matter what they signed or agreed to.

Churches must say "No" to conspiracies of silence!

Resources:

- 1) *Tear Down This Wall of Silence: Dealing with Sexual Abuse in Our Churches (an introduction for those who will hear)*, Dale Ingraham, Rebecca Davis (Ambassador International, Apr. 3, 2015)
- 2) <https://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2012/06/12/strict-confidentiality/>
- 3) *1987 Psalter Hymnal*, CRC; liturgical forms, pp. 996, 1004-1005
- 4) <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/>;
<http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers-choice/>
- 5) <http://pres-outlook.org/2017/12/metoo-silence-church/>
- 6) <http://www.geftakysassembly.com/Articles/AssemblyTeachingPractice/CodeOfSilence.htm>
- 7) *Spiritual Abuse Recovery: Dynamic Research on Finding a Place of Wholeness*, Barbara M. Orlowski (Wipk & Stock, 2010)
- 8) <https://theestablishment.co/how-abusers-rely-on-shame-to-keep-victims-down-87f2d8b9f57d>
- 9) <http://www.marydemuth.com/when-rapists-win/>

Appendix D

Victims Support Fund (see *Agenda for Synod 2010*, AVTF, II, C and III, G)

There are many options here. This appendix lists just a few. The hope is that the Safe Church Ministry can increase its funding/resources so that the synodical decisions can be adequately implemented in 100 percent of the congregations and classes and help facilitate a Victims Support Fund (VSF) at the congregational and classical levels.

Some suggestions follow:

Encourage CRC congregations to take a special offering once a year on Safe Church Sunday. Sharing \$5-\$10/member to benefit Safe Church Ministry with additional resources would help bear one another's burdens and assist with the cost of counseling and other costs for people who have been harmed in the CRC due to various abuses on a case-by-case basis. This sharing of counseling and other related costs on behalf of other believers would be based on the New Testament principles of sharing needs in the family of God. When the body of Christ comes together to pray, encourage, and provide for one another, burdens are lifted and God is glorified (Samaritan Ministries).

Create/organize a voluntary board to help oversee the VSF. This board could include members who have experienced harm either directly or indirectly due to abuse in the CRC (this would be helpful in their healing to be a part of the solution), along with counselors, safe church reps, etc. This board would not be just for financial provision but also for prayer and encouragement for those who have been harmed, and for support and encouragement for the safe church teams at the local and classical levels along with the CRC Safe Church Ministry staff, recognizing they qualify as some of the *TIME* people of the year for 2017!

Each request can be assessed, processed, and extended on a case-by-case basis as appropriate, by the local safe church team and/or the classis level of safe church or the voluntary board that was created specifically for this fund. For example, the VSF could use a portion of the funds to cover counseling for up to one year, up to \$5,000 to start with, where there has been abuse by someone who is/was in the CRC.

In especially difficult situations, the classis level VSF could use a portion of the funds to help people like Wesley Heersink who had very serious needs, far above and beyond counseling.

These funds can be used to help someone process an appeal and retain an advocate. Otherwise the appeal process can be a financial burden. The victims can experience loss of work time, along with the emotional and spiritual burden the process already adds. Appeals are often not an option because of the financial strain they can add to an already difficult and painful situation.

These funds can be reevaluated annually, depending on how long the gifts last.

A portion of the offering/fund can be used to augment the CRC Safe Church Ministry so that it is adequately resourced to carry out the recommendations adopted by synod and achieve 100 percent participation at the classical and congregational levels.

Appendix E

Past Recommendations Adopted by Synod

I. Recommendations adopted by Synod 2010 from the Abuse Victims Task Force Report

(Each of these had grounds included in the report; see *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 862-66.)

1. That synod urge councils to provide for the pastoral care needs of the claimant, the accused, families, and congregation when an allegation of sexual abuse against a church leader is brought forward.
2. That synod urge councils, when an allegation of sexual abuse against a church leader is brought forward, to immediately appoint a person or small group of persons, accountable to the elders, who will ensure that the pastoral care needs of the claimant, the accused, families, and congregation are addressed; when circumstances make it extremely difficult to address the pastoral care needs of any of those involved using pastoral resources of the congregation, that the council arrange for pastoral care through a neighboring congregation or other caregivers.

3. That synod reaffirm the decision of Synod 2005 in its support for restorative justice principles and their application in the way that churches respond to abuse issues, recognizing that it will not be appropriate in all cases.
4. That synod encourage churches and agencies to take steps to increase awareness and understanding of restorative justice teachings and their relevance for life within the church, among both pastors and church members.
5. That synod, to begin implementation, allow for pilot projects in the use of restorative justice practices in response to specific situations of abuse by church leaders, provided that recognized restorative justice facilitators are available and participation is genuinely voluntary. Pilot projects and evaluations of them will be coordinated by the Safe Church Ministry to share the learning for application to other cases.
6. That synod encourage councils to develop a plan for providing financial assistance for abuse-related counseling, if and when it is needed, as a diaconal response to a person in need, as early as possible and without judgment regarding any future claims. Options for consideration are a classis counseling fund, an arrangement with a local counseling or mental health agency, or other appropriate means.
7. That synod advise councils to annually review their policies for abuse prevention and liability coverage.
8. That synod encourage councils to use a restorative justice framework in decisions regarding restitution following sustained sexual abuse allegations against a church leader.
9. That synod strongly encourage councils to participate in yearly training on topics such as effective abuse prevention, the complexities of abuse situations, the denominational abuse response guidelines, and comprehensive healing for everyone affected by the situation.
10. That synod direct the BOT to instruct the executive director to develop additional educational resources on abuse prevention and church leader misconduct that are easy to understand and readily accessible for church members in general (e.g. brochures for church information centers, and specific resources on the dynamics of abuse by church leaders for church council members).
11. That synod direct the BOT to instruct the executive director to develop a handbook, as soon as possible, that clearly describes the roles and responsibilities of church council members when an allegation of sexual abuse by a church leader arises, for distribution to church council members as soon as it becomes available and to every new council member when each begins office as well as when a case arises, and for easy reference throughout the process.
12. That synod adopt the revised "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader" as indicated in Appendix A.
13. That synod direct the Board of Trustees to take the necessary steps to ensure that adequate resources are available to implement the recommendations in this report (emphasis added).
14. That synod dismiss the Abuse Victims Task Force with thanks.

Also:

That synod make the following declaration of confession in response to Communication 1:

We, the Christian Reformed Church, confess that we have not always justly and compassionately helped those who have been sexually abused. Furthermore,

we confess that we have not always justly or adequately disciplined church leaders who have been abusers. We humbly ask forgiveness from those we have failed. We thank God for the progress we have made, and we commit with God's help to do better in the future."

Note: The above declaration was read in the form of a prayer by the delegates to synod.

(*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 866-67)

II. Recommendations adopted by Synod 2014

(See *Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 559-60.)

- a. That synod commend the work of the Office of Safe Church Ministry as it seeks to educate, encourage, and lead churches in implementing and maintaining policies approved by previous synods.
- b. That synod again remind all churches in the denomination of the critical importance of documenting, developing, and implementing a safe church policy and remind all classes in the denomination of the vital importance of a safe church team. There are many resources available from the Office of Safe Church Ministry and on its website. The director informs us that only 22 of the 46 classes have formed safe church teams. A safe church team is an important part of the pastoral care that the church offers to its members. Awareness and prevention, if given high priority, can minimize the risk of abuse and the damage it causes.
- c. That synod instruct the executive director to work with staff teams, such as the Better Together team, to explore ways of developing and promoting safe church teams in each classis.
- d. That synod take note of the following five goals that continue to guide the work of Safe Church Ministry:
 - 1) Each church has implemented a written Safe Church/abuse prevention policy.
 - 2) Each church includes abuse prevention in its church school and youth education. Programs such as Circle of Grace, which teach positive respect in relationships, are recommended.
 - 3) Each church has protocols in place for responding to misconduct and is aware of the recommended "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations against a Church Leader" approved by Synod 2010.
 - 4) Abuse is acknowledged as an important issue and can be freely discussed.
 - 5) **Leadership at all levels is supportive of Safe Church Ministry, and each church is represented on a classis Safe Church team** (emphasis added).

Appendix F

References and Resources

- 1) <https://ruthkrall.com/downloadable-books/elephants-in-gods-living-room-volume-one/>; chapter 12 - Clericalism
- 2) *Forgiving the Church*, Judy De Wit (IUniverse, 2011), pp. 32-44; *Understanding Abusive Church Leadership*, Judy R. De Wit (IUniverse, Inc., 2012)
- 3) *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, John Thoburn, Ph.D., Rob Baker, M.A. (Gentle Path Press, 2011), p. 72

- 4) <http://religionnews.com/2015/12/07/spotlight-its-not-just-a-catholic-problem/>; Boz Tchividjian
- 5) *In the Name of All That's Holy*, Anson Shupe (Praeger Publishers, 1995), pp. 79-100
- 6) *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, David Johnson, Jeff Van Vonderen (Bethany House, 1991), p. 68
- 7) <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/abuse-boz-tchividjian>
- 8) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2015/march-online-only/when-sin-works.html>; Chris Nye
- 9) "Narcissism and the System It Breeds," Dr. Diane Langberg, 2016; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BU3pwBa0qU>
- 10) <https://freefromtoxic.com/2015/06/16/the-8-most-common-narc-sadistic-conversation-control-tactics/>; Bree Bonchay LCSW
- 11) <http://religionnews.com/2015/05/15/a-grand-deception-the-successful-response-of-sex-offenders/>; Boz Tchividjian
- 12) <http://religionnews.com/2015/08/28/false-narratives-of-christian-leaders-caught-in-abuse/>; Boz Tchividjian
- 13) "Order more Millstones," 9.7.17; <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/blog/marie-fortune/256>
- 14) Church Refugees, Josh Packard, Ph.D., Ashleigh Hope (Group, 2015), p. 61
- 15) Spiritual refugee definition: a refugee is someone that leaves their home/country, not because they want to but because it is no longer safe for them there. A spiritual refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their church in order to escape oppression, manipulation, or abuse. It is spiritually dangerous for them to stay. (<https://nakedpastor.com/2014/12/do-you-identify-as-a-spiritual-refugee/>)
- 16) *Breaking the Silence within the Church*, Judy R. De Wit (Iuniverse, 2010), p. 46
- 17) <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/14/564158465/after-sexual-harassment-accusations-congress-moves-toward-mandatory-training>
- 18) *Seven Snares of the Enemy*, Erwin W. Lutzer (Moody Publishers, 2001), pp. 79-95; <https://blog.perspectivesjournal.org/2017/12/16/we-need-to-talk-about-sex/>, Chuck Degroat
- 19) https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ellie-hamalian/how-pornography-fuels-exp_b_6187936.html
- 20) *Tear Down This Wall of Silence: Dealing with Sexual Abuse in Our Churches* (an introduction for those who will hear), Dale Ingraham, Rebecca Davis (Ambassador International, April 3, 2015)
- 21) https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/safechurch_taskforce.pdf
- 22) <https://www.thebanner.org/news/2011/01/report-calls-for-better-response-when-leaders-abuse>
- 23) <http://religionnews.com/2017/12/19/winter-inside-the-church-and-the-hope-of-christmas/>
- 24) <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/constituents/HEN17B45.pdf>
- 25) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWWFB6RZwgg&feature=youtu.be> (Aly Raisman, Jan. 2018)
- 26) <http://caryschmidt.com/2015/02/the-dangers-of-lording-leadership/#!prettyPhoto>

27) crcna.org/sites/default/files/Safe%20Church%20Ministry%E2%80%9494A%20Church%20Leader%20Role.pdf

Suggested websites/authors for additional resources:

crcna.org/SafeChurch/safe-church-teams

Boz Tjividian (GRACE/Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environment)

Diane Langberg (Global Trauma Recovery)

Judy De Wit (New Beginnings Counseling)

Scripture Passages That Address Justice

It is not right to acquit the guilty or deny justice to the innocent. —Proverbs 18:5, NLT

Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – both are detestable to the LORD. —Proverbs 17:15, NLT

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice. —Proverbs 31:8-9, NLT

Put a mark on the foreheads of all who weep and sigh because of the detestable sins being committed in their city. . . . The city is filled with injustice. —Ezekiel 9:4, 9, NLT

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign LORD (the LORD of Hosts): What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? You who drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty. So My sheep have been scattered. . . . And though you were My shepherds, you didn't search for My sheep when they were lost. You took care of yourselves and left the sheep to starve . . . for you fat sheep pushed and butted and crowded My sick and hungry flock, until you scattered them to distant lands. —Ezekiel 34:2-5, 8, 21, NLT

"For they have treated the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' When there is no peace. —Jeremiah 8:11, AMP

After Jesus clears the temple in Jerusalem, driving all the dealers out with a whip (John 2:13-16), then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures (Ps. 69:9): "Passion for God's house has consumed me." —John 2:17, NLT

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. . . . Beware lest anyone cheat you through (hollow) philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. —Colossians 2:4, 8, NKJV

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it must be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant. . . . For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. —Matthew 20:25-26, 28, NLT

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. —2 Corinthians 3:6, NIV

Overture 3: Approve Transfer of Stephenville (Texas) CRC from Classis Central Plains to Classis Rocky Mountain

With gratitude to God for the time it has spent in ministry with Stephenville (Tex.) CRC, Classis Central Plains overtures Synod 2018 to approve the transfer of Stephenville (Tex.) CRC from Classis Central Plains to Classis Rocky Mountain.

Grounds:

1. In past years, there were other CRCs which ministered in Texas and were members of Classis Central Plains. These churches have either disbanded or transferred to a different classis. This has left Stephenville CRC as the only church in Texas that is a member of Classis Central Plains.
2. Even though Classis Rocky Mountain meets in Colorado, there are several other CRCs in that classis located in Texas. The nearest CRC is in Austin, Texas—less than a three-hours drive from Stephenville. A transfer to Classis Rocky Mountain would allow Stephenville CRC greater classis involvement and greater awareness and support for its neighboring Texas churches.
3. The transfer would help Stephenville CRC foster greater collaboration when planning special ministry events or mission opportunities.
4. Sharing the same classis with the other Texas churches would help promote greater ministerial fellowship, in which challenges and opportunities unique to Texas could be more openly and readily discussed.
5. Travel from Dallas, Texas, to Des Moines, Iowa, at this time is fairly limited and makes travel to Classis Central Plains meetings extremely inconvenient. Travel options to Denver, Colorado, are far more plentiful and would provide an added relief in flexibility for delegates to classis.

Classis Central Plains
Rod Spoelstra, alternate stated clerk

Overture 4: Permit Transfer of Stephenville (Texas) CRC from Classis Central Plains to Classis Rocky Mountain

With a deep desire to follow God's leading and profound thanks in our hearts to Classis Central Plains, Classis Rocky Mountain of the CRCNA overtures Synod 2018 to permit the transfer of Stephenville (Tex.) CRC, from Classis Central Plains to Classis Rocky Mountain.

Grounds:

1. In past years there were other CRCs that ministered in Texas and were part of Classis Central Plains. Those churches have either disbanded or

transferred to another classis. As a result, Stephenville CRC is now the only church in Texas that is a member of Classis Central Plains.

2. While Classis Rocky Mountain meets in Colorado, there are several other member congregations in our classis that are located in Texas. The nearest CRC is in Austin, less than a three-hour drive from Stephenville. A transfer to Classis Rocky Mountain would allow Stephenville CRC greater classis involvement and greater awareness and support for neighboring Texas churches.
3. Transferring to Classis Rocky Mountain would help Stephenville CRC foster greater collaboration when planning special ministry events or mission opportunities.
4. Sharing the same classis with other Texas churches would help promote greater ministerial fellowship, in which challenges and opportunities unique to Texan culture could be more openly and readily discussed.
5. Travel from Dallas, Texas, to Des Moines, Iowa, at this time is fairly limited, making travel to Classis Central Plains meetings rather inconvenient. Travel options to Denver, Colorado, are far more plentiful and would provide an added relief in flexibility for Stephenville CRC delegates to classis.

Classis Rocky Mountain
Mark W. Hilbelink, stated clerk

Overture 5: Permit Transfer of Hope Community CRC, Indianapolis, Indiana, from Classis Illiana to Classis Kalamazoo

I. Introduction and history

For over fifty years, Hope Community CRC in Indianapolis, Indiana, has been an active part of Classis Illiana, in which it was founded. Throughout most of the congregation's history, however, because of their location and lack of proximity to other CRC congregations, they have been on the fringe of classis. As a result, their role in serving with the classis on committees and to denominational bodies has been minimal. For almost twenty years Hope Community has also been served by strong, competent women elders, deacons, and pastors, additionally limiting their participation due to the Classis Illiana Rules of Procedure.

This past year several churches in Classis Illiana petitioned the classis to change its Rules of Procedure by removing the word *male* in describing classis delegates. This would have allowed classis to seat women elders and pastors and would have given Hope Community the opportunity to present a full delegation. When the vote was taken, the motion received more than a simple majority of votes but less than the two-thirds vote required for a change in the Rules of Procedure for Classis Illiana.

After the meeting, Hope Community expressed its intent to the clerk and president of classis to transfer to a different classis because they did not feel they could be effective and useful within Classis Illiana.

II. Overture

Classis Illiana overtures Synod 2018 to permit the transfer of Hope Community CRC, Indianapolis, Indiana, from Classis Illiana to Classis Kalamazoo.

Grounds:

1. Currently Hope Community is not connected in either representation or involvement with the churches in Classis Illiana.
2. The Rules of Procedure for Classis Illiana do not allow women to be seated as delegates at the present time.
3. Classis Illiana is a cluster primarily made up of churches in the south-eastern Chicago area, and most of the people serving on classical and denominational committees come from those churches.
4. Classis Kalamazoo is much more of a regional classis in which one-third of its churches drive more than an hour to meetings.
5. Classis Kalamazoo demographically has more small-membership congregations, which more closely reflect the makeup of Hope Community.
6. Precedence would have Hope Community join the Indiana congregations of Ft. Wayne and Goshen CRC and outlying congregations from Three Rivers, Paw Paw, Martin, Battle Creek, and Plainwell, Michigan, making up one-third of the classis.
7. Classis Illiana approved the request of Hope Community CRC to transfer classis membership at its March 6, 2018, meeting, and Classis Kalamazoo approved the same at its March 13, 2018, meeting.

Classis Illiana

Laryn G. Zoerhof, stated clerk

Overture 6: Allow Transfer of Hope Community CRC, Indianapolis, Indiana, from Classis Illiana to Classis Kalamazoo

I. Introduction and history

For over fifty years, Hope Community CRC of Indianapolis, Indiana, has been an active part of Classis Illiana, in which it was founded. Throughout most of Hope Community's history, because of their location and lack of proximity to other CRC congregations, they have been on the fringe of classis. This has meant that their role in serving with the classis on committees and to denominational bodies has been minimal. For nearly twenty years, Hope Community also has been served by strong, competent women elders, deacons, and pastors, and this has additionally limited their participation due to the Classis Illiana Rules of Procedure.

This past year several churches in Classis Illiana petitioned the classis to change its Rules of Procedure by removing the word *male* in describing classis delegates. This would have allowed classis to seat women elders and pastors and would have given Hope Community the opportunity to present a full delegation. When the vote was taken, the motion received more than a majority of votes but less than the two-thirds majority required for a change in the Rules of Procedure for Classis Illiana.

After the meeting, Hope Community expressed its intent to the clerk and president of classis to transfer to a different classis because they did not feel they could be effective and useful within Classis Illiana.

II. Overture

Classis Kalamazoo overtures Synod 2018 to permit the transfer of Hope Community CRC, Indianapolis, Indiana, from membership in Classis Illiana to Classis Kalamazoo.

Grounds:

1. Currently Hope Community is not connected in either representation or involvement with the churches of Classis Illiana.
2. The Rules of Procedure for Classis Illiana do not allow women to be seated as delegates at the present time.
3. Classis Illiana is a cluster classis made up primarily of churches in the southeastern Chicago area, and most of the people serving on classical and denominational committees come from those churches.
4. Classis Kalamazoo is much more of a regional classis in which one-third of its churches drive more than an hour to meetings.
5. Classis Kalamazoo demographically has more small-membership congregations, which more closely reflect the composition of Hope Community CRC.
6. Precedence would have Hope Community join the Indiana congregations of Fort Wayne CRC and Goshen CRC and outlying congregations from Three Rivers, Paw Paw, Martin, Battle Creek, and Plainwell, Michigan, making up a full third of Classis Kalamazoo.
7. Classis Illiana approved the request of Hope Community CRC to transfer classis membership at its March 6, 2018, meeting, and Classis Kalamazoo approved the same at its March 13, 2018, meeting.

Classis Kalamazoo

Jacob C. Weeda, stated clerk

Overture 7: Permit the Transfer of Peace CRC, Menno, South Dakota, from Classis Iakota to Classis Minnkota

I. Background

At its meeting on September 15, 2015, Classis Iakota approved an overture to allow the seating of women as delegates at the Classis Iakota assemblies. This changed their position which had stood from the time before the CRC denomination had opened all church offices and the classis assemblies to women. In 1991 Classis Iakota even sent a protest to the decision by Synod 1990 that allowed for women to become officebearers in the CRC.

Following this change Peace CRC sent an overture to Classis Iakota for its March 1, 2016, meeting, requesting that the September 15, 2015, decision to seat women delegates be overturned. Along with Peace, both Calvin CRC of Rock Valley, Iowa, and First CRC of Rock Valley also submitted overtures for that meeting, requesting that Classis Iakota return to its original position. After some discussion Peace's overture was voted down, and then the classis chairman removed the other two overtures from consideration.

Over the two years since that decision was made by classis, the elders and council of Peace CRC have struggled to discern what the best response to the change Classis Iakota made should be. Peace does not want to have any of its officebearers forced to compromise their consciences and convictions by attending Classis Iakota assemblies. Peace voiced its objection by protesting the seating of women delegates at the beginning of each classis meeting, but that does not change that this still requires their delegates to set aside their convictions in order to attend. Rather than continuing down this path, Peace considered what the options were. Following a congregational meeting to discuss this topic and to get input from our members, the council of Peace CRC, Menno, South Dakota, voted to pursue a transfer to Classis Minnkota.

This is not a statement against women but a desire on Peace's part to be faithful to their understanding of Scripture.

II. Overture

The council of Peace Christian Reformed Church, Menno, South Dakota, overtures Synod 2018 to permit the transfer of Peace CRC from Classis Iakota to Classis Minnkota.

Grounds:

1. Peace CRC cannot in good conscience remain in a classis that allows the ordination of women to the offices of minister and elder and seats them at the shared assembly.
2. Peace CRC wishes to join a classis in which it can serve in harmony as opposed to serving in protest. Synod provides such allowance (see Church Order Art. 39 and its Supplement).
3. Synod 2007 permitted the churches to seek out like-minded classes with which to participate and has set precedent to do so (e.g., Mt. Pleasant CRC, Mich., 1997; Pine Creek CRC, Holland, Mich., 1997; South Bend CRC, Ind., 1999; First CRC, Prinsburg, Minn., 2007; Alto CRC, Waupun, Wisc., 2017).
4. Synod has declared that churches and delegates to classis should not be forced to participate against their convictions (see Church Order Art. 3, and Supplement, Art. 3-a, 1, b and c, 3, and 5).
5. Peace CRC has been in contact with Classis Minnkota regarding its desire to join them. Peace CRC received a positive response from Classis Minnkota at its meeting on March 1, 2018.
6. We think that the seating of women as delegates forces delegates who disagree with the seating of women delegates to compromise their own scriptural convictions if they are to participate within Classis Iakota assemblies (see Gen. 2:16-25; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:10-14; 3:1-13; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 3:1-8).
7. Classis Minnkota churches are not much further away than many of the Classis Iakota churches. Culturally most of the Minnkota churches are in small-town or rural settings, as is Peace CRC.

Council of Peace CRC, Menno, South Dakota
Ralph Schnabel, clerk

Note: This overture was presented to Classis Iakota at its meeting on March 13, 2018, but was not adopted.

Overture 8: Approve Transfer of Membership of Peace CRC, Menno, South Dakota, from Classis Iakota to Classis Minnkota

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2018 to approve the transfer of Peace Christian Reformed Church in Menno, South Dakota, from Classis Iakota to Classis Minnkota.

Grounds:

1. Peace Christian Reformed Church has requested this transfer.
2. Classis Minnkota has considered the reasons for which Peace CRC desires a transfer and finds these reasons to be acceptable.
3. Classis Minnkota would welcome Peace CRC into its classical fellowship.
4. In recent years Classis Minnkota has welcomed other churches that for reasons of conscience have been unable to remain in the classes of which they historically have been a part.

Classis Minnkota

LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 9: Allow One Classis to Appeal to Another Classis by Amending Supplement, Article 30-a

I. Background

A. The general authority of broader assemblies

The Christian Reformed Church in North America has, in its history, struggled with the relationship between minor and broader assemblies. What, if any, authority do the broader assemblies such as the synod or the classis have in relation to the minor assemblies (local church councils)? The church government of the CRCNA has adopted ideas from both congregational and hierarchical models. The foundation for understanding these principles is found in Church Order Article 27.

Article 27-a makes clear that “each assembly exercises, in keeping its own character and domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ; the authority of councils being original, that of major assemblies being delegated.” This article has the underpinnings of a congregational model by correcting against a top-down hierarchy: local councils hold original authority, while major assemblies hold delegated authority. In his *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (2010), Henry DeMoor states that “the result is not without some inconsistency, especially so if the word ‘delegated’ comes to mean ‘derived’” (p. 151).

At the same time, Church Order Article 27-b grants some sense of authority to the broader assemblies: “The classis has the same authority over the council as the synod has over the classis.” According to DeMoor, “broader assemblies have an ‘accumulated authority,’ a ministering authority of all the ordained leaders in the CRCNA that is extended to them by Christ, who, when he distributes it, remains the only universal bishop of the church” (*Church Order Commentary*, p. 154).

Because of this hybrid system, the authority to practice mutual accountability can take place both locally and in the broader assemblies. An office-bearer's ministering authority to shepherd and, when needed, to correct does not cease when participating in these assemblies (Matt. 18:15-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3; Heb. 12:15; 13:17; Belgic Confession, Art. 30). In the past, broader assemblies have acted with authority toward the minor assemblies when weighty matters of doctrine and life have required it (see *Acts of Synod 1926*, pp. 141-43; *Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 55; DeMoor, *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, pp. 150-52).

B. The specific use of the appeal process in Church Order Article 30

In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul uses the word *appeal* to strongly urge and exhort the Corinthian church to agree with one another in unity. Though he wasn't physically present with them, he could appeal to them by way of letter to be united in the name of Christ when a gospel issue was at stake. Such appeals continue among churches and their leaders to this day.

Another use of the word *appeal* has a more technical sense. Churches can appeal to one another in this sense by following the process of Church Order Article 30-a and its supplementary rules. This avenue allows assemblies and church members to "appeal to the assembly next in order if they believe that injustice has been done or that a decision conflicts with the Word of God or the Church Order." By filing an appeal, an individual or assembly is asking a broader assembly (classis or synod) to reexamine a decision made. This is done in attempts to peaceably resolve differences, decide whether or not the decision made was in error, and provide an avenue for interchurch accountability (see DeMoor, *Church Order Commentary*, p. 153).

Classis overtures synod to assert that making an appeal to an "assembly next in order" includes the ability for one classis to officially appeal to another. The Church Order clearly states that appeals may originate either from a church member or an assembly, yet there is no language that prohibits appeals from being made from one assembly to another. Appeals from other classes can help mediate by bringing fresh eyes to an internal dispute in a classis that might otherwise be reluctant to act. This type of appeal will help us to live as members of the body of Christ, especially since the rise of the Internet has helped to break down geographical barriers.

One historical example of this occurred in 1988; synod upheld an appeal first made from one classis to another when a consistory was accused of violating the Church Order (Appeal 2, *Agenda for Synod 1988*, pp. 382-84; *Acts of Synod 1988*, pp. 542-43).

II. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2018 to amend the Supplement to Article 30-a, section C, General Rules by adding a new point 5 (indicated by *italics*):

C. General Rules

1. Filing an appeal. An appeal must be in writing and filed with the stated clerk or executive director of the assembly appealed to. A copy shall be promptly given to the clerk of the assembly whose action is being appealed and to any other party to the appeal.

2. Form of Appeal. No specific form is prescribed. However, an appeal should contain at least the following elements:
 - a. The name of the appellant.
 - b. The name of the body against which the appeal is being made.
 - c. The decision which is being appealed.
 - d. The reasons why the appealed decision is believed to be wrong.
 - e. Background information which will enable the assembly to make a proper decision.
 - f. A statement defining clearly what action the appellant desires the assembly to take.
3. Respondent's Submission. The respondent shall be entitled to submit a response to the appeal. Such submission shall be made to the clerk of the assembly appealed to within sixty (60) days from the date the respondent has received a copy of the appeal. A copy of such submission shall be promptly given to the appellant.
4. In any appearance before an assembly or a committee of an assembly, the appellant and the respondent shall have the right to be represented or counseled by a member of the church.
5. *Official appeals may be made from one classis to another and, if necessary, to synod.*

Grounds:

1. Our form of church government grants ecclesiastical authority to the broader assemblies (Church Order, Art. 27-b), since all officebearers are called to preserve true religion through spiritual correction no matter where they exercise that office (Heb. 12:15; Matt. 18:15-17; Belgic Confession, Art. 30-31).
2. Historical precedent demonstrates that assemblies have related to one another in this way before.
3. This would give classes an official way to speak to one another in matters of common concern.

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 10: Change the Title *Classis* to *Regional Assembly*

Classis Eastern Canada overtures synod to change the title *classis* to *regional assembly*.

Grounds:

1. The word *classis* is an old Latin European word that communicates to very few people in our North American society outside of Reformed churches. In fact, increasingly it does not communicate to people within Reformed churches. As such, in order to be hospitable when speak-

ing with a group of people (e.g., a congregation), the word requires explanation every time it is used.

Note: Our denomination's website uses the words *regional assemblies* to explain the word *classes*: www.crcna.org/ministries (accessed April 5, 2017).

2. The word *classis* is confusing, since it may sound like a homophone for the plural (educational) classes.
3. The plural of *classis*, the word *classes*, is also confusing, especially in print, where it is a homograph for educational *classes*.
4. The phrase *regional assembly* is self-explanatory and is descriptive.
5. The phrase *regional assembly* conveys both a geographical reality (generally, part of the reality of what a classis is) and an ecclesiastical reality (more importantly, what a classis is).
6. While adapting to the new term would require administrative changes in our denomination (print and web resources, etc.), it would be a worthwhile change because changing to the new title would communicate better in our broader society and so remove a barrier in our mission to proclaim Jesus to all.

Classis Eastern Canada

Richard Smit, stated clerk

Overture 11: Honor the Synod of Dort and Teach Its Five Main Points of Doctrine throughout the CRCNA in 2019

I. Background

Four hundred years ago, from 1618-19, the great Synod of Dort met in the city of Dordrecht, the Netherlands. The different Reformed church bodies in Europe sent delegates consisting of elders, ministers, theological professors, and official political representatives to discuss and formulate a formal response to the Remonstrants. These delegates represented not only the Reformed churches from the different provinces of the Netherlands, but also delegates from eight other countries. Delegates from France were also invited, but these Calvinist Huguenots were prohibited from attending by the Roman Catholic government of France at that time; empty chairs were set up in the assembly hall in their honor.

Over the course of six months, this synod created a five-point biblical and theological response to five points drawn up by the Remonstrants in 1610. This five-point response is most well known today by the acronym TULIP (Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints). Since then, these five points have been used by Reformed churches to teach its members the doctrines of grace in regard to matters of salvation.

The danger is ever-present, however, that we who are Reformed churches, now 400 years separated from this great synod, will too soon wander from these doctrines of grace. Too many Reformed Christians today around our world are growing up in Reformed churches unaware of the Canons of Dort as a document, of the history surrounding its creation, and of the teachings found in it. Consequently, too many Christians (not only in Reformed

churches, but in other church bodies) are missing out on the depth, power, and great comfort that these doctrines of grace present to us—in part out of basic ignorance of these teachings, and in part out of a distortion of what the Canons of Dort actually teach.

The 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort (and the Canons of Dort which arose from it) is a providential opportunity to teach these rich, deep doctrines again to a new generation of believers, both inside and outside of our churches.

II. Overture

Therefore, Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2018 to

A. Commission our denomination's seminary, Calvin Theological Seminary, in cooperation with our Faith Formation Ministries, to create a series of instructional, devotional, and interactive pieces for our churches, families, and individuals to be reminded of and taught in a fresh and new way the following:

1. The doctrines of grace as summarized for us in the Canons of Dort (TULIP).
2. The history of the great Synod of Dort (1618-19) and the historical value that these doctrines of grace have played over the generations in the life of the Reformed churches (even prior to the existence of the CRCNA).
3. The present value of these doctrines of grace in the life of the CRCNA.
4. The future value of these doctrines of grace in the life of the CRCNA.

B. Instruct *The Banner* to be one of the principle avenues by which the history and content of these doctrines of grace is delivered into the hands of the members of the CRCNA, with articles to be published throughout the 2019 calendar year.

C. Commission Resonate Global Mission, our denomination's mission agency, to encourage and provide resources for our missionaries to teach and preach regarding these doctrines of grace as outlined in the Canons of Dort during the course of 2019.

D. Commission Back to God Ministries International to use all media resources at their disposal to instruct the broader Christian and non-Christian community about these doctrines of grace as outlined in the Canons of Dort during the course of 2019.

E. Use the overall format of the Canons of Dort (TULIP) as the structure by which the times of worship of Synod 2019 are planned and coordinated.

Classis Zeeland
Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

Overture 12: Foster Discussion and Education Focused on the Biblical Principles for Public Discipleship; Instruct the Executive Director to Monitor Progress and to Report to Synod 2019

I. Preamble

We are citizens of our respective nations. We participate in and help shape our nations' public life. Our votes select and legitimize governments. We participate in public policies related to immigration, refugees, the homeless, economic justice, stewardship of the earth, housing, race relations, the justice system, health care, social policies affecting families, abortion, recreational drug use, euthanasia, educational opportunities, pornography, welfare rates, war, peace, international trade relations, religious freedom, human rights, and much more.

Our participation is inescapable, but is our participation in public life sufficiently shaped and informed by biblical principles? When it comes to political discipleship, can we say, along with the psalmist, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"? (Ps. 119:105).

Biblical principles that bear on political discipleship include the following:

- A. God is the Creator,¹ the Sovereign,² the source of all authority,³ worthy of our utmost trust, loyalty, allegiance, and commitment.⁴
- B. Every person on the planet is a treasure, made in God's image,⁵ richly endowed⁶ but also deeply flawed,⁷ yet loved of God⁸ and therefore deserving of our love, respect, and protection.⁹
- C. Social justice rates very high in the Bible.¹⁰ In the absence of social justice, religious observance is a mockery, the prophets teach.¹¹ And you cannot love God if you do not love your brother.¹²
- D. Jesus is Savior for eternity¹³ and Lord of time,¹⁴ through whom God reconciles all things to himself, things on earth and things in heaven.¹⁵
- E. Government exists to protect the well-being of all: the young, the elderly, the marginalized, the widow, the orphan, the foreigner among you, for you were once a foreigner.¹⁶

¹ Deut. 10:12-14

² Gen. 15:2

³ John 19:11; Rom. 13:1-7

⁴ Matt. 22:37-40

⁵ Gen. 1:26-30

⁶ Ps. 8

⁷ Gen. 3

⁸ John 3:16; 6:40

⁹ Matt. 25:31-46

¹⁰ Isa. 10:1-2; Matt. 5:6

¹¹ Isa. 1:11-17; Mic. 6:6-8; Amos 5: 21-24; Hos. 6:6

¹² 1 John 4:20

¹³ Heb. 10:1-18

¹⁴ John 1:3; Col. 1:16

¹⁵ Col. 1:20

¹⁶ Ps. 72; Luke 4:17-21; Isa. 58:6; Deut. 10:18-19; Isa. 1:16-17; Lev. 19:13-16; Jer. 9:23-24; 22:15-17

F. The gospel is inclusive; it does not build walls, it builds bridges.¹⁷ The promise to Abraham was for the purpose of blessing the nations.¹⁸ That theme is repeated in the prophets and finds its culmination in Revelation, where all tribes, tongues, nations, and peoples come to worship God.¹⁹

G. “Blessed are the peacemakers.”²⁰

H. The incarnation means good news for the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed.²¹

Is our public witness sufficiently informed by these biblical principles? Do we take direction from God and God alone, or is our political discipleship at times compromised by idol worship, trusting something other than the God of the Bible?

At this moment in history, the Christian community suffers polarization and division, threatening the unity of the body. The coarsening of political discourse that marks our day also affects Christians. We seem to lack a common language informed by biblical principles to facilitate civil, constructive dialogue across political divides. Political discipleship should be a testimony to the redeeming, reconciling power of the gospel. To overcome political divisions, minister to each other, and have a more effective political public witness requires that biblical principles shape our talk and walk as citizens. Christian discipleship includes political discipleship. “We are to obey God in politics.”²² This overture aims to focus the denomination not on political leaders and partisan agendas but on God’s Word.

II. Overture

Classis B.C. South-East overtures Synod 2018 to do the following:

A. Encourage the denomination, its officers, boards, agencies, publications, and local congregations to foster discussion and education focused on the biblical principles for public discipleship, including those enumerated in the Preamble of this overture.

B. Instruct the executive director of the CRCNA to monitor progress made and report to Synod 2019.

Grounds:

1. While it is not the task of the pulpit to tell the pew how to fill in the ballot, the Bible’s view of the task of government must shape how we vote, talk about, and participate in the public life of our nations.

¹⁷ Matt. 28:18-20; Gal. 3:26-29

¹⁸ Gen. 12:3;

¹⁹ Isa. 42:6; 49:6; Rev. 21: 24-26

²⁰ Matt. 5:9

²¹ Luke 4:17-21

²² *Our World Belongs to God* (1986), para. 53

2. The denomination's unity is threatened by a deep and growing divide and confusion about the practice of political discipleship.²³ That is equally true on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border.
3. Our unity is not found in party leaders, partisan agendas, and nationalistic interests. Our unity is in the principles God reveals in the Bible and our common Reformed confession that Jesus is Lord of all of life.
4. During the most recent Canadian and U.S. federal elections, *The Banner* carried no spiritual commentary and guidance for political discipleship. That void leaves the impression that God is not interested in what happens in Washington or Ottawa, that God cares not how his children vote.
5. The deepening political uncertainty, polarization, and racial and religious intolerance both at home and abroad demand that we equip ourselves, putting on the whole armor of God.
6. The world needs the church. In fact, the church exists for the sake of the world.
7. Church and state must remain separate, but to separate religion from politics is impossible. Religion touches all of life; politics is part of life.
8. Confusion about the demands of political discipleship is not political but spiritual in nature. Exploring God's claim on life is a spiritual quest, entirely appropriate for the denomination to address.

Classis B.C. South-East

Lubbert van der Laan, stated clerk

Overture 13: Instruct Agencies to Refrain from Political Advocacy

I. Background

As an expression of the body of Christ, the CRCNA is a body of believers unified under the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord. Central to that claim, the church's mission is to fulfill the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20) by engaging in the pure preaching of the gospel, to make use of the pure administration of the sacraments, and to practice church discipline (Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

²³ The most passionate, most intense discussion at Synod 2017 centered on the intersection of religion and politics. See the July/August 2017 *Banner*. A discussion on how the church is to do justice opened up denominational 'fault lines,' says *The Banner* (p. 16). Opposing positions were taken and defended.

The discussion centered on the Office of Social Justice and the Ottawa-based Centre for Public Dialogue. These denominational agencies speak to governments and issue pronouncements on public policies. Within the denomination, there are many voices opposed to doing this while others do not approve of the positions these agencies take. Some want the church to engage the world; others say the denomination has no business telling politicians what to do.

Executive Director Steven Timmermans reports receiving many calls and emails asking that he close the Office of Social Justice and the Centre for Public Dialogue. This issue will again be the focus of Synod 2018, because Synod 2018 must decide which agencies and ministries will no longer be funded (p. 26). It is a serious matter. *The Banner* asks, "Will all these fault lines cause the church to fracture, or will they prompt people to reach across the divides to stay united?" (p. 17).

Reformed churches have long held to an important distinction made by Abraham Kuyper between the church as organism and institute. Even though individual Christians may participate in organizations that speak to governments about issues of justice, the church as institute should be cautious in doing so (for more information on this distinction, see Overture 6 in *Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp. 479-81).

Kuyper also spoke about an idea called sphere sovereignty. Each sphere of society has its own God-ordained task. While the government is competent to bear the sword and protect its citizens, the church is a spiritual kingdom. Henry DeMoore states in his *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, p. 159:

In fulfilling the church's task, the CRCNA may occasionally address the governments of Canada and the United States of America and, indeed, has done so through its assemblies. When it has done so, it has typically sought to limit itself to matters within its own competence. When it was believed that these appropriate limits are not observed, members and minor assemblies have often sent protests to the broader assemblies. The reason for that is obvious: going beyond demonstrably biblical proclamation to embrace a particular political philosophy or strategy runs the risk of equating that point of view with the gospel of Christ. When the church becomes too closely identified with a particular political point of view, it compromises its foundation in the prophetic and liberating Word of God.

In the past few years, our denomination has entered into the world of political advocacy. This appears to be a shift of focus away from its mission and God-given sphere. Consider the following examples of engaging in this kind of activity:

- In 2003 the CRC Committee for Contact with the Government in Canada stated that "church members ought to affirm the validity of legal recognition of long-term and committed same-sex interdependent relationships" (*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).
- In 2006 denominational leaders signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative Statement asserting that human-induced climate change is real and asking the government to pass legislation establishing limits on carbon-dioxide emissions.
- In 2009 the Office of Social Justice (OSJ) and CRWRC both signed on to a Micah Network Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change.
- As a part of receiving the Creation Stewardship Task Force Report, Synod 2012 called climate change a "moral, religious, and social justice issue" and called on denominational bodies, congregations, and members to private and public action.
- In 2015 the CRC sent a delegation of four to the Paris Climate Talks to witness to others at the event that climate change is fundamentally a religious and moral issue, mobilized CRC members to write op-eds for news outlets, and arranged several visits with members of Parliament and Congress.
- *Do Justice* (a website run by the Centre for Public Dialogue and the Office of Social Justice) included an article on Sept. 18, 2015, as part

of a point-counterpoint series in favor of continuing to fund Planned Parenthood.

- On May 9, 2017, the Office of Social Justice signed a letter sponsored by the Friends Committee on National Legislation (a religious lobby in Washington), along with several left-leaning religious organizations, urging President Trump to remain in the Paris Climate Agreement.
- A *Do Justice* article from June 28, 2017, criticized President Trump’s budget proposals to enforce existing immigration law by increasing funding for immigration enforcement, and called for sending emails, phone calls, or tweets to our representatives in Washington asking them to oppose the funding proposal.
- The OSJ posted an action alert (an online campaign with a form for contacting members of Congress) advocating for adequate funding of Medicaid to continue the support of Family Planning.
- The OSJ issued an action alert urging Congress to put a price on carbon.
- In September 2017 the OSJ issued a call to sign an Interfaith Dream Act Sign-on Letter that calls on Congress to pass the Dream Act as a matter of moral urgency.
- An OSJ action alert issued in November 2017 speaks out against the proposed GOP Tax Cuts and Jobs Act because of cuts to renewable energy, funding for ANWR drilling, and cuts to the Affordable Care Act’s individual mandate.
- Once the tax bill passed the Senate and reached reconciliation, the OSJ posted an action alert asking senators to oppose amendments that will open the Arctic to oil and gas exploration. The site contained this sentence: “There is one discrepancy present in the Senate bill that Christians must stand up against and demand be removed from the final bill.”

We believe that engaging in this kind of activity goes beyond demonstrably biblical proclamation and embraces a particular political philosophy or strategy. This deviates from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for the institutional church (Belgic Confession, Art. 32). It further erodes the harmony and unity of the church because it causes the church to be too closely identified with a particular political point of view (DeMoor, p. 159). In harmony with what Christ has taught us, Church Order Article 28-a declares, “These assemblies shall transact ecclesiastical matters only, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner.”

The church is a diverse body of believers gathered together in harmony under the banner of Christ. The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* holds that the Bible contains all truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life, yet the Bible does not contain the truth about everything. The New Testament authors had every right to petition the corrupt Roman government for its social abuses but chose not to. Christ came not as a political leader, as the Palm Sunday crowds had hoped for, but as one whose kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Prohibitions and demands not found in Scripture are to be left up to Christian freedom. It is there that the beautiful unity in the midst of diversity enables a flourishing church. We all share great concern for the poor and the marginalized, but we will not all agree as to the correct solution for these problems.

When the church petitions a government for a specific policy position not found in Scripture, it takes a Christian freedom disagreement and turns it into a demand, needlessly binding consciences where God's Word does not. This kind of activity borders on hypocrisy by appearing to care for the marginalized while at the same time ignoring the policy solutions of other church members. It also threatens to turn a simple disagreement into a cause for division. Further, it discourages church members from robustly supporting ministry shares when the money they are giving supports causes that go against their own conscience.

If it pleases synod to adhere to Church Order Article 28-a by refraining from political advocacy, it is necessary to revise the mandates of the Office of Social Justice (OSJ) and the Centre for Public Dialogue (including the Committee for Contact with the Government [CCG]). The mandates are found in *Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 73-76. The OSJ mandate states that its leadership and equipping consist primarily of, among other things, "raising the voice of the CRCNA in advocacy for and with those who suffer injustice, through action alerts to our members, participation in advocacy coalitions, and public statements when appropriate" (*Agenda for Synod 2011*, p. 75). The mandate for the CCG includes a call to presenting "proposed position papers, briefs, and submissions to appropriate levels of government" and "proposed strategies for communicating with the government" (*Agenda for Synod 2011*, p. 73).

In this mandate revision process, each agency should strengthen its commitment to taking up positions widely agreed upon by members of the CRCNA. The CCG mandate speaks of informing the churches about issues it seeks to address and eliciting responses to its work in order to establish a broad consensus before recommending positions or actions. The list of criteria for selecting issues for the OSJ includes the question "How likely is it that we can forge a broad-based agreement to deal with this issue?" This criterion is far down on a list of secondary criteria that "are to be used more as guidelines in the decision-making process rather than as rigid mechanical screens" (*Agenda for Synod 2011*, p. 76). We believe that to help insulate these policy positions from causing disunity among members of the CRCNA, the agencies should only take a position on specific directives from synod.

II. Overture

For the sake of the integrity of the church's mission, and of her unity, Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2018 to do the following:

A. Direct the Council of Delegates to instruct all agencies of the CRCNA to take up ecclesiastical matters only and to refrain from political advocacy.

Grounds:

1. When the CRCNA participates in advocacy, it steps beyond its ecclesiastical domain and its own Church Order: "These assemblies shall transact ecclesiastical matters only, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner" (Art. 28-a).
2. Participating in nonecclesiastical advocacy activities
 - a. brings the divided world of politics into the church, creating further division.
 - b. arrogantly asserts only one political solution into gray areas where godly Christians can disagree.

- c. confuses the pure preaching of the gospel with mere human opinion.
- d. undermines our commitment to *sola Scriptura* and Christian liberty by binding consciences in areas where God’s Word does not speak (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 96).
- e. applies general principles approved by synod to specific policy positions and elevates those positions to that of the Christian Reformed Church.
- f. could bring the church into conflict with regulations for tax-exempt organizations (IRC section 501(c)(3)) by attempting to influence legislation.

B. Direct the Council of Delegates to revise the mandates of the Office of Social Justice and the Centre for Public Dialogue (including the Committee for Contact with the Government) to adhere to Church Order Article 28-a to “transact ecclesiastical matters only” and refrain from political advocacy. As a part of this process, the mandates of each agency will include updated procedures for selecting policy positions, ensuring that a position taken is based on specific instructions from synod.

Grounds:

- a. The agencies’ mandates include directives to engage governments, but should be consistent with the above recommendation and the stipulation of Church Order Article 28-a.
- b. Synod-directed positions will help ensure broad-based consensus among members.

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 14: Instruct CRC Agencies and Ministries to Stop Political Lobbying on Behalf of the Christian Reformed Denomination

I. Background

In 2012 Classis Columbia submitted an overture to synod requesting that synod commission a study to determine the extent to which the CRCNA, as church institution, “should declare truths about political matters to its members and others, lobby governments as to particular political (including economic) or legal positions, or . . . results” (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 467). Synod responded by choosing to receive the overture for information and by instructing the executive director to draft a letter “urging the church on all levels . . . to reflect on the issues and concerns” raised in the overture and “to take note of the range of ethical positions that the CRC has adopted through the years”; this letter would also admonish “all those who speak on behalf of the church to speak with discernment” and would admonish “all church members to be ‘quick to listen, slow to speak . . .,’ seeking the unity in Christ” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 808-809).

Additionally, synod asked the (then-active) Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture to “take the information found in Overture 3 and include it in its considerations” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 809).

While the actions instructed by synod were reasonably carried out, many of the foundational concerns in the 2012 overture remain unresolved. One problem is that accountability measures that might better ensure meeting the objectives of synod's actions were never put in place.

Christians *should* be involved in issues of social concern, but the issue confronting us today is the *scope* and *extent* of the *institutional* church's involvement. At present, the institutional church is actively involved in political lobbying of the government in support of, or opposition to, various pieces of legislation. The institutional church is supporting climate agreements and engaging in diplomacy abroad. The institutional church is financially supporting advocacy positions. Simply put, the institutional church is engaging in areas beyond its calling and competency.

II. Defining the problem

It is sometimes argued that those who oppose the institutional church being involved in political lobbying or advocating social causes are indifferent to matters of justice, or that they wish to mute the church's "prophetic voice" in society in favor of focusing on spiritual concerns. This is simply not the case. Among those who drafted this overture are individuals involved (vocationally, and as volunteers) in political lobbying, volunteering in the foster care system, and caring for an underserved community. The problem at hand is not whether or not Christians *should* address social concerns but *how* that concern should be carried out.

At present, our denominational agencies address the variety of social concerns by engaging in social and political activism on behalf of our denomination. Consider some of the following examples, gleaned from official denominational sources:

- The Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJHA) encouraged members to oppose a proposed tax bill in the United States Congress (<http://p2a.co/Gt58t6E>), *even before the Senate and House versions of the bill had been reconciled* (meaning that members were being asked to oppose legislation before it had even been written).
- The OSJHA hired a "Regional Immigration Organizer," tasked with building "relationships with church members in the region to encourage them and their congregation to engage one or more of the four focus areas."
- The OSJHA urges CRC constituents to support a U.S. Senate bill known as the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, stopping abortions before twenty weeks.
- The OSJHA urges members of the CRC to support legislation intended to grant legal residency to undocumented youth and young adults in the United States.
- The Advocacy Action Center on the OSJHA website claims that "now is the time to act" by opposing legislation intended to reform the current immigration system in the United States.

While these are important social and political concerns that conscientious followers of Jesus Christ must wrestle with, they are also complex issues that often do not have simple and clear-cut stances that Bible-believing Christians must hold to. Some Christians may be in favor of a tax bill; yet others may,

for different reasons, oppose the same legislation. Some Christians may view the issue of immigration and conclude that more needs to be done to control our borders, while others may promote less control. Even discerning Christians can come to different conclusions and will disagree with one another; Christian liberty allows for different voices and opinions.

But when the agencies and offices of our denomination take stances and engage in political lobbying on these complex issues *on behalf of the entire denomination*, they are purporting to speak with one voice for every member of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. One could read the Advocacy Action Center on the OSJHA website and reasonably conclude that—since this is a denominational office—these are official positions of the Christian Reformed Church.

A. Interpreting the problem: Why the concern?

A Parable: One of the members of the committee tasked with writing this overture once worked on the third floor of an office building that was later found to be structurally unsound. At first, cracks appeared in the ceiling, and pencils rolled off the desks. Contractors tried patching cracks and repairing crooked door and window frames; these solutions only masked the problem. The engineers soon determined that the foundation had to be repaired. We see a parallel here, in that there are at least three layers to the problems here that ultimately must be traced to our theological and biblical foundations.

1. Layer one: our covenant

Our Church Order functions as our covenant that governs how we agree to serve, worship, and govern one another as a church. It is, of course, nowhere near a “canonical” document, and it is indeed imperfect. Wisdom must be used as we apply the Church Order in daily life; however, the Church Order serves us well, giving shape to our life together as churches. Our congregations agree to be bound by this covenant and to abide by its order. When there are parts that we object to, or that no longer seem prudent, we work together to change it. Otherwise, to ignore it, or to follow it selectively as is convenient, is to invite disunity.

Relevant to this issue, Church Order Article 28 (included below in its entirety, with **emphasis added**) defines the scope of what the church is called to be and to do:

- a. These assemblies [council, classis, and synod] shall **transact ecclesiastical matters only**, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner.
- b. A major assembly shall deal only with those matters which concern its churches in common or which could not be finished in the minor assemblies.
- c. Matters referred by minor assemblies to major assemblies shall be presented in harmony with the rules for classical and synodical procedure.

The church as an institution is called to be about the matters that pertain to the church. The *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (2017 ed., p. 111) explains what this means, in the following:

Although Christian people have a responsibility to serve the Lord in all spheres of life – physical sciences, education, political life, art, business, etc. – these are not to be regarded as ecclesiastical matters. Synod has declared that political, social, and economic questions are ecclesiastical matters only when doctrinal and ethical issues of sufficient magnitude are involved as

commonly understood according to the Word of God and the confessional standards of the Christian Reformed Church.

The agencies and the offices of the Christian Reformed Church represent the denomination as a whole. They act under the direction of, and under the authority of synod. They spend money allocated by synod, and they carry out the work mandated by synod. Therefore, when they lobby on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church, they are carrying out work that falls under the auspices of synod. Thus, when our offices and agencies call for political or social action that is not of “sufficient magnitude,” they are stepping beyond the bounds of what the institutional church is called to be and to do. In so doing, they are violating the covenant that we as a church agree to honor in our life together.

Henry DeMoor, professor emeritus of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, states this concern well:

going beyond demonstrably biblical proclamation to embrace a particular political philosophy or strategy runs the risk of equating that point of view with the gospel of Christ. When the church becomes too closely identified with a particular political point of view, it compromises its foundation in the prophetic and liberating Word of God.

(*Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*, p. 159)

The point should not be missed; when we try to be prophetic by calling on the institutional church to support political legislation or policies, we actually become less prophetic because we become equated not with the gospel we proclaim, but with a particular political agenda.

2. Layer two: our Reformed heritage

In the mid-nineteenth century Abraham Kuyper was concerned over what he saw as the overreach of the state into the life of the church. Responding to this, Kuyper—himself a politician, diplomat, journalist, and theologian—spoke against the control of the state in the affairs of the church, and against the inappropriate involvement of the institutional church in the affairs of the state. Today, we refer to Abraham Kuyper’s theory as *sphere sovereignty*, and his philosophy has shaped Reformed ecclesiology for the past century.

While an extended analysis of sphere sovereignty is beyond the scope of this overture, it is worth summarizing briefly. Kuyper argues that “the family, the business, science, art, and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the state, and which do not derive the law of their life from the superiority of the state, but obey a high authority within their own bosom” (Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Stone Foundation Lectures*, [Eerdmans, p. 90]). He does not mean to suggest that each social sphere is free to operate independent of any authority, all the time – but that each sphere operates according to principles and laws inherent to that sphere, and therefore “the state cannot intrude here, and has nothing to command in their domain” (Kuyper, p. 91). In other words, the government ought not to tell families how many children to have, or tell farmers which crops to plant. Among these social spheres, Kuyper includes the church—an institution that is to be free to operate according to her own principles and according to her own purpose. But what matters here is that Kuyper insists that “the sovereignty of the state and the sovereignty of the church

exist side by side, and they mutually limit each other.” The church and the state each have their respective roles in society, and while they function together, they must both be careful to remain faithful to their respective callings. The government should not exercise authority over the church (defining her doctrine, prescribing liturgy, or exercising church discipline), and the institutional church should not exercise undue influence in the realm of the state, prescribing how to vote, crafting legislation, or lobbying for specific political or social agendas. The government transacts governmental matters, businesses pursue business matters, and the church conducts ecclesiastical tasks.

Incidentally, our Church Order reinforces this idea. The *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* states that by “adhering to this fundamental principle, the church will not invade the rights of the state (government) nor erase the boundary between the duty of the church-institute and the duty of Christian citizens” (p. 111).

There is much wisdom in this approach. Kuyper’s approach in no way discourages believers from political or social involvement—Kuyper himself did both. But it insists that the church is truest to her calling and identity when it sticks to the task of proclaiming the gospel and encouraging and equipping her members for service in the kingdom of God. To be sure, this includes speaking into the realms of public life—preachers will preach on biblical themes that pertain to immigration, creation care, poverty, and the sanctity of life—but they will *not* lobby members of a church or denomination to vote for or against candidates, or to stand for or against specific legislation. When this is done well, individual believers—the “organic church”—are equipped and sent out to engage in politics, in social action, and in matters of societal justice; in fact, they *ought* to do these things. However, they are free to do them according to their individual conscience: some believers will endorse a tax bill, while others will oppose it. Some will lobby for one stance on immigration, while others may oppose that stance in favor of a different approach.

When the denomination—including its agencies and offices—lobbies for specific positions on legislation, or encourages its members to adopt positions on social and political issues that are not central to the gospel, it is overstepping its authority. It is functioning as the institutional church, exerting power over the affairs of the state, on behalf of every member of the Christian Reformed Church. The institutional church (the CRCNA and its offices and agencies) should not be doing so; the individual members of our churches should, but—to quote Kuyper again—with “a liberty of conscience, which enables every man to serve God according to his own conviction, and the dictates of his own heart” (Kuyper, p. 109).

Additionally, urging members of the CRC to lobby government representatives can inadvertently violate the Reformed principle of the priesthood of all believers. Historically, the Reformed branch of the Christian church has taught that people in all vocations can serve God equally—one does not need to be a member of the clergy to seek the cause of God’s kingdom. We might reasonably extend that argument to say that the institutional church does not need to engage in the work of lobbying particularly because individual Christians are able to do so. In fact, they probably do it better than the institutional church can.

For example, the OSJHA website offers a way for members of the CRC to act for or against specific legislation by writing a form letter to their representatives. While this might feel empowering, and it might appear, on the surface, to be speaking prophetically, this form of social activism is generally regarded by government representatives (who receive these form letters and emails) as weak and ineffective. An email or letter will be one voice among masses, especially given that OSJHA tends to recommend action on very complex federal issues. Typically these emails are essentially ignored: a staffer will read and file away their email, without it really making a difference.

Christians should not shy away from engaging politics; however, letters and email are not the most effective. The more influential position is to be the staffer with a Christian perspective. Thus, one important way the church can support changes in politics is to support our institutions of higher learning to train students in policy-making, law, and politics. These institutions and their academic experts are more qualified to instill not only Christian perspectives on political issues du jour, but also the mechanics of how to lobby properly.

3. Layer three: our scriptural foundation

We covenant together as a church to focus on ecclesiastical matters, and doing so reflects our Reformed heritage. These layers are virtually insignificant, however, unless they stem from a scriptural foundation. We must admit that there are no specific texts that outline what the institutional church may and may not do. However, when we look at the pattern of the early church, we see a number of ideas that ought to shape the pattern of our church today:

- Matthew 28:28-20 records the instructions given by our Lord to the apostles, which were in turn to be the mission of the institutional church: making disciples, teaching, and baptizing.
- Acts 1:7-10 records the same event from Luke’s perspective—as the disciples have witnessed the resurrection, they ask whether Jesus would soon be initiating the kingdom of God. Specifically, they were anticipating the advent of a worldly, political kingdom—to which Jesus responded to the early apostles (the leaders of the church) that their mission was to be witnesses to the resurrection. In other words, Jesus directs the institutional church leadership *away* from the work of ushering in a political movement, into disciple-making instead.
- Acts 2:42-47 summarizes the priorities of the institutional church: the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, and diaconal ministries.
- 1 Timothy 4-5 spells out instructions for the leadership of the church—they are to guard their lives as examples; they are to ensure the care of the widows and orphans; they are to teach well and “direct the affairs of the church”—but nothing is said (here or anywhere) about the institutional church’s political engagement with the Roman Empire or with local government.
- 2 Timothy 2:14-26 relays Paul’s further instructions for the leadership of the church—and in addition to what is stated above, he instructs Timothy to guard the church against false teaching.

In other words, all instruction given to the institutional church is focused on the core task of the church: preaching the gospel, worship, making disciples, caring for the poor in the church, and guarding against false teaching. To be sure, there is *much* in the New Testament about the need for addressing issues of social concern—but nothing that creates the impression that the institutional church ought to be involved as a political institution. The church must remain true to her biblical calling to be the church.

B. *What is the solution?*

It would be both unwise and unbiblical to discourage the church from careful reflection on the implications of the gospel in public life. We believe that the church will be best served by two concrete actions.

1. The denomination, including the agencies and offices, should discontinue all political lobbying and activism on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The denomination should not be involved in promoting or opposing specific legislation, policies, or social and political agendas that are not directly related to the institutional church's mission of proclaiming the gospel and equipping the saints for service in God's kingdom. This would include refraining from calling on members to vote for or against legislation, or from calling on members to contact their legislators to do the same.

Those in positions of denominational leadership should not sign petitions or declarations as representatives of the CRCNA on issues or matters that fall outside the realm of the institutional church. Those in positions of denominational leadership should not in any way use their positions to engage in political, social, or diplomatic lobbying in a way that could be construed as representing the entire CRCNA.

2. The offices of the CRCNA will focus on informing the church on matters related to injustice in our society. The most effective ministry of the church happens at the local level, and the offices and agencies of the Christian Reformed Church can best serve the church by educating the members of the local church and helping them think through how best to pursue biblical justice in our world. A positive example of this is the *Do Justice* blog, which serves as a forum for having conversations on social and political topics.

It may be helpful here to distinguish between *advocacy* and *lobbying*. While the definitions can be rather technical, the simple difference is that advocacy articulates certain principles while lobbying calls for specific action. Advocacy could include informing the members of the CRC about issues and how certain legislation may relate to Christian principles. Lobbying means telling members of the CRC to call on their government representatives to vote in a specific fashion. Advocacy may fall within the purview of the institutional church; lobbying surely does not.

A positive illustration may be cited here as an example of how the institutional church *could* act in the face of societal injustice. In the wake of disparaging comments made about certain countries, the presidents of both Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin College issued a statement on racism that stated strong biblical opposition to racism, and urged students, faculty, and staff to exercise love for neighbor as an outworking of the gospel. This letter articulated well the biblical concerns about racism in the face of

contemporary issues without calling for specific political action. We see this as a positive example for other leaders in our denomination to follow.

III. Overture

Therefore, Classis Columbia overtures synod to instruct the agencies and the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church to stop political lobbying on behalf of the Christian Reformed denomination. Where there may be confusion between political lobbying and advocacy, the denominational agencies should consult with the executive director of the CRCNA who, at his or her discretion, may poll the Council of Delegates before a statement is released. We encourage the denominational agencies to continue to use their resources to help members of the Christian Reformed Church think biblically about matters of biblical justice.

Grounds:

1. Political lobbying falls outside of the boundaries of what the institutional church is called to do.
2. The church needs to be informed about matters related to justice, but the members must also be free to act in accordance with their own conscience and convictions.
3. Lobbying for specific political positions or policies will prove to be divisive in the long run, polarizing the denomination around political issues.
4. Helping the membership of the CRC think biblically about matters of justice would serve the church well, as her diverse membership seeks to apply biblical wisdom to contemporary issues.

Classis Columbia
Roger Kramer, stated clerk

Overture 15: Approve Funding for New Curriculum Development and Clarify Mandate of Faith Formation Ministries

I. Background

The Christian Reformed Church in North America has a long and impressive history of being a pillar of theological, doctrinal, and faith-forming resources. For a long time, such resources, including curriculum for Sunday school programs, were published through CRC Publications, renamed Faith Alive Christian Resources in 2007 (*Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 201; see also *Agenda for Synod 2001*, p. 148). Due to a variety of economic factors, the board of Faith Alive was dissolved in 2013 (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 550). The same year synod instructed the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA “to continue the foundational work of the Faith Formation Committee by making intergenerational lifelong learning and discipleship integral to the realignment of Faith Alive and denominational structures” (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 553), and began a “faith formation initiative” led by Dr. Syd Hielema (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 581-82), which over the years became what we now know as Faith Formation Ministries.

The dissolution of the Faith Alive board in 2013 left many unanswered questions. Delegates were told that the dissolution of the board was a

financial necessity, which left many delegates feeling their hands were tied. Nevertheless, delegates were assured that while some functions of Faith Alive would obviously be reduced, postponed, or even eliminated, its “critical functions” would be realigned and assigned “to other parts of the denominational structure” (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 441). There was, however, very little clarity about what constituted a “critical function.” Particularly, no guidance was given regarding curriculum development and maintenance. Faith Formation Ministries noted this in their report to Synod 2016:

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.
(*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 156)

In response Synod 2016 adopted the following recommendation:

That synod instruct the executive director to task Faith Formation Ministries to investigate the feasibility of the development of new curricula and its potential usage within the Christian Reformed Church.

Grounds:

- a. When synod approved the dissolution of Faith Alive Christian Resources in 2013, it was assured that its core functions would continue, and its approval was based on this understanding. Yet synod gave no clear guidance concerning the future of developing and supporting Christian Reformed Church curricula.
- b. There is an ongoing need for distinctively Reformed curricula, yet the development of such new curricula may be costly.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 931)

While Synod 2016 recognized that curricula development may be costly, it did not provide funds for Faith Formation Ministries to begin to develop curricula, nor did it approve the recommended increase in ministry shares for CRC agencies and ministries. In February 2017, Faith Formation Ministries presented some limited solutions to the Board of Trustees, detailed in an article published in the April 2017 issue of *The Banner*, “Curriculum Solutions Approved, Little Funding Available” by Gayla Postma (thebanner.org/news/2017/03/curriculum-solutions-approved-little-funding-available). The proposal included an at-home family component to the flagship *Dwell* curriculum, a selective update of the entire *Dwell* curriculum to keep it up-to-date, development of a church school toolkit, and hiring a children’s ministry catalyzer to support children’s ministry staff and volunteers throughout the denomination. The proposal was intended to provide churches with Reformed and biblical resources and personnel to help churches navigate children’s ministry in a changing world, all with a proposed budget of about \$150,000. The Board of Trustees enthusiastically approved the proposal but was unable to secure any funding for the proposal to begin, due to a \$1 million budget gap as a result of undercollection of ministry shares and Synod 2016’s decision not to raise ministry shares to the recommended amount. Faith Formation Ministries reported to Synod 2017:

We have developed a proposal for continuing the strong CRCNA tradition of providing solid Reformed Sunday school curriculum in a cost-effective manner, and we are currently waiting for this proposal to go through approval processes.
(*Agenda for Synod 2017*, p. 215)

As it stands now, Faith Formation Ministries is working with other denominational resources to fund these proposed solutions in nontraditional ways, pioneering a sort of fundraising experiment that operates out of funds accrued outside of the ministry share system. This is laudable in its own right, but we feel that there is a deeper principal issue at stake here—whether the development of Reformed curricula is a peripheral ministry funded by some passionate donors or a task central to the calling and identity of the CRCNA. It is our perspective that the development of Reformed curricula and resources is important not only to our history as a denomination but also to our future. For this reason, we believe that Synod 2018 ought to clarify the mandate for Faith Formation Ministries regarding curriculum development, approve a one-time ministry share increase for the specific solutions approved by the Board of Trustees in February 2017, and make clear any expectations for denominational funding of Reformed curricula in the future.

We understand that there are important, ongoing denominational conversations regarding the reallocation of ministry shares, denominational fundraising practices, restructuring of denominational agencies and ministries, and the function of synod. This overture is not intended in any way to supersede, override, detract from, or attempt to control these important conversations. We simply want the CRCNA to take a clear stand regarding the development of Reformed curricula at this critical juncture.

II. Overture

In light of the above, Classis Huron overtures synod to

- approve a one-time ministry-share increase of \$150,000 to fund the approved curricula solutions.
- clarify the mandate of Faith Formation Ministries to include the development of Reformed curricula.
- clarify expectations for the denominational funding of Reformed curricula in the future.

Grounds:

1. Faith formation is a priority within the denomination, enabled when those who teach our youngest members have access to materials that explain Scripture by recourse to a Reformed hermeneutic. The solutions proposed by Faith Formation Ministries would provide greater biblical literacy while avoiding the more deleterious effects of moralistic and pietistic readings of Scripture.
2. The denomination can no longer believe that all of its children and youth will be educated within Reformed Christian day schools. The solutions proposed by Faith Formation Ministries equip churches and parents to lead children in faithful Christian discipleship. Such provision is made much easier with up-to-date curricula.
3. We cannot overlook the fact that other non-CRC churches make use of the *Dwell* curriculum. In this respect, the Reformed hermeneutic that is central to our denominational identity is a gift to the broader body of Christ and should not be squandered by letting it age and fall into disuse. Many denominations have benefited from the Reformed approach to Scripture.

4. In its proposal, Faith Formation Ministries identified \$150,000 as the estimated cost of implementing the solutions. Although things may have changed since the original proposal, a one-time ministry-share increase for this amount will go a long way toward providing the funding needed to implement these solutions, which have already been approved by the Board of Trustees.
5. Clarifying the mandate of Faith Formation Ministries and the financial commitment of the denomination will demonstrate whether the development of Reformed curricula is central to our calling as the CRCNA.

Classis Huron
Vic Vandermolten, stated clerk

Overture 16: Establish a Fund to Assist Immigrant Churches Affiliating with the CRC

Classis Illiana overtures the synod of the CRCNA to establish a \$25,000 fund to assist with the expenses of immigrant churches affiliating with the CRCNA. The fund will be used for assisting classes in small financial ways to provide transitional and relocation expenses to immigrant religious workers, administrative expenses associated with immigration requests, and offsets to immigration lawyer expenses to provide immigrant pastors as needed.

The executive director will have responsibility for placing the funds with the appropriate agency.

Grounds:

1. The CRCNA is receiving requests from Burmese immigrant churches to join the CRCNA. We have a CRC Burmese pastor, Rev. Siang Hup of Southside Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, who is willing to network, mentor, and help these groups into the CRCNA. Funds for networking visits are provided by Classis Illiana.
2. Most of the Burmese congregations are small house churches that speak little English, so it is a challenge for CRC English-speaking pastors to serve them effectively.
3. In the future, other immigrant groups may have similar needs.
4. Qualified, Reformed pastors who speak the Burmese groups' various dialects are available overseas.
5. Religious worker visas are available but are complicated to obtain.
6. Costs are prohibitive for these tiny churches to pay the immigration fees.
7. The process is too complicated and expensive to be handled by a classis without legal help.
8. When a local "neighboring" church, the local classis, and the CRCNA work together on a religious worker visa request, it is more likely to be honored.

Classis Illiana
Laryn G. Zoerhof, stated clerk

Overture 17: Establish a Fund to Assist Affiliating Immigrant Churches with Expenses for Securing Pastoral Leadership

Classis Atlantic Northeast overtures synod to establish a \$25,000 fund for expenses of immigrant churches affiliating with the CRCNA. The fund will be used for assisting classes in small financial ways to provide salary and relocation for immigrant pastors, administrative expenses associated with immigration requests, and offsets to immigration lawyer expenses to provide immigrant pastors as needed. The executive director will have responsibility for placing the funds with the appropriate agency.

Grounds:

1. The CRCNA is receiving requests from Burmese immigrant churches to join the CRCNA. We have a CRC Burmese pastor, Rev. Siang Hup of Southside Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, who is willing to network, mentor, and help these groups into the CRCNA. Funds for networking visits are provided by Classis Illiana.
2. Most of the Burmese congregations are small house churches that speak little English, so it is a challenge for CRC English-speaking pastors to serve them effectively.
3. Qualified Reformed pastors are available overseas who speak the Burmese groups' various dialects. For example, the Chin Christian Church of Syracuse, New York, an emerging CRC in Classis Atlantic Northeast, has identified a pastor in Burma (Myanmar); he has visited them, and he would like to accept the call.
4. Religious worker visas are available but are complicated to obtain.
5. Costs are prohibitive for these tiny churches to pay the immigration fees.
6. The process is too complicated and expensive to be handled by a classis without legal help.
7. When a local "neighboring" church, the local classis, and the CRCNA work together on a religious worker visa request, it is more likely to be honored.

Classis Atlantic Northeast
David D. Poolman, stated clerk

Overture 18: Address Membership Decline and Unresolved Conflict in the CRCNA

I. Prologue and reason for this overture

Formed in 1857, the Christian Reformed Church (CRCNA) grew steadily from several hundreds of founding members until it reached 316,415 in 1992¹ (recorded in the 1993 *Yearbook*). For its first 135 years the growth averaged 2,300 members per year.

¹ Numbers will be rounded, often without comment. The *Yearbook* reports data for the previous year. Therefore, the 1993 *Yearbook* reports 1992 membership records.

In 1993, the CRCNA began losing members. For the twenty-five years from 1993 until 2017, the CRCNA lost members almost every year. The denominational membership has plummeted from 316,000 to 227,968 in 2018, a twenty-five percent loss.

In light of this, Synod 2017 was presented with an overture concerning membership decline. Overture 11: Discover Causes for CRC Membership Decline; Develop Strategy to Reverse the Trend of Decline through Church Renewal and Planting; Require Annual Reporting of Progress asked synod to research the causes and cures of decline. When synod convened and acted on the overture, the delegates chose not to accede to the requests of Overture 11, answering with a few paragraphs and the following summary:

In summary, our committee has concluded that the denominational leadership of the CRC has made a good start in beginning to address the concerns raised in this overture with strategies for growth and renewal. We see hopeful possibilities also emerging from our new unified global mission agency and the structural changes of our new Council of Delegates. In light of this hopeful momentum emerging from the past research in the churches and classes of the CRC, and the hopeful potential promised by the latest structural changes, we do not see the benefit of initiating another detailed research process. However, we do see the benefit of a more focused and effective application of what has been learned and will be learned, especially with regard to the specific challenge of church renewal. Facilitating renewal includes the responsibility of the leadership and agencies of the CRC to provide useful resources, and it includes the responsibility of congregations and individuals to admit their need for renewal and to actively embrace and utilize those resources.

Synod 2017 concluded that the denominational leadership had already “made a good start in beginning to address the concerns” raised by the overture. Synod did not specify what the “good start in beginning to address” actually meant or how it was changing the membership losses.

Synod 2017 added that there were “hopeful possibilities” in merging mission agencies and in the Council of Delegates. Synod did not specify how the administrative changes would increase denominational membership.

Synod termed this a “hopeful momentum.” Synod did not specify how the current situation is hopeful.

Synod, perhaps correctly, observed that it did not “see the benefit of initiating another detailed research process.” In contrast, synod did allude to the value of “renewal.” While synod did not specify what that renewal might be or how it might occur, synod did note that the facilitating of renewal requires the CRCNA leadership and agencies to “provide useful resources.”

Finally, synod correctly noted that congregations and individuals are responsible to “admit their need for renewal and to actively embrace and utilize those resources.”

In 2017, the year of “a good start,” “hopeful possibilities,” and “hopeful momentum,” the CRCNA lost 7,000 additional members. The membership momentum of the CRCNA is strongly negative and has been for twenty-five years. The past twenty-five years in the CRCNA have included significant conflict and the loss of approximately 88,000 members.

With the preceding as background, Classis Pacific Northwest presents the following overture and extended Appendix, both directed toward membership loss and intramural conflict. This overture is best understood as a

follow-up to Synod 2017 (sketched above) and as a further request to Synod 2018 to address membership decline.

While we recognize many reasons for decline in our denomination, we specifically want to name unresolved conflict and the need to reconcile past hurts within the CRCNA. The CRCNA has endured unresolved conflict as a contributing factor for decline (see Appendix). Repentance and reconciliation are critical to the health of our congregations and the restoration of the church.

II. Overture

Classis Pacific Northwest overtures Synod 2018 to direct the denominational leadership to vigorously and purposefully address the concerns raised in Overture 11 to Synod 2017 (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 429-34) and in this overture with the following actions:

A. Urge the denominational leaders to continue the “good start” mentioned by Synod 2017 with a purposeful and consistent call to the entire denomination to be intentional in prayer for reconciled relationships among the members of the CRCNA, with special focus toward our brothers and sisters who have left the CRCNA for various reasons.

B. Urge all church members to use Matthew 5:23-25 as a model, recognizing where hurt has been given and actively seeking to reconcile strained and broken relationships.

C. Urge denominational leaders and *The Banner* staff to “produce useful resources” addressing unresolved conflict in our history and the need for reconciliation, and to publish at least one article with a minimum of 1,000 words in each printed issue.

Ground: We need to place right relationships over having our way. Church decline and conflict will continue if we persist in prioritizing personal preference over reconciled relationships. Reconciliation is the heart of the gospel.

Classis Pacific Northwest
Rob Jansons, stated clerk

Appendix

The History of Membership Growth in the CRCNA

I. A history of membership growth in thirty-year intervals

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (the CRCNA) was formed in the unlikely setting of mid-nineteenth-century western Michigan when disappointed Holland immigrants found themselves unable to continue with the Americanized ways of their cousins in the Reformed Church in America (the RCA). Originally known as the *Ware Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord Amerika* (True Holland Reformed Church in North America), the church had a distinct mission and a role in the developing Midwest of the United States.

In the earliest years the church was *ware*, true, in contrast to the Americanized RCA. As immigrants wrote to relatives in the home country, they endorsed this new denomination as being the true church where faithful pastors preached, and as a place where Holland parents could send their children with confidence that they would find the *ware* gospel.

In those years the CRCNA grew externally from arriving immigrants and organically from swelling families. There is little reason to imagine the early Hollanders were engaged in evangelism outreach and still less reason to believe the neighboring ethnic groups would abandon their own churches for a Holland church.

It is worth noting, at the outset, that the bitter feud between the CRCNA and the RCA lasted more than a hundred years. While the consequences of the single year's conflict (1857) may have seemed limited at the time, the damage caused by that breakup continued for more than 130 years.

A. A.D. 1900

By 1900, the CRCNA membership had attained the remarkable size of 55,593 souls. The 1901 *Yearbook, Jaarboekje ten Dienste Der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord Amerika*, records the data as Households, Members, Souls, and Congregations. Presumably, the number of nonprofessing members (children) was left to the reader's math ability.

Huisgez.	(families)	10,787
Avondmaalg.	(professing)	18,096
Zielen.	(total members)	55,593
Gem.	(congregations)	145

The number of children² equals 55,593 minus 18,096, or 37,497.³ (Calculations denoted as 55,593 - 18,096 = 37,497, hereafter.) This is slightly more than 3.3 children per household.

Denominationally, there was an average of 258 children per congregation. Denominationally, there was an average of 125 professing members per congregation.

Overall, the average membership was 383 souls⁴ per congregation.

The overall denominational growth rate in this period averaged slightly less than 1,500 souls per year.

B. A.D. 1930

Skipping ahead three decades to the *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church of 1930*, we find that many features of denominational life had changed. English had become the standard language, and the emphasis

² The proper term for the baptized but not professing children of professing members is non-professing members. For the sake of readability two additional terms will be used interchangeably and without explanation: children and baptized members.

³ Following the example of a mathematical calculation in the text, as above, the convention for this paper will be to use only the most essential calculations in the text, trusting the reader to follow the pattern.

⁴ Souls is the commonly used term for *members* at the time. The terms will be used interchangeably.

shifted from *Ware* to *Hollandsche* in many aspects of church life. The immigrants were now second-, third-, and perhaps fourth-generation, properly settled in the farms and factories of the Holland Colonies, including West Michigan (Grand Rapids, Holland, Kalamazoo, Muskegon); Chicago area (Roseland, South Holland, West Side, and Cicero); Paterson area (Passaic, Prospect Park, North Haledon); Pella and northwestern Iowa; Sheboygan, Wisconsin; and a host of other towns farther west.

They were Holland-American, living often in colonies and close communities, but sometimes involved in the broader American culture.

Calvin College was developing, as was the seminary. CRCNA luminaries, such as Geerhardus Vos were making their mark—our *Hollandsche* mark—in the Reformed and Presbyterian world. The denomination had weathered a few conflicts, including the breakup of Classis Hackensack, the bitter formation of the Protestant Reformed Church, and the publication of a (English) *Psalter Hymnal* after the war with Germany.

Despite the changes of culture, the denomination could feel confident about its place in the United States as the world was plunged into the Great Depression. The *Yearbook* reported:

Families	22,534
Members	52,905
Souls	108,864
Congregations	263

Overall, the calculated number of children equals 55,959, or about 2.48 non-professing members per family, down from the 3.3 of 1901.

Overall, there were 213 children per congregation.

The number of professing adults averaged 201 per congregation—for a combined total of 414 members per congregation. (Errors due to rounding.)

The overall denominational growth rate in those first three decades of the new century reached nearly 1,600 souls per year ($108,864 - 55,593 / 30 \approx 1,600$) from all sources. This rate compares closely to the four decades from 1857-1900.

A note about congregation size: By 1930, the denomination boasted 263 congregations. A little math informs us that the average congregation comprised 414 souls. That number may seem unrealistically large. To give that a little substantiation, a few classes are cited to illustrate.

- The twenty congregations of rural Classis Sioux Center were home to 7,404 souls, or, 370 souls per congregation.
- In Classis Pella, the corresponding numbers were 4,999 for 15, or 330 souls per congregation.
- Larger congregations were found in Illinois, where 13,148 souls worshiped in 22 congregations, averaging 597 souls. Again, simply for the sake of illustration, that classis included three congregations of more than 1,000 souls.
- It will come as no surprise to informed readers that Classis Holland averaged a substantial 670 souls per congregation in 1930, and that four of its thirteen congregations held more than 1,000 souls.

- Finally, the 28,000 CRCNA members living in two Grand Rapids classes worshiped in fifty-three congregations, with an average membership of about 560 souls.

Not all congregations were large, of course. In farther-flung locations, the dozen congregations of California numbered only 2,435 souls, about 200 per congregation. Similar numbers could be reported for most of the remaining classes.

In those prosperous years, Henry Beets, a prominent leader, served as *Banner* editor and contributor to the *Yearbook*, calling his readers to see the land of vast opportunity and our role in it.

C. A.D. 1960

After another three decades, the CRCNA of 1960 had assimilated more change from the North American culture. First, Canada’s immigrant Holland communities attached to the CRCUSA to form a binational denomination, the CRCNA. Disrupted by World War II and a devastating global Depression, the denomination’s growth nonetheless continued. It emerged from those years with strong resolve and vision to celebrate its first century in North America.

From 1930 to 1960, the denomination focused on its core ministry as the Great Depression and war created hardship at all levels. For example, in some years, the *Yearbook* published a list of the contributions each congregation was able to give toward mission projects, such as in New Mexico, or Hoboken. For another example, the church emphasized its own ministry and needs by listing the choirs and glee clubs and women’s and men’s groups, along with their leaders. The church pulled together in those difficult years. Similarly, the denominational emphasis was on its Reformed theology and its categorical distinction from American theology, such as Methodism or Modernism. H. J. Kuiper, the *Banner* editor, pulled the body together around its distinctive Reformed theology. Even so, the denomination grew.

The 1960 *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church* summarized its membership as follows.

Families	52,690
Communicant	124,268
Total Members	236,145
Congregations	531

The calculated number of children rose to 111,877 in 1960, while the average per household dipped to 2.12 per family.

On a congregational basis, the number of children stood at 210 per congregation.

Similarly, the number of communicant members was 234 members per congregation.

During this period the average church was 445 souls per congregation.

The growth rate from 1930 to 1960 was a remarkable 128,000 souls, for an average of over 4,000 souls per year. For reference, 4,000 souls per year is equal to ten new congregations of 400 members—*each year*. Those were, of course, the years of post-war immigration and the Baby Boom.

As a consequence of the growth, many congregations constructed larger new buildings to accommodate the growing families. Many of these buildings are still in use.

How large were the buildings? The average building served the needs of over 200 youth. The reader is asked to remember that the once-crowded buildings of the 1960s are now half empty, or, for the optimists, half full.

We notice a change in terms in the 1960 *Yearbook*: “Families” remains “Families,” but “Members” are now “Communicant,” and “Souls” are now “Total Members.” Other items to note: baptized members (mostly children) still do not have their own column in the *Yearbook* data. What’s new in the *Yearbook* is greater detail describing children baptized, professions of faith, and another nine columns of data. These terms reflect the steady Americanization of the CRCNA.

D. A.D. 1990

As another thirty years passed, the 1990 membership expanded to 313,722 total members, just shy of its zenith of 316,000 members recorded in 1993. Between 1960 and 1990, the CRCNA endured a few major internal conflicts, such as debate surrounding “the nature and extent of biblical authority,” a report on human sexuality and homosexuality, and theological challenges by Rev. Harry Boer and Dr. Harold Dekker. During this time the roles of women in the church were expanded as women were ordained as deacons.

The CRCNA and the entire nation struggled through conflicts involving racial segregation and the bitterly divisive Vietnam Conflict. The *Ware Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord Amerika* had paid its dues and was emerging as a fully Americanized denomination.

During this time, the CRCNA evolved as a fully American or fully Canadian church. While the process of Americanization involved the entire church ministry, two concerns dominated the era: missional outreach to American and Canadian neighbors and an escalating conflict over the increasing roles of women.

The *Yearbook* (the new, shortened, Americanized title, omitted “Christian Reformed Church in North America” from the cover) reported the membership as follows:

Total Families	76,745
Professing Members	196,026
Non-Professing Members	118,046
Total Members	313,722
Congregations	911

In 1990 the 118,046 children in the CRCNA represented 38 percent of the entire church membership. Finally recognizing them as a category, the *Yearbook* labeled them as “Non-Professing Members.” At the congregational level, the average church included 130 children.

At the family level, there were 1.5 children per family, down from each of the previous periods.

Again, at the congregational level, the number of professing members was 215 per congregation, for an average of 344 total members per congregation.

Among the striking changes that occurred during the period 1900 to 1990, one is highlighted here: the rise of the number of professing members per household. Ninety years earlier, the *Yearbook* for 1901 showed the following:

Huisgez.	10,787
Avondmaalg.	18,096

There were, in 1901, 1.67 professing members per household. To be explicit—that’s not even the 2.0 nominally required for a married couple (a household). Be that as it may, ninety years later that same calculation shows 2.55 professing members per family.

The 1990 denominational membership statistics again reveal three decades of denominational membership growth. The growth rate for the thirty years was a strong 77,000 souls, for an average annual rate of 2,600 souls per year.

In fact, in three of the metrics we are following (the number of families, the number of *professing* members, and the number of congregations) the denomination increased over 50 percent compared to 1960. Strikingly, and important for this presentation, the total membership grew by only 32 percent.

Why is that important? It is important because the “children” component of the total membership barely changed in those thirty years, as shown below.

Non-professing members, or children:

1960: 111,877

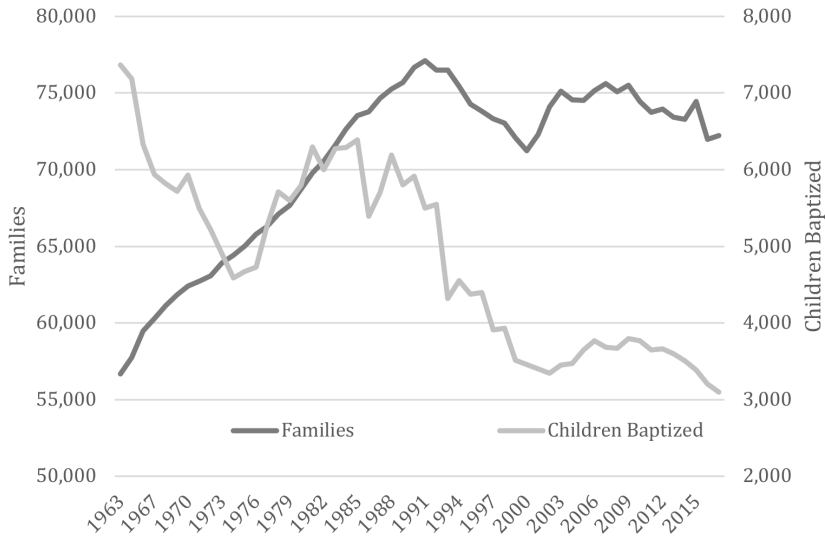
1990: 118,046 (growth is 5.5% in thirty years)

This 5.5 percent growth in the number of children took place while the number of families, professing members, and congregations grew by a minimum of 50 percent.

How could this happen? A tentative or conceptual explanation follows. As the Baby Boomer children of the 1950s and ’60s reached adulthood in the 1970s and ’80s, many of them professed their faith, thereby moving their number from the non-professing/children category to the professing/member category—but not increasing the total membership. Concurrently, many of them married, thereby creating a new family, which increased the family count—but not necessarily the total membership of the CRCNA. While the CRCNA continued to grow, as noted above, the number of children per new family had already begun to decline. By 1990, even as the baptism rate had begun to decline, the church continued to add new members. See Graph 1: Families vs Children Baptized.

In retrospect but not in prospect, the changes in demographics of the CRCNA first evident in 1990 were the hints of a sea change for the denomination. Congregational membership size had dropped to slightly more than 300 souls per congregation. The ratio of children per family had been dropping from approximately 3.3 non-professing members per family over the century, and in 1900 that ratio fell below 1.6. Not only was the size of each family shrinking, the number of children born into the denomination was dropping, resulting in a fewer members per congregation and an increasing average age.

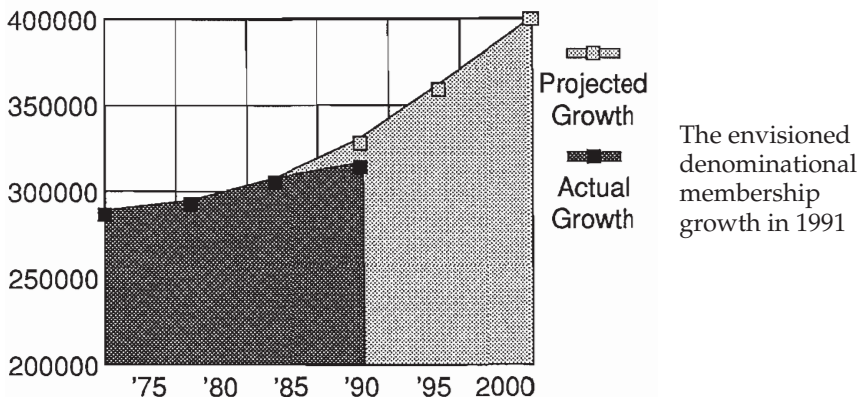
Graph 1: Families vs Children Baptized



As the critically important ratio of children per family dropped below 1.6 and therefore organic growth was declining, the flow of immigrants from Holland had all but stopped. With the absence of those two historic sources of membership growth (children and immigration), the continued viability of the denomination would depend upon three factors: (1) transfers from other denominations, (2) missional outreach, and (3) stanching membership losses caused by transfers out of the CRCNA.

At that time, under the leadership of Christian Reformed Home Missions, the CRCNA created a growth emphasis named “400,000 by 2000.” In this project the denomination was given the goal of reaching the lofty target of 400,000 members in the upcoming decade. The “400,000 by 2000” initiative was a bold move that was doomed to failure.

CRC's GROWTH NUMBERS



E. A.D. 2018

Moving forward to the 2018 *Yearbook*, the denominational membership statistics of the CRCNA show a dramatic change of direction. After 130 years of steady annual growth, the denomination began losing members. As suggested in earlier paragraphs, part of the decline is directly attributed to the changing demographic of the North American family, and part is attributable to the end of immigration from Holland. A third category changed the pattern in the 1990s. A mass-defection of existing members became, for the first time in CRCNA history, a significant and chronic factor in the life of the denomination.

The 2018 *Yearbook* data is online at the denominational website: crcna.org/sites/default/files/membership_stats_2018.pdf. We find the following:

Families	70,256
Professing Members	165,806
Non-Professing Members	62,162
Total Members	227,968
Churches	1,094

The number of children per family has dropped to 0.88, a dramatic drop from the previous century and an almost unbelievable fall from 1990. The number of children in the classrooms of the average church dropped to 57 persons.

The number of professing members per congregation fell to 152.

The average number of persons per congregation fell to an all-time (from the available data) low of 208.

Most notable in CRCNA membership is the relentless pattern of membership loss starting in the early 1990s. From 313,722 in 1990, and the all-time high of 316,415 in 1992, the total membership has plummeted to 227,968 in 2018, a loss of 85,754 members from 1990 (and a loss of 88,447 from the all-time high in 1992). During these past 25 years, the average loss was nearly 3,500 souls per year.

The denomination changed from an increase of 2,600 souls per year to an average loss of 3,500 souls per year. This is a delta of 4,100 members per year. Assuming 300 members per congregation (in the 1990s), the CRCNA is no longer growing by eight full-size congregations each year. Instead, it now is losing the equivalent of nine congregations per year and has been losing at that rate for 25 years.

Using the current membership size of 208, the denomination lost the equivalent of seventeen congregations in calendar year 2017.

The change of membership growth patterns in the CRCNA is shown graphically in the following two charts. The “CRCNA Membership” chart demonstrates the sharp change in membership growth for the CRCNA that began in 1992-93.

CRC's GROWTH NUMBERS

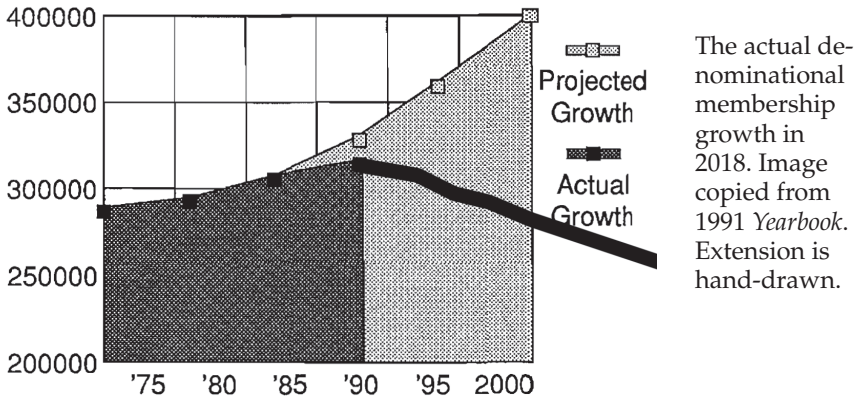


Chart 2 below is a graphical representation of the membership of the CRCNA from 1963 to 2018. It demonstrates with all the clarity of a thousand words that the CRCNA is smaller in 2018 than it was in 1963 and that the decisive tipping point was the early 1990s. While much can be said of this chart, the purpose of it here is to summarize the dramatic and ongoing changes catalyzed in 1992 and 1993.

At the present rate of declension, the CRCNA will fall to 220,000 members by 2022—a far cry from the “400,000 by 2000.”

Chart 2: CRCNA Membership, 1963-2018

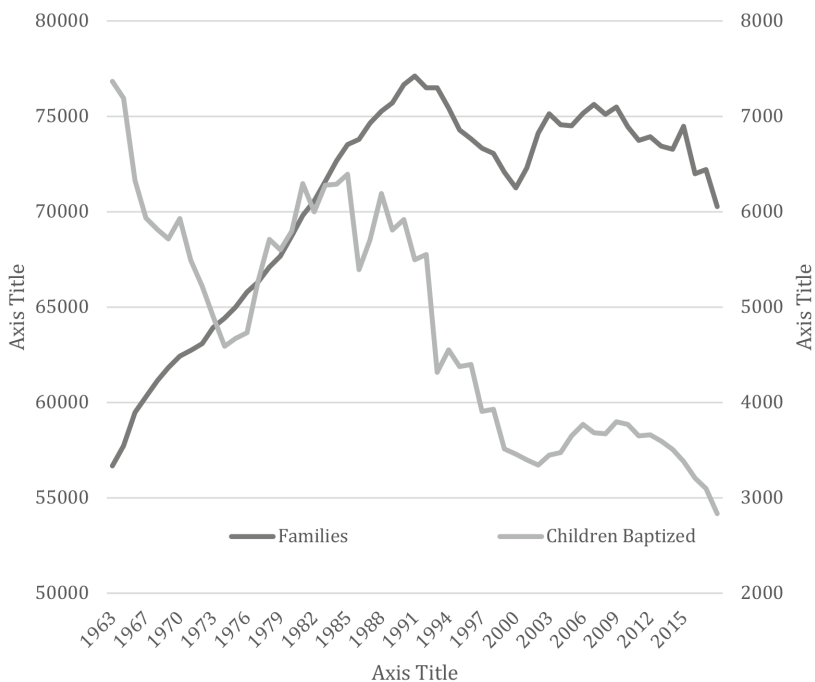


II. Loss of membership

Between 1857 and 1993 the CRCNA was a growing denomination. Three streams fed membership: births to members, immigration, and transfers/conversions. By 1993 the birth rate was declining, and the immigration rate was nearly zero. The Home Missions effort, "400,000 by 2000," was abandoned in the turmoil of the mid-1990s.

Chart 3: Families vs. Children Baptized (duplicated here for convenience) graphically illustrates several important demographic changes to the CRCNA in the past sixty years. As mentioned earlier, Chart 3 demonstrates the trend toward fewer babies baptized into the denomination. Upon closer inspection we see that between the *Yearbook* for 1992 and 1993 the baptism rate dropped from 5,548 to 4,318, a sizable 1,230 baptism decline, or 22 percent.

Chart 3: Families vs. Children Baptized 1963-2018



A. What happened in 1993?

In 1993 the CRCNA decided to open all ecclesiastical offices to both men and women. Since that date the denomination has lost 88,000 members.

It is the thesis of this appendix that in 1993 the significant change was not the decision to admit women to office. The events of that year were far more complex than the decision itself.

Since the 1950s, internal conflict in the CRCNA had been increasing, as described by Dr. Robert Swierenga's informative essay, "Burn the Wooden Shoes" (swierenga.com/BurnWoodenShoesOrigPaper.html). Swierenga documents the four decades of increasing conflict between and among the

factions of the denomination: the post-war immigrants (who settled largely in Canada), the progressives within the CRCNA (*The Reformed Journal*), and the resistant conservatives (*The Torch and Trumpet*).

The factions skirmished over four decades on such topics as the “love of God,” worship music, biblical authority, and more. The conflict eventually focused on admitting women to ecclesiastical office. When the decision was made in 1993, the conflict was formally decided. A few changes to the Church Order, and the decision was final.

B. When a decision is not settled and binding

People who are heavily invested in a position, as was the situation in 1993, do not abandon their convictions on the results of a vote. Yet synod put an end to the debate.

What happened in 1993 is that the enormous, all-encompassing conflict of forty years came to a dramatic conclusion decided by a handful of votes. That is, there were winners and losers. A handful of votes for women-in-office one year. A handful more against, the next. Back and forth. So it had gone for years until 1993, when it all came to a halt. In theory.

The issue was resolved, but the conflict was not resolved in 1993. The debate was stopped, but the emotional consequences continued, and increased. Thousands of members left immediately. Entire congregations defected. Ministers were released. Others were deposed. In some cases, when a minister had already resigned from the CRCNA, synod invented a new term, “as one deposed.”

Congregations were split. Classes were divided.

Households were in conflict.

Positions that had been debated were abruptly and forever fixed, like a specimen under a microscope. Negotiation and compromise and conversation were all stopped by a handful of votes. The divisions that had formed so sharply for the forty preceding years were suddenly made permanent.

We have, in effect, two ongoing sides. The underground, barely discussed ongoing conflict is evident in the life of the CRCNA when new topics surface. When a congregation wishes to change from one classis to another, the old conflicts and emotions surface immediately. When the Belhar Confession is discussed, the same divisions are brought to the fore.

A person is asked if he visits his home church when he returns to his hometown. “I never worship in my home church. They refused to ordain women.”

Or, “I’d never worship in my home church. It’s now a United Reformed Church.”

The importance of 1993 for the CRCNA in 2018 is not simply women-in-office. The importance is the unresolved conflict that was fixed and set in 1993 and was never addressed as a relational or spiritual issue by the denomination. Until it is resolved as a relational issue, the conflict will continue to pollute our future.

Rather than resolving the matter, synod chose to honor both convictions. No one congregation would be forced to comply or conform to the opposing side. That was a gesture with a limited benefit and limited duration. Instead of reducing conflict, the decision to honor two systems of thought served to protract the conflict.

Our own history already has two examples of how long and damaging conflict can be. The first is the break with the RCA in 1857. The second,

not discussed in this overture, came with the breakoff Protestant Reformed Church in the 1920s.

One hundred sixty years ago the CRCNA and the RCA split. The bitterness of that conflict poisoned both denominations for well over a hundred years. It could have been different if leaders and members of both denominations had stopped competing with one another and had made simple good-faith efforts at reconciliation.

That simple decision to pull away from the RCA reminds us that a decision is more than a decision. It is a decision that becomes fixed and permanent, locking emotions of hurt and bitterness into the hearts of the participants. That conflict was so deep that it was taught to generations of children and passed along for over a hundred years.

We are repeating that destructive process.

Every day that passes in which we fail to address the conflict, we pass it on to the next generation.

C. The failure to thrive

The CRCNA has lost some members due to the change of demographics among the membership. We have fewer children. As we age, we have losses due to death. But that is not sufficient to explain how the denomination was growing at the rate of 2,000 persons per year and then, one year later, began losing members at the rate of 3,500 persons per year.

A contributing cause of that change is the emotional and spiritual hurt and grief caused by the bitter conflict that remains unresolved. Instead of dissipating over time, the hurt of that conflict has become institutionalized and normalized, and it is at the root of the CRCNA's failure to thrive.

D. Worship without conflict

It is well known that the rising ocean tide floats all boats in the bay. But the same does not apply to churches. One church may thrive while another congregation across the street falters and fails.

The CRCNA is the one that is faltering and failing. The cause of our loss of membership is not simply demographic or cultural or an end of immigration. The CRCNA is failing to attract and retain new members. At the same time, it is losing members to other denominations. And losing members to reversion.

Conflict, even the subtle undercurrents of hidden conflict, repels potential new members. In 1990, when Home Missions brought "400,000 by 2000" to the denomination, it was ambitious, but at least almost realistic. Within three years the entire effort was completely impossible and was scrapped, soon forgotten in the conflict over church office.

Why was "400,000 by 2000" scrapped? Because it was pointless to attempt to attract new members to a denomination in conflict. It can be said with confidence that the unchurched and the guests will walk away from conflict.

The evidence of this is clear. In Grand Rapids there are several thriving "megachurches." It is often said that those congregations are drawing members from the CRCNA. This is another illustration of the same principle: people prefer to worship without conflict.

What happened in 1993 is that a conflict was locked into the life of the CRCNA. It has created a culture of conflict that is evident at each meeting of synod and in many newsletters of the Office of Social Justice and discussions

of same-sex marriage and in the transfer of congregations to a classis that is more compatible. That conflict discourages visitors and guests from joining.

It is the unresolved conflict that is the one element of the CRCNA membership loss that can be changed.

Writing on the topic of the CRCNA's future, Alvin Hoksbergen, in an op-ed in the February 4, 2011, issue of *The Banner*, summarizes the situation in these words:

Where are we going as a denomination? If we do not come to a fresh and relevant understanding of what we have to contribute as Reformed Christians, our future may not be long-lived. But should we gain a new and vigorous appreciation of who we are, we may have a lengthy and productive ministry ahead of us.

Hoksbergen, though writing primarily about Reformed theology, accurately recognizes that the CRCNA has lost its focus and unifying theological core and is therefore in danger.

III. Biblical references

It is the premise of this overture that unresolved conflict is at work among the members of the CRCNA and that this conflict is a significant element in causing the membership loss of the past twenty-three years. The Bible is filled with references to conflict and how the church must manage its conflict. Two representative passages are brought to this overture.

The Bible and conflict

Matthew 6:14-15—"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (NIV)

Jesus tells his disciples that when someone has sinned against them, it is their responsibility to forgive. The unwillingness to forgive jeopardizes one's relationship with God.

Matthew 5:21-26—"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

On the other hand, Jesus also admonished, if there is a possibility that you have sinned against your brother or sister and that person has something against you, then it is your first priority to tend to that hurt. Even if you are on the way to worship at church, you must drop everything in order to reconcile with the person who holds something against you.

For decades the CRCNA leadership wrangled bitterly over women-in-office and many other issues. There were plenty of hurts to both sides and from both sides of the conflict.

Yet there has been no structural effort to undo or resolve those wrongs and the associated hurts.

For the past twenty-five years the CRCNA has made no organized effort to reconcile brothers and sisters who are at odds with one another. For example, in the past twenty-five years we have not seen one article in *The Banner* promoting normalizing relations with those women who left the CRCNA for more welcoming denominations. They, too, lost much in leaving. They left much in following their call. Many women have deep hurts over how they were treated in the early years—and perhaps how they are treated in more recent years.

On the other side, we have not seen *Banner* articles encouraging reconciliation with the United Reformed Church (URC). The URC pastors and congregations lost much, and many of them have deep hurts over how they were treated in those years.

Ministers were deposed. Others were released. Some were declared to be considered deposed, though they had already left. Others were dismissed with disrespect. Hurts exist that have not been tended to. The responsibility for reconciliation is with the CRCNA. It is, according to Jesus, even more important than Sunday's worship.

Paraphrasing Jesus' admonition: You will never be released from the damages of your unforgiving hearts until you forgive. Until you forgive, the seed of resentment will spoil everything you attempt to do. Until we go to our offended brothers and sisters, we will live with the consequences of the hurts we have caused.

IV. On the road to renewal: Renewal by the numbers

The Christian Reformed Church, along with many other denominations and individual congregations, has suffered material membership loss in the past decades. With 25 percent fewer members than in 1990, and still losing, the denomination must address the question: Can the CRCNA reverse its membership slide to become a thriving denomination once again? Or is its fate sealed? Can it, by the grace of God, return to a state of growth and strength?

The question can be asked in a variety of ways, such as, Where is the greatest potential for effecting a turnaround? Or is there any potential for a turnaround? Is it best to merge into another denomination, buying some time in the process?

These questions are a way of asking, Is the CRCNA in a temporary decline, or is it dying?

To answer these questions, we examine one more set of data. In the table below we see eight cells with numbers in two columns. Here it is that we see some hopeful news.

Each of these numbers is the result of adding twenty-seven other numbers together. In the left column, *Baptism*, is the sum of twenty-nine years of baptisms, from 1990 to 2018. The second number, *Transfer Growth*, is the sum of twenty-nine years of transfer growth. The third, *Evangelism Growth*, is the sum of all our evangelism growth for the same period. The fourth number, *GROWTH TOTAL*, is the sum of the first three.

Table 6: CRCNA SUMMARY 1990 – 2018, Selected Data			
GROWTH		DECLINE	
Baptism	112,346	Deaths	54,097
Transfer Growth	94,199	Transfer Decline	124,241
Evangelism Growth	81,384	Reversion	77,044
GROWTH TOTAL	287,929	DECL. TOTAL	255,382

The left column demonstrates that the CRCNA added 287,929 members between 1990 and 2018. That number, for reference, is larger than the current membership of the denomination.

The right column reports the membership losses for the same period, in an “apples-to-apples” kind of comparison. Beside the 112,346 births, we suffered 54,097 deaths. Note there are twice as many births as deaths.

Similarly, even though we transferred 94,199 people into the CRC, we lost 124,241 to transfers out.

We evangelized 81,384 souls, and we saw the reversion of 77,044 souls.

What do these most recent numbers tell us?

First of all, the numbers are flawed. The growth (287,929) and decline (-255,382) might lead us to believe we are more than 32,000 members larger than we were in 1990. Clearly, that is incorrect; the CRCNA did not grow 32,000 members in the past three decades. We know we lost about 88,000 members during that period. We need to explain this discrepancy before moving forward.

What caused the huge statistical discrepancy? It may be impossible to know with certainty. However, a likely explanation is that church clerks who report the numbers simply did not know how to report the losses during the turbulent years of the mid-'90s. For example, when an entire congregation abandoned the CRCNA, there was no one left to report the loss. Further, our data tabulators do not reconcile all the cells of the spreadsheet as if it were a CPA's audit. With that in mind, we leave this question unresolved and continue.

Pushing on beyond the clerical errors, we see that the CRCNA welcomed 280,560 persons in the twenty-five years. For a denomination now totaling 227,968, that is a huge number.

The downside is similarly remarkable. We lost 255,382 members (by the *Yearbook* reckoning). Of the losses, half were transfers out of the CRCNA to other churches.

Now we focus on the middle row—Transfers In and Transfers Out. Here we see that the CRCNA does have a considerable ability to attract new members. In this row are the numbers of people who voluntarily chose to join the denomination. Those people made a choice, and they chose the CRCNA.

Unfortunately, we have the ability to lose members to transfers out.

How can it be hopeful and encouraging that we lost 30,000 more people to transfers out than in? The answer is simple: transfers are a choice.

How can it be hopeful and encouraging that we lost 30,000 more people to transfers out than in? The answer is simple: transfers are a choice.

The CRCNA lost 88,000 members—many of them transferred out. They chose to abandon the CRCNA. Prior to 1990, that kind of wholesale abandoning the denomination was not a part of our history. In our history it happened only during this time of turmoil and disruption as the denomination was engaged in a battle over church offices.

All of our history and membership data and anecdotal experience agree with one conclusion: What tipped the CRCNA from gaining to losing was the loss associated with conflict. What keeps us losing members is unresolved conflict. The cure for our malaise is to put an end to the conflict.

This is what Jesus told his followers when they faced conflict.

First, it is essential to pursue forgiveness when you have caused hurt.

Matthew 5:23-26—“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Second, it is essential to forgive.

Matthew 6:14-15—“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

By ending conflict in the CRCNA, we will remove the motive for transferring out and remove the roadblock to transferring in. Conflict, the unresolved conflict, of decades of squabbling at synods has taken a toll on the CRC that can be undone with the spiritual remedy for repentance, forgiveness, and grace.

Overture 19: Establish an Annual Compensation Survey for Commissioned Pastors

I. Introduction

One of the excellent resources established by the CRCNA is the annual Ministers' Compensation Survey. This tool provides invaluable information for churches and ministers of the Word in setting and maintaining equitable compensation for ministers across the denomination, taking into consideration years of service, size of congregation, and geographical location. Unfortunately there is no comparable resource for the office of commissioned pastor.

Currently there are over 250 people serving in the office of commissioned pastor across our denomination. Churches and commissioned pastors, though, have no established way of comparing compensation to know whether the compensation provided or received is comparable with that of others serving in the same office of their ordination within our denomination.

II. Overture

Classis Niagara overtures synod to establish a compensation survey for all commissioned pastors.

Grounds:

1. This tool would have the excellent benefit of providing comparable information for churches and commissioned pastors in setting equitable compensation.

2. Establishing a compensation survey would encourage parity of compensation within the office of commissioned pastor, taking into consideration years of service and geographical location.

Classis Niagara
Richard W. Loerop, stated clerk

Overture 20: Establish a Defined-Contribution Pension Plan for Commissioned Pastors

I. Introduction

One of the important considerations for an employer is determination of the kind of benefits to provide for employees. One of the long-standing benefits that the CRCNA has provided for ministers of the Word is a pension plan. In addition, most employees of participating denominational agencies and ministries who are not ordained as ministers of the Word can participate in a retirement plan. This has been a welcome benefit in which the burden of planning for retirement has been shared by both employers and employees.

Unfortunately a pension plan is not in place for commissioned pastors within the CRCNA. Although there may be individual consideration for commissioned pastors in different ministries, there is no established denominational standard or a denominationally managed fund in which employers can participate so that costs are reduced and potential benefits are maximized. Should such a fund be established, employers would participate through matching contributions as a nontaxable benefit for their employees (e.g., 3% of earnings inclusive of salary and housing benefit). A denominationally managed fund should provide for a better return, based on economies of scale in which a large group fund would incur lower management fees. This would also establish a standard that all commissioned pastors could anticipate the benefit of a pension plan as a normal part of their compensation.

II. Overture

Classis Niagara overtures synod to establish a defined-contribution pension fund for all commissioned pastors serving in the CRCNA.

Grounds:

1. CRCNA churches provide a pension plan for ministers of the Word. The principle of parity suggests that a similar consideration should be made for commissioned pastors.
2. A denominationally managed pension plan could maximize returns based on economies of scale in comparison with individually held 401K or RRSP funds.
3. A denominational defined-contribution pension plan would allow for portability for the employees and would demonstrate a long-term commitment by the employers to their staff.
4. As Christian employers, it is incumbent upon us to do the best we can for the long-term care of our employees.

Classis Niagara
Richard W. Loerop, stated clerk