

AGENDA FOR SYNOD



Responding to God's
gracious call.



14th Street
Christian Reformed
Church



Christian
Reformed
Church

**AGENDA
FOR SYNOD**

2019



**Christian
Reformed
Church**

June 14-20, 2019
Covenant Fine Arts Center
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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PREFACE

Synod 2019 will begin its sessions on Friday, June 14, at 8:30 a.m. in the Covenant Fine Arts Center Auditorium on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Faith Community CRC in Wyoming, Michigan, will serve as the convening church. Reverend Roger B. Groenboom, pastor of Faith Community CRC, will serve as the president pro-tem until synod is duly constituted and its four officers have been elected. A community-wide Synodical Service of Prayer and Praise will be held Sunday, June 16, 2019, at 5:00 p.m. in the College Chapel, Calvin College, 1835 Knollcrest Circle 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 13, 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 9 and 16. 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 each of us serving at Synod 2019 follow the words of Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director of the CRCNA

ANNOUNCEMENTS

I. Welcome

Thank you for serving as a delegate to Synod 2019. Whether you are a returning delegate or you are coming for the first time, we sincerely hope and pray that you will find synod to be a rewarding and blessed experience. We come together as disciples of Jesus Christ, as members of the CRC, and as representatives of the classes that delegated and appointed you to serve. Synod is more than just a gathering of church leaders or a governing body. It is a reflection of the church and a time for reflection and celebration of what God is doing in and through the Christian Reformed Church in North America. God has richly blessed us, and you have been given a unique privilege to serve him and his kingdom by your engagement at synod.

The synodical services staff, under the leadership of Ms. Dee Recker, is available to assist you as you prepare for, arrive at, and serve throughout the week of synod. Please feel free to contact the Office of Synodical Services, if you need information or have any questions, 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 2019 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 the recordings.

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 2019:

Thursday orientations

5:00 - 6:45 p.m.	Orientation supper for chairs and reporters, and alternate chairs and alternate reporters of advisory committees
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Supper
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.	Orientation for delegates, faculty advisers, and young adult representatives
8:30 p.m.	Welcome reception and Ministry Fair

Convening Friday

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

Saturday

8:15 - 8:45 a.m.	Opening worship
8:45 - 9:15 a.m.	Brief plenary session
9:30 - 11:45 a.m.	Advisory committee meetings
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 5:00 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Picnic hosted by President Le Roy
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Tentative plenary session

Sunday

Morning worship at area CRC churches	
5:00 p.m.	Synodical Service of Prayer and Praise
6:15 - 7:15 p.m.	Supper
7:30 - 8:30 p.m.	Synod workshops

Monday – 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.	Supper
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Plenary session

Thursday

8:15 - 8:45 a.m.	Opening worship
8:45 - 11:45 a.m.	Plenary session
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 3:30 p.m.*	Plenary session

*Synod will adjourn no later than 3:30 p.m. on Thursday.

DELEGATES TO SYNOD 2019

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Alberta North		
Minister . . . Jacob H. Boer	Minister . . . Michelle J. Kool	
Elder . . . Helen M. Doef	Elder . . . Gerrit W. Duthler	
Deacon . . . Nathaniel C. Vos	Deacon . . . Jesse E. Edgington	
Other . . . Kornelis De Koning	Other . . . Richard J. deLange	
Alberta South/Saskatchewan		
Minister . . . Hendrick J. Roeda	Minister . . . H. John Vanderburgh	
Elder . . . Hessel Kielstra	Elder . . . Nelly Eyk	
Deacon . . . Cynthia M. de Graaff	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Paul Van Stralen	Other . . . Matthew D. Vanden Heuvel	
Arizona		
Minister . . . Anthony R. DeKorte	Minister . . . Ernesto J. Hernandez	
Elder . . . Dennis W. Preston	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . _____	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . José Rayas	Other . . . _____	
Atlantic Northeast		
Minister . . . Joel D. Vande Werken	Minister . . . William M. Hanchett	
Elder . . . Gloria A. Ranney	Elder . . . Wisner H. Buckbee, Jr.	
Deacon . . . Cynthia G. Baker	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Phillip T. Westra	Other . . . Bruce M. Dykstra	
B.C. North-West		
Minister . . . Willem J. Delleman	Minister . . . Michael Yang	
Elder . . . Lori A. Fieber	Elder . . . Asher S. DeGroot	
Deacon . . . Melissa Van Dyk	Deacon . . . Robin de Haan	
Other . . . Chelsey L. Harmon	Other . . . Andrew E. Beunk	
B.C. South-East		
Minister . . . Chad M. Vandervalk	Minister . . . Thomas W. Bomhof	
Elder . . . John Zuidhof	Elder . . . Andy G. Emmens	
Deacon . . . Jim Tolsma	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Michael J. VanderKwaak	Other . . . Michael J. Vander Laan	
California South		
Minister . . . Andrew T. Hanson	Minister . . . Louis W. Wagenveld	
Elder . . . Phil Du Bois	Elder . . . Gabriel Colangelo	
Deacon . . . Irma R. Rivera	Deacon . . . Daryl L. Switzer	
Other . . . Yun Jin Kim	Other . . . Bert Block	
Central California		
Minister . . . Nicholas A. Blystra	Minister . . . Mark VanDyke	
Elder . . . Sandra Baerwald	Elder . . . David Hollander	
Deacon . . . Ruth E. Van Eyk-Wissink	Deacon . . . David L. Harrington	
Other . . . Joel W. Renkema	Other . . . Cynthia J. Fair	

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Central Plains		
Minister . . . Gary W. Brouwers	Minister . . . Mark J. Jicinsky	
Elder . . . Ken J. Rozenboom	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . Marie M. Vanourney	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Thomas R. Wolthuis	Other . . . Jonathan Spronk	
Chatham		
Minister . . . George W. Lubbers	Minister . . . John Moelker	
Elder . . . Pete Weening	Elder . . . Elaine I. Smit	
Deacon . . . Klaas (Nick) Dykema	Deacon . . . Shirley Bakker	
Other . . . Philip A. Apoll	Other . . . David S. Van Berkel	
Chicago South		
Minister . . . Gary K. Foster	Minister . . . _____	
Elder . . . Lisa Dykstra	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . _____	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Gregory S. Janke	Other . . . _____	
Columbia		
Minister . . . Louis M. Korf	Minister . . . Jelmer P. Groenewold	
Elder . . . _____	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . Philip Dekker	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Carl J. Leep	Other . . . Roger D. Kramer	
Eastern Canada		
Minister . . . Aaron M. Thompson	Minister . . . Kenneth M. Gehrels	
Elder . . . Ron P. Hosmar	Elder . . . Tony Verheul	
Deacon . . . Michael W. Fekkes	Deacon . . . Joyce J. Luimes	
Other . . . Daniel A. Meinema	Other . . . _____	
Georgetown		
Minister . . . Timothy L. Holwerda	Minister . . . Gerald A. Koning	
Elder . . . Paul A. Smit	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . Allen W. DeWeerd	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Joshua S. Van Drunen	Other . . . Samuel J. Krikke	
Grand Rapids East		
Minister . . . Nathan DeJong McCarron	Minister . . . Jack Kooreman	
Elder . . . Marlyce J. Snyder	Elder . . . Jonathn P. Bradford	
Deacon . . . Grace A. Roossien	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Thea N. Leunk	Other . . . _____	
Grand Rapids North		
Minister . . . Joshua E. Blunt	Minister . . . Benjamin McKnight	
Elder . . . Noah Kruis	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . Linda B. Rienstra	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Kevin S. Heeres	Other . . . Kory L. Plockmeyer	
Grand Rapids South		
Minister . . . Ronald G. Kool	Minister . . . Paul O. Sausser	
Elder . . . Janice B. Heerspink	Elder . . . David H. Klooster	
Deacon . . . Margery L. Rowles	Deacon . . . Judy Myszak	
Other . . . David A. Struyk	Other . . . Stephen A.B. De Wit	
Grandville		
Minister . . . Heather Strooboscher	Minister . . . _____	
Elder . . . Brian S. Reed	Elder . . . Ronald W. Holtrop	
Deacon . . . Mary J. Wood-Agents	Deacon . . . Wanda K. Kunzi	
Other . . . Daniel B. Mouw	Other . . . _____	

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Greater Los Angeles		
Minister Erick D. Westra	Minister	
Elder Terry R. Van Dyk	Elder Thomas H. Byma	
Deacon Annette L. Biggs	Deacon	
Other Julius Umawing	Other	
Hackensack		
Minister Margaret J. Jenista Kuykendall	Minister Frederick Harvey II	
Elder Violetta A. Diamond	Elder Efren S. Echipare	
Deacon Joseph R. Sanderlin	Deacon Piet de Dreu	
Other Petr Kornilov	Other Paul J. Van Dyken	
Hamilton		
Minister William T. Koopmans	Minister Rita S. Klein-Geltink	
Elder Darrell H. Ouwehand	Elder	
Deacon Marcia L. Hosmar	Deacon	
Other Gareth P. Harker	Other Kenneth F. Benjamins	
Hanmi		
Minister Handeok Daniel Park	Minister	
Elder Heu Gyu Park	Elder	
Deacon Myung Hee Park	Deacon	
Other O. Seog Seo	Other	
Heartland		
Minister Jesse L. Walhof	Minister Todd M. Zuidema	
Elder Duane Walhof	Elder	
Deacon Keith E. Boersma	Deacon	
Other Robert D. Drenten	Other Aaron C. Gonzalez	
Holland		
Minister Matthew J. Stob	Minister Mark M. Douglas	
Elder Donald A. Bemis	Elder Andrew Visser	
Deacon Jon R. Fuder	Deacon Dwayne L. Nienhuis	
Other Jacob D. Porter	Other Lee Khang	
Hudson		
Minister Kevin C. Vande Streek	Minister	
Elder	Elder	
Deacon Shanti Jost	Deacon	
Other	Other	
Huron		
Minister Stephen D. Tamming	Minister A. Carel Geleyne	
Elder Albert J. Hovingh	Elder Irene C. Geleyne	
Deacon Jane Vander Velden	Deacon	
Other Victor S. Laarman	Other Paul D. DeWeerd	
Iakota		
Minister Stanley J. Groothof	Minister John R. Lee	
Elder Gerald L. Zwart	Elder	
Deacon David J. Van Schouwen	Deacon	
Other Adam T. Eisenga	Other Calvin Hoogendoorn	
Illiana		
Minister Laryn G. Zoerhof	Minister Calvin J. Aardsma	
Elder Nathan Sederstrom	Elder Paul J. Epley	
Deacon Mark R. Uittenbogaard	Deacon	
Other Cary R. Gephart	Other	

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Kalamazoo		
Minister . . . Simon A. Tuin	Minister . . . David L. Van Der Wiele	
Elder . . . John C. Gritter	Elder . . . David J. Batts	
Deacon . . . _____	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . G. Ben Bowater IV	Other . . . Timothy L. Raakman	
Ko-Am		
Minister . . . Kyung Ho Park	Minister . . . _____	
Elder . . . Jimmy S.M. Oh	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . Susan Oh	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Sungjin Kim	Other . . . _____	
Lake Erie		
Minister . . . Alex D. Snider	Minister . . . Mark P. Van Andel	
Elder . . . Mary A. Kalmink	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . Robert E. Van Luven	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Randall D. Engle	Other . . . _____	
Lake Superior		
Minister . . . Harrison A. Newhouse	Minister . . . Robert A. Hoekstra	
Elder . . . Michael J. Wiersma	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . _____	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Brady J. Mulder	Other . . . Benjamin C. Verkerk	
Minnkota		
Minister . . . Scott M. Muilenburg	Minister . . . Roger W. Sparks	
Elder . . . Harold J. Westra	Elder . . . John Byl	
Deacon . . . Brent A. Van Schepen	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Brian M. Kornelis	Other . . . Timothy J. Ouwinga	
Muskegon		
Minister . . . Drew K. Sweetman	Minister . . . Kenneth T. Krause	
Elder . . . Daniel M. Mulder	Elder . . . Ronald D. Bielema	
Deacon . . . Birdella W. Cleveland-Hawkins	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Laura de Jong	Other . . . John S. Huyser	
Niagara		
Minister . . . Sidney Couperus	Minister . . . Robert J. Loerts	
Elder . . . Dan R. Baarda	Elder . . . Frank Engelage	
Deacon . . . _____	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Tena Dykxhoorn	Other . . . Steven J. deBoer	
Northcentral Iowa		
Minister . . . Jason T. Semans	Minister . . . Frank E. Pott	
Elder . . . Darrel Druvenga	Elder . . . Herbert W. Schreur	
Deacon . . . Tyler R. Helpers	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Brian M. Hofman	Other . . . _____	
Northern Illinois		
Minister . . . Gregory D. Schuringa	Minister . . . John R. Huizinga	
Elder . . . Peter C. Zigterman	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . _____	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Ezra Jang	Other . . . _____	
Northern Michigan		
Minister . . . Jeffrey S.M. Kroondyk	Minister . . . Steven J. Datema	
Elder . . . Alan L. Diemer	Elder . . . _____	
Deacon . . . _____	Deacon . . . _____	
Other . . . Gregory J. Kett	Other . . . _____	

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Pacific Northwest		
Minister . . . Douglas E. Fakkema Elder . . . Aaron J. De Boer Deacon . . . Orry D. Poe Other . . . Bill A. Schaetzke	Minister . . . Jacob L. Meadows Elder . . . Joseph M. Strong Deacon . . . _____ Other . . . Kyle D. Sanford	
Quinte		
Minister . . . Steven L. Kooy Elder . . . Robert A. Pijper Deacon . . . Irene G.I. Jonker Other . . . Ronald E. VanAuken	Minister . . . Darren Hoogendoorn Elder . . . Cathy L. Vink Deacon . . . Richard B. Hamilton Other . . . Andrew Buwalda	
Red Mesa		
Minister . . . Lora A. Copley Elder . . . Sherry M. TenClay Deacon . . . Sharon K. Jim Other . . . Caleb N. Dickson	Minister . . . Timothy Howerzyl Elder . . . Mike L. De Young Deacon . . . Autumn J. Newell Other . . . Jon Hunt	
Rocky Mountain		
Minister . . . Philip VanderWindt Elder . . . Julie Ann Walden Deacon . . . Terri L. Weatherman Other . . . Brian Tarpy	Minister . . . _____ Elder . . . _____ Deacon . . . Delinda Baker Other . . . Maria M. Rawlinson	
Southeast U.S.		
Minister . . . Scott A. Vander Ploeg Elder . . . Juan P. Sierra Deacon . . . Jason W. Palm Other . . . Stanley J. Workman	Minister . . . Joshua (Kyong Won) Jung Elder . . . Sandy Wagner Deacon . . . Irma Rodriguez Other . . . Kristin J. Vos	
Thornapple Valley		
Minister . . . Dirk M. vanEyk Elder . . . Steve Bootsma Deacon . . . _____ Other . . . Steven M. Hull	Minister . . . David J. Bosscher Elder . . . Lisa K. Garvelink Deacon . . . _____ Other . . . Casey Jen	
Toronto		
Minister . . . Steven D. Frieswick Elder . . . Dorothy Thomson Deacon . . . Mary Schoenmaker Other . . . John Tenyenhuis	Minister . . . _____ Elder . . . Corrie Tuyl Deacon . . . _____ Other . . . _____	
Wisconsin		
Minister . . . Jeffrey J. Brower Elder . . . Chris A. Maurer Deacon . . . Charles C. Adams Other . . . Timothy D. Kooiman	Minister . . . Peter T. Verhulst Elder . . . David L. Katsma Deacon . . . Carol J. Wynstra Other . . . Andrew D. Zylstra	
Yellowstone		
Minister . . . Timothy A. Kuperus Elder . . . Les Visser Deacon . . . _____ Other . . . Jonathan S. Owens	Minister . . . Chris A. Kostelansky Elder . . . Cornelius W. Kroon Deacon . . . _____ Other . . . Clair Vander Neut	
Zeeland		
Minister . . . Tyler J. Wagenmaker Elder . . . Ronald Boersema Deacon . . . James D. Diemer Other . . . Vern D. Swieringa	Minister . . . Arthur J. Van Wolde Elder . . . _____ Deacon . . . Calvin P. Scholma Other . . . Mark D. Timmer	

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES REPORT

The Council of Delegates (COD) of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) began its service of interim governance on behalf of the CRC's annual synods after being appointed by Synod 2017. COD delegates represent the CRC's forty-eight classes, with additional at-large members, gathering to address the mission and ministry of the CRCNA on behalf of synod. The COD addresses agency matters 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 2018.

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, 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 the BTGMI corporations and the CRCNA corporations.

The Council of Delegates has met two times since Synod 2018 (October 2018 and February 2019), and is scheduled to meet again in May 2019. The COD’s agenda is primarily first reviewed by one of five committees: Congregational Ministries Committee, Global Missions Ministries Committee, Mercy and Justice Ministries Committee, Ministry Plan and Communication Services 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 and are evaluated; the financial status, administrative leadership, and 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. Tasks carried out on behalf of synod

Much of the COD’s work over the past year has been in response to synodical instructions directed to either the COD or the executive director in conjunction with the COD. An outline of the various instructions, organized by ministry-priority area, is provided below.

1. Faith formation

Curriculum Development and Mandate for Faith Formation Ministries (*Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 461-62): "That synod instruct the COD to clarify expectations for the denominational funding of Reformed curricula in the future," and ground c: "Clarifying the mandate of Faith Formation ministries and the financial commitment of the denomination will demonstrate that the development of Reformed curricula is central to our calling." (See section II, B, 6.)

2. Global mission

Church Renewal (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 706): "That synod instruct the executive director to work with each agency and educational institution to collaborate in finding areas of convergence related to church renewal and to develop effective strategies for implementation by classes and churches." (See section II, B, 7.)

Immigrant Churches (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 459): "That synod instruct the executive director to work with the appropriate agencies and ministries to explore the potential processes and resources necessary to facilitate enfolding immigrant churches into the CRCNA." (See section II, B, 8.)

3. Gospel proclamation and worship

Bible Translation (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 452): "That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to determine the means for synod to address its responsibility of approving Bible translations for our congregations to use in worship." (See section II, A, 16.)

4. Mercy and justice

Abuse of Power (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 523): "That synod instruct the Council of Delegates, in consultation with the executive director, to appoint a small team to bring recommendations through the Council of Delegates to Synod 2019 regarding how the CRCNA can best address patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination." (See section II, A, 19.)

Diversity Report (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 829): "The executive director will continue to request an annual diversity report from each agency and ministry and will include a summary of these reports in the report to the [COD] each February." (See section II, A, 6.)

Goals and Priorities (*Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 634-35): "That synod (1) take note that the above proposal arises in response to a decision of Synod 2016 (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 829), instructing 'the executive director to encourage the Justice, Inclusion, Mercy, and Advocacy (JIMA) collaboration group to continue to prioritize goals and assign resources for all of our justice and mercy denominational issues,' and (2) instruct the executive director to pursue other possible priorities as well as to plan and implement the program described in recommendation a, 4, [adopted by synod; *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 633] and report the results to synod annually through 2020." (See section II, B, 12.)

Judicial Code (*Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 477, 529): "[That synod] instruct the executive director, working with the Judicial Code Committee and Church Order experts, to bring to Synod 2019 recommendations for improving the clarity of the Judicial Code as found in the Supplements to

Church Order . . . ;” and “that synod instruct the executive director and the Council of Delegates to explore how to improve the gender and ethnic diversity of the Judicial Code Committee.” (See sections II, A, 13, b and c.)

Language for Diversity Reporting (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 450): “That synod instruct the executive director to request the Office of Race Relations to re-examine the most appropriate language to employ when reporting on ethnic and gender diversity in denominational reports.” (See section II, A, 7.)

Office of Social Justice U.S. Advisory Committee (*Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 527-28): “That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to create a U.S. committee to provide guidance and support to the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action.” (See section II, B, 9.)

Reconciliation (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 473): “That synod urge the executive director to work with the appropriate agencies and ministries to publicize existing resources addressing unresolved conflict in our history and the need for reconciliation.” (See section II, A, 18.)

Safe Church Reporting (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 476): “That synod instruct the executive director to have Safe Church Ministry report annually through the Council of Delegates to synod regarding the number and names of classes with and without Safe Church teams, and the number of congregations with and without Safe Church teams and policies.” (Coming by way of the COD Supplement Report.)

5. Servant leadership

Offices of Elder and Deacon (*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 669-70): “That synod, in order to provide for the ongoing revitalization of the offices of elder and deacon, mandate the executive director of the CRCNA to task appropriate agencies and ministries with the development of strategies for the revitalization of the offices of elder and deacon, including

- a. A cataloging of all resources offered by our denominational agencies that support the vision of reinvigorated offices of elder and deacon, as well as other appropriate resources offered by other sources (see Appendix A, *Agenda for Synod 2015*, pp. 401-404).
- b. The development of an approach, whether by way of conferences, staff, materials, or other means, that gives energy to initiatives of deacons and elders in churches, classes, and the denomination.

The executive director of the CRCNA shall report to synod on the annual progress of the above efforts of denominational agencies and ministries as all seek to work together for the revitalization of the offices of elder and deacon.” (See section II, B, 13.)

6. Other areas

Classis Title (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 454): “That synod instruct the Council of Delegates to refer Overture 10 [Change the Title *Classis* to *Regional Assembly*] to the Classis Renewal Advisory Team or another appropriate body for analysis, including potential costs involved in a change.” (See section II, A, 20.)

Evaluation and Prioritization (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 455): “That synod instruct the Council of Delegates and the executive director to continue the important work of evaluation and prioritization by working together

to implement a robust evaluation strategy whereby in a five-year cycle all agencies and ministries will be continually evaluated through the framework of the five ministry priorities.” (See sections II, B, 4 and 5.)

Our Calling (Five Ministry Priorities) (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680): “That synod instruct the executive director to provide an annual update to synod’s authorized governing board, including recommendations, on how the Five Streams are being used and developed.” (See section II, B, 2.)

Note: In February 2019 the COD decided to discontinue the annual reporting by the executive director on the use of the “Five Streams” (renamed Our Calling and referred to as our five ministry priorities) because the language of these ministry priorities is sufficiently enculturated into the denomination.

Ministry Plan (*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 630): “That synod give ‘concept endorsement’ to the goals and strategies attached (*Agenda for Synod 1997*, pp. 54-61), which the agencies will use to work toward implementation of the strategic plan.” (See section II, B, 1.)

Reimagining Ministry Shares (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 858-59): “That synod ask the BOT [now COD], following ministry evaluation/prioritization, to reimagine ministry shares . . . and to report to Synod 2019.” (See section II, C, 2.)

C. COD membership

The members of the Council of Delegates from the classes include B. Bernard Bakker (Eastern Canada), Bev Bandstra (B.C. South-East), Gary D. Bos (Columbia), Timothy Bosscher (Grandville), Wayne Brower (Holland), John H. Caicedo (California South), Paula Coldagelli (Wisconsin), 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), Sherry Fakkema (Pacific Northwest), Beth Fellinger (Chatham), Laurie Harkema (Lake Erie), Emmett A. Harrison (Grand Rapids East), Sally Haywood Larsen (Illiana), Susan B. Hoekema (Muskegon), Sheila E. Holmes (Hackensack), Melvin O. Jackson (Greater Los Angles), Stanley W. Jim (Red Mesa), Michelle J. Kool (Alberta North), Jose Antonio (Tony) Lara (Arizona), John R. Lee (Iakota), Theodore Lim (Ko-Am), Daudi Mutisya Mbuta (Grand Rapids North), Brian L. Ochsner (Central Plains), Cora Rempel (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), James Roskam (Georgetown), Roger W. Sparks (Minnkota), Arnie J. Stolte (Northern Illinois), David A. Struyk (Grand Rapids South), Samuel D. Sutter (Atlantic Northeast), Garry H. Sytsma (Hamilton), Kevin T. TenBrink (Kalamazoo), Mark Volkers (Heartland), Tyler J. Wagenmaker (Zeeland), Ralph S. Wigboldus (Huron), Jei Wilson (Chicago South), Stanley J. Workman (Southeast U.S.), and George R. Young (Hudson).

Four at-large members also serve the COD: Elsa Fennema (U.S.), Verney Kho (Canada), Ashley Medendorp (Canada), and Aaltje Van Grootenhuis (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 Keith Oosthoek) and two guests from the World Renew Board of Delegates (Hyacinth Douglas-Bailey and Jim Joosse) 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 from Classis Central California also serves as a member on the Calvin College Board of Trustees, providing a valuable link to this CRCNA institution.

The following serve as officers of the COD and of respective corporations for the 2018-2019 term:

1. COD officers: Rev. Paul R. De Vries, chair; Mr. Andy de Ruyter, vice chair; Mr. Tim Bosscher, treasurer; Ms. Aaltje van Grootenhuis, secretary.
2. Corporation officers
 - a. CRCNA Canada Corporation: Mr. Andy de Ruyter, president; Rev. Donald D. Draayer, vice president; Ms. Aaltje van Grootenhuis, secretary; Ms. Verney Kho, treasurer.
 - b. CRCNA U.S. Corporation: Rev. Paul R. De Vries, president; Rev. Emmett A. Harrison, vice president; Mrs. 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. Verney Kho, treasurer.
 - d. BTGMI U.S. Corporation: Rev. Paul R. De Vries, president; Rev. Emmett A. Harrison, vice president; Mrs. 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; Mrs. Laurie Harkema; Mrs. Susan Hoekema; Rev. Michelle J. Kool; and Ms. Aaltje van Grootenhuis. Dr. Steven R. Timmermans serves *ex officio*.

Note: Rev. Tong Kun Park resigned from the COD and its executive committee in January 2019. Subsequently the COD appointed Mrs. Laurie Harkema in February 2019 to fill the vacancy through June 2019.

D. COD nominations

Shortly after synod met in June, the COD received the resignation of Cori Christiaanse (Quinte). Classis Quinte submitted the following nominee for appointment by the COD as *interim* delegate until synod appoints the next term delegate. The COD recommends Ms. Gloria Melenberg for appointment as the Classis Quinte delegate to serve a modified first term through June 30, 2021, eligible for reappointment.

Mrs. Gloria Melenberg is a member of Hope Fellowship CRC in Courtice, Ontario. She worked in payroll/accounting for more than twenty years, and in 2012 she completed a bachelor of nursing degree.

Her previous experience includes serving on the mission team at Maranatha CRC, Calgary, Alberta. Mrs. Melenberg served as an implementer/facilitator for the Justice Café and as an educator at the Calgary Pregnancy Care Centre. Currently she serves on the finance committee, the prayer team, and the ladies' ministry committee at Hope Fellowship CRC.

The COD also received the resignation of Rev. Tong Kun Park (Hanmi) in January 2019. Classis Hanmi submitted the following nominee for appointment by the COD in February as *interim* delegate until synod appoints the nominee as a term delegate. The COD recommends Rev. Roger Y. Ryu for appointment as the Classis Hanmi delegate to serve a modified first term through June 30, 2021, eligible for reappointment.

Rev. Roger Y. Ryu, a member of Olympic Presbyterian Church (CRC) in Los Angeles, California, is the director of K-A Christian Community. He graduated from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Pacific Law School. Rev. Ryu has served as a delegate to synod several times and has served on the CRC Home Missions board. He has more than twenty years' experience serving on church councils.

The COD Nominating Services Committee works from an adopted rotation of concluding terms for the current COD membership—ideally eight or nine members will conclude their term with the board each year to provide continuity in the long run. Over the next several years, some members will be serving out their term from previous board service (transitioning from the CRCNA Board of Trustees, the Back to God Ministries International board, or the Resonate Global Mission board) with a shortened term rather than two full terms (six years) on the COD.

Concluding service to the Council of Delegates in June 2019 are the following members:

Alberta South/Saskatchewan	Ms. Cora Rempel
Hamilton	Mr. Garry H. Sytsma
Heartland	Mr. Mark Volkers
Rocky Mountain	Rev. John O. Eigege
Southeast U.S.	Rev. Stanley J. Workman
Canada at-large	Ms. Verney Kho

The COD recommends that synod thank these members for their faithful service and significant contributions to the denomination, especially during these inaugural years of the Council of Delegates.

The COD recommends the following nominees from the classes indicated for appointment to a first term of three years on the Council of Delegates:

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan

Ms. Heather Cowie, in the process of completing a D.Min. degree from Tyndale University College and Seminary, is a commissioned pastor and spiritual director at The Road CRC in Calgary, Alberta. Pastor Cowie has previously served as a member and chair of The King's Fold Retreat Board and has served on the council at The Road CRC.

Classis Hamilton

Dr. William T. Koopmans, senior pastor at Hope CRC in Brantford, Ontario, served on the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee from 2006-2012 (and as chair from 2007-2012). He was recently reappointed to the EIRC in 2018. 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 has served as president of synod, as a synodical deputy and church visitor, and on several synodical committees, most recently the Synod Review Task Force.

Classis Heartland

Rev. Mark Vande Zande serves as pastor at First CRC, Orange City, Iowa. He received his M.Div. from Calvin Theological Seminary, and has served twice as a delegate to synod. He previously served on the Minn-I-Kota Youth Network board and the CRC's Sesquicentennial Planning Committee. Rev. Vande Zande is currently serving on the Orange City Area Health System Diabetes board, the classical interim committee, and the nomination committee and education committee of classis. He has extensive experience serving as the president of church council (2000 to present).

Classis Rocky Mountain

Rev. Adrian de Lange is the lead pastor at New Life CRC in Grand Junction, Colorado. He served as the student senate president while attending Calvin Theological Seminary. He currently serves as secretary of the Christ Center board (nonprofit coffee shop supporting missions) in Grand Junction, Colorado, and as president of the church council at New Life CRC. He has served on several classical committees in Classis Rocky Mountain.

Classis Southeast U.S.

Mr. Jesús Bayona is employed as a full-time fireman and EMT. He is a member of Sunlight Community Church in Port St. Lucie, Florida, where he currently serves as elder. Mr. Bayona has previously served as a church visitor and as a member of the classical home missions committee, and has a passion for church planting.

E. Salary matters

1. 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 (increased 2% from the 2017-2018 ranges) are as follows:

2018-2019 Salary Grade and Range Structure

Level	U.S. Range		Canadian Range	
	Minimum	Target	Minimum	Target
20	\$156,839	\$184,516		
19	\$141,755	\$166,771		
18	\$124,880	\$146,918	\$116,541	\$137,107
17	\$110,647	\$130,173	\$101,700	\$119,647
16	\$95,260	\$112,070	\$88,839	\$104,516
15	\$82,984	\$97,628	\$79,068	\$93,022
14	\$74,093	\$87,168	\$71,978	\$84,680
13	\$66,154	\$77,828	\$65,648	\$77,233

2. Salary review project

The COD mandated a review of current CRCNA salaries using Mercer to help identify pay ranges in comparable nonprofit markets in the United States and Canada. A new pay range structure (e.g., alphabetical categorization) as well as a reduction in the number of overall pay ranges was adopted. The COD also approved specific pay ranges for senior positions based on the new system. A study was conducted concerning salary differences in Burlington, Ontario, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, with regard to each nation's national wage and salary markets, respectively; as a result, pay differentials were adopted, thereby amending target salary levels for the Canadian pay system. Changes to the new salary-range system will be implemented in spring 2019.

Related to the adopted changes to pay ranges and levels, the COD confirmed that the leadership of World Renew are empowered to apply compensable factors as appropriate to reflect unique staff positions.

II. Activities of the COD

A. Polity matters

1. Convening church of Synod 2020

The Council of Delegates recommends that synod accept the invitation of Encounter Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to serve as the convening church of Synod 2020.

Grounds:

- a. Encounter Church, a multigenerational and diverse church, will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2020.
- b. Encounter Church also has plans to plant a new church in 2020.

Note: Synod is scheduled to meet on the campus of Calvin College.

2. Host church of Synod 2021

The Council of Delegates recommends that synod accept the invitation of First CRC in Orange City, Iowa, to serve as the *host* church of Synod 2021, and that synod be held on the campus of Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Grounds:

- a. First CRC in Orange City, Iowa, will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2021.
- b. Dordt College has communicated its availability and willingness to serve as the host college for the meetings of Synod 2021.

Note: The Synod Review Task Force is recommending to Synod 2019 that the election of synod officers take place at the conclusion of synod and that they serve throughout the year, through the following synod. If synod adopts this recommendation, a convening church and president pro tem (pastor of the convening church of synod) would no longer be needed in 2021—thus the recommendation is for a *host* church. However, if the recommendation by the Synod Review Task Force is *not* adopted, First CRC in Orange City, Iowa, would serve as the *convening* church of synod and would provide the president pro tem.

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	Alberta South/Sask. Chatham Pacific Northwest Southeast U.S. Wisconsin Yellowstone	Rev. David J. Swinney Rev. Eric Groot-Nibbelink Rev. Clair Vander Neut	Rev. Norman J. Visser Rev. Randolph A. Beumer Rev. Gerrit Besteman Rev. Mark J. Pluimer Rev. Peter J. DeVries	2021(1) 2021(1) 2021(1)

*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 2018-2019 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 159 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 174 members, 56 (32%) are women, and 27 (16%) are people of color. The data received from the boards for the 2018-2019 board term reflects an *increase* of 4 percent in women delegates and a *decrease* of 2 percent for people of color on our denominational boards as compared to the 2017-2018 reporting year. In the joining of the former Board of Trustees with the boards of Back to God Ministries International and Resonate

Global Mission to form the new Council of Delegates, each board also is examined individually in light of synod's goal of having *at least 25 percent ethnic minority membership*. The board membership of Calvin College is 11 percent ethnic minority; Calvin Theological Seminary, 21 percent; World Renew (JMC), 7 percent; and the COD, 25 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 director of ministries and administration on behalf of 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. Terminology for diversity

Synod 2018 instructed the executive director "to request the Office of Race Relations to re-examine the most appropriate language to employ when reporting on ethnic and gender diversity in denominational reports" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 450). The COD endorsed the Terminology for Diversity report (Appendix A), including utilization of the findings for editorial style guidance in CRCNA communication, and recommends the findings and implementations to synod for adoption.

8. 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 2019 (* indicates service in this capacity in 2018):

* Mr. Benjamin Boersma
Ms. Rebecca Bokma
Ms. Katie E. Haan
Mr. William Krahne

* Ms. Jenna Rodermond
* Mr. Benjamin VanderWindt
Mr. James Williams

9. Report of the Chicago South Appeals Review Committee

The executive director's office received two appeals to Synod 2019 in December 2018 regarding a decision of Classis Chicago South. The executive committee of the Council of Delegates judged that address of the appeals could not wait to be decided at the next meeting of synod in

June 2019. In summary, the appeals claimed that Church Order guidelines were not followed by a decision of Classis Chicago South when it approved the formation of a union congregation between Calvin CRC, Oak Lawn, Illinois, and Calvary RCA, Orland Park, Illinois.

The urgency for the COD to address the appeals became clear after learning that implementation of the new union was planned for early April 2019. The COD received the report of the appeals review committee as found in Appendix B and adopted the following in response to the report.

The COD voted not to sustain the appeals presented by the Palos Heights (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church council and by Mr. Robert Dykstra and Mr. Jeremy Oosterhouse.

Grounds:

1. The review committee observed that proper procedure was followed by Classis Chicago South in dealing with the overture.
2. The charge that the Church Order was not followed, and therefore that the matter should not have been considered, is not valid, as the Church Order does not specifically address the kind of union envisioned.
3. The overture was presented to the classis, and a motion of support was made, properly placing the overture on the floor of classis for discussion. The decision to consider the overture went unchallenged by classis delegates.
4. The minority report, which identified the concerns contained in the appeals, was available to all classical delegates, and thus the issues were sufficiently transparent.
5. The appellants support the union of these churches, which, through the multisite church (Calvary-Oak Lawn, a ministry of both the CRC and the RCA), would continue a Reformed witness in the neighborhood.

The COD recommends that synod approve the action taken by the Council of Delegates with respect to the two appeals regarding the decision of Classis Chicago South.

10. Proposed Church Order changes

The COD, on behalf of Synod 2018, presents to Synod 2019 the Proposed Church Order Changes by Synod 2018 in Appendix C for adoption.

11. Ministry presentations at synod

For presentations to synod by CRC ministries, a rotation schedule reflecting the denomination's five ministry priorities was implemented in 2018, and Synod 2018 received presentations by the ministries of Gospel Proclamation and Worship (Calvin Theological Seminary and Worship Ministries). Synod 2019 will hear from our ministries serving in the area of Faith Formation: Calvin College and Faith Formation Ministries. (Note: In future rotations, the ministries serving in the area of Gospel Proclamation and Worship will join with those of Faith Formation in making presentations to synod. See also section II, 4-5 in this report.)

12. Role of COD Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA
- The COD Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA is similar to, but not identical to, the Covenant for Officebearers (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5). Given the breadth of the COD's mandate, the COD statement focuses on the creeds, confessions, and contemporary testimonies, seeking affirmation of the creeds and confessions and seeking recognition of the contemporary testimonies as Reformed expressions of the Christian faith (Synod 2017 provided this designation).

The COD recognizes that individual members have the privilege of indicating any personal exemptions from specific points contained within creeds, confessions, and contemporary testimonies. Personal exemptions will be noted by an asterisk (*) next to the signature with an accompanying explanation footnoted in the COD book of signatures. When an exemption is indicated, the executive committee has the right to evaluate whether the exemption is allowable or compromises the individual's ability to serve the CRCNA in the capacity of a COD member. New COD members will be informed of this statement and exceptions policy when they are nominated for the COD.

13. 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.

a. Membership

We are still in the process of implementing the changes to the JCC composition adopted by Synod 2014, staggering the terms of current JCC members. Ms. Rita Buitendorp (having served six years) and Mr. Calvin Rozeboom (having served four years) are concluding service on the JCC in 2019. It is recommended that synod express gratitude to Ms. Buitendorp and Mr. Rozeboom for their service to the committee.

The Judicial Code Committee reviewed and accepted potential nominees, and the COD recommends that synod appoint the following single nominees to the Judicial Code Committee for a first term of three years.

Ground: The nominees are presented by the COD in light of Synod 2018's instruction to improve the ethnic and gender diversity of the JCC (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 529).

Position 1: Person trained in the law

Ms. Eun-Joo Gloria Dykstra is a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ontario. She is currently employed as a lawyer at Smordin Law Professional Corporation in Hamilton, Ontario, having earned her J.D. from the University of Windsor and with faculty of law. Ms. Dykstra has also served on the Hamilton Early Learning Centre board. She has a keen interest in matters of justice and is characterized as "thoughtful and measured."

Position 2: Layperson not trained in law

Ms. Amy Vander Vliet, a member of the Washington, D.C., CRC, is employed as a senior web content editor for Georgetown University. She has previously served as secretary for the Creation Stewardship Task Force (Synod 2012), as coleader for the denomination's Young Adult Leadership Task Force, as a delegate to synods, and as reporter for a synodical advisory committee. Ms. Vander Vliet has also served as leader of her local church pastor-search committee, hospitality team, and 75th anniversary team. In addition, she has served as a deacon, including as chair of deacons and clerk of council. She is currently serving on the Dordt College Alumni Council.

b. Assignment re diversity in Judicial Code Committee membership

In response to a directive by Synod 2018 to "explore how to improve the gender and ethnic diversity of the Judicial Code Committee" (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 529), the COD recommends that synod adopt the following addition to Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c, Section 8, b (as indicated in **bold** text):

The Judicial Code Committee shall be composed of twelve (12) members and shall reflect the diversity of the denomination, **preferably with at least 25 percent of the members reflecting ethnic diversity and an equal balance of men and women.**

Each year four (4) persons shall be elected for terms of three (3) years. At least one (1) of these four (4) persons shall be a minister of the Word or a commissioned pastor; at least one (1) shall be a person trained in the law; at least one (1) shall not be a minister of the Word or a commissioned pastor nor one trained in the law. Synod shall elect members from nominations presented by the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA.

Ground: Including specific goals will, over a period of three to four years, help the committee better "reflect the diversity of the denomination."

c. Proposed revision to Judicial Code processes

Synod 2018 decided the following with regard to the Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures:

The Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c) was rewritten four years ago. Thankfully, there have been very few occasions to utilize the amended Judicial Code and the processes it suggests. Yet, recent use of the code has identified a few areas where clarity is needed. Therefore, the JCC's recommendation is as follows:

Recommendation: To instruct the executive director, working with the Judicial Code Committee and Church Order experts, to bring to Synod 2019 recommendations for improving the clarity of the Judicial Code as found in the Supplements to Church Order and as illustrated by the following points:

1. The Judicial Code states that "either party to the dispute may request the opportunity to address synod." While the code provides the opportunity for either party to make a request, the code would

serve us better if it provided criteria upon which decisions about such requests are made and by whom.

2. The Judicial Code (Supplement, Article 30-c) requires that “charges involving physical, emotional, or sexual abuse . . . should be dealt with . . . by way of the Advisory Panel Process.” The first of five footnotes in the Advisory Panel Process includes this statement: “These are suggested guidelines. The circumstances of abuse may dictate that church officials deviate from them. In addition, state and provincial law vary somewhat in terms of the manner in which abuse is defined and how it should be reported.” The statement continues, saying that “the presumption should be in favor of following the guidelines in the case of each allegation of abuse; however, the church is best served by retaining legal counsel with expertise in the area to define the legal standards relevant to a particular jurisdiction.” Additional clarification and examples may help the church—at each level of assembly—know when deviation is permissible. Additional clarification of the definitions of sexual misconduct and physical misconduct would also assist the church in determining what conduct falls within the Advisory Panel Process.

(Acts of Synod 2018, p. 477)

The executive director met with the Judicial Code Committee and Rev. Kathy Smith, polity professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, in response to synod’s request; however, the JCC presented a report and recommendation independent of the executive director’s proposal. The Council of Delegates reviewed the two proposals in response to this assignment and recommends that Synod 2019 adopt the proposed revisions to the Church Order Supplement (Art. 30-c), Rules for Synodical Procedure, and Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader as found in Appendix D.

The COD also decided to provide synod with the JCC’s proposal for a task force to “consider issues and make recommendations regarding the Judicial Code and related rules” (see Appendix E). However, the COD wishes to communicate its nonendorsement of the proposal and asks that synod take note that nominations and appointments to proposed synodical task forces need to follow synod’s Rules for Synodical Procedure, not the procedure requested by the JCC.

14. National and binational gatherings

a. Canadian regional gathering

A Canadian regional gathering will be held in Edmonton, Alberta, on the campus of The King’s University, on May 23-25, 2019. The national gathering will include three days of listening, celebrating, and discerning together next steps for the CRC in Canada.

b. Inspire 2019

A team is preparing for the second CRCNA biennial conference, Inspire 2019. This exciting event will be held August 1-3, 2019, in Windsor, Ontario, providing an opportunity for members from all of the CRC’s 1,000-plus churches to connect through engaging workshops, motivational speakers, inspirational worship, and energizing conversations. Come and be inspired! Visit crcna.org/Inspire to learn more and to register.

15. Binationality

It has been almost six years since the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA adopted the Cultivating Binationality report in May 2013. With this in mind, the COD instructed its executive committee to appoint an ad hoc group, composed of a balance of Canadian and U.S. COD members (taking into account the need for diversity in its membership), to review progress via the stated pathways toward the goals of the Cultivating Binationality report. The mandate of the ad hoc group will be

To gather information and perceptions from Canadian and U.S. agency and ministry staff, consider surveying key constituents (e.g., stated clerks), and review the recent governance work related to binationality of the COD and the various corporations since the transition in 2017. A report will be presented to the COD in October 2019; this report may include suggestions for policy, administrative standards and strategies, and/or guidelines and procedures.

16. Proposed Bible Translations Committee

In response to the instruction by Synod 2018 (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 452) regarding approval of Bible translations (in English) for use in worship, the COD recommends that synod establish a standing committee of the Council of Delegates for the purpose of reviewing Bible translations for potential use in the CRCNA, with a mandate and composition as follows:

- The committee will establish a rubric consisting of a set of criteria to evaluate the translation philosophy and process used by translators for any version of the Bible.
- The committee will meet at least annually, usually by video conference.
- The committee's agenda will always include a review of the translation rubric, as well as an assessment of each new translation being reviewed.
- The committee will apply this rubric to new Bible translations requested by any church, classis, or synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRCNA).
- The committee will report its findings annually to the COD for recommendation to synod, indicating recommended use of translations for (1) pulpit, (2) Bible study, and (3) personal devotions.

Committee membership (synodical terms of three years not applicable):

- three members of the theological faculty (Old Testament and/or New Testament) of a seminary with strong ties to the CRCNA
- English-language stylist—may be an English-language professor, communications expert, or other such professional who understands the current use of language in contemporary life
- church leader or pastor who understands the needs of the pulpit
- denominational representative who will serve as convener (nonvoting)

Committee nominees must be ratified by the COD and recommended to synod for appointment.

17. Calvin College revised Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws
Synod 2018 endorsed the intended name change for Calvin College to *Calvin University* and permitted the COD to act on synod's behalf in approving a revision in Article 1 of the Calvin College Articles of Incorporation upon action of the Calvin College Board of Trustees to modify the Articles of Incorporation with the name change (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 464). The COD approved updates to the Calvin College bylaws in October 2018, and, on behalf of synod, the COD in February 2019 approved revisions to the Calvin College Articles of Incorporation, reflecting the change in name to *Calvin University*.
18. Reconciliation resources
The Council of Delegates received the report that a list of reconciliation resources has been developed in response to Synod 2018's urging the executive director to "work with the appropriate agencies and ministries to publicize existing resources addressing unresolved conflict in our history and the need for reconciliation" (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 473). The list of resources is available on the Network (crcna.org/Network; search "reconciliation and forgiveness resources").
19. Abuse of Power report
The COD reviewed and responded to a draft report from the Abuse of Power Committee, appointed following Synod 2018's instruction that the COD, "in consultation with the executive director," appoint a team and "bring recommendations through the Council of Delegates to Synod 2019 regarding how the CRCNA can best address patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 523-24). The final report will be submitted to the COD in May and forwarded to Synod 2019 by way of the COD Supplement.
20. The title *classis*
The COD received a preliminary report from the Classis Renewal Advisory Team, tasked with considering a new title for the assembly *classis* (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 454). The advisory team will submit a final report to the COD in May for recommendation to Synod 2019 by way of the COD Supplement.
21. 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* (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 2018* reflects the updates adopted by Synod 2018. The latest version, published by the Office of Synodical Services, was distributed to each of the churches in early fall 2018 and has been translated into Korean and Spanish. The *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, 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 *Agenda for Synod and Acts of Synod* is the responsibility of the director of synodical services under the direction of the executive director. From time to time some decisions need to be made by the ED about which material properly belongs in the *Agenda for Synod*. Erring on the side of grace seems more appropriate than erring on the side of rigid regulation. Synod itself will finally decide in all cases whether material is properly on its agenda.

d. *Manual for Synodical Deputies*

The *Manual for Synodical Deputies* is distributed to synodical deputies, their alternates, and the stated clerks of classes. A revision of the manual was completed in summer 2018 by the Office of Synodical Services, reflecting the decisions of Synod 2018. 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—was updated to reflect decisions through 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 (faithliveresources.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 K to this Council of Delegates Report as well as in the *Agenda for Synod 2019—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.

The COD adopted a timeline for developing the next ministry plan (including listening sessions during national and binational gatherings in 2019 to gather input), for receiving a draft plan for endorsement, and for presenting a revised ministry plan to Synod 2020.

Noted in particular by the COD in February 2019:

- a desire for a continued focus on local congregations
- consideration toward possible simplification and/or reframing of the five ministry priorities and of the desired futures, strategic foci, and steps
- differing purposes of the plan exist for congregations in comparison to denominational agencies and ministries
- a continued need for helping congregations deal with challenges and the continuous process of change

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 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 segments 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 and for the thousands of staff and volunteers throughout the church who are living and sharing the gospel.

4. Ministry evaluation

Synod 2018 instructed the COD and the executive director “to continue the important work of evaluation and prioritization by working together to implement a robust evaluation strategy whereby in a five-year cycle all agencies and ministries will be continually evaluated through the framework of the five ministry priorities” (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 455).

In response to this directive, the COD adopted the following policy (employing a four-year cycle for sake of efficiency) to ensure continual evaluation of all agencies and ministries according to the five ministry priorities, and endorsed the **implementation steps as outlined:**

Policy

All agencies and ministries will continually be evaluated through the framework of the five ministry priorities. Each agency and ministry is required to have comprehensive and strategic program goals and objectives and, by means of fitting evaluation and assessment approaches, to provide annual outcomes.

Implementation

The Ministries Leadership Council (MLC) will be provided opportunity to review agency and ministry evaluation plans on a regular basis for critique and input, particularly as each agency or ministry works side-by-side with other agency / ministry plans.

A program evaluation-reporting schedule by Calling area follows, with February being the target date for a review of program evaluation results by the Council of Delegates, followed by a final review by synod in June:

- Feb. 2019: Faith Formation and Gospel Proclamation and Worship (i.e., Calvin College, Faith Formation Ministries, Worship Ministries)
- Feb. 2020: Servant Leadership (i.e., Candidacy, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, Pastor Church Resources, Calvin Theological Seminary)
- Feb. 2021: Global Mission (i.e., Back to God Ministries International, Resonate Global Mission, Raise Up Global Ministries)
- Feb. 2022: Mercy and Justice (i.e., Indigenous Ministries Canada, Centre for Public Dialogue, Disability Concerns, Race Relations, Safe Church Ministry, Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action, World Renew)

While the agencies and institutions (e.g., BTGMI, Resonate, Calvin College) will provide discrete reports of their goals and objectives to synod, the other ministry-report groups may be asked to present to synod a combined or synthesized report for their respective calling area.

5. Faith Formation, and Gospel Proclamation and Worship ministry evaluations

In alignment with the ministry evaluation schedule, the following ministries grouped under Faith Formation and Gospel Proclamation and Worship present their evaluation reports, endorsed by the Council of Delegates, for review and approval by synod:

- a. Calvin College (Appendix F)
- b. Faith Formation Ministries (Appendix G)
- c. Worship Ministries (Appendix H)

6. Revised mandate for Faith Formation Ministries

The COD approved the following *addition* to the mandate for Faith Formation Ministries in response to Synod 2018's instruction "to clarify expectations for the denominational funding of Reformed curricula" (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 461-62):

Faith Formation Ministries will support children's ministry in Christian Reformed congregations by

- regularly refreshing existing Faith Alive curricula.
- providing training, support, and consultations for teachers and directors.
- providing guidance for assessing and adapting other (non-Faith Alive) curricular materials.

The COD presents on behalf of Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) the following recommendations for consideration by synod (see also the Faith Formation Ministries report, pp. 153-55):

- a. That synod warmly welcome the newly appointed FFM team leader and pray a blessing over him/her. Mr. Syd Hielema, team leader, will transition from his current role, effective July 1, 2019.
- b. That synod, as follow-up to the decision of Synod 2018 to affirm the importance of Reformed children's curriculum, encourage congregations to consult with FFM concerning their curricular needs.
- c. That synod encourage all classes to partner with FFM in appointing a volunteer youth ministry champion to serve the congregations within their classis.
- d. That synod encourage all congregations to (1) recognize how critical the church-home relationship is for discipleship, and (2) take steps to strengthen the faith formation partnership between the church and the home.
- e. That synod recommend that congregations use the new Faith Formation Primer as a guide for assessing and planning their faith formation strategies.
- f. That synod encourage CRC congregations to consider supporting Faith Formation Ministries with their gifts. FFM is very grateful for the many congregations that now include FFM for an annual offering.

7. Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal

The CRC and Reformed Church in America received a generous grant from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation to be used over a five-year period to establish a “third space”—not entirely within the RCA, and not entirely within the CRC—where churches from either denomination can access resources and support for congregational renewal. Subsequently the COD approved appointment of a steering committee, consisting of at least two senior staff members and one nonstaff member from each of the two denominations to oversee the establishment and initial operations of the Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal (RPCR); the executive director has been instructed to make final appointments of the steering committee members representing the CRCNA. The COD also endorsed the direction of the Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal (RPCR) as a joint endeavor between the CRCNA and the RCA in promoting renewal for all churches.

8. Assisting immigrant churches

Synod 2018 instructed the executive director “to work with the appropriate agencies and ministries to explore the potential processes and resources necessary to facilitate enfolding immigrant churches into the CRCNA” (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 459). The executive director invited staff from Resonate Global Mission and Candidacy to begin exploring these parameters, and those staff members reported on their findings by way of a document titled Assisting Immigrant Churches (Appendix I). The COD reviewed and endorsed the Assisting Immigrant Churches document and, in particular, the conclusions or *next steps* identified therein.

The document serves as a brief guide to discerning when and how an inquiring non-CRC congregation and pastor can become affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The following are updates on two of the conclusions provided in the document:

- a. “To make available to classes and regional Resonate Global Mission leaders a cadre of volunteers with the gift of hospitality and Church Order knowledge willing to assist groups and their leaders.” After discussion with CRCNA staff members involved in assisting immigrant congregations, the direction is to develop a list of those in the CRC who have had experiences enfolding immigrant congregations and leaders in the CRC. This list will not be public, but rather will be a resource list for denominational and classical staff members who are working in this domain. CRCNA and classical staff who are assisting immigrant churches can connect immigrant leaders to people on the list as needed for help and advice for enfolding into the CRC.
- b. “To set clear annual goals for the number of immigrant congregation affiliations and church plants established by Resonate Global Mission but owned more broadly (e.g., part of the Ministry Plan).” Resonate’s Diversity Team has the following goals: 50 new ethnic or multiethnic church plants in the next five years, and 40 new ethnic or multiethnic affiliations in the next five years.

Synod is asked to recognize the ongoing work in response to synod's instruction and to command the Assisting Immigrant Churches document (Appendix I) to the classes and churches.

9. U.S. Committee for Guidance and Support of the Office of Social Justice
- Synod 2018 instructed the Council of Delegates "to create a U.S. committee to provide guidance and support to the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 527-28). The COD in October adopted the following mandate and composition for a new U.S. Committee for Guidance and Support of the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action:

Mandate

In keeping with the synodical instruction to provide guidance and support, the yet-to-be-named U.S. committee may guide and support the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJ) in effectively addressing all relevant levels of U.S. government on significant and pressing issues of the day from an integrally biblical, theological, and confessional perspective, expressed in terms of a Reformed worldview, emphasizing whenever possible the official positions of the CRCNA as adopted by synod. Such recommendations will ordinarily be detailed in an annual plan for addressing public policy and rely on OSJ's criteria. Significant mid-course additions to the plan are possible via consultation by committee members with officers of the CRCNA U.S. Corporation.

Process for meeting

The U.S. Committee will meet twice a year (at least once via video conference) and consider draft plans from staff, resulting in an annual plan to be presented to the COD (via its Mercy and Justice Ministries Committee), with input as needed from the CRCNA U.S. Corporation. The U.S. Committee will develop and propose an annual plan and goals for approval by the CRCNA U.S. Corporation. Ideally, the proposal will be presented for COD approval at the May meeting for the subsequent ministry year.

Composition

Normally the committee will have eight members, with at least one representative from each of the four CRCNA U.S. regions—one of whom is elected as chair by the committee itself.

Total composition, at minimum, should reflect the diversity goals of the denomination, as synod has repeatedly encouraged, and priority should be given to include representation and the voices of people affected by at least one of the primary justice issues mentioned below.

In order to place emphasis on the OSJ mandate highlighting "advocacy for and with those who suffer injustice" (see *Agenda for Synod 2011*, p. 75), membership must primarily consist of persons who have expertise in, are affected by, and/or have personal life experience with the primary justice issues addressed by OSJ (at present: poverty/hunger, creation care/climate change, immigration/refugees, religious persecution, or abortion).

Member selection

Nominations for committee membership will be solicited by way of a *Banner* announcement and correspondence through classical stated clerks.

Members will serve a three-year term, renewable for a second three-year term; staggering of terms at the outset will be required.

Membership will also include two *ex officio* nonvoting members: one OSJ staff member and one staff member from another JIMA ministry (the former who also serves as liaison to the CRCNA U.S. Corporation and COD Mercy and Justice Ministries Committee).

The COD anticipates making the committee appointments in May 2019.

10. “Hearts Exchanged” process

In May 2018 the COD approved initiating a binational study and conversation to continue dialogue begun through the “Hearts Exchanged” report from 2000 about issues facing Indigenous ministry direction and support. The COD aims to develop a binational process for discerning and knowing what constitutes appropriate and effective Indigenous ministry throughout North America. Senior leadership has conducted binational conversations that demonstrate a significant difference in understanding how the gospel of Christ is shared in diverse cultural settings.

Subsequently the COD approved (1) the need to proceed with a nationally contextualized approach and (2) sharing comments/suggestions for ministry leaders to consider that go above and beyond the ministry issues of leadership, worship, and historical issues—namely, to achieve a clear understanding of *syncretism* as a result of this process and to ensure that, in pursuing nationally contextualized approaches, the process should leave room for comments, questions, and considerations from others in their respective national contexts.

11. Resourcing congregations

By means of a pilot project funded by the Lilly Endowment over the past three years, the ministries of the CRCNA have been transitioning to provide regional resourcing for the congregations of twelve classes. Now, thanks to a second grant from the Lilly Endowment and the endorsement of the COD, the approach of regionally resourcing congregations will be extended over the next few years to all forty-eight classes in a way that will make this model self-sustainable after the conclusion of the grant program.

12. “Other priorities” considered

In connection with a directive from Synod 2017 to prioritize justice and mercy goals (see *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 633-35), the COD’s Mercy and Justice Ministries Committee developed the following list of priorities and presented them to the COD:

- a. Reconciliation of communities within the Reformed fellowship and family who have a history with the CRC but have left our denomination.
- b. Care and consideration for unwed pregnant women and their-inclusion in churches for support.

- c. Care and consideration to how ministry connects locally in terms of support (i.e., grants) to pursue justice and mercy.
- d. Formation of regional teams to help regions and classes contextualize the expression of justice and mercy in their area.

Item a above is being addressed by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee; item b could be folded in with work already being done with regard to abortion. The Justice, Inclusion, and Mercy Advocacy group has been asked to consider including items c and d in their local emphases.

13. Support for elders and deacons

The Council of Delegates routinely receives reports from staff in order that “the executive director of the CRCNA [can] report to synod on the annual progress of . . . efforts of denominational agencies and ministries as all seek to work together for the revitalization of the offices of elder and deacon.” The *efforts* referenced include (a) “cataloging of all resources offered by our denominational agencies that support the vision of reinvigorated offices of elder and deacon, as well as other appropriate resources offered by other sources”; and (b) “the development of an approach, whether by way of conferences, staff, materials, or other means, that gives energy to initiatives of deacons and elders in churches, classes, and the denomination” (*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 669-70).

The Council of Delegates affirmed the direction of the progress of efforts by denominational agencies and ministries toward the revitalization of the offices of elder and deacon. Highlights include the following:

- Pastor Church Resources (PCR) staff have been gathering information on structures and models for council organization, methods of selection for officebearers, and onboarding / offboarding protocols and procedures. They have learned that there is a broad and deep need for officebearer orientation. Thus PCR is addressing this need.
- Staff of PCR have also learned that an ocean of resources is available and that the material itself is widely diverse. It would likely be a challenge for the average council leader to navigate it all. Staff in PCR are therefore focusing on building an online toolkit, similar to others already published. Tentatively titled the “Leading Together Toolkit,” this resource will become a repository of resources for elders, deacons, and councils. In addition, for training purposes, PCR and Faith Formation Ministries are producing a number of short video clips on maximally helpful and actionable topics related to councils.
- The work of revitalizing the office of deacon, in particular, has involved building networks of diaconal groups in the United States (Canadian congregations are well served by Diaconal Ministries Canada). Meetings have occurred among leaders of diaconal conferences. Retired World Renew U.S. director Andy Ryskamp has been providing training for these gatherings as well as for specific classes and congregations. Out of this work, it has become apparent that there is a need in the United States to have, as in Canada, a staff person or persons who provide such services on an ongoing

basis. The Ministries Leadership Council (MLC) recently endorsed a report describing ownership of diaconal matters by various offices (e.g., World Renew, Office of Social Justice, etc.), and the COD anticipates receiving word about plans for implementing specific recommendations contained in that report.

14. 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, translation, rights and permissions management, design and 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, email, and live chats on various CRCNA websites.

In the interest of consistent style, branding, and quality presentation, MSS has supported CRC communications staff in creating guides for Brand Standards (crcna.org/Brand) and Editorial Style (crcna.org/Style).

b. *The Banner*

The Banner, the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church, currently prints and distributes more than 85,000 copies of its paper version. Website pageviews average about 45,000 per month, and 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 ensure that *Banner* content is available to anyone in a variety of forms.

The *Banner* app is available for free download on iPhone and Android devices (thebanner.org/App); monthly, the app is receiving more than 6,500 pageviews.

We are most thankful for a huge show of support from *Banner* readers, as more than 6,000 donors gave over \$450,000 for the annual appeal fund-raiser in 2018. New this year was a lapsed-donor appeal that raised \$50,000.

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 Desafio has ceased publishing new titles but continues to sell and reprint the backlist; sales are about \$225,000 per year.

A few 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, or as an ecumenical partner to the CRCNA, free access to most Faith Alive titles online. 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

Launched in 2010, the Network (crcna.org/Network) has become one of the CRC’s most-visited websites. The Network is a site 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 four years, traffic has doubled. 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 last 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 played a lead role in two initiatives aimed at making it easier for churches to access denominational resources. In the first initiative, we 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 crcna.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 have turned the Faith Alive call center into the CRCNA call center, equipping staff to answer the most frequently asked questions from churches and to connect callers 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 fields 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 information to keep track of—all the more reason to provide this service to our churches! Hopefully you have seen the “Click. Call. Chat.” ads in *The Banner*. On average, per month we are responding to about 100 chats and 100 phone calls to the new line so far. It is a small part of our call center’s work, but one that we hope will grow with greater awareness of this new service for churches.

f. Special Sundays

MSS has supported the CRCNA communications office in launching a unified process for churches to request materials for special Sundays (e.g., Easter, World Hunger Sunday, Abuse Awareness Sunday). Instead of each ministry separately promoting “their” week, we now send churches a link to a single page where they can view all the materials for the next six months, order the ones they want, and access other supporting resources (e.g., litanies, videos, projection images). The form remembers each church’s preferences so that each time they go into the form, they need only to review and make minor adjustments. The new process has been a hit with churches (because of the convenience) and with ministries (because churches are requesting more materials). In addition, we are saving ministry-share expense by consolidating ordering, printing, and shipping.

C. Financial matters

1. Introduction

In order to assure that synod has the most up-to-date and accurate financial information, detailed financial data will be included in the *Agenda for Synod 2019—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 2020 (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020), and the recommended ministry-share amount for calendar year 2020. 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.

2. Reimagining Ministry Shares report

In response to the Task Force on Financial Sustainability report submitted to Synod 2016 by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA (now Council of Delegates), synod asked that the BOT, after completing an evaluation/prioritization of all ministries, “reimagine ministry shares” using three guidelines: (a) “fund the prioritized ministries at agreed-upon levels,” (b) “simplify the calculations,” and (c) “consider options other than the number of professing members over 18 as a basis of the calculation” (see *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 858-59). The COD presents the Reimagining Ministry Shares report as presented in Appendix J for adoption by synod, with the following additional recommendations related to the report:

- a. That synod (1) move the ministry-share year from a calendar-year setting to that of the fiscal year July 1 through June 30, effective beginning July 1, 2021, and (2) adopt a ministry-share rate for the period January 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022, to facilitate the transition to a July 1-June 30 fiscal year.
- b. That synod (1) request church councils to prayerfully consider their response to the ministry-share request for the period July 1, 2021,

through June 30, 2022, and (2) instruct the classes, beginning at their fall 2020 meetings, to dedicate sufficient time to consider the ministry-share contributions projected by each church for the coming fiscal year; and, working with the assembly, determine the best way to maximize the pledged support for denominational ministry. The level of pledged support is to be reported to the denominational offices not later than February 1, 2021.

- c. That synod encourage the churches to commit to an annual gift in support of Calvin College and the four regional, Christian higher-educational institutions at the same or greater amount as the support previously requested through ministry shares and direct gifts.
- d. That synod circulate the Reimagining Ministry Share report, as presented by the COD, to congregations and classes and encourage its study with assistance provided by the appropriate denominational staff for each context.

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 2019.
- 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 2019.
- D. That synod by way of the ballot appoint persons previously appointed as interim COD classical delegates to a modified first term (I, D).
- E. That synod by way of the ballot elect new members to the COD from the nominations presented to a first term of three years (I, D).
- F. That synod thank retiring COD members for their faithful service and significant contributions to the denomination (I, D).
- G. That synod accept the invitation of Encounter Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to serve as the convening church of Synod 2020 (II, A, 1).

Grounds:

- a. Encounter Church, a multigenerational and diverse church, will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2020.
 - b. Encounter Church also has plans to plant a new church in 2020.
- H. That synod accept the invitation of First CRC in Orange City, Iowa, to serve as the host church of Synod 2021, and that synod be held on the campus of Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa (II, A, 2).

Grounds:

- a. First CRC in Orange City, Iowa, will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2021.
 - b. Dordt College has communicated its availability and willingness to serve as the host college for the meetings of Synod 2021.
- I. That synod approve the interim appointments made by the COD for synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies (II, A, 3).
- J. That synod adopt the Terminology for Diversity report for implementation (II, A, 7; Appendix A).
- K. That synod approve the action of the COD with respect to the appeals regarding a decision of Classis Chicago South (II, A, 9; Appendix B).
- L. That synod adopt the changes to Church Order Articles 42 and 39 as proposed by Synod 2018 (II, A, 10; Appendix C).
- M. That synod express gratitude to Ms. Rita Buitendorp and Mr. Calvin Rozeboom for their service to the Judicial Code Committee (II, A, 13, a).
- N. That synod by way of the ballot elect two new members to the Judicial Code Committee, as presented, to a first term of three years (II, A, 13, a).
- O. That synod adopt the following modification to Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c, Section 8, b, in response to the instruction by Synod 2018, as indicated in **bold** text (II, A, 13, b):

The Judicial Code Committee shall be composed of twelve (12) members and shall reflect the diversity of the denomination, **preferably with at least 25 percent of the members reflecting ethnic diversity and an equal balance of men and women.** Each year four (4) persons shall be elected for terms of three (3) years. At least one (1) of these four (4) persons shall be a minister of the Word or a commissioned pastor; at least one (1) shall be a person trained in the law; at least one (1) shall not be a minister of the Word or a commissioned pastor nor one trained in the law. Synod shall elect members from nominations presented by the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA.

Ground: Including specific goals will, over a period of three to four years, help the committee better “reflect the diversity of the denomination.”

- P. That synod adopt the proposed revisions to the Church Order Supplement (Art. 30-c), Rules for Synodical Procedure, and Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader as found in Appendix D (II, A, 13, c).
- Q. That synod establish a standing committee of the Council of Delegates (COD) for the purpose of reviewing Bible translations for potential use in the CRCNA, with a mandate and composition as outlined in section II, A, 16.
- R. That synod take note of the COD’s plans to develop a revised ministry plan, including listening sessions during national and binational gatherings

in 2019 to gather input, and to present a revised ministry plan to Synod 2020 (II, B, 1).

S. That synod approve the evaluation reports by Calvin College, Faith Formation Ministries, and Worship Ministries (II, B, 5; Appendices F-H).

T. That synod address the following with regard to Faith Formation Ministries (II, B, 6; see also FFM report, pp. 153-55):

- a. That synod warmly welcome the newly appointed FFM team leader and pray a blessing over him/her. Mr. Syd Hielema, team leader, will transition from his current role, effective July 1, 2019.
- b. That synod, as follow-up to the decision of Synod 2018 to affirm the importance of Reformed children's curriculum, encourage congregations to consult with FFM concerning their curricular needs.
- c. That synod encourage all classes to partner with FFM in appointing a volunteer youth ministry champion to serve the congregations within their classis.
- d. That synod encourage all congregations to (1) recognize how critical the church-home relationship is for discipleship, and (2) take steps to strengthen the faith formation partnership between the church and the home.
- e. That synod recommend that congregations use the new Faith Formation Primer as a guide for assessing and planning its faith formation strategies.
- f. That synod encourage CRC congregations to consider supporting Faith Formation Ministries with their gifts. FFM is very grateful for the many congregations that now include FFM for an annual offering.

U. That synod recognize the ongoing work in response to synod's instruction related to enfolding immigrant churches and commend the Assisting Immigrant Churches document (Appendix I) to the classes and churches (II, B, 8).

V. That synod take note of the adopted mandate and composition for the U.S. Committee for Guidance and Support of the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (II, B, 9).

W. That synod adopt the Reimagining Ministry Shares report as presented in Appendix J and address the following recommendations with regard to the report (II, C, 2):

- a. That synod (1) move the ministry-share year from a calendar-year setting to that of the fiscal year July 1 through June 30, effective beginning July 1, 2021, and (2) adopt a ministry-share rate for the period January 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022, to facilitate the transition to a July 1-June 30 fiscal year.
- b. That synod (1) request church councils to prayerfully consider their response to the ministry-share request for the period July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, and (2) instruct the classes, beginning at their

fall 2020 meetings, to dedicate sufficient time to consider the ministry-share contributions projected by each church for the coming fiscal year; and, working with the assembly, determine the best way to maximize the pledged support for denominational ministry. The level of pledged support is to be reported to the denominational offices not later than February 1, 2021.

- c. That synod encourage the churches to commit to an annual gift in support of Calvin College and the four regional, Christian higher-educational institutions at the same or greater amount as the support previously requested through ministry shares and direct gifts.
 - d. That synod circulate the Reimagining Ministry Share report, as presented by the COD, to congregations and classes and encourage its study with assistance provided by the appropriate denominational staff for each context.
- X. That synod receive as information the condensed financial statements of the agencies and educational institutions (Appendix K).

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

Appendix A **Terminology for Diversity**

I. Background

Synod 2018 instructed that the executive director

request the Office of Race Relations to re-examine the most appropriate language to employ when reporting on ethnic and gender diversity in denominational reports.

Grounds:

- a. Concerns were raised in the committee that terms like “people of color” were not appropriately sensitive or inclusive.
- b. Descriptive terms that identify people groups change with time and geographical context.

(Acts of Synod 2018, p. 450).

The Council of Delegates, by way of its Ministry Plan and Communications subcommittee, took the responsibility of ensuring this task was carried out.

Mandate: To draft appropriate terminology that can be used across CRCNA agencies and ministries, as well as in official denominational reports, when referring to ethnic and gender diversity.

II. Proposed methodology

- A. Review existing CRCNA editorial style guide (crcna.org/style) suggestions about ethnicity and gender in the “human dignity” section.

- B. Do a literature review to see what terminology is being used by media, universities, and other institutions that we trust. The Office of Race Relations suggests that this include the National Black Evangelical Association, the Christian Community Development Association and the Program for the Study of Race, Religion, and Culture at Rice University (kinder.rice.edu/program-study-ethnicity-race-and-culture).
- C. Survey key denominational leaders who represent women and ethnic communities for their personal and regional input.
- D. Share results with Office of Race Relations and ask them to make a glossary of terms that the CRCNA should use.
- E. Share recommendation with Ministries Leadership Council and Council of Delegates.
- F. Update editorial style guide.

III. Existing Editorial Style Guide suggestions

A. Gender

1. Gender-sensitive language

Language describing humanity should include women and girls as well as men and boys. Whenever possible, avoid terms that exclude females. For many years the word *man* was used to describe humanity at large, and many vocational terms referring to men became commonplace. Today, however, such usage is inappropriate because it ignores the presence of women. Alternative expressions should therefore be used. Some substitutions for common *man* words include the following:

man, mankind	humanity, humankind, human beings, people
man-hours	work hours, worker hours
manmade	artificial, synthetic, manufactured
manpower	human resources, workforce, work hours, worker hours
man the office	staff the office
the family of man	the human family, the family of humanity
the brotherhood of man	human kinship, the unity among humans
primitive / early /	primitive people / peoples, primitive humans, early humans
prehistoric man	
a one-man show	a one-artist show, a one-person show
the common man	the average person, common person, ordinary citizen
agreed to a man	agreed unanimously, all agreed
forefathers	ancestors, forerunners, precursors
spokesman	spokesperson, representative

2. Occupations, titles

The working world should be portrayed without discrimination by gender. All workers' titles should be described in a way that indicates the job could be filled without reference to gender. Titles ending in *-man* or *-woman* are generally made genderless by replacing those endings with *person* or by using other wording.

<u>Traditional titles</u>	<u>Current titles</u>
businessmen	businesspeople
chairman	chair, chairperson
cleaning lady, maid	housekeeper, office cleaner
congressman	representative, member of congress
craftsman	craftsperson, artisan, craft worker
fireman	firefighter
foreman	supervisor
housewife	homemaker
insurance man	insurance agent
mailman	mail carrier, postal agent
patrolman	police officer
policeman, policewoman	police officer
pressman	press operator
salesman	salesperson, sales representative
seamstress	tailor
steward, stewardess	flight attendant

3. Pronouns

The English language lacks a third-person singular personal pronoun referring to human beings, and today the use of a male generic pronoun is archaic. To date, no one-size-fits-all solution for a genderless personal pronoun has been found. The most helpful results usually involve rewording, from recasting to a different person to revising without pronouns altogether. Some ideas for potential solutions follow. (For a detailed discussion on bias-free language, see *Chicago Manual* 5.46, 5.221-5.230.)

- a. Reword to eliminate unnecessary gender pronouns.

Instead of

The average North American likes to start his day with a cup of coffee.

or

The average North American likes to start her day with a cup of coffee.

Use

Many North Americans like to start their day with a cup of coffee.

- b. Use *one* or *you* or the third-person plurals *they, them, their* as appropriate to the context

Some points to note:

- *One* can work fairly well as a third-person substitute for a first-person pronoun, but frequent use will make the writing sound stuffy and formal.
- *You* can work in some contexts as an indefinite pronoun (needing no antecedent) applying to any person or all persons.
- According to the *Chicago Manual* and *Merriam-Webster's*, it has become acceptable and more common to use *they, them, their* as generic singular pronouns in speech and writing.

These guidelines suggest only a few solutions to the sometimes challenging overuse of gender-based pronouns. The best solution in any situation will depend on the context.

B. Ethnic diversity

The CRCNA affirms that all human beings are made in the image of God, and we believe that this truth should guide the language we use. We want to be careful in the ways we communicate about others, avoiding word choices that would exclude some people or create an “us/ them” kind of mentality. This section therefore includes guidelines and reminders to speak with respect toward all who are made in God’s image.

It’s easy to commit sins against human dignity: paternalism, sexism, racism, ageism, ableism, dominant culture attitudes, “white savior” complex, and more. We might define these faults as prejudice or discrimination based on assumptions about class, gender, race, age, ability, and so on.

Use descriptors about such characteristics only if necessary. Too often, for example, we think of race as the most defining characteristic of a person whose skin color is different from our own. But if it is not important to identify a person’s skin color, do not do it.

Avoid prejudicial content. Use content that encourages growth rather than status, content that advocates freedom and justice rather than oppression and discrimination. Be mindful of the following:

1. Following general use in the media, lowercase *black* and *white* as nouns or adjectives.
2. Do not hyphenate terms such as *African American*.
3. For references to Indigenous or Aboriginal peoples in North America (or, in the U.S., often Native Americans; or, in Canada, First Nations or Metis or Inuit, for different groupings of peoples), it is usually preferable to refer to a specific nation or tribe (*Navajo*, *Cherokee*, *Blackfoot*, *Algonquin*, *Tlingit*, and so on).
4. *Hispanic* is a generic term that refers to people in North America with origins in a Spanish-speaking country. *Latino* refers to people from Latin America in general (including Brazil). However, “Hispanics generally prefer to be identified by their nationality—Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban—because Hispanics know very well we aren’t all the same” (*Latinos* [Office of Race Relations, 2014], p. 7). And just as some African Americans prefer to be called *black* and some Native Americans prefer to be called *American Indian*, some Hispanics prefer to be called *Latino*.
5. To refer to people from Asia in general, use *Asian*. Do not use the outdated term *Oriental*. However, it is preferable to refer to a person’s country of origin, using terms such as *Korean*, *Chinese*, *Cambodian*, *Laotian*, and so on.
6. People of Arab descent should be referred to as *Arab*, not *Arabic*. The language they speak is Arabic.
7. Do not refer to an individual as *multicultural* or *multiethnic* unless the intent is to state that this person can move in and out of many cultures or

has a mixed ethnic background. Too often such terms have been wrongly used to describe a person who is monocultural and nonwhite.

8. Do not refer to a person or group as *ethnic* to describe them as nonwhite. We all come from an ethnic background (in which nation, culture, and race are usually prominent characteristics), so we all have ethnicity.

9. Languages

Be aware that the predominant Philippine language is Tagalog (Filipino), and the people who speak it are Filipinos. (English is also an official language of the Philippines.) The language spoken by Laotians is Lao. The language of Cambodians is Khmer. When referring to official Chinese languages, try to specify Mandarin or Cantonese. Native American peoples do not speak “Indian”; their languages, like their nations, are numerous. Most Latin Americans speak Spanish, but Brazilians speak Portuguese. The language commonly spoken by Arab peoples is Arabic.

10. Portray women and men of all races in a wide variety of professions and trades and in equal proportion. Avoid type-casting people in certain roles. For example, black women may be administrators; white men may be nurses.
11. Avoid portraying people of color as victims or people who need the help of white people. For a helpful discussion about being aware of the “white savior” complex, see the link everydayfeminism.com/2016/06/white-savior-problem/.

IV. Literature review

National Association of Black Journalists: **minority, minorities:** Group or groups differing especially in race, religion, or ethnicity from the majority of a population. Collective when used as a noun. Does not refer to an individual, so avoid such phrases as “There are three minorities on the council.”

Also, women do not constitute a minority, although they may be linked with minorities in various civil-rights contexts. Avoid saying, for example, that a program is designed to encourage the representation of minorities if it also encourages the representation of women. It’s better to say that the program is designed to encourage the representation of women and minorities. Further, a better alternative is *people of color* when referring to a group. (See *people of color*.)

People of color: Acceptable use as a synonym for minorities. May also adapt this term to describe groups such as journalists of color or women of color. (See minorities.)

V. Summary

After reviewing the existing editorial style guide, and because the grounds from Synod 2018 refer only to terminology around ethnic diversity, it was decided that our terminology for referring to gender is sufficient. We focused the rest of our efforts on terminology around ethnic diversity.

After conferring with administrative staff from Calvin College and Grand Valley State University, we found that the use of *people of color* in their documents and media platforms is acceptable language. According to

Michelle Loyd-Paige, Calvin College executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion, “*People of color*” is a shorthand term used to describe non-white individuals.” She prefers it because it includes Asian and biracial individuals.

After soliciting some ethnic ministry leaders about their perspectives, we found there is not agreement among them about the use of the term *people of color*.

Checking with other religious institutions, we found that the use of the term *people of color* varies among organizations. The National Black Evangelical Association uses exclusively *pro black* terminology. The Christian Community Development Association uses *people of color* sporadically on their website and in their literature. The Program for the Study of Race, Religion, and Culture at Rice University shows little evidence of the term on its website and in its reports.

With all of this in mind, the Office of Race Relations recommends the continued use of *people of color* as the most appropriate term to employ when reporting on ethnic diversity in denominational reports.

Appendix B Chicago South Appeals Review Committee Report February 2019

I. Introduction and mandate of committee

The following persons were appointed by the COD executive committee to address an appeal to Synod 2019 regarding a decision of Classis Chicago South: Don Draayer, chair; Bev Bandstra, Chris deWinter, Sheila Holmes, Tony Lara, Jim Roskam, and Dave Struyk. Paul De Vries and Kathy Smith served as advisers, and Dee Recker served as staff and recorder. The executive committee determined that the COD needed to address the appeal(s) before synod meets in June. The rationale and mandate for the Review Committee are provided in the minutes of the executive committee:

The mandate of this committee is to consider two appeals submitted to synod regarding a decision of Classis Chicago South from two persons and the council of Palos Heights (Ill.) CRC. The executive committee judges that address of the appeals cannot wait until June (synod) to be decided. In summary, the appeals claim that Church Order guidelines were not followed by a decision of Classis Chicago South when it approved the formation of a union congregation between Calvin CRC, Oak Lawn, Illinois, and Calvary RCA, Orland Park, Illinois.

The urgency for the COD to address an appeal to *synod* was realized after learning implementation of the new union is planned for early April 2019. To allow sufficient time to potentially meet with the appellants and respondents if needed, the executive committee has appointed a committee to review in advance of the February COD meetings the two appeals, presenting to the COD a report and recommendations.

(email correspondence among the COD executive committee on Dec. 12 and 21, 2018; and Minute EC 19-003)

II. Summary of appeals

Although two appeals are addressed to synod (one by the council of Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church, Palos Heights, Illinois; and the other

submitted jointly by two individuals: Robert Dykstra, a member of Calvin CRC, Oak Lawn, Illinois; and Jeremy Oosterhouse, who serves as stated clerk of Classis Chicago South), in essence there is a singular appeal as the appeals are virtually identical.

At the September 18, 2018, meeting of Classis Chicago South, an overture from Calvin CRC of Oak Lawn requested that Classis Chicago South (CCS) permit Calvin CRC of Oak Lawn to unite with Calvary—Orland Park (a Reformed Church in American congregation) as a multisite campus. It should be noted that the Classical Interim Committee (CIC) of CCS had originally received the overture as a joint overture from Calvin (Oak Lawn) CRC and Calvary RCA. The Classis Chicago South CIC informed Calvin CRC that the overture had to come solely from their council as a member of CCS.

In addition, the CIC noted that the overture included several discrepancies with requirements for a church union as outlined in Church Order (CO) Article 38-g and its Supplement. The Calvin CRC council addressed several of these matters, but the two provisions listed in the CO Supplement that were not addressed in the revised overture stand at the center of the appeal. (See sections p and w of the Supplement to Article 38-g.)

The appeal to synod follows:

We, the Council of Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church, Palos Heights, Ill., appeal the decision of Classis Chicago South of September 18, 2018, to approve the process of union between Calvin-Oak Lawn, a member church of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, with Calvary-Orland Park, a member church of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). . . . We appeal this decision on the basis of Church Order (hereafter, C.O.) Articles 29 and 30, which provide grounds for appeal when a decision of an assembly conflicts with the Word of God or the Church Order or when the appellants believe an injustice has been done.

To be clear from the outset, we support the union between Calvin-Oak Lawn and Calvary-Orland Park, but we object to the plan for union which was proposed by Calvin and Calvary and, thereafter approved by Classis Chicago South.

We believe this decision of Classis Chicago South conflicts with the Church Order on the following grounds:

1. The proposed plan of union submitted by Calvin-Oak Lawn does not contain all the required elements of the plan of union found in Church Order Supplement, Article 38-g and / or conflicts with the required elements found in Church Order Supplement, Article 38-g.
2. The action of Classis Chicago South to take up the deficient plan of union was in conflict with the Rules of Procedure of Classis Chicago South and the Church Order of the CRCNA.
3. The council of Calvin-Oak Lawn violated its own articles of incorporation by governing the church in ways that are not in accordance with Church Order of the CRCNA.

We believe this decision of Classis Chicago South conflicts with the Church Order and has resulted in an injustice on the following grounds:

The delegates of Classis Chicago South, meeting September 18, 2018, were misled through a misrepresentation of the extent to which the proposed plan of union followed the Church Order of the CRCNA and prior local precedent. As a consequence, the delegates were not able to exercise “due consideration” (C.O. Art. 29) in making their decision.

The appeal goes on to address these four grounds in greater detail and concludes with the following desired course of action.

1. We request that synod overturn the decision of Classis Chicago South dated September 18, 2018, approving the plan of union between Calvin-Oak Lawn and Calvary-Orland Park.
2. We request that synod direct Classis Chicago South to maintain “proper unity, order, and sound doctrine” (C.O. Art. 48) by fully adhering to the Church Order, as written.
3. We request that synod direct the Calvary-Oak Lawn and Calvary-Orland Park churches to resubmit a plan of union that fully agrees with the Church Order and that synod task the executive director with communicating with the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to ensure Calvary-Orland Park carries this out.
4. We request that in the event #3 above is rejected by Calvary-Orland Park and Calvary-Oak Lawn, that the executive director communicate with the general secretary of the RCA to divide the real and personal property formerly controlled by Calvin-Oak Lawn as if this were an irreconcilable division between the members of Calvin-Oak Lawn who wish to remain true to the CRCNA and those who wish to join Calvary-Orland Park of the RCA.

The appeals argue that the overture of Calvin-Oak Lawn fails to do the following:

1. Provide that ministry share funds collected be equally divided between the two denominations as stipulated in provision “p” of the Supplement to Church Order Article 38-g regarding union churches.
2. Provide that, should the union church dissolve, all property, real and personal, would be divided equally between the classes of jurisdiction as stipulated in provision “w” of the Supplement to Church Order Article 38-g regarding union churches.

Since these provisions are not included, the appeals assert that the overture for the proposed union was in conflict with the Church Order. The appeals maintained that since CCS’s Rules of Procedure state that “CCS shall be constituted and function by the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church of North America,” failure to include these provisions meant that CCS was operating in conflict with its own Rules of Procedure. The appeals also maintain that Calvin-Oak Lawn’s Articles of Incorporation were violated in that they “provide for a division of assets in either a consensual or irreconcilable division. By transferring the control of assets solely to the Calvary-Orland Park church, the council of Calvin did not abide by the protections given to those who wanted to ‘remain true to the purposes of this church as a member church of the Christian Reformed Church in North America’” (Palos Heights Council appeal, p. 4).

Finally, the appeals maintain that classis was informed that the union of Calvin-Oak Lawn and Calvary-Orland Park was patterned after the union of First-Highland CRC and Faith-Dyer RCA in 2013. The appeals assert that on the two points already noted, the two unions differ significantly. The assertion is made that classis was misled by this comparison.

Although concerns were expressed about the deficiencies of the overture to take into account all the provisions of a church union, the matter was placed on the agenda of CCS; then it was discussed and debated and finally

approved by majority vote. The appeals contend that the decision of CCS should be overturned for the reasons cited.

III. Summary of response of Classis Chicago South

Members of the Classical Interim Committee of CCS (Rev. Roger Nelson, chair; Rev. Tim Bossenbroek; and Rev. Derek Buikema; but not including Mr. Jeremy Oosterhouse, who was in disagreement with the rest of the CIC, submitted a minority report to classis, and is one of the appellants) provided the response on behalf of CCS.

The CIC response to the appeals presented the following four points:

1. While the proposed plan of union of Calvin Christian Reformed Church of Oak Lawn and Calvary Reformed Church of Orland Park is not in perfect alignment with Church Order Article 38-g, the type of union between the two congregations is of a sort not envisioned by the Church Order. It would be more correct to identify the relationship between the two congregations as a multisite campus, with Calvary being the supervising congregation. CO 38-g comes the closest to providing guidance, and except for the two provisions previously mentioned, 38-g was followed. Thus, the CIC encouraged CCS to consider the overture, recognizing that it did not fully comply with the provisions for a church union, but due to the unforeseen situation of a multisite church, judged that it was not violating the Church Order nor the Rules of Procedure of CCS. They believed that the overture deserved to be heard and provided a way for a Christian Reformed witness to continue in Oak Lawn. By a majority vote CCS affirmed the overture and the “union” of the two churches.
2. The plan brought by Calvin-Oak Lawn to classis was an agreement that had been reached with Calvary-Orland Park. The agreement stipulated that Calvary would be the supervising council with the Calvin council being dissolved. Some members of Calvary would join the former Calvin worship community as a part of the multisite ministry of Calvary. The CIC of CCS had originally informed Calvin that the agreement did not fulfill all the provisions of a union given in CO 38-g; however the final overture did not contain anything of items “p” and “w.” The pastor of Calvary (who had been given the privilege to speak by the chairperson of the day) made it clear that the overture contained the final offer from Calvary. Failure to accept the overture would likely mean the closing of the Calvin-Oak Lawn church.
3. The CIC did not seek to mislead CCS in its deliberations. They acknowledged to classis the areas where the proposed “union” did not meet the provisions of the CO. Further, the minority report submitted by Jeremy Oosterhouse as a member of CIC was included as part of the agenda for the September 18 classis meeting, and attention was drawn to it. Opportunity was available to classis to take up the minority report, but no motion was made to do so.
4. Point 3 under “Desired Course of Action” in the appeal says:

We request that synod direct the Calvin-Oak Lawn and Calvary-Orland Park churches to resubmit a plan of union that fully agrees with the Church Order and that synod task the executive director with communicating with the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to ensure Calvary-Orland Park carries this out.

In the time following the approval of the overture by CCS, the council of Calvin CRC has been dissolved and, therefore, there is not a Christian Reformed council that can be tasked with resubmitting a plan in agreement with Church Order Article 38-g. The “union” to that extent has already occurred, and the property is presently in process of being transferred to the New Thing Classis of the RCA.

The CIC believes that CCS had to make a decision about a proposed relationship between a Christian Reformed congregation and a Reformed Church in America congregation that the Church Order does not address. The CO simply does not make provision for a multisite ministry as envisioned in the “union” that was approved.

IV. Observations

Having reviewed the appeals and the seven exhibits (CCS Agenda; CIC report to CCS; CIC letter to Calvin; CCS minutes of September 18, 2018; CCS Rules of Procedure; Calvin-Oak Lawn’s Articles of Incorporation; and the Union document between First-Highland and Faith-Dyer), and having heard a short presentation by the appellants and respondents, followed by questions from the review committee members to the appellants and respondents, the committee was convinced that the handling of the overture was “messy.” On the one hand, the Church Order does not provide guidance for the kind of “union” that was envisioned by Calvin CRC and Calvary RCA. Additionally, it was reported that a few members of Calvin were convinced that CCS would not approve of the overture because it was in conflict with the Church Order and, therefore, did not bring an appeal to classis regarding the action of their council in the proposal presented to and approved by the congregation. During the presentation of the overture at classis, the delegates from Calvin were asked to explain why the two sticking points were omitted from the overture; however, they offered no explanation.

Recognizing these concerns, the committee was not convinced, however, that the appeal(s) should be sustained. Sometimes classes must deal with situations that are not fully addressed by Church Order (or even the Word of God). Decisions have to be made utilizing the wisdom of the broader community, seeking to discern the best course of action in light of similar, but not identical, situations. Calvin CRC was a church facing declining membership with its future in jeopardy. Its council, with the council of Calvary RCA, crafted the agreement presented in the overture as a way to continue a Reformed ministry in Oak Lawn and a Christian Reformed Church presence through a multisite union church. That agreement was approved by the congregation, and subsequently by the classis with no objection or formal appeal from the congregation. Perhaps it would have been better not to refer to this as a *union church* because that designation has specific provisions and expectations attached to it from the Church Order that are used for the union of two CRC and RCA congregations. This plan is for the union of one CRC congregation to become a ministry site under the multisite church of Calvary RCA. But no other designation has to date been defined by synod that could guide Calvin and Calvary in their negotiations. The council of Calvin CRC and Classis Chicago South did the best they could in discerning the best procedure and decision.

The appellants are in agreement that it would be beneficial for a union to take place. However, the appellants do not agree with the action of CCS affirming the overture by Calvin CRC, requesting instead a union in accordance with all the provisions outlined in the Supplement to Church Order Article 38-g.

V. Recommendation

The COD adopted the following related to the appeals at its meeting on February 22, 2019. It is recommended that synod approve the work of the COD.

The COD voted not to sustain the appeals presented by the Palos Heights (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church council and by Mr. Robert Dykstra and Mr. Jeremy Oosterhouse.

Grounds:

1. The review committee observed that proper procedure was followed by Classis Chicago South in dealing with the overture.
2. The charge that the Church Order was not followed, and therefore that the matter should not have been considered, is not valid, as the Church Order does not specifically address the kind of union envisioned.
3. The overture was presented to the classis, and a motion of support was made, properly placing the overture on the floor of classis for discussion. The decision to consider the overture went unchallenged by classis delegates.
4. The minority report, which identified the concerns contained in the appeals, was available to all classical delegates, and thus the issues were sufficiently transparent.
5. The appellants support the union of these churches, which, through the multisite church (Calvary-Oak Lawn, a ministry of both the CRC and the RCA), would continue a Reformed witness in the neighborhood.

Appendix C

Proposed Church Order Changes by Synod 2018

On behalf of Synod 2018, the COD presents to Synod 2019 the following Church Order changes proposed by Synod 2018 for adoption (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 517-18).

1. That synod propose the following revisions to Church Order Article 42 and its Supplement (changes indicated by strikethrough and *italics*) to Synod 2019 for adoption:

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)

—Adopted

- c. That synod propose that Synod 2019 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.

Ground: The above changes are substantive and should be proposed to Synod 2019 for adoption.

—Adopted

Appendix D

Proposed Changes to Church Order Supplement (Art. 30-c), Rules for Synodical Procedure, and Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader

I. Background

Synod 2018 decided the following with regard to the Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures:

The Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c) was rewritten four years ago. Thankfully, there have been very few occasions to utilize the amended Judicial Code and the processes it suggests. Yet, recent use of the code has identified a few areas where clarity is needed. Therefore, the JCC's recommendation is as follows:

Recommendation: To instruct the executive director, working with the Judicial Code Committee and Church Order experts, to bring to Synod 2019 recommendations for improving the clarity of the Judicial Code as found in the Supplements to Church Order and as illustrated by the following points:

1. The Judicial Code states that "either party to the dispute may request the opportunity to address synod." While the code provides the opportunity for either party to make a *request*, the code would serve us better if it provided criteria upon which decisions about such requests are made and by whom.

2. The Judicial Code (Supplement, Article 30-c) requires that “charges involving physical, emotional, or sexual abuse . . . should be dealt with . . . by way of the Advisory Panel Process.” The first of five footnotes in the Advisory Panel Process includes this statement: “These are suggested guidelines. The circumstances of abuse may dictate that church officials deviate from them. In addition, state and provincial law vary somewhat in terms of the manner in which abuse is defined and how it should be reported.” The statement continues, saying that “the presumption should be in favor of following the guidelines in the case of each allegation of abuse; however, the church is best served by retaining legal counsel with expertise in the area to define the legal standards relevant to a particular jurisdiction.” Additional clarification and examples may help the church—at each level of assembly—know when deviation is permissible. Additional clarification of the definitions of sexual misconduct and physical misconduct would also assist the church in determining what conduct falls within the Advisory Panel Process.

(*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 477)

II. Response re addressing synod

- A. The Judicial Code states, “Either party to the dispute may request the opportunity to address synod” (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c, section 9, f). While the code provides the opportunity for either party to make a request, the code would serve the church better if it provided criteria upon which decisions about such requests are made and by whom.

B. *Additional reflections*

Section 9, f (above) of the Code follows the statement: “The Judicial Code Committee shall present its findings of fact and recommendations, along with grounds for its recommendations to synod in writing. . . .” The Code currently does not indicate whether the complainant and/or the respondent should or should not receive the written report to synod.

Following are recommended changes to be added in ***bold italics***, with additional changes that would be implied for the Rules for Synodical Procedure, sections VI, F, 3, f, 1-2; and h, 3:

Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c, section 9, e

- e. The Judicial Code Committee shall present its findings of fact and recommendations, along with grounds for its recommendations to synod in writing, and they shall be openly discussed in a plenary session of synod. These written findings of fact and recommendations shall omit any disclosure of names in cases where such disclosures is judged to be potentially damaging to their reputation.

Concerning release of the report to synod delegates:

Normally the report is provided to synod delegates at such time that the matter is before synod (therefore time to read the report must be provided as well). However, the Judicial Code Committee may recommend to the officers of synod release of the written report to the delegates while synod is in session, one or two days before the matter is on the schedule; rationale should relate to the degree of confidentiality needed.

Concerning release of the report to the complainant and respondent:
Not more than 15 business days and not less than 10 business days before the convening of synod shall be the time parameters within which the complainant and respondent shall receive the written report (sent by the executive director's office). Providing the written report to the complainant and respondent includes a required commitment not to share the report with any party other than the representative of each.

Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c, section 9, f

- f. Either party to the dispute may request the opportunity to address synod. Such request shall be made through the Judicial Code Committee, which shall make recommendation concerning the request to synod.

Concerning requests to address synod (the following proposed would replace the current section 9, f):

Upon receipt of the written report or prior to, both the complainant and respondent may request the opportunity to address synod. The Judicial Code Committee shall make a recommendation to the officers of synod as soon as possible based on ensuring due process (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c, section 2, g) and on the benefit synod would derive from such an address, and communicate the decision immediately to both parties (even if only one has made such a request).

Rules for Synodical Procedure (to be added to the Rules)

Concerning addresses to synod by the complainant or respondent, if allowed:

After the reporter provides the recommendation(s) of the Judicial Code Committee (and if there are majority and minority reports/recommendations, after both have been presented), the complainant and/or respondent shall be given opportunity for summarizing their positions, not unlike provided in the hearing (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c, section 5, a, vii), except that no opportunity for rebuttal will be allowed. Addresses shall be no more than five (5) minutes. If both parties have requested to address synod, the complainant shall be given no more than five (5) minutes to address synod first, and then the respondent shall be given no more than five (5) minutes to address synod. The Judicial Code Committee chair or the executive director shall be responsible for providing these instructions to each party, stressing that the function of addressing synod is to provide their personal summaries to synod, not to retry the case. After addressing synod, neither party may provide additional comments to synod, nor may synod ask for either or both parties to return to the speaker's podium for further questions, comments, or discussion.

III. Response re clarification of permissible deviation from advisory panel process

The Judicial Code (Supplement, Article 30-c; Preamble to the Judicial Code; see also section 3, c, i) requires that “charges involving physical, emotional, or sexual abuse . . . should be dealt with . . . by way of the Advisory Panel Process.” The first of five footnotes in the Advisory Panel Process includes the following: “These are suggested guidelines. The circumstances of abuse may dictate that church officials deviate from them. In addition, state and provincial law vary somewhat in terms of the manner in which abuse is defined and how it should be reported.” The statement continues, saying that “the presumption should be in favor of following the guidelines in the case of each allegation of abuse; however, the church is best served by retaining legal counsel with expertise in the area to define the legal standards relevant to a particular jurisdiction.” Additional clarification and examples may help the church—at each level of assembly—know when deviation is permissible. Additional clarification of the definitions of sexual misconduct and physical misconduct would also assist the church in determining what conduct falls within the Advisory Panel Process.

*Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader; p. 6 (additions in **bold italics**)*

These are suggested guidelines. The circumstances of abuse may dictate that church officials deviate from them. In addition, state and provincial laws vary somewhat in terms of the manner in which abuse is defined and how it should be reported. The presumption should be in favor of following the guidelines in the case of each allegation of abuse; however, the church is best served by retaining legal counsel with expertise in the area to define the legal standards relevant to a particular jurisdiction. Furthermore, the director of Safe Church Ministry can be consulted regarding the application of the guidelines.

Concerning the role of suggested guidelines (to be added after the second sentence):

These are suggested guidelines. The circumstances of abuse may dictate that church officials deviate from them. *Such circumstances cannot all be anticipated in advance, but would include deviations that provide protection for the alleged victims or alleged perpetrators of abuse.*

Ground: Section A, 5 of the *Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader* explains that in some situations the recommended procedures may create further revictimization of the alleged victims and that if “forced to face one who has dealt inappropriately with him/her, the abused may feel like a victim once again. Therefore, abused people have been unwilling to come forward with their stories even though their silence means that they cannot experience significant healing in their own lives and that an abusive spiritual leader continues to serve in a position of authority.”

Concerning the matter of jurisdictions (to be added to the following sentence):

The presumption should be in favor of following the guidelines in the case of each allegation of abuse; however, the church is best served by retaining legal counsel with expertise in the area to define the legal standards relevant to a particular jurisdiction *that could assist the body that would justify deviation from the suggested guidelines.*

Concerning additional clarification of the definitions of sexual misconduct and physical misconduct:

It should be noted that the guidelines include definitions of both *sexual misconduct* and *physical misconduct* (*Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader*, B, 1, b, 1 and 2).

Appendix E

Proposal for a Task Force to Consider Issues and Make Recommendations Regarding the Judicial Code and Related Rules

I. Introduction

During 2017 and 2018, the twelve person Judicial Code Committee (JCC) processed a dispute that involved a CRC pastor (who had been a denominational employee), multiple complainants, a CRC classis, the council of a CRC congregation, the CRC's Safe Church Ministry, and persons assigned by Safe Church to an advisory panel.

Those involved ("parties" and witnesses) in some way in the dispute were numerous. The facts and procedural issues involved were many, complicated, nuanced, and not always apparent. The time taken by the Judicial Code Committee, and each of its twelve members, was substantial, including reviewing a substantial quantity of materials, deliberating and making decisions about preliminary issues, and conducting a two-day hearing in which testimony was taken from quite a number of witnesses.

At the end of processing the appeal, the JCC members were unanimous with respect to some of its conclusions, and split with regard to others. As provided by the Judicial Code rules, the JCC report concerning the matter was forwarded to Synod 2018, which in turn took it up and made a "final decision" concerning the matter. In addition to deciding the matter,

Synod also adopted the following from the Judicial Code Committee (JCC) in executive session:

The Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures (Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c) was rewritten four years ago. Thankfully, there have been very few occasions to utilize the amended Judicial Code and the processes it suggests. Yet, recent use of the code has identified a few areas where clarity is needed. Therefore, the JCC's recommendation is as follows:

Recommendation: To instruct the executive director, working with the Judicial Code Committee and Church Order experts, to bring to Synod 2019 recommendations for improving the clarity of the Judicial Code as found in the Supplements to Church Order and as illustrated by the following points:

1. The Judicial Code states that “either party to the dispute may request the opportunity to address synod.” While the code provides the opportunity for either party to make a *request*, the code would serve us better if it provided criteria upon which decisions about such requests are made and by whom.
2. The Judicial Code (Supplement, Article 30-c) requires that “charges involving physical, emotional, or sexual abuse . . . should be dealt with . . . by way of the Advisory Panel Process.” The first of five footnotes in the Advisory Panel Process includes this statement: “These are suggested guidelines. The circumstances of abuse may dictate that church officials deviate from them. In addition, state and provincial law vary somewhat in terms of the manner in which abuse is defined and how it should be reported.” The statement continues, saying that “the presumption should be in favor of following the guidelines in the case of each allegation of abuse; however, the church is best served by retaining legal counsel with expertise in the area to define the legal standards relevant to a particular jurisdiction.” Additional clarification and examples may help the church—at each level of assembly—know when deviation is permissible. Additional clarification of the definitions of sexual misconduct and physical misconduct would also assist the church in determining what conduct falls within the Advisory Panel Process.

(Acts of Synod 2018, pp. 476-77)

II. Recommendation to appoint task force

The JCC recommends that Synod 2019 appoint a task force that would report back to Synod 2020 (or later if an extension were requested and granted) with observations about and recommendations for changes to the Judicial Code and other related CRC Church Order provisions, Church Order Supplement provisions, or other rules or generally accepted / implemented practices, with a view to improving the processing of disputes under the Judicial Code.

A. Scope of concern for proposed task force

That which is quoted above from pages 476-77 of the *Acts of Synod 2018* represents synod’s adoption of a recommendation made by the JCC to synod and expressed in the JCC report within an “Addendum to the Report.” At that point in time (before synod took up the matter from the JCC), the JCC had specific concerns resulting from the JCC’s processing of the matter that it then handed off to Synod 2018. After the matter was processed by Synod 2018, the JCC, then having the additional experience of observing how synod processed the matter, had additional concerns.

The proposed scope of concern for the proposed task force is as follows:

1. To consider and suggest clarifications and / or changes in the rules by which parties to a Judicial Code dispute might address synod when the matter is taken up by synod.
2. To consider and suggest clarifications and / or changes in the “Advisory Panel rules,” referred to by the Judicial Code (Supplement, Article 30-c), so as to clarify, e.g., which procedural rules may be regarded as merely “suggestive” and which should be regarded as “required” (that is, not merely “suggestive”), including under what circumstances or for what reasons.

Note: Items 1 and 2 above are recommendations made resulting from the JCC processing of the matter *before* the matter was then sent to synod for

a final decision. The recommendations below are made resulting from the JCC's observing how the matter was processed by Synod 2018.

3. To consider clarifications and / or changes in the meaning of the four options given synod when receiving a matter from the JCC, those options currently being the following (Supplement, Article 30-c, Section 9, h):
 - h. Synod may dispose of a judicial matter in one of the following ways:
 - i) by deciding the matter;
 - ii) by deferring it to one of its committees for settlement or reconciliation;
 - iii) by remanding it with advice to the appropriate classis or council; or
 - iv) by conducting its own original judicial or appeal hearing.
4. To consider clarifications and / or changes in the current practice rules, or to consider making new rules (whether in the Judicial Code or otherwise), relating to when JCC reports are provided to the parties and to the members of synod prior to the time the matter is to be considered by synod.
5. To consider whether rules governing the role of synod or the status / character of the JCC in its relationship to synod, or both, should be changed.

Special note re item 5: Eyebrows may raise at this suggestion. Notwithstanding, the JCC recommends this be within the scope of the proposed task force because the JCC observed a significant "mismatch" between the inherent complexity of the JCC matter taken up by Synod 2018 and the inherent capabilities (or lack thereof) of that body to adequately process the matter, given its sizeable composition and the very limited time it had available to it. The JCC observed that Synod 2018 did not follow certain rules that were quite clear and should have been followed in processing the JCC matter before it. However, even if those rules had been followed, it would remain the observation of some or all JCC members that a body the size of synod, having the time that an annual synod inherently has, with executive session rules now followed, simply cannot adequately (fairly, justly) process a matter of the kind before Synod 2018. Important note: Different matters that come before the JCC (and thus, synod) may be more or less complex (more or less fact intensive, more or less numerous in "legal" principles involved, more or less procedurally complicated). Thus, even if some matters are matters that annual synods could competently decide upon, others might not be. The task force should fully examine all of this and consider proposing changes that would create a more just process for matters coming under the provisions of the Judicial Code.

6. To consider, as determined prudent by the task force, other possible changes in Judicial Code rules or otherwise that would result in a more just process when matters are taken up under the Judicial Code.

Special note: This is proposed simply so that the mandate for the task force is not closed-ended.

B. Task force composition

The JCC recommends that Synod 2019 (or its designee) appoint as members to the task force the following:

1. members of the current JCC who are willing to so serve
2. past chairpersons of the JCC who are willing to so serve
3. the denominational executive director, as task force adviser
4. persons who would also be selected, if any, by the mutual decision of the current chair of the JCC and the executive director

(It is assumed that the task force would have access to the participation of Church Order knowledgeable persons [such as Kathy Smith and Henry DeMoor] and persons tangentially involved in the considerations of the task force [such as Bonnie Nicholas and / or other Safe Church persons], but it is not recommended that such persons be appointed as members of the task force).

Grounds:

1. Given the size of synod and the timeframe of its session, it is often difficult for synod to adequately process matters presented to synod by the JCC.
2. A task force would help determine how a more just process can be established for matters that come before the JCC, and how synod can determine its response to the report (and any recommendations) of the JCC with a sense of fairness and justice.

Appendix F **Calvin College Evaluation** **Report on Faith Formation**

The *Agenda for Synod 2017* described goals for each of the denomination's areas of calling: Faith Formation, Gospel Proclamation and Worship, Servant Leadership, Global Mission, and Mercy and Justice. At that time, the goals for the Faith Formation calling area as related to Calvin College were described as follows, based on the college's own educational framework:

Faith Formation via Calvin College. To help students learn that the Christian faith (1) increases in richness, resilience, and passion when grounded in biblical, theological, and historical knowledge as articulated in this Reformed tradition of Christianity; (2) is strengthened by historic spiritual practices, particularly devotional practices and communal worship; and (3) finds purpose in acts of justice, mercy, and love in the world—acts by which we show gratitude and through which God builds the kingdom. Calvin College evaluates this goal by once every four years implementing an assessment plan that engages a cross-divisional group of students, staff, and faculty, gathering outcome data for its core, major, and cocurriculum programs.

The following report describes the ways in which faith formation of students is integral to all aspects of a Calvin College education. Indeed, faith formation is the common thread running from the college's foundational statements throughout all the college's curricular and cocurricular programs.

Mission

*Calvin College equips students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world.*¹

The college's *Expanded Statement of Mission* commits to the importance not only of providing an education but also of engaging "in vigorous liberal arts education that promotes lives of Christian service. This mission in education affects the goals that the college sets for its programs, the contexts in which various fields are studied, and the pedagogical techniques used to fulfill those goals and to examine those fields."²

Vision

By 2030, Calvin will become a Christian liberal arts university with an expanded global influence. We envision Calvin University as a trusted partner for learning across religious and cultural differences and throughout the academy, the church, and the world.

Calvin University will be animated by a Reformed Christian faith that seeks understanding and promotes the welfare of the city and the healing of the world. We welcome all who are compelled by God's work of renewal to join us in the formative pursuits of lifelong learning, teaching, scholarship, worship, and service.

Values

- Boldness and Humility
- Curiosity and Conviction
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Tradition and Innovation³

The Educational Framework of Calvin College and Its Relation to Faith Formation

Calvin College's Educational Framework names college-wide goals that ground the college's curricular and cocurricular activities. It attempts to answer this question: "What are the enduring characteristics or qualities of thinking, doing, and being that mark a Calvin graduate?" The Educational Framework does not duplicate or expand on the primary documents of the college (*Expanded Statement of Mission; An Engagement with God's World: The Core Curriculum of Calvin College; From Every Nation: Revised Comprehensive Plan for Racial Justice, Reconciliation, and Cross-Cultural Engagement at Calvin College; and the Statement on Sustainability*), documents that articulate the college's foundational commitments to a liberal arts education, a Reformed tradition, and matters of racial justice, reconciliation, cross-cultural engagement, and creation care. Rather, the Educational Framework emerges from

¹ Calvin College's mission statement, quoted here, was approved by the Board of Trustees in October 2013.

² An Expanded Statement of the Mission of Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Calvin College, 2004), p. 27.

³ Calvin College's statement of Vision and Values was approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2018.

the college's foundational documents and commitments. These foundational documents provide coherence and meaning to the Educational Framework.

The all-college goals identified for a Calvin graduate are embedded in the four pillars of the Educational Framework:

1. Learning – Deep, Broad, Engaged
2. Faith – Informed, Courageous, Lived
3. Citizenship – Local, Global, Christlike
4. Vocation – Responsive, Discerning, Dynamic⁴

Every year, the college selects one of the four themes of the Educational Framework for an in-depth assessment. This year (2018-2019), the second pillar, faith, is being assessed in the college's academic programs, the core curriculum, and the cocurricular programs. Each academic department at Calvin College has developed an assessment plan. Each curricular program has an assessment plan that includes outcomes, data collection, data analysis, and program improvements based on evidence. And each cocurricular program has developed an assessment process suitable for the goals and activities of that program.

Just as synod seeks evidence of the college's effectiveness in faith formation in students, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC, a regional accrediting body that, among other things, assures the U.S. Department of Education of the rigor of a Calvin education and that Calvin students are qualified to receive federal financial aid) requires evidence of quality and transparency. The HLC requires assessment efforts to document that the college prioritizes activities and resources according to its mission, that faculty and staff are qualified, that the college uses evidence-based assessment for continual quality improvement, and that budgeting practices are sound and transparent. Because Calvin's mission clearly articulates a goal of preparing students for Christian service, it is essential that the college encourage and promote faith formation in all its endeavors, academic and otherwise.

Faith Formation of Calvin College Students

This report describes efforts that Calvin College has undertaken to assess and strengthen the faith formation of students. The efforts reported here correspond to the goals highlighted by Synod 2017. Not all programs at Calvin are described; rather, this report points to a variety of curricular and cocurricular efforts as examples. Programs are at various stages in the assessment process. Due to the often internalized and private nature of faith formation, much of the evaluative data comes in the form of self-reports and observed practices. While Calvin remains focused on collecting direct assessments of student learning as its primary tool for assessment, the unique characteristics of faith formation sometimes can require a different approach.

⁴ Excerpted from the Educational Framework, Calvin College, 2015; calvin.edu/offices-services/provost/educational-framework/.

GOAL 1

The Christian faith increases in richness, resilience, and passion when grounded in biblical, theological, and historical knowledge as articulated in this Reformed tradition.

In the *Expanded Statement of Mission*, Calvin College affirms that “Christian education should let faith find full expression; that genuine community is essential to such faith and education; and that Christian colleges are called to help transform contemporary society and culture.”⁵ The college is therefore concerned with encouraging faith formation not only in Bible and theology core courses but also throughout general education and within all majors. The following are examples of faith formation from academic programs and the core curriculum, including gateway courses, Bible and theology core courses, and integrative study (capstone) courses.

Academic Programs

All academic programs are required to develop program learning outcomes related to competencies expected within a given discipline as well as the development of communication skills and critical thinking. Departments are also expected to demonstrate that their programs’ learning outcomes fit with the college’s mission and with Reformed Christian commitments. Examples of program learning outcomes related to integration of faith perspectives and a particular discipline include the following:

- Live Chemistry Faithfully: Students will exhibit scientifically and theologically grounded principles that inform their personal and communal participation in work, worship, service, and stewardship. (Chemistry and Biochemistry)
- Students will be able to articulate their Christian worldview and how their worldview informs their view of business mission, vision, values, competitors, customers, and profits. (Business)
- Internalize the core virtues (*An Engagement with God’s World: The Core Curriculum of Calvin College*)⁶ into the practice of Reformed Christian professional nursing. (Nursing)
- Students will demonstrate the ability to thoughtfully integrate broadly Christian and specifically Reformed ideas with psychological understandings of human personhood. (Psychology)

Each year all departments are required to submit reports to the college’s Academic Assessment Committee on the assessment activities for each academic program in their purview. These reports do not have a prescribed format, in order to allow departments—especially those with accredited programs—latitude to develop reports that serve their own needs. The reports are submitted by the department chair in the fall. All departments are expected to have developed direct measures of student learning for each outcome and, as appropriate, indirect measures as well. The minimal expectation is

⁵ *Expanded Statement of Mission*, p. 36.

⁶ Cf. appendix 3, Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Reformed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 225-41.

that each year every program should assess at least one program-level outcome using at least one direct measure of student learning. Most programs do much more.

A primary means of synthesizing faith formation in every academic program is via an integrative studies (capstone) core course that students in every academic program complete at the conclusion of their studies. Each of these courses requires students to produce a major paper or project in which they integrate Reformed Christian perspectives with their given discipline or profession.

Core Curriculum Program at Calvin College: Engaging God's World and Faith Formation

Faith formation and Calvin's core curriculum are intentionally tightly intertwined. Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., describes this relationship in *Engaging God's World: A Reformed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living*, noting first that Jesus Christ is the *sine qua non* on whom the college's mission is based:

The distinguishing mark of the mission of Calvin College derives, like all Christian missions, from Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of creation, the Savior of all who place their trust in him. For the Christian life, including the Christian academic life, centers on the person of Christ—on his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and on the sovereign love that these astounding events express.⁷

And, second, that the core curriculum reveals the nature of Christ:

Calvin College is a Christian college. Its students should acquire in the core curriculum a mature and reflective knowledge of the triune God as revealed in the Bible and interpreted by the Christian tradition.⁸

Given these overarching purposes, the primary purpose of core courses is not to serve as introductions to the various disciplines, but rather to help students learn about the world in which they are called to serve from the perspective of each discipline. Thus all courses in all core categories have a faith formation intent. For the purpose of this report, three aspects of the core curriculum are highlighted: gateway courses, Bible and theology courses, and integrative study (capstone) courses.

Core Gateway Courses: First-Year Coursework

Three of the college's student learning outcomes for first-year students focus on the mission of Calvin College and on Reformed Christian perspectives.

1. Describe the guiding principles of a Reformed liberal arts education.
2. Articulate the ways in which the Christian faith bears upon a current issue.
3. Engage in and reflect on practices that help students live out a faith commitment in the world.

⁷ Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, p. 178.

⁸ Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, p. 205.

These learning outcomes are addressed in student orientation, in the first-year seminar, and in the required January course, Developing a Christian Mind (DCM). *Engaging God's World* is the common text for most sections of DCM. This book, specially commissioned as an introduction to Calvin's core curriculum, provides an overview of the Reformed doctrines of God's creation, humanity's fallen state, and the redemption of the world in Christ; in addition, it traces the implications of this approach for the life of learning.

Of the over 800 students who were enrolled in DCM in January 2018,

- 76 percent reported that they experienced either "good" or "great" gain in their ability to describe the guiding principles of a Reformed Christian faith.
- 78 percent reported "good" or "great" gain in their ability to articulate the ways in which the Christian faith related to the topic of their DCM course.
- 82 percent reported "good" or "great" gain in engaging in and reflecting on practices that help them live out a faith commitment in the world.

Based on past feedback and performance of DCM students, the DCM leaders continue to make annual adjustments to the program in order to improve student learning.

Core Courses in the Biblical Foundations and Theological Foundation Core Categories

All Calvin graduates are required to take at least one course in either biblical or theological foundations, and the majority are required to take two courses in biblical and theological foundations. (The external demands of some programs, such as engineering and education, require that core requirements be abbreviated.) The student learning outcomes for these core categories are as follows:

Biblical Foundations I

Students will

1. demonstrate understanding of central theological themes of the Bible.
2. demonstrate understanding of the historical-cultural context and literary features of various sections of the Bible.
3. demonstrate understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture as understood within the Reformed tradition.
4. interpret Scripture, think critically, and write coherently at an introductory level.

Biblical Foundations II

Students will

1. demonstrate understanding of central theological themes of a portion of the Bible.
2. demonstrate understanding of and analyze in depth the historical-cultural context and literary features of a particular portion of the Bible.
3. demonstrate understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture as understood within the Reformed tradition.
4. interpret Scripture, think critically, and write coherently at an intermediate level.

Theological Foundations I

Students will

1. demonstrate understanding of the central teachings of the Christian church and the Reformed tradition.
2. demonstrate understanding of the development of Christian theology through history.
3. reason theologically about key questions of life and faith.
4. analyze theological texts, think critically, and write coherently at an introductory level.

Theological Foundations II

Students will

1. demonstrate understanding of the central teachings of the Christian church and the Reformed tradition.
2. demonstrate understanding of and analyze in depth a key Christian doctrine or the development of doctrine in a particular historical era.
3. reason theologically about key questions of life and faith.
4. analyze theological texts, think critically, and write coherently at an intermediate level.

The faculty in the Religion Department assess student achievement of these outcomes by applying a faculty-developed rubric to a final-exam essay. Based on assessment data, the faculty make changes to the core courses as needed. For instance, a recent assessment noted that students did well in understanding central theological themes of Scripture as well as in interpreting Scripture; however, students had a comparatively more difficult time with Reformed Christian perspectives of Scripture and applying critical thinking to scriptural interpretations. Subsequently, the faculty decided to devote more attention to student analysis of primary texts, both in class and in writing assignments.

Core Courses in Integrative Studies

Integrating a Reformed Christian faith with an academic discipline is one of the central goals of a Calvin College education. As mentioned previously, students are required to take an integrative studies course (often referred to as a capstone course) for each of their major fields of study. Students are required to complete either a paper or a cumulative project in which they examine their academic programs in light of Christian themes or perspectives. This project is a graded component of the integrative studies course and is also used as a primary assessment artifact in every academic program. In addition, many integrative studies courses ask students to create a vocational statement or plan. In this way, the threads of the core curriculum are interwoven with students' academic programs, culminating in such a way that students graduate having learned to love God with their minds and able to apply that learning in lives of service.

GOAL 2

Christian faith is strengthened by historic spiritual practices, particularly devotional practices and communal worship.

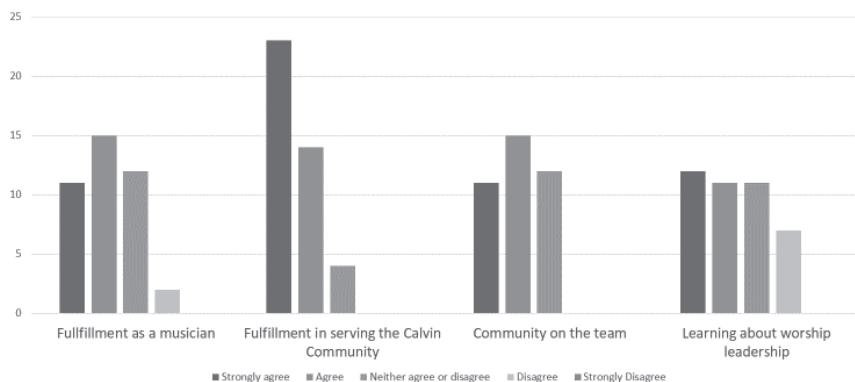
Although developing students' Christian faith is a vital part of the academic program efforts, Calvin College also recognizes that much of this formation will occur outside of the classroom. The *Expanded Statement of Mission* states, "Maintaining community requires rituals, celebrations, worship, traditions, and experiences in which the members of the community remember the past, honor the present, and give promise to the future. . . . The college's mission in community must be true to its Reformed tradition, mindful of its rich heritage, welcoming of new partnerships, and growing in its sense of God's global community."⁹ All cocurricular organizations are required to develop student learning outcomes, with at least one focused specifically on faith formation. For this report, the chaplaincy and residence-life programs are discussed in detail.

Chaplaincy, Worship Program, and Campus-wide Bible Studies

Campus Ministries is part of the Student Life Division. The chaplain, three associate chaplains, and a mentoring coordinator provide programming centered on faith formation and support for students. A half-hour chapel service is offered each day at 10:00 a.m., during which no classes or other activities are scheduled. Although chapel is not required, it remains an appreciated feature of student and staff life. Attendance varies from 100 to 1,000, depending on the day of week and the semester calendar. Living Our Faith Together (LOFT) is a worship service offered each Sunday evening. Chapel and LOFT services are both web-streamed and archived, and online viewing of these services continues to increase.

An important goal of the worship program is to help students prepare as worship leaders for future service to the church. Over 100 students have formal worship leadership (Worship Apprentice) roles each year, and 455 students participate in occasional worship leadership. Worship Apprentices report that this role is fulfilling and has helped strengthen their faith.

Serving as a Worship apprentice has given me...



⁹ *Expanded Statement of Mission*, p. 47.

The mentoring program of the Campus Ministries Department, now in its fourteenth year, provides adult mentors for interested students in a one-on-one or group setting. This program continues to grow steadily, with about 300 students participating in 2017-2018.

What have you learned about your relationship with God during the Worship Apprentice program?

In order to lead well, I need to focus on my personal relationship with God. Corporate worship is a part of our interaction with God and can provide the language we need to talk to God, but it can't replace personal spiritual disciplines.

I've learned to be a lot more honest with God about how I'm really doing. I think I've learned to trust God better. I have learned how to lean heavily on sustaining grace and provision in times of distress. I've relearned over and over that I am desperately imperfect, but God perfects my human efforts.

I learned that God is present in everything even if I don't realize it. I learned that even if I am not "moved" by God, God is always moving. I learned that it is just like any other relationship, work needs to be put in order to see results. I can't expect to have a good relationship with him if I only think about him once a week.

I have learned that my relationship with God is not so much about what I mentally ascent to, but it is an active way of life that both challenges and comforts me. Also I have become ever-more aware of how God works through people and through community. I have found that worship is, or should be, a place where I can go no matter where I am with God because it should be reflective of that place.

Comments expressed by Worship apprentices in a confidential survey, 2018

The Barnabas Program continues to bring practices associated with spiritual formation to the residence halls through Bible studies and dorm worship. An average of 17 percent of students in each residence hall participate in dorm worship throughout the year, and a similar 17 percent of students participate in the Bible studies offered on the dorm floors.

Campus Ministries coordinates a campus-wide Bible study each fall. This program, now in its fifth year, involves coordinated Bible studies of faculty, staff, and students as well as worship themes in LOFT and chapel. In 2017-2018, 524 people participated in the study "Old Testament Characters."¹⁰

Residence Life

In fall 2017, over 90 percent of first-year students lived in the residence halls. Each hall has a full-time, non-student resident director living in the hall and supervising the overall operations. Like every division in Student Life, the residence halls have developed student learning outcomes in regard to faith formation:

The Student Life Division, as noted earlier, is engaged in assessing these outcomes; outcome data are not yet available.

Several students per dorm are also involved in programming to promote the learning outcomes of residence life. These students, described below, also have a faith-formation focus to their work:

- *Resident assistants*: students who live on each floor, trained and paid to promote the development of community on the floor
- *Barnabas Team members*: students who lead Bible studies, promote worship, serve as mentors

¹⁰ Excerpted from Campus Ministries Annual Report, 2017-2018.

Programs (from 6.2)	Assessment activities
Students will <i>practice</i> the value of corporate worship	We will coordinate with campus ministries office to obtain attendance numbers. We'll also collect survey data from all-resident surveys in fall and spring.
Students will <i>practice</i> the value of corporate bible study	We will coordinate with campus ministries office to obtain attendance numbers. We'll also collect survey data from all-resident surveys in fall and spring.
Students will <i>describe</i> the connection between Christian belief and behavior.	We'll survey all RAs in the spring, and ask them to describe the connection between their Christian belief and behavior. We'll also ask them to evaluate how much their RD contributed to their spiritual growth.

- *Cultural Discerners*: students who promote discussion of culture, including movies, concerts, and albums
- *Sustainability coordinators*: students who promote environmental sustainability in the residence hall
- *Community Partnership coordinators*: students who facilitate an existing partnership between the residence hall and a Grand Rapids organization

Most upper-class students live off-campus or in apartments on the east side of campus. The college offers less formal programming for these students, but a programming activities council in each on-campus apartment complex does plan several events each semester. Another living option for upper-class students is Project Neighborhood. These houses (six houses serving a total of 37 students) are an alternative housing opportunity for Calvin students to live in intentional Christian community in the city of Grand Rapids. Participants are committed to personal spiritual growth, structured time together as house residents, and service to the neighborhood. Each house has a formal connection to community organizations, and residents commit to serving the community with these organizations.¹¹

GOAL 3

Christian faith finds purpose in acts of justice, mercy, and love in the world, acts by which we show gratitude and through which God builds his kingdom.

Calvin College does not view a rich and deep Christian, liberal arts education as the final product; the value of this education can only be revealed in service to one's neighbors and the world. In the *Expanded Statement of Mission*, Calvin's outward focus is described as follows, "The Reformed vision of the Christian faith moves outward to engage, to learn, to transform, and to redeem. Community at Calvin College is not an end in itself, but a threshold for enacting in the world the purpose, justice, sympathy, and discipline that serve as the basis for our community."¹² Although community and cross-cultural engagement is found in almost every academic program and

¹¹ Excerpted from Campus Ministries Annual Report, 2017-2018.

¹² *Expanded Statement of Mission*, p. 49.

cocurricular activity, the Off-Campus and Service-Learning programs are central in helping shape these experiences.

Off-Campus Programs

Calvin College's off-campus programs are an important part of the Calvin experience. On average, 65 percent of Calvin students study off campus prior to graduation.¹³ In 2017-2018, over 200 students spent a semester abroad in one of ten programs around the world. Calvin works to integrate Christian faith into all aspects of the off-campus experience. Off-campus programs focus on providing Calvin students with opportunities to

- experientially connect knowing with doing and beliefs with behaviors.
- explore the role of faith in the places where students study.
- reflect on and articulate how Christian worldview and faith commitments affect interaction with "the other" as well as how encounters with "the other" help one recognize one's own cultural perspective.
- explore a Reformed worldview in the context of international learning.

Much of the assessment of off-campus experiences comes from tracking the frequency of student participation and asking students to evaluate their experiences. In 2017-2018, using a four-point scale, students participating in an off-campus semester experience rated the experience highly (3.83), as did students participating in a three-week interim-abroad course (3.58).

On a five-point scale, students self-described their off-campus growth as follows:¹⁴

• My semester helped me appreciate diverse viewpoints	4.62
• My semester helped me gain a greater understanding of the place and people	4.72
• My semester encouraged a sense of humility in interacting with others	4.55
• My semester helped prepare me to interact in cross-cultural settings	4.67
• My semester gave me a greater sense of the challenges our world is facing	4.50
• I developed a deeper faith as a result of my off-campus semester	3.90
• I stretched myself to make contact with local people	3.73
• My semester helped me better understand how to be an agent of redemption and transformation in this world	3.92

Service-Learning

The Service-Learning Center has existed for over 50 years. Its mission is "to engage and equip Calvin College students, faculty, staff, community partners, alumni, and other friends of the college in and for the pursuit of God's shalom in our learning together, primarily through community-based service-learning, social justice activity and civic participation in Grand Rapids and other partner communities." The center helps professors connect

¹³ Every year, between 650 and 800 students study off campus. Overall numbers are difficult to calculate because many students study off campus more than once.

¹⁴ Excerpted from the Center for Community Engagement and Global Learning Annual Report, 2017-2018.

community needs to specific learning goals and also helps students pursue independent learning opportunities. According to the center's most recent year-end report (2017-2018), 1,700 students logged 5,770 service-learning hours with over 186 different agency partners. Besides local placements, the center coordinates approximately ten spring-break service opportunities in other parts of the United States. The center has maintained long-term relationships with many community partners and regularly conducts site visits to accurately assess the needs of the community.

In the Service-Learning program, the student learning and developmental outcomes related to faith formation are the following:

- a greater awareness of and appreciation for the assets of various communities
- an increased commitment to service both during and after Calvin
- enhanced awareness of, knowledge about, and skills in working with diverse communities and people
- a greater understanding of systemic injustice
- growth in knowledge and understanding of faith traditions, and the experiences that people of a variety of faith traditions have in the current social context of Grand Rapids
- a deeper, broader understanding of the *sensus divinitatis* in other image-bearers of God

The Service-Learning program is undergoing an external review in 2018-2019; as part of that review, the program's assessment plan and associated assessment activities and outcome data are currently under review.

Going Forward

Calvin College takes the responsibility of faith formation very seriously. As the college's *Expanded Statement of Mission* states, "The tasks of our daily life together are guided by faithfulness to the Word. We aim to be conformed more and more to the likeness of God incarnate, willing to receive the mind and heart of Jesus. We also aim to be agents of renewal. We believe that we are, as individuals, as groups, and as a whole gifted by God to be such agents of a common aim."¹⁵ As faculty and staff at Calvin College, it is our highest commitment and joy to, in the words of our mission statement, "equip students to think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world."

Laura De Haan, Ph.D.
Dean for Academic Administration

Appendix G

Faith Formation Ministries Evaluation

Introduction

The *Agenda for Synod 2017* described goals for each of the CRC's ministry priorities. The goal for Faith Formation was stated as follows:

The Goal via Faith Formation Ministries: To strengthen and support congregational faith formation leaders with vocabulary, resources, creative steps, and implementation ideas so that their entire spectrum of faith formation culture, practices, and programs is enhanced.

Faith Formation Ministries assesses its effectiveness by tracking engagement with churches and evaluating their use of our coaching services and resources. We ask questions like these:

- How many CRC church leaders are we interacting with?
- What common themes emerge from our interactions with them?
- What new learnings have we gleaned from the local church?
- How effective are we at nurturing trusting relationships with congregational leaders?
- What is the ratio of one-time interactions to ongoing, sustained interactions?
- What assessments do congregational leaders give us through (a) their attendance at our workshops, (b) their participation in our cohorts, (c) our ongoing, sustained interactions with them, and (d) their evaluations of our resource materials?
- How many hits are our online resources—toolkits, Ten Ways tools, curated resource lists, Network posts—receiving?
- How frequently does an online resource lead to a relational interaction?

Faith Formation Ministries' Mandate

Faith Formation Ministries was officially launched at Synod in June 2015 and has now completed four years of service. During those years FFM has clarified its mandate, built an effective and committed team, carried out a launch strategy focused on listening to and cultivating relationships with congregational leaders, and created resources to assist them in their ministry.

FFM's official mandate reads as follows:

Faith Formation Ministries joins and continues God's mission of transforming lives and communities worldwide by encouraging and equipping local Christian Reformed congregations and their leaders in their calling to practice intentional, lifelong, intergenerational, holistic, missional discipleship and faith formation, with an emphasis upon children, teens, and young adults.

Note: Because faith formation by definition is lifelong and involves all ages together in community, our mission has expanded to include adults of all ages so that we can encourage cradle-to-grave faith formation in CRC churches.

This mandate has four aspects:

1. To participate in assessing and strengthening discipleship and faith formation throughout the CRCNA, and developing supports, workshops, and resources in response to this assessment. Resourcing includes developing new resources in response to discerned needs, curating the best available resources, and revising / updating existing resources.
2. To cooperate in developing regionally distributed ministry that cultivates interpersonal trust relationships with congregational leaders in order to

facilitate the tasks of (a) learning from congregations in order to discern ministry patterns and (b) assessing and empowering them in their callings.

3. (Added to mandate by COD, Oct. 2018) To support children's ministry in Christian Reformed congregations by

- regularly refreshing existing Faith Alive curricula.
- providing training, support, and consultations for teachers.
- providing guidance for assessing and adapting other (non-Faith Alive) curricular materials.

Note: The denomination commits to include the need for these resources in upcoming budget processes and to request the appropriate financial resources required to carry out this mandate.

4. To strategically collaborate with CRC ministries and discern where fruitful collaborations are possible outside the CRCNA.

History

Because FFM is relatively young, assessing its effectiveness must include understanding its birth story. Faith Formation Ministries was born at the intersection of three (fairly unusual) developments in CRC denominational history:

1. **The Faith Formation Committee (FFC; 2007-2013) completed its synodical mandate.** The final piece of the FFC's mandate was to recommend to synod how the denomination might continue supporting faith formation in CRC congregations. FFC member Syd Hielema developed that part of the committee's work, and out of this project Faith Formation Ministries was later born, with Hielema serving as its leader. The FFC broke new ground in that it was called a "shepherding" committee (in contrast with the more traditional "study committee"), meaning its primary calling was not to study and present conclusions to synod but rather to listen to congregational leaders and embed these conversational postures within its ministry DNA.
2. **Faith Alive Christian Resources' mandate to create resources for the CRC ended at Synod 2013.** A long history of creating strong Reformed curricula and resources through Faith Alive, the denomination's publishing ministry, ended at Synod 2013, indicating that a publishing/retailing programmatic model of serving congregations was no longer feasible. Thus, the ending of one method of serving congregations dovetailed with the birth of a more relational and dynamic model of service. (*Note:* Because Faith Alive's ministry ended in a rather confusing manner, the ongoing provision of curricula remained in limbo until Synod 2018 and the COD in October 2018 officially added point 3 above to FFM's mandate.)
3. **The CRC's new leadership team developed *Our Journey 2020*.** Between June 2014 and March 2015, new leaders were appointed to all three senior denominational positions: Steve Timmermans, Colin Watson, and Darren Roorda. Each of these leaders affirmed a deep commitment to serve local congregations and oversaw the development of the Ministry Plan *Our Journey 2020*. Their leadership and the shape of the Ministry Plan built significant capacity for FFM to launch well.

The FFM team sees these three developments as a kind of “providential convergence” that allowed us to launch during a fruitful season as a new ministry.

Denominational Survey

The CRC’s annual denominational survey reinforces the trajectory of these three developments. Faith Formation Ministries was born at the intersection of one great denominational strength and two significant weaknesses.

In the discipleship section of the 2018 denominational survey (network.crcna.org/crcna-and-synod/2018-denominational-survey-results), the statement “Our church strongly encourages us to apply the Bible to every area of our lives” received the highest ranking of the 12 statements listed there, with 89 percent of respondents rating this statement as “definitely true” or “mostly true.” That affirms two great strengths of the Reformed tradition: a comprehensive and holistic understanding of following Christ, and a commitment to effective teaching.

The two discipleship statements that ranked the lowest are these:

- “Our church has a clear disciple-making process from exploring Jesus to spiritual maturity” (just 46% of respondents rated this statement as “definitely true” or “mostly true”)
- “I speak regularly with others about their spiritual life” (just 39% of respondents rated this statement as “definitely true” or “mostly true”)

These two results reveal that the down-to-earth daily practices of discipleship and faith formation need much more attention in the CRC.

Launch Strategy

Our launch strategy for the first four years of our ministry was guided by these convictions:

<i>Conviction</i>	<i>Corresponding strategy</i>
Every congregation has a unique identity, history, context, and calling. Christ is present in his church in hundreds of different ways.	FFM is called to enter into conversations with a respectful listening posture that discerns how Christ is present in each church and with the capacity to adapt resources and advice to fit that reality. Thus, FFM’s resources adopt a flexible menu approach.
Ministry is primarily local.	As FFM develops deeper connections with local congregations, our approach must be local and relational. FFM’s team of regional catalysts and network of classis-based youth ministry champions build significant capacity for this local, relational approach.

<p>The traditional head-centered educational approach of the CRC needs to be expanded toward whole-person faith formation.</p>	<p>Faith formation needs to address every dimension of our humanness, for Christ transforms every part of our being. FFM's resources are wide-ranging, holistic, and practical.</p>
<p>We often perceive congregational ministry solely through the lens of worship and programs. But the Spirit's transforming presence takes place through practices embedded in worship, programs, and many informal means.</p>	<p>FFM's calling includes strengthening a faith formation vocabulary that helps congregations move beyond information to formation and transformation. The Building Blocks of Faith toolkit provides sound faith formation guidance, our many Ten Ways tools function as conversation-shapers, and our soon-to-be released Faith Formation Primer provides helpful background and vocabulary. FFM's workshops, classis presentations, and blog posts all communicate a consistent faith formation vision and vocabulary.</p>
<p>An unintended consequence of the CRC's strong educational heritage is the misconception that ages 0-22 are the focus of faith formation. But faith formation is lifelong.</p>	<p>FFM's ministry focuses on the church as the intergenerational body of Christ, with resources increasingly providing guidance for every season of life, from the cradle to the grave.</p>
<p>Specific practices that are especially needed today include family faith formation, faith story-telling, and youth leadership development.</p>	<p>FFM has developed resources and strategies in each of these three areas.</p>
<p>Our Reformed heritage provides a deep and rich foundation and framework for faith formation.</p>	<p>FFM's work consistently draws upon Reformed theology. In addition, we have encouraged synod to affirm the importance of and need for Reformed curricula for children, which Synod 2018 did, adding that responsibly officially to our mandate. FFM has begun to take steps to carry out synod's affirmation, including a refresh of the Dwell children's ministry curriculum.</p>

Fruitful collaborations with other ministries are a priority.	FFM has engaged in several significant collaborations, and we expect these to increase in the next five years.
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Team Composition

Because of our emphasis on building relationships with local churches, as of this writing just three of FFM's 15 team members (FTE = 6.4) work from the denominational offices. The other 12 team members are located in various regions of the U.S. and Canada. As we listen, learn, and respond to the needs of local churches, we create resources that reflect this listening posture.

Team Leader	Syd Hielema
Regional Catalysters	Kevin Adams (Calif.) Trudy Ash (Midwest—Minn., Iowa, Wis.) Ron Chu (Calif./Korean churches) Ron DeVries (Alta.) Jill Friend (Iowa/Heartland/Minnkota) Laura Keeley (Mich.) Liz Tolkamp (B.C., U.S. Northwest) Lesli vanMilligen (Eastern Canada) Mimi Larson (based in Wheaton, Ill.) Ron DeVries (based in Devon, Alta.) Martin Contant (based in Surrey, B.C.) Karen De Boer (based in Kitchener, Ont.) Sandy Swartzentruber (based in Grand Rapids, Mich.)
Children's Min. Catalyzer	Paola Fuentes Gleghorn (based in Grand Rapids, Mich.)
Youth Min. Catalyzer	Christine Dekker (based in Grand Rapids, Mich.)
Team Mentor	
Resource Developer	
Resource Coordinator	
Communications Manager	
Administrative Coordinator	

The work of FFM's team is also extended and expanded by a growing network of Youth Ministry Champions across the U.S. and Canada.

Summary: The Privilege and the Challenge

The calling to walk alongside Christian Reformed congregations as a faith formation partner is a profound privilege. We're grateful for the encouraging welcome we have received from so many church leaders. We're also aware that the scope of faith formation is so wide that fully embracing our calling is a ten-year project, and we are learning to patiently serve one step at a time.

Measuring and Assessing FFM's Work

Our self-assessment efforts include both statistical data (see below) and some anecdotal feedback we have received from churches (see Appendix). Of course, the true fruit of FFM's labor lies not in the number of churches contacted or workshops presented but in the deepening of the faith formation of individual CRC members. While we have few ways to measure that impact, we trust and believe that it is taking place as a result of the many activities described below. The following numbers are up to date as of

December 2019. Please see the Faith Formation Ministries website (crcna.org/faithformation) for more information about all of the resources, staff, volunteers, and concepts cited below.

Relationship-building

Churches with at least one contact by FFM team member	563 (52%)
Churches with three or more contacts with FFM team members*	263 (24%)
Number of churches who participated in one of four FFM cohorts	51 (5%)
Classes that have a youth ministry champion	28 (58% of all classes)
Ministries with whom FFM has had significant collaborations	16

*represents a wide range, including churches with more than 30 contacts

Resources created by FFM

Online resource toolkits on a variety of faith formation topics that meet needs expressed by churches	8 created
Percent of CRC congregations that have utilized one or more of FFM's toolkits	31%
Total number of people who viewed FFM's toolkits	51,600
Number of unique page views for each toolkit • <i>Building Blocks of Faith</i> (launched Sept. 2016) • <i>Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper</i> (Oct. 2016) • <i>Faith Storytelling</i> (launched Nov. 2016) • <i>Intergenerational Church</i> (launched Feb. 2017) • <i>Professing Our Faith</i> (launched March 2017) • <i>Children's Ministry</i> (launched Feb. 2018) • <i>Pastor's Spiritual Vitality</i> (launched with PCR Feb. 2018) • <i>Family Faith Formation</i> (launched Sept. 2018)	10,400 14,700 6,400 5,800 3,742 3,800 596 2,000
<i>Ten Ways</i> tools These one-sheet resources give churches ten tips or ideas for increasing faith formation efforts in a wide variety of areas.	23 created

Other resources available online or as downloads: <i>Spiritual Characteristics of Children and Teens</i> <i>Children and Communion</i> <i>Hiring a Youth Pastor or Director</i> <i>The Big Question</i> catechism course	10,400 total views online
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Communications and Presentations

Blogs and articles published or posted	430
Subscribers to FFM's monthly email newsletter, as of January 2019	872
People who follow FFM on social media (Facebook and Twitter)	960
Workshops and other presentations	165
Presentations at various classes, as of January 2019	34

Fundraising

Total funds raised from church offerings, grants, and individual donors (FY 15/16 thru Dec. 2018)	\$337,000
Congregations that held an FFM offering in 2018	114 (11%)

Assessing This Data

We recognize that data recorded over time is more reliable, and at this point in FFM's history, only preliminary conclusions can be drawn. With that in mind, we draw these conclusions:

1. Our relationship-based menu approach works well for CRC congregations. They appreciate a ministry posture that is adapted to the needs of the local church and resources that respect both our denominational identity and local uniquenesses.
2. Congregations are ready for a more holistic approach to faith formation, but the transition will take time. The education-based model of faith formation has very deep roots.
3. Congregations appreciate the combination of honoring the Reformed tradition and giving it expression in fresh ways.
4. Launching a denominational ministry that prioritizes the local church feels like a mixed message, and it will take time for some congregations and classes to understand this paradox.
5. Our menu-based, relationship-driven approach seeks transformational change in congregations, which (as every ministry knows) is very difficult to assess. One of our long-term goals is to develop assessment tools for such change.

6. Since not all CRC congregations are familiar with FFM and its work yet, we need to keep communicating in a variety of different ways.

Looking Ahead

1. In the short term (the coming year), we see these developments coming to fruition:
 - a. A significant emphasis on the home and church as partners in faith formation, supported by a *Dear Parent* booklet, a family faith formation pocket guide titled *Everyday Family Faith*, the *Family Faith Formation* toolkit, a variety of other resources, and many workshops held throughout the denomination.
 - b. Refreshing the *Dwell* children's ministry curriculum (dwell.faithaliveresources.org).
 - c. A focus on the intergenerational church supported by specific resources for all ages, culminating with the release of a new toolkit on faith formation for church members in the third “third” of life (ages 60-90).
 - d. The publication of a faith formation primer, supporting churches with a user-friendly vocabulary and conceptual framework for faith formation.
 - e. Continuing the long-term process of beginning and/or nurturing trusting relationships with church leaders.
 - f. Supporting the relationship cultivation and resourcing work of two of FFM’s newest additions to the team: the youth ministry catalyst (Ron DeVries) and the children’s ministry catalyst (Mimi Larson).
 - g. A transition in July 2019 to new leadership for the FFM team.
2. In the longer term (the next 10 years), we hope to strengthen these very initial developments:
 - a. Working toward a deeper and more intentional “new normal” in the partnership between church and home.
 - b. Collaborating in greater depth with other CRC ministries, including participating in the formation of regional teams that will take place through the Connections II project.
 - c. Encouraging more and more congregations and classes to embrace without suspicion the paradox of denominational ministry prioritizing the local church.
 - d. More intentionally addressing the increasing diversity within the CRCNA, and adapting our faith formation strategies and resources to respect this diversity.
 - e. Building a strong, sustainable donor base through church offerings and a constituency of faithful annual givers.

Summary

The Faith Formation Ministries team is grateful for the trust the denomination has placed in us as we continue to grow into our calling. We know that in a kingdom perspective, four years is a tiny smidgen of time. Even so, we are glad that these four years have revealed fairly clear indicators of how the Lord is working within the CRC and how we at FFM are called to play a role in that working. We're eager to see how the relationships and resources we're developing will bless the CRC for generations to come.

Appendix

The following quotes illustrate the positive impact Faith Formation Ministries is having in CRC churches. (Note: Some of the people who gave these quotes have since moved to another church.)

"[FFM's *Faith Storytelling*] toolkit has made me as a pastor more intentional about incorporating faith stories in an organic manner through our services. When God's work is shared through personal stories, that connects, that inspires! I believe this has greatly increased the emotional and spiritual health of our congregation!" —Pastor Matthew Vanden Heuvel, Covenant CRC, Calgary, Alberta

"FFM's Grace Buffet workshop helped attendees take a broad and idea-sparking look at ways we make disciples. When we asked for input on the matter of children at the Lord's Supper, FFM provided resources and shared experiences gathered from other churches, all without making prescriptions for us." —Rev. Brent Wassink, Long Beach (Calif.) CRC

"As a result of working with FFM, our Faith Nurture Team has presented a proposal to the Council recommending a very significant change. Sunday mornings will focus on worship, and Wednesday evening events will focus on faith formation programming, from nursery through adult." —Ev Holtrop, Spring Lake (Mich.) CRC

"We have begun to digest the *Building Blocks of Faith* [presented by FFM]. We're asking how every member of our congregation knows that they belong, if they understand who God is and who he created them to be, if they have hope in the future, and how they are called and equipped to serve God." —Pastors Ken Boonstra and Bret Lamsma, Immanuel CRC, Ripon, Calif.

"One of the youth who participated in the FFM-led Leadership Studio said that no one had ever pointed out their gifts for leadership before. . . . The faith of the whole congregation has been impacted through this one catalytic event!" —Pastor Anthony Elenbaas, Immanuel CRC, Hamilton, Ont.

"I think the primary effect the [FFM] presentations will have on our congregation is in encouraging the families to continue working at family worship. Our goal as elders is to help put new ideas out there and encourage faithfulness in helping children live into the faith." —Pastor George Den Oudsten, Peoria (Iowa) CRC

"I am writing to thank you for the wealth of resources available on your website. We are finding the toolkits that you have developed in relation to

faith formation and children's ministry particularly helpful." —Isobel Booth-Clibborn, Mission and Discipleship Council, Church of Scotland

"Our youth ministry and worship have been helped greatly by your team's work on creating toolkits and *Ten Ways* sheets (in particular). Thanks for doing this great work. Also, love the idea that you are working on reinvigorating the *Dwell* curriculum! I really love the *Dwell* curriculum and am excited that you are working to make it even better. I think you and Faith Formation are doing great things for churches." (Anonymous quote)

"Being part of [FFM's] *Building Blocks of Faith* pilot project helped us to identify and celebrate the ways that our own faith has been shaped, and the ways that the Building Blocks are being incorporated into our present ministries. Looking ahead, this is helping us to refocus and become more intentional. It has been a very valuable process for our church." —Terri Baas, Bethel CRC, Princeton, Minn.

Appendix H Worship Ministries Evaluation

Note: A more detailed report is available at tinyurl.com/WMinEvalChart.

Worship Ministries officially launched at Synod 2015, so this report covers our journey from then to the present. Guiding us along that journey are three key documents:

1. Our Journey 2020 (endorsed by Synod 2015)

Desired Future 2.5: Our congregations are characterized by vibrant worship that engages people of all ages.

Step 2.5.1: Congregations and teams explore the fundamentals of worship by engaging in refreshed preaching, the incorporation of testimony, the use of creeds and confessions in worship, and other means (e.g., global music, etc.)

2. Our Calling (presented to Synod 2017)

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.

Goals Specific to Worship Ministries

To provide **networks** of mutual learning among worship leaders, other organizations (such as the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship), and ecumenical relationships; and to **equip** worshiping communities to reflect deeply about their worship including preaching and the sacraments, using multiple resources; embrace their specific contexts and calls to ministry; join their worship with the church of all ages and around the world as an expression of our unity in Jesus Christ; include and develop the gifts of people of all socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds without favoritism regarding gender, age, or abilities; and provide

support for the Children and Worship program and develop resources such as the quarterly publication *Reformed Worship*.

3. Worship Ministries Vision, Mission, Mandate, and Values Statement (approved by the BOT, May 2017)

Vision

Worship Ministries desires that every worshiping 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.

Mission Statement

Enriched by a great diversity of communities, ethnicities, generations, styles, and gifts, Worship Ministries supports and strengthens biblically grounded and theologically Reformed worship in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Mandate

Worship Ministries accomplishes its mission for supporting and strengthening local worshiping communities in the Christian Reformed Church in North America by

Networking

- to seek ways for those who plan and lead worship in the CRCNA to meet for mutual encouragement and opportunities to share with, learn from, and listen to each other.
- to leverage worship opportunities and learning by connecting with and supporting worship-related efforts of other CRCNA ministries and agencies, particularly Faith Formation Ministries, and of other worship organizations, such as the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Calvin Theological Seminary, and the Center for Excellence in Preaching.
- to foster ecumenical relationships that strengthen the CRCNA's understanding and practice of worship.

Equipping

local worshiping communities . . .

- to reflect deeply about their worship, using multiple resources including our creeds, confessions, contemporary testimonies, liturgical forms, and relevant synodical documents.
- to embrace their specific contexts and calls to ministry by reflecting their uniqueness in their worship and to enrich their worship by engaging with and learning from other churches both within and outside of the CRCNA.
- to join their worship with the church of all ages and around the world as an expression of our unity in Jesus Christ.
- to preach the Word of God faithfully, effectively, and contextually, and to respond as we are called.
- to share in the sacraments, teaching their full meaning and significance.

- to form all worshipers, including children and youth, into full, active, and conscientious worship participants.
- to develop the gifts of all, including children and youth, and to incorporate those gifts into the worship life of the community (technology, hospitality, visual arts, speaking, planning, signing, carpentry, etc.).
- to mentor worship leaders from within the congregation, including children and youth.
- to include people of all socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and without favoritism regarding gender, age, or abilities.
- to use and lead the Young Children and Worship program.
- to share their rich resources with each other, to utilize existing resources, and to aid in the creation of new resources that meet specific needs, through the publication of the quarterly journal *Reformed Worship*, the use of social media, and the CRCNA Network.

Values

Worship Ministries desires to create a space where we can listen to and learn from each other, form networks for peer learning, and develop resources to nurture faithful, effective, and contextual gospel proclamation and worship by valuing the following:

1. Humility and charity: The fundamental posture of this ministry is to learn and share local wisdom across communities, ethnicities, and generations.
2. Prioritizing people: Interpersonal learning across church types meets a deep need in this information-focused age and capitalizes on the strengths of a denomination.
3. Unity in diversity: Encouraging more learning across ethnic, cultural, geographic, and church types, asking how common theological commitments are reflected in diverse local contexts.
4. Leveraging existing strengths and resources.
5. Avoiding programmatic silos: developing weblike, open networks and resisting the separation of worship and proclamation from other streams and initiatives.
6. Avoiding duplication: focusing on topics that a denomination is well positioned to address, and creating awareness and access to other key resources.
7. Team identity: When people think of the CRCNA working on worship and proclamation, we desire that they would think not merely of an “office” or “person” but of a team that includes people from multiple regions, ethnicities, congregations, and agencies. A primary function for Worship Ministries should be to gather, nurture, and sustain a realistic and effectively networked team.

As requested, we are using Our Calling goals specific to Worship Ministries for the purpose of this evaluation. To see how these goals line up with our mandate, please visit tinyurl.com/WminEvalChart.

The People

Some of the people behind the name *Worship Ministries* are our staff (2.3 FTE), made up of Diane Dykgraaf as program coordinator, Laura Meyering as administrative specialist, and Rev. Joyce Borger as director. A significant task of Worship Ministries has been to continue to publish *Reformed Worship*, a journal for worship leaders produced by the CRC for over 30 years and having a global and ecumenical reach. A year ago the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) began providing staff support in the person of Dr. Kai Ton Chau, who serves as associate editor of *Reformed Worship*.

Because we have largely been a monocultural staff (prior to the past year), it has been important for us to have diverse communication partners. In 2015 we assembled and began meeting with our advisory committee, a wonderfully diverse group. Their voices, experience, and insights have done much to shape who we are today. We have become our own learning community, as each of us has had to expand and deepen our understanding of worship in the CRC.

We are grateful for the following advisory members who volunteer their time and energy to serve the church for Worship Ministries:

Elly Boersma, Region 2, Eastern Canada (chair)

Gary Bomhof, Region 1, Western Canada (vice-chair)

April Jackson, Black and Reformed representative (located in California)

Joyce Jackson, Region 3, U.S. East/Black and Reformed representative

Darlene Silversmith, Region 6, U.S. West/Native American/

First Nations representative

Sandra Van Opstal, Region 5, U.S. Central/Latino Representative

(secretary)

Among those who have served so faithfully, the following have now left our advisory committee, and we thank them for their service as well (while working to identify replacements):

Sung Hur, Korean representative

David Vroege, additional Canadian representative

James Lee, seminary student/Korean representative (now ordained)

Networking

Two words that have governed our actions since we began are *network* and *equip*. It is not insignificant that networking comes first as we firmly believe that equipping happens best through the building of strong networks and that ultimately our job as staff is to highlight the knowledge and experience that already exist in the local church so that it can be accessed by others. In addition, we have a growing sense of the importance of developing a learning culture among people who lead worship, that none of us should ever assume to know enough or be good enough but that a healthy leader is one who is growing. For that to happen, all of us need to find people and places through which we continue to learn and engage with current topics and issues facing the church today.

One of the first things we began doing was to set up what we called “Meet and Greet” gatherings. These were informal opportunities for staff to meet and listen to CRC worship leaders and for them to meet each other. It has been surprising to find that worship leaders in close geographical

proximity had never met before, and it has been gratifying to learn that some of them continue to connect with and support each other since having met. We continue to set up these kinds of gatherings as we travel around the denomination and participate in events like the Calvin Worship Symposium.

Early on, we also established a CRC Worship Ministries Facebook group. Our prayer was that this would become a safe place for people to ask questions, share resources, and be a support to each other. We are thrilled that it has become that and more. The group currently has 346 members! A testimony to the supportive nature of this group of worship leaders is that when someone posted a question on December 21, within a day they had six helpful responses.

We also continue to look for ways to partner with ministries and agencies within the CRC. One of our first collaborative efforts was with Pastor Church Resources around the topic of worship in difficult times, which included, among other things, the publication of resources for church closings. We have also found that there are many natural connecting points with Faith Formation Ministries, and we have worked to support their work on the *Building Blocks of Faith* and many other such toolkits. Members of our staff and theirs also provide support for the Children and Worship program. With Resonate we have supported Little Lambs and Story Hour programs, doing a joint webinar and traveling to China to offer training there. We have also worked with various agencies to develop resources around the Belhar Confession, the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and the anniversary of the Canons of Dort, and we have worked as well on resources for specific events like the Day of Justice, Abuse Awareness Sunday, Worldwide Communion Sunday, and more. This past year we worked with the Office of Disabilities to organize a conference on aging adults and worship. Worship Ministries also provides a supporting role for worship at chapel services and other events planned by our denominational ministries, and we have had a key role in the planning and coordination of worship at the Engage conference and synod.

Worship Ministries continues to support the music and worship products published by Faith Alive Christian Resources. This takes the form of answering copyright and royalty questions, customer engagement, collaborating with CICW and TheHymnary.org (Calvin College website) in developing an app and "Flex Scores" for *Lift Up Your Hearts* and an accompanying collection of descants. We published the large print version of the *Lift Up Your Hearts* hymnal in 2014. In addition, we worked with the publisher GIA to produce an app for *Psalms for All Seasons*.

Other key ecumenical partners include the Reformed Church in America, with whom we collaborated along with CICW on an extensive worship survey completed at the end of 2018. Other organizations with whom we converse and regularly attend events include the Hymn Society, the Center for Congregational Song, the Consultation on Common Texts (group that oversees the Revised Common Lectionary), the Samford University Center for Worship and the Arts, and the Presbyterian Church of Canada.

Our closest ministry partner is the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW), whose support is felt in large and small ways. While all that we do complements the work of the other, Worship Ministries focuses on the local church and its worship leaders, and CICW finds expression in the broader Christian Reformed Church.

All of these networking relationships are helpful in that they support our second main goal: to equip our worshiping communities.

Equipping

In 2015 we began a peer-learning book group program. Each year we identify two to three books and seek out individuals who are willing to convene a group in person or online. We even had a church that had three different book groups reading three different books. A CRC missionary led a group in the Ukraine for several years. We have also supported two different book studies for CRC clergywomen. While we are pleased that these groups have provided opportunities for individuals to read, think, and discuss worship's theology and practice, one of the exciting by-products are the relationships that are forming. We are very grateful that CICW provides free registration to the Calvin Worship Symposium to all of our book-group conveners. (This year CICW also provided free registration to all the CRC clergywomen who participated in the most recent book group, our advisory committee, and our endorsed coaches.)

Another means of equipping worship leaders has been supporting and encouraging 19 CRC worship leaders to work on their Certificate in Worship Leadership from Samford University. We have also held and then published on the Network over a dozen training webinars on various topics.

Worship Ministries worked, as well, with a committee to write new forms for baptism, the Lord's Supper, and profession of faith that were approved by Synod 2016. Those forms, along with all other approved liturgical forms, can be found at tinyurl.com/crcna-org-LiturgicalForms.

We recognize too that, given a local church's unique context and ministry goals, a church may have specific topics it would like to address. In response to specific questions from churches, we have gathered small groups of individuals from across the denomination to address particular topics, creating an opportunity to learn best practices from other worship leaders. We would like to support more of these short-term low-commitment kinds of conversations in the future. Staff have also led workshops for various churches and classes as requested. With the goals of wanting to do an even better job of equipping, desiring to elevate the expertise of CRC worship leaders, and making more training accessible to the local church, we also launched an Endorsed Coaches program at synod last year, and ten coaches are currently endorsed. For more information on this program and how it works visit crcna.org/worship/endorsed-coaches.

Of key importance to Worship Ministries is an ever-widening table around which we can gather brothers and sisters in Christ of all ages, representing people from across the globe, with a desire to grow and benefit from the gifts of people of all socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds without favoritism regarding gender, age, or abilities. We've tried to accomplish that by making sure that our staff take advantage of opportunities that exist to widen our own understanding and experience, in highlighting resources that reside in diverse communities, and by publishing resources that connect worship, mission, and justice. In 2015 we published an entire issue of *Reformed Worship* around the theme of multicultural worship, and in 2018 we focused on worship and mental illnesses.

We also continue to support children and youth so that they can become full, active, and conscious worship participants. For our younger children we support the Children and Worship program. We have had book groups on intergenerational worship, have led workshops on that topic, and recently hosted a webinar on mentoring.

All of these initiatives also find their way into *Reformed Worship*. Though it's impossible to highlight all the specific collaborations that resulted in great articles and resources, we can say that RW was an expression of all of these goals long before Worship Ministries was ever formed. About 90 percent of RW's content comes unsolicited from worship leaders, planners, and pastors. RW has always been about the local church sharing its gifts with others, and its table has always been as wide and diverse as possible while still being solidly Reformed. While it has a global and ecumenical readership, RW continues to be a major influence in the CRC, with over 62 percent of our churches utilizing its resources. We have great hopes that RW will continue to serve our denomination and be a gift to the wider church for years to come.

The Numbers

If you are a person who likes numbers, you can find many counts in pink at the end of tinyurl.com/WMinEvalChart. Please note that over time our counting has gotten a little better, so don't read too much into the earlier numbers there.

It is encouraging to note that by June 2018 Worship Ministries had connected with 69 percent of CRC churches. According to the 2018 Worship Survey, CRC congregations have participated in or made use of the following resources:

Peer learning groups	10%
Webinars	17%
Website	31%
Facebook group	10%
E-newsletter	17%
Faith Formation Ministries toolkits	31%
Worship Ministries event	7%
RW magazine	62%
RW website	56%
Worship section on the Network	29%
Agency-produced worship resources	33%
<i>The Worship Sourcebook</i>	61%
<i>Lift Up Your Hearts</i> hymnal	67% (34% have them in pews)
<i>Gray Psalter Hymnal</i>	63% (64% in pews)

<i>Blue Psalter Hymnal</i>	26% (13% in pews)
<i>Psalms for All Seasons</i>	17% (4% in pews)
<i>Sing! A New Creation</i>	43% (13% in pews)

While all these statistics look great, only 50 percent of CRC congregations offer training for their worship volunteers, who fill an incredibly important role. Ascension Day is observed in 66 percent of our churches, while Mother's Day is observed in 71 percent (this is not to say that observing Mother's Day is wrong, but Ascension Day is receiving less notice).

According to the report presented to Synod 2018 (*Response to Synod's Evaluation and Prioritization Assignment, Agenda for Synod 2018*, pp. 51-64) Worship Ministries continues be highly valued, with 67 percent of respondents saying it has good to great value (p. 56). While Worship Ministries currently receives 1.5 percent of ministry shares, delegates to Synod 2017 indicated that their ideal ministry-share allocation to Worship Ministries was 6 percent (p. 61).

Hopes, Dreams, Questions, and Challenges

1. There isn't any database with the names of worship leaders, committee chairs, musicians, or artists in the CRC. Developing a network and including more people around the table is important. It's important also to have great resources and networks that people know about. At Worship Ministries, we imagine a future with networks of artists and musicians who share their music and write together.
2. Some of the biggest needs reside in congregations that do not have paid worship staff or even volunteers. Many of these are small congregations with limited time, people, and financial resources, and often these are immigrant or ethnic-minority congregations. How do we connect to gain a better understanding of their unique challenges and then come alongside to help find solutions that work? How do we support such churches effectively with our limited staff and financial resources?
3. The Endorsed Coaches program is a grand experiment that we want to invest in for the next few years to see if it might be a healthy way forward—a way for ministry to happen without being dependent on denominational staff and funds.
4. As a small ministry, we do not have the staff or the funding to have paid regional staff. With the move toward regionalization, what does that mean for ministries like ours? One idea is for the paid regional staff who are out there to represent more than one ministry. We will be exploring what that might look like with Faith Formation, and we imagine that this will be a multiyear process.
5. The April 2019 *Banner* will include a short article about our Reformed identity and worship. We have amazing material available in the form of the 1968 and 1997 synodical reports, but they don't translate well in our increasingly diverse denomination. The question before us is, What are the core theological convictions related to worship that are true of a church on a Navajo reservation, an urban Latino immigrant congregation,

a church in a rural farming community in Canada with strong Dutch roots, a Korean congregation, a multicultural congregation, a church plant, and an established church? Can we articulate those convictions in such a way that they are heard and understood regardless of the context?

Summary

God has been doing good things through Worship Ministries, and we are humbled and grateful to have a front-row seat. In a few short years a firm foundation has been laid, and we are starting to see a structure forming. Though we imagine that within that basic blueprint adjustments will need to be made over time, will we perhaps in the future need to knock down a wall so that we can gather around an even bigger table?

Thank you for entrusting Worship Ministries with this mission. A prayer that we have prayed since Worship Ministries began is that we may be used as servants of the local church, that the Spirit will open doors and lead us where we should go, that we may be wise in how we use the resources we are given, and finally that worship leaders may be strengthened and encouraged so that they in turn can be used by the Spirit to strengthen and encourage God's people—all so that God may be glorified. Please join us in that prayer.

Appendix I

Assisting Immigrant Churches

I. Background

Synod 2018 adopted the following recommendation in response to overtures asking for assistance in the enfolding of immigrant churches:

That synod instruct the executive director to work with the appropriate agencies and ministries to explore the potential processes and resources necessary to facilitate enfolding immigrant churches into the CRCNA.

Grounds:

- a. The current church planting initiatives need to be coordinated.
- b. The long-term costs of such a program require further research and consideration.

(Acts of Synod 2018, p. 459)

II. Introduction

When the executive director invited us as Resonate Global Mission and Candidacy staff to begin exploring the parameters of assisting immigrant churches toward enfolding them in the CRCNA, it immediately became clear that we did not see the value in a rigid definition of the term *immigrant church*. Whether the persons involved in an affiliation process represent first-generation immigrants or the generation that follows, we believe the intent for successful enfolding should be the same. In addition, we discovered that it will be helpful to differentiate between congregations of immigrants who wish to affiliate with the CRC and those who wish to plant a church for and with the CRC. Therefore, sections III and IV in this document note that distinction, and then ministry orientation approaches common to both are explained. Addendum 1 provides a five-year review of new immigrant CRC churches (without differentiation between affiliation and church planting).

III. Affiliating congregations

A. Inventory of current resources and approaches appropriate for immigrant groups:

- Guidelines for classes to use when congregations wish to affiliate with the CRC (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 65-70; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 845; also included as Addendum 2).
- A brochure titled *Welcome to the Family: A Guide for Congregations Wishing to Affiliate with the CRCNA* (available in English, Korean, Spanish).
- Orientation curriculum (just emerging in English; soon in Spanish) to help orient congregational leaders (e.g., elders and deacons) to life in the CRCNA.

B. Noted: Most often such congregations require parallel induction for their pastor.

C. Needed

- Renewed efforts to help classes find these resources.
- Appropriate ways to invite immigrant groups renting space in our churches to consider affiliating with the CRCNA.
- A cadre of CRC pastors (e.g., retired pastors) with the gift of hospitality/knowledge of Church Order to be available to provide assistance to and with the classes and to immigrant groups.

IV. Church planting

A. Inventory of current resources and approaches for immigrant groups:
Multiple resources – the best place to start is Resonate Global Mission's *Starting Churches* webpage (resonateglobalmission.org/start).

B. Noted: The point guards are Resonate Global Mission regional directors (who have budget resources for church plants) who work with classes; Resonate Global Mission leaders (e.g., Kevin Schutte and Charles Kim) assist.

1. Current: For current church plants which have partnership agreements, 12 to 16 are immigrant aimed.
2. Future: Regional mission leaders set goals for church plants per ministry year, a subset of which are to be for immigrant populations; for the coming ministry year, the estimate is three to five plants.

C. Needed: Churches willing to partner/parent a new church plant—whether within ethnic similarities or cross-culturally.

V. Ministerial ordination

We have in place three short-term educational programs (institutes) useful for assisting ministers from other denominations who are seeking ordination in the CRC; they reflect the joint efforts of the Candidacy Office and Resonate Global Mission. However, local leadership is also emerging (e.g., the Consejo Latino group is assuming more and more responsibility). The majority of those participating in these efforts do so because they have been called to a

CRC congregation. Yet a significant minority participate simultaneously with the affiliation of the congregation into the CRCNA.

A. KIM (Korean Institute for Ministry). This effort is our longest serving effort, providing each year nine to 12 Korean pastors a week of induction. Since it began in 2014, KIM has led to CRC ordination for 28 ministers and four commissioned pastors (others are still in the process toward ordination); moreover, along with the ordination of these 32 pastors, in 17 instances KIM has included the affiliation of their congregations with the CRC.

B. ELIM (Ethnic Leadership Institute for Ministry). This effort is in its second year, providing each year seven to nine pastors of various backgrounds a week of induction.

C. SLIM (Spanish Leadership Institute for Ministry). This effort began being piloted in fall 2018 and will provide training and instruction (in Spanish) for pastors and church leaders.

D. *Further notes*

1. Inventory of current resources and approaches: Each program has a developed language-specific curriculum and resource materials (some of which include information about Church Order Article 8 ordination).

2. Noted

When visas are required, past experience has shown it is best to have this taken care of by the local church, and when necessary, the classis. The reasons for this is that the motive for seeking the visa remains tied directly to the local position, and local leaders develop ownership of what sometimes is a challenging process; moreover, each case is specific to the individual. While costs are sometimes involved, local churches unable to address financial challenges should rely on their classes. In certain situations, support from the denomination (e.g., Financial Shalom funds) may be available as needed.

The financial costs for KIM, ELIM, and SLIM are shared between the sponsoring congregation and other funds of Resonate Global Mission (sometimes solicited for these very purposes).

3. Needed: Continued awareness of and utilization of these three institutes.

VI. Conclusions (see COD Report, pp. 44-45 for update)

Much good work is going on, and critical resources are available. However, as is often the case, we could always do more. In terms of strategic next steps, three possibilities should be considered:

A. To make available to classes and regional Resonate Global Mission leaders a cadre of volunteers with the gift of hospitality and Church Order knowledge willing to assist groups and their leaders.

B. To set clear annual goals for the number of immigrant congregation affiliations and church plants established by Resonate Global Mission but owned more broadly (e.g., part of the Ministry Plan).

C. To continue educating classes (via stated clerks) on the processes and resources available for immigrant groups.

Addendum 1

New Immigrant Churches (Organized or Emerging) 2012-2017 (Yearbooks 2013-2018) (churches initially listed in the *Yearbook* but no longer listed in recent *Yearbooks* not included)

2017 (n = 10)	2016 (n = 10)	2015 (n = 14)	2015 (n = 8)	2014 (n = 1)
Aurora, Colo.: New Gate Church (Korean)	Ann Arbor, Mich.: Hope (Korean)	Allendale, Mich.: Eagle's Wings (Spanish lang.)	Denver, Colo.: Cascade of Hope (Span- ish lang.)	Old Tappan, N.J.: Deep Rooted Tree of Life (Korean)
Byron Cen- ter, Mich.: Albanian Chr. Min.	Chino, Calif.: La Semilla (Spanish lang.)	Anchorage, Alaska: Sumkeeneun Church (Korean)		
Holland, Mich.: My Father's House (Span- ish lang.)	El Monte, Calif.: Living Well (Korean)	Bellflower, Calif.: Ethnos (Spanish lang.)	New York, N.Y.: Namu (Korean)	
	Grand Rap- ids, Mich.: En Vivo (Spanish lang.)	Bellflower, Calif.: New Dawn (Span- ish lang.)	Gardena, Calif.: Jesus' Love Church (Korean)	
Indianapo- lis, Ind.: South Side Chr. Church (Chinese)	Kentwood, Mich.: Chinese Christian Church	Chandler, Ariz.: Iglesia Creacion (Spanish lang.)	Los Angeles, Calif.: Triumph Church (Korean)	
Los Angeles, Calif.: Jesus' Heart (Korean)	Las Vegas, Nev.: Vision Church (Korean)	Chino, Calif.: Indo- nesian Protestant Church	Palo Alto, Calif.: Hanaseed Church (Korean)	
Pearland, Tex.: Filipino-Am CRC	Los Ange- les, Calif.: Church of Joy (Korean)	Hawaiian Garden, Calif.: Joo Sung CRC (Korean)	Spring, Tex.: Casa de Oraxion (Spanish lang.)	
San Diego, Calif.: S.D. Woori Community (Korean)	Orange, Calif.: Hispano Americana (Spanish lang.)	Los Altos, Calif.: San Jose Ark Church (Korean)	Tenafly, N.J.: Grace Commu- nity Chapel (Korean)	
South Haven, Mich.: Prin- cipe De Paz (Spanish lang.)	Riverside, Calif.: Inland Jubilee (Korean)	Los Altos, Calif.: Union with Christ (Chinese)	Tenafly, N.J.: Grace Comm. Chap- el Bergen (Korean)	
Spring, Tex.: Vida Nueva (Spanish lang.)	Rosemead, Calif.: Sky City (Korean)	Lynwood, Wash.: Garden of Grace (Korean)		
Wyoming, Mich.: Strong Tower (Mus- lim refugees)		Orlando, Fla.: Haitian CRC		
		Port St. Lucie, Fla.: Sunlight Espanol (Spanish lang.)		
		San Marcos, Calif.: Iglesia Camino al Cielo (Spanish lang.)		
		Westminster, Calif.: Little Saigon Nex- gen (Vietnamese)		

Addendum 2

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

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

Note: The following information, based on a report adopted by Synod 2006 (see *Agenda for Synod 2006*, pp. 64-70; *Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 680), is presented to assist in the affiliation process of congregations and their pastors with the CRCNA, as described in Church Order Article 38-c and its Supplement.

I. Introduction

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

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

II. Receiving congregations and their pastors into the CRC

A. Preface

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

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

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

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

B. Phase 1: Getting acquainted

1. Often this phase begins with personal and even casual contact between a member or leader of the CRC and their counterpart in the inquiring group. An initial contact may lead to a more formal exploratory discussion between the interested group or congregation and the CRC person(s) facilitating the conversation. Such exploratory discussion might include a preliminary study of each other's history, theology, and polity—and perhaps attendance at one or more worship services.
2. If this phase goes beyond initial contact and preliminary discussions, the local CRC classis should appoint one of its members to be an official counselor/liaison to represent the classis in further conversations. The goal in this entire phase is to determine whether the group wants to proceed to a deeper phase of meaningful fellowship with a view toward joining the CRCNA denomination, and whether the CRC classis wants to receive the congregation (and its pastor, if applicable) into the CRC. The getting-acquainted phase will typically take from three to six months to complete.
3. Tools available for this phase include denominational materials and brochures, descriptions of CRC polity, and copies of the Church Order and the CRC creeds and confessions. These tools are available in printed and electronic formats in English, and they are also available electronically in various languages (Korean, Chinese, Spanish, and some others) on the denominational website (www.crcna.org, search "other languages").
4. Toward the end of this phase, the inquiring group / congregation and their pastor (if applicable) will gather a variety of documents, with the help of the appointed classis liaison. Note that assistance and advice regarding these matters are available from the CRC denomination through its Candidacy Committee (see www.crcna.org/Candidacy).
 - a. A letter of interest regarding affiliation from the inquiring group's leadership—this letter should specify whether the affiliating group / congregation is a governmentally registered nonprofit organization.

If the group is to be received as an organized congregation, a copy of the bylaws needs to be attached to the letter.

- b. A group/congregation profile and ministry plan including a description of the group's ministries, programs, and vision.
 - c. Financial documents (budget, actual expenses, pastor's compensation [salary, benefits, pension, and so forth, if applicable]).
 - d. A description of the group's current state of commitment to a Reformed biblical, confessional, and theological identity, and its current awareness of and readiness to function within CRC polity.
5. An initial request for affiliation by a non-CRC minister seeking to be received into the CRC (as provided via Church Order Article 8-c) must be processed according to the requirements of the Candidacy Committee and the "Journey Toward Ordination" process. Sometime during the "getting acquainted" phase the classis-appointed liaison and/or the inquiring pastor should contact the director of candidacy, Rev. David Koll (dkoll@crcna.org).
 6. This initial phase moves toward a conversation between the leaders of the inquiring group/congregation and the designated leaders of the CRC classis to determine in greater detail the course forward. The material described in item B, 4 above should be reviewed and considered. An eventual motion to continue the process should be formulated by the classis and would then need to be adopted by both the potentially affiliating group/congregation and the classis. If the request involves a minister seeking affiliation, the motion must include a "declaration of need" completed in consultation with the Candidacy Committee, which serves as an agent of the denomination (see item B, 5 above).
 7. If both the potentially affiliating congregation and classis adopt such an initial motion to continue the process, then the general orientation of affiliating leaders begins under the guidance of a classis-appointed mentor. (The mentor may or may not be the same person who functions as the contact/liaison.)

C. *Phase 2: Mentoring and orientation*

1. In this phase, the leaders and members of the new group will receive orientation more fully with regard to the confessions, theology, polity, and practices of the CRC. At the same time the classis will acquaint itself more fully with the background, values, beliefs, and vision of the group seeking affiliation. It is desirable that both parties in their joining together may enrich their respective ministries as they serve God together, and this phase allows for such discernment. This phase will normally take not less than six months to complete.
2. The mentoring and orientation phase includes the following orientation items for the affiliating group or congregation in a plan to be formulated by both the classis representative/mentor and the affiliating group leaders.

a. In-depth orientation and / or training of congregational leaders (elders, deacons, church school and youth ministry leaders, adult group leaders, and so forth) through a series of meetings, a full-day retreat, or a strategy combining both. Material to be considered includes the following:

- CRC polity and Church Order
- Distinctive features of the Reformed faith
- CRC doctrinal and ethical decisions
- Financial rights, obligations, and practices for the group as a congregation, including church budgeting and accountability, ministry shares, pastoral salary, insurance, pension, and so forth, as may apply
- CRC history—both origins and the era of development to the present, with appropriate recognition of any unique contextual connections between the affiliating group and the CRC's story.

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

- b. Orientation of the whole group / congregation (many of the same topics introduced to leaders will also be covered with the whole group / congregation).
- c. Expected outcome: The congregation and its leaders pass a motion affirming continuation of the affiliation process, which will lead into "Phase 3: Affiliation."

3. Protocol for pastoral orientation

a. In-depth orientation of an affiliating pastor takes place in consultation with the Candidacy Committee. The standards used by the Candidacy Committee for affiliating a pastor already ordained in another denomination include creating an individualized learning plan to be formed in consultation with the pastor, the classis representative, and the Candidacy Committee. The plan involves a designated mentor as a guide and includes the following requirements:

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

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

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

D. Phase 3: Affiliation

1. The final phase, “Affiliation,” involves a formal decision by the classis, in response to the announced decision of the congregation (and pastor, if applicable) seeking affiliation (see item C, 2, c above).
2. A formal determination regarding the status of the congregation as either *organized* or *emerging* should be made in conversation between the leadership of the affiliating group and the leadership of the classis (see the guidelines of Church Order Art. 38-c and its Supplements). If a congregation is to be designated as “emerging,” a “mother church” must be designated.
3. The following documents are prepared for presentation to the classis, along with a motion that this group of believers be admitted to the CRCNA and accepted into the life of the classis (note that sample documents are available from the office of the director of candidacy):
 - a. A letter from the affiliating congregation’s leadership addressed to the classis and reaffirming the desire to affiliate with the CRC.
 - b. A report from the mentor / liaison appointed by the classis for orientation of the affiliating congregation and its leaders.
 - c. A formal covenant, signed by both the leaders of the affiliating congregation and the classis, stipulating a willingness to participate in classis life by sending delegates to the classis meetings, and to participate in the life of the classis and denomination through a level of financial support appropriate to the current situation of the congregation, in view of understandings expressed through ministry share expectations.
4. A letter is presented to the classis from the Candidacy Committee endorsing the affiliation request of the pastor (if applicable) and confirming that all the required elements for the Article 8 pastoral affiliation process have been properly addressed.
5. As the motion to receive the congregation as an organized or emerging body (see item D, 2 above) is acted upon, a suitable time of rejoicing at classis should take place. Also, the classis should appoint a counselor to

- mark the reception of the congregation in a worship service, and to walk alongside the pastor and congregation for a period of at least two years.
6. The pastor (if applicable) is approved for affiliation by the classis following a colloquium doctum as described in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, E, 5-6. The appointed counselor works with the pastor to determine an appropriate way to mark the new ordinalia affiliation of the pastor in the life of the congregation.
 7. The new congregation provides the classis with updated articles of incorporation and bylaws, as well as the appropriate information required by the Office of Synodical Services.

III. Conclusion

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

Appendix J

Reimagining Ministry Shares

I. Introduction

Synod 2016 received, through the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA (BOT), a report of the Task Force on Financial Sustainability (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 723-33). This report focused on ways to maximize the benefits of the ministry-share system, considered alternatives to the one-size-fits-all current program, looked to match the funding provided with the denominational ministry plan, and looked to match the duration of funding sources with the duration of the ministry being supported. In response, synod asked the BOT to do the following three things: (1) evaluate and prioritize the existing denominational programs and ministries with a goal of reducing the institutional footprint; (2) create a process for classes to encourage churches to do their share as they are able; and (3) reimagine ministry shares to fund the prioritized ministries (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 857-59).

The Council of Delegates (COD), through the office of the executive director, has addressed the prioritization of ministry. This report addresses the second and third request.

II. Our current process

Since its origin in the mid-nineteenth century, the Christian Reformed Church has embraced a group-funding methodology that we now call *ministry shares*. These are used to fund synodical expenses, our congregational

ministries that help support the work of the local church, our educational institutions including Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, and the work of our global mission agencies as they extend the work of the denomination around the world.

Step One. The current process for establishing the requested ministry-share contribution begins with the creation of the annual budgets for the institutions, agencies, and ministries of the CRCNA. General assumptions are made to provide consistency to the building blocks of the fiscal year projections, including an assumption for the expected ministry-share **receipts** (a projection based on less-than-complete provision in response to the **rate**).

Step Two. The detailed proposed budgets are reviewed and approved by the Council of Delegates, albeit with further action needed by synod for one component.

Step Three. Because these budgets include anticipated revenue from ministry shares, the approved budgets are reported to synod but require synod's adoption of the per-member ministry-share rate. For example, Synod 2018 approved a 2 percent ministry-share increase effective January 2019, marking the first increase in the rate since January 2016.

Two observations about our current process require mention. First, as a labor-intensive organization, ministry costs are significantly affected by employment costs. In recent years the biggest driver of such increase has been the cost of providing employee health care and modest pay adjustments. Even with no change to the amount of ministry being conducted, costs to complete the work rise each year. One way to address these cost increases has been to request an increase in the ministry-share rate.

Second, while it is true that the per-member rate has increased over time, the cumulative rate increase over the past two decades has only been in line with inflation as measured by the change in the consumer price index for the same period. Unfortunately, when ministry-share dollars are not received by the denomination, the shortfall is addressed by an increase in the funding targets of the denominational and agency advancement staff and other staff members, such as missionaries who are called upon to fund-raise. These funds derive in the form of current one-time gifts, recurring gifts, and bequests. The estimated cost per dollar to collect and manage the ministry-share system is approximately 0.2 percent (or 20 cents per \$100). The cost to raise a similar amount through the denomination's advancement efforts is approximately 20 percent (or \$20 per \$100), with the incremental cost funding the added administrative and fundraising expenses.

III. Recent results

Over the past 12 years, the following ministry-share results have been achieved:

Year	Active Adult Professing Members	Organized Churches	Requested Contribution	Actual Contribution	%	Effective Ministry-Share Rate*	Actual Ministry-Share Rate
2006	152,214	853	\$37,269,243	\$26,119,769	70.1	\$244.85	\$280.08
2007	151,739	839	\$40,124,171	\$26,673,334	66.5	\$264.43	\$289.88
2008	148,825	833	\$40,289,754	\$25,851,354	64.2	\$270.72	\$298.58
2009	147,952	844	\$40,051,772	\$24,663,838	61.6	\$270.71	\$307.53
2010	151,877**	835	\$40,916,835	\$25,877,112	63.2	\$269.41	\$307.53
2011	148,526	857	\$41,015,538	\$25,378,873	61.9	\$276.15	\$316.76
2012	142,534	850	\$40,424,039	\$25,685,744	63.5	\$283.61	\$316.76
2013	140,144	849	\$40,007,367	\$24,697,531	61.7	\$285.47	\$326.26
2014	139,137	842	\$40,370,182	\$24,052,081	59.6	\$290.15	\$332.79
2015	138,084	857	\$39,229,408	\$23,590,341	60.1	\$284.10	\$336.12
2016	136,094	851	\$38,219,193	\$22,296,441	58.3	\$280.83	\$339.48
2017	134,136	854	\$37,937,501	\$22,788,222	60.1	\$282.83	\$339.48

* The Effective Ministry-Share Rate is the requested contribution adjusted for the impact of the small church reduction factor as well as the Canadian/U.S. dollar exchange rate. Ministry-share requests for churches in the United States and Canada are made in their local currency, respectively.

** 2010 is the first year for the elimination of the hardship exclusions by Synod 2009, resulting in the increase in the number of active adult professed members reported.

The overall ministry-share receipts declined \$3.3 million over this twelve year period—nearly a 13-percent reduction. During the same period the number of active adult professed members declined approximately 12 percent. While the reduction in dollars mirrors the reduction in membership, the value to the denominational ministries and agencies was further affected by cumulative inflation of 23 percent in the same dozen years, based on the U.S. Consumer Price Index.

It is important to note that while the number of active adult professed members declined approximately 12 percent, the number of organized churches remained about the same. The result is a significant decline in the average size of the CRCNA organized churches. In calendar year 2007, 535 organized congregations had fewer than 200 active adult professed members—approximately 63.7 percent of all organized congregations. By calendar year 2017, the number had increased to 612 organized congregations with fewer than 200 active adult professed members, or 71.6 percent of total organized congregations. This trend contributes to the decline in ministry share dollars with the related increase in the number of smaller churches being affected by the ministry-share size reduction factor.

Synod 1987 approved “the concept of a [ministry share] reduction for smaller churches (*Acts of Synod 1987*, pp. 559-60). This factor provides for an adjustment in the requested ministry share amount based on the congregation size. At 193 or more active adult professed members, the factor is 100

percent, or a request of the full amount. The factor gradually decreases to 50 percent for a congregation of 72 or fewer active adult professing members. So while the actual ministry-share rate increased 21 percent, the effective ministry-share rate requested of the membership only increased 15.5 percent over this same period.

IV. Learnings from the Task Force on Financial Sustainability Report

With the decline in the support of ministry shares, the Task Force on Financial Sustainability spent some time evaluating the current environment to determine what has changed over the years to cause the downturn. Part of the change is attributable to the expansion of missional ministry beyond the traditional work of the denomination. Many churches support expanded ministry efforts in their communities as well as members or close acquaintances of members working nearby and faraway with organizations not part of the CRCNA.

As with most organizations, costs are both fixed and variable. The declining membership per church needs to continue to support the local fixed costs, including facilities costs and staff expense. Any reduction in financial capacity of the congregation is borne primarily by the ministry programs of the church including ministry-share support. One expression heard by task force members was that ministry shares are often the “shock absorber of the budget.” As demands on local resources expand, ministry shares, which is one of the largest single line items in the local church budget, becomes a focus of reductions, especially as there are no direct consequences to the local church itself for reduced or eliminated support.

When ministry funding was discussed with the denomination’s advancement departments, the common sentiment was that there needs to be a stronger connection between the ministry that is occurring and the donor. The donor wants to be engaged by the ministry so they feel ownership. A lack of understanding of our current ministry-share system prevents this connection. The key element seen to making these ministries exciting and engaging is a robust communication exchange from the ministry to the donor—and in many cases a true dialogue between the two.

The advancement directors also each felt that their agency’s mandate was set by the churches through synod, but they did not feel that the congregations saw it that way. In fact, there were several comments that the churches see the work of the denomination as being driven “top down,” with the denominational leadership and the Council of Delegates being at the top rather than the congregations. From that perspective, the ministries exist not because the church asked for them but are simply competing with similarly focused parachurch organizations for the support of the local church.

This disconnect was the first issue Synod 2016 asked the Council of Delegates to address as they evaluated and prioritized the existing denominational programs and ministries. The surveys conducted with both COD members and synod delegates in 2017 indicated a high desire and priority for all the current work of the denomination.

V. The issue of capacity

The support of the work of the denomination through ministry-share giving is subject to both desire and ability to contribute. The ability or

financial capacity of a congregation is only partially determined by the number of active adult professing members. Since the early years of the denomination, the different ability of various congregations of similar size to meet the ministry share request has been noted. Numerous alternatives to the membership allocation have been suggested, including titling the general fund as well as using faith promise pledges. In 1985 it was suggested that a quota request based on a percentage of each member's income might be used, but was quickly rejected as far too complex a system to sustain.

Synod has repeatedly stated that it is the responsibility of the classis to determine how the inability of one church to meet its ministry-share request can be shared by other churches. Recently, Classis Muskegon has engaged in an exercise to allocate the ministry-share request among the churches based on a standardized budget comparison. The primary driver of this process is the assumption that the budget of the local church more closely reflects the financial capacity of the congregation. Several classes have also engaged in conversation and experimentation with other alternative processes.

VI. Beyond ministry-share funding

While ministry shares have been used to fund the work of the Christian Reformed Church in North America for many decades, they have not been the basis for all of our work.

Ministry shares were never intended to cover all the costs of ministry. Synod said that individual gifts, as well as church offerings, are needed to meet the costs of the agencies and ministries beyond what ministry shares would fund. Such giving allows persons who are financially blessed to give proportionally to the kingdom. However, synod also stressed that the agencies and ministries of the denomination were to have a priority in funding over other non-CRC ministries that may make appeals to the churches.

Since its inception, World Renew (formerly Christian Reformed World Relief Committee) has been funded by church offerings, individual gifts, and grants, but not ministry shares, because the work of CRWRC was originally established as a diaconal ministry focused on relief work. Synodical delegates felt that funds for this work should naturally arise out of the Sunday offerings collected by deacons. Synod continues to request that all churches take four or more offerings for World Renew each year in lieu of ministry shares. Such church offerings annually have totaled more than \$4 million for this agency.

VII. The key idea: Church pledges initiating the process for a ministry-share gift

The logistics of the current ministry-share system put most of the focus on budget preparation by the denominational institutions, agencies, and ministries; budget review and approvals by the Council of Delegates; and the action of synod with the final approval of the ministry-share rate that translates into the request for contribution to each church. The critical stakeholders in this process who may feel excluded from the decision-making table are the local churches. While synod is a gathering of representatives of all the classes and speaks on behalf of the church, some delegates in advisory committee sessions have indicated that they do not see synod as speaking directly for their local congregation.

The timing of the current ministry-share process seems to enforce this perception. Once the COD has approved the operating budgets of the denominational ministries and agencies, and synod has determined the ministry-share rate, the churches are simply told what they should contribute to fund the plan. As local congregations serve as the initial and broadest level of authority in our denominational polity, this certainly makes the ministry-share processes seem backward. Instead, the ideal ministry-share system should provide a process for the churches to consider and respond to the ministry share funding requests, with their response becoming the basis for the denominational operating budgets.

In addition, Synod 1939 stated that the classes were to be the place where the churches determine their joint ability to meet the requests of the denominational ministry share. Synod encouraged all churches in a classis to consider the ability of each to meet the requested contribution. Synod 1970 decided, “When a classis is convinced that a member church is unable to pay the quotas, the churches within a classis, if possible, through a combined effort [should] be requested to assist a church to meet its denominational obligations” (*Acts of Synod 1970*, p. 81). Churches that are more financially blessed are to consider their ability to carry some of the burden of churches with fewer resources. Recently several classes have modeled this directive by focusing on local church budgets, faith promise, and a simple tithe.

It would be beneficial for each classis to facilitate a conversation of its member churches to determine what ministry-share contribution they are able to make, with a goal toward maximizing the dollars made available for the work of the kingdom while providing a fair sharing of the financial burden by each congregation.

VIII. A new approach

Given this commitment to shift the initiation of setting a ministry-share contribution to the churches, the following steps are envisioned.

Step One. In anticipation of a coming new budget year for the denomination, each church council prayerfully considers how much they are willing and capable of giving for their ministry shares. Guidance developed by denominational staff and endorsed by the Council of Delegates is sent to the churches and to classis treasurers to aid them in this step.

Step Two. At the fall classis meetings, each church reports its projected ministry-share commitment, and the classis evaluates the collective commitments to determine if any church needs assistance in participating in the ministry-share provision. It is anticipated that some congregations may be willing and able to do more in response to those only able to do less. This evaluation and resulting mutual reliance among the churches, if any, is to be conducted using a methodology the classis determines is appropriate for its situation. The end result of the classis process is a composite pledge by the churches of the classis for ministry-share contributions.

Step Three. The denominational ministries, institutions, and agencies would develop their preliminary budgets based on agreed-upon budget assumptions, including using an initial estimate of ministry-share

contributions and then adjusted, if necessary, once the pledged ministry-share amount is received from the classes.

Step Four. The spring meeting of the Council of Delegates would result in a final budget, with the pledged ministry-share amount included as a portion of the anticipated revenue.

Step Five. Using the current advisory committee approach, synod would endorse the budget.

As one would expect, the timing and sequence of this new approach would require significant planning and careful implementation. If the conclusion of the process takes place during the meeting of synod in June, and the May meeting of the Council of Delegates serves in preparation for that final action, the classes will need to do their collective work in winter or early spring (i.e., January, February, or March), requiring that the individual churches complete the first step prior to their respective winter or early spring classis meeting.

IX. Reflections for this new approach

A number of issues require consideration, leading either to continuation of current practices or changes.

- Synod 1939 stated that there is no biblical basis for a penalty for failure to meet the requested ministry-share contribution. Christian Reformed churches have covenanted together to support the work of the denomination. This covenant should be sufficient to hold each other accountable. Therefore no recommendations about consequences of meeting or failing to meet ministry-share pledges are included in this proposal.
- Research suggests that some prefer the use of local church budgets as the basis for determining the requested ministry-share contribution amount. However, past requests for budget information by the denominational offices resulted in less than a 10 percent participation rate. Representatives that worked on the Classis Muskegon reallocation experiment using the local church budget as a measure of financial capacity reported that churches in the classis were hesitant to share this information. For these reasons, local budgets should be part of the classis conversation but not be the initial basis for the requested contribution by the churches coming from synod. Therefore, no change to reliance on local church budgets is included in this proposal.
- Currently emerging churches do not formally participate in the ministry-share process because their active adult professing memberships are held by the sponsoring or supervising church. Each classis should determine if and how it incorporates the emerging congregations in the sharing of ministry-share support. Therefore, while there is no specific recommendation for change in this proposal, this suggestion is provided to classes.
- As indicated above in Section VIII, Step One, guidance will be developed by denominational staff with input from synod and sent to the churches and to classis treasurers to aid them in the initial pledge-making step. Factors to be used for determining guidance need to rely on statistics that are regularly reported and not easily manipulated.

Participation in the submission of the annual *Yearbook* questionnaire is not 100 percent, but we have to rely on the *Yearbook* data knowing some of the information is not current. Approximately 15 to 20 percent of churches do not provide annual updates with their statistics. In those cases, the previously reported data is rolled forward and used. Therefore, while there is no specific recommendation, encouragement toward better participation in *Yearbook* data submission is assumed.

- In addition, guidance, as mentioned above, needs to be based on a reliable variable upon which budgeting is based. The current use of the *active adult professing member* category should remain the basis for determining guidelines. The determination of who is an adult professing member is well established, and the definition of *active* as provided by Synod 1998 is easily applied.
- The reimagined ministry-share system maintains the unique relationship that Calvin College has as our denominational college, while also encouraging support for Dordt College, Trinity Christian College, The King's University, and Redeemer University College. All five should continue to be an integral part of a reimagined system. Further implications and recommendations are addressed in section XI below.

X. Implementation considerations

While this proposed change—that ministry-share commitments begin with churches, not synod—is significant, it will become far less daunting after the transition. For example, the first time a congregation’s council prayerfully considers its commitment to ministry shares, the congregation’s treasurer and others, with sure knowledge of their historical giving patterns, will have a significant homework assignment. In subsequent years, it will be less difficult, as learnings encountered in the new system will welcome refining improvements. Similarly, the first time a classis collectively considers the range of commitments from its various member churches, the task will seem quite complex. After the first year, improvements will become evident as patterns emerge.

For this change for churches to be the first step in the process, it is important that churches and classes align their commitments with the denominational budget, recognizing that it may straddle portions of two of their church budgets if their fiscal year is different from the denomination’s fiscal year (July 1 to June 30).

The process for consideration and eventual approval of this new approach requires careful sequencing, as illustrated by the following:

February - May 2019	The Council of Delegates completes its work.
June 2019	Synod considers the proposal and adopts it in principle for consideration by churches.
July 2019 - April 2020	Churches and classes provide feedback through the usual process for consideration of such reports.
May - June 2020	COD readies; synod adopts the system in light of the feedback.

July - August 2020	Denominational staff prepare educational and guidance materials for use by classes at their fall 2020 meetings.
October 2020 - January 2021	Churches develop ministry-share commitments with their classes.
January - March 2021	Classes adopt and report their collective pledge.
March - May 2021	Denominational staff prepare a proposed budget for fiscal year.
May 2021	The Council of Delegates approves a budget based on ministry-share commitments.
June 2021	Synod endorses the denominational budget.



XI. Funding of the education institutions

Since the 1960s, the ministry-share funding of Calvin College has included the support for the work of Dordt College, Trinity Christian College, The King's University, and Redeemer University College. The requested ministry share of each classis for Calvin College has been based on the number of Christian Reformed students from the classis attending Calvin. Through a complicated formula developed over the years at synod, support for the other four schools has been requested based on the reduced ministry-share rate the various classes experienced due to this allocation by student count. The result has been a confusing process with unequal support for the five schools as well as unequal overall request for funding from some of the classes.

Rather than continue with the complicated formulary support, the churches should be asked to contribute at the current requested support for both Calvin College ministry shares and, if applicable, the requested funding for the area educational institutions. Gifts to Calvin College would continue to be processed as part of the ministry-share system while gifts to the area educational institutions would continue to be contributed directly to the schools. The total amount requested in support from an individual church would not change from the current system. The decision of which institution(s) to support would be made by each local church.

Appendix K

Condensed Financial Statements of the Agencies and Institutions

**Back to God Ministries International
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	\$	June 30, 2018			
		Unrestr. (note 2) Ag. Desig.	Temp. Restr. (note 3)	Perm. Restr. (note 4)	Total
Cash	\$ 3,381		104		3,485
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	3,749		1,019	100	4,868
Receivables & Advances	31	-	-	-	31
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-		-	-	-
Equities	-		-	-	-
Partnerships	-		-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-		-	-	-
PP & E	107	-	-	-	107
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	7,268	-	1,123	100	8,491
Accounts Payable	467	-	-	-	467
Notes/Loans Payable	283	-	-	-	283
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	274	-	-	-	274
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	1,024	-	-	-	1,024
Net Assets	\$ 6,244	-	1,123	100	7,467
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					
			Isaac Jen endowment fund and Media Reach Fund.		
				Permanently restricted endowment funds.	

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

	Fiscal 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 2,962	\$ 2,918
% of Total Income	36.0%	29.8%
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ 3,575	\$ 3,522
Estate Gifts	\$ 1,161	\$ 2,207
Total Gift Income	4,736	5,729
% of Total Income	57.6%	58.6%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ -	\$ -
Grants-Animation	\$ -	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$ 530	\$ 1,133
Total Other Income	530	1,133
% of Total Income	6.4%	11.6%
TOTAL INCOME	8,228	9,780
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
English FTEs	\$ 2,167	\$ 2,282
16	16	13
International FTEs	\$ 3,246	\$ 3,367
8	8	6
Education FTEs	\$ 155	\$ 168
2	2	2
Total Program Service \$	\$ 5,568	\$ 5,817
Total Program Service FTEs	26	21
% of Total \$	70.6%	71.4%
% of Total FTEs	72.2%	66.3%
Support Services:		
Management & General FTEs	\$ 931	\$ 940
4	4	4
Plant Operations FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
-	-	-
Fund-raising FTEs	\$ 1,392	\$ 1,395
6	6	7
Total Support Service \$	2,323	2,335
Total Support Service FTEs	10	11
% of Total \$	29.4%	28.6%
% of Total FTEs	27.8%	33.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 7,891	\$ 8,152
TOTAL FTEs	36	31
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ 337	\$ 1,628

Calvin College
Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2018				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 14,445	-	-	-	14,445
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	18,193	-	-	-	18,193
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	22,217		23,316	46,496	92,029
Equities	33,326		34,973	69,745	138,044
Partnerships	-		-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-		-	-	-
PP & E	205,335	-	-	-	205,335
Other	4,040	-	-	-	4,040
Total Assets	297,556	-	58,289	116,241	472,086
Accounts Payable	3,250	-	-	-	3,250
Notes/Loans Payable	76,504	-	-	-	76,504
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	5,800	-	-	-	5,800
Deferred Income	3,640	-	-	-	3,640
Other	42,495	-	-	-	42,495
Total Liabilities	131,689	-	-	-	131,689
Net Assets	\$ 165,867	-	58,289	116,241	340,397
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					Over 1,440 accounts for instruction, scholarships, grants, research, public service, student services, etc., funded by outside sources.
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					Endowed gifts.

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

	Fiscal 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 2,324	\$ 2,349
% of Total Income	1.5%	1.5%
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ 3,518	\$ 3,247
Estate Gifts	\$ 45	\$ 11
Total Gift Income	3,563	3,258
% of Total Income	2.4%	2.1%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ 140,396	\$ 141,415
Grants	\$ -	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$ 4,700	\$ 5,409
Total Other Income	145,096	146,824
% of Total Income	96.1%	96.3%
TOTAL INCOME	150,983	152,431
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Education	\$ 131,690	\$ 134,784
FTEs	558	548
\$ -	\$ -	-
\$ -	\$ -	-
\$ -	\$ -	-
\$ -	\$ -	-
\$ -	\$ -	-
\$ -	\$ -	-
\$ -	\$ -	-
Total Program Service \$	\$ 131,690	\$ 134,784
Total Program Service FTEs	558	548
% of Total \$	87.2%	87.7%
% of Total FTEs	77.7%	80.6%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 8,383	\$ 8,404
FTEs	59	40
Plant Operations	\$ 8,119	\$ 7,597
FTEs	69	63
Fund-raising	\$ 2,791	\$ 2,849
FTEs	32	29
Total Support Service \$	19,293	18,850
Total Support Service FTEs	160	132
% of Total \$	12.8%	12.3%
% of Total FTEs	22.3%	19.4%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 150,983	\$ 153,634
TOTAL FTEs	718	680
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ -	\$ (1,203)

Calvin Theological Seminary
Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2018				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 699	-	1	-	700
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	1,894	-	-	-	1,894
Receivables & Advances	801	-	1,751	-	2,552
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	274	-	-	-	274
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	10,838	-	10,838
Equities	-	-	14,444	12,641	27,085
Partnerships	-	-		8,069	8,069
Property (nonoperating)	-	-		1,050	1,050
PP & E	10,259	-	-	-	10,259
Other	3,174	-		-	3,174
Total Assets	17,101	-	27,034	21,760	65,895
Accounts Payable	1,772	-	-	-	1,772
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	70	-	-	-	70
Annuities Payable	-	-	147	-	147
Deferred Income	-	-	222	-	222
Other	-	-	3,164	-	3,164
Total Liabilities	1,842	-	3,533	-	5,375
Net Assets	15,259	-	23,501	21,760	60,520
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: Post retirement liabilities Notes/Loans Payble: 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 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 2,379	\$ 2,405
% of Total Income	32.2%	32.3%
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ 1,261	\$ 1,295
Estate Gifts	\$ 198	\$ 210
Total Gift Income	1,459	1,505
% of Total Income	19.7%	20.2%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ 2,266	\$ 2,397
Grants	\$ 1,204	\$ 1,018
Miscellaneous	\$ 90	\$ 119
Total Other Income	3,560	3,534
% of Total Income	48.1%	47.5%
TOTAL INCOME	7,398	7,444
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Instructional FTEs	\$ 2,881 22	\$ 2,716 20
Public Service FTEs	\$ 79 1	\$ 43 1
Academic Support FTEs	\$ 1,232 5	\$ 1,266 5
Student Services FTEs	\$ 628 5	\$ 644 5
Student Aid FTEs	\$ 314 1	\$ 323 1
	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service \$	\$ 5,134	\$ 4,992
Total Program Service FTEs	34	32
% of Total \$	70.1%	68.9%
% of Total FTEs	68.0%	66.7%
Support Services:		
Management & General FTEs	\$ 896 9	\$ 1,003 9
Plant Operations FTEs	\$ 691 2	\$ 689 2
Fund-raising FTEs	\$ 606 5	\$ 557 5
Total Support Service \$	2,193	2,249
Total Support Service FTEs	16	16
% of Total \$	29.9%	31.1%
% of Total FTEs	32.0%	33.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 7,327	\$ 7,241
TOTAL FTEs	50	48
Post-retirement benefit costs >	-	-
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ 71	\$ 203

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

INCLUDED IN SYNODICAL ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

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

		Fiscal 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	\$ 5,395	\$ 5,088	
% of Total Income	41.8%	43.8%	
Other Gift Income:			
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 929	\$ 970	
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	
Total Gift Income	929	970	
% of Total Income	7.2%	8.4%	
Other Income:			
Tuition & Sales	\$ 5,195	\$ 5,278	
Grants	\$ 1,000	\$ -	
Services & Misc	\$ 373	\$ 268	
Total Other Income	6,568	5,546	
% of Total Income	50.9%	47.8%	
TOTAL INCOME	12,892	11,604	
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Lead-Chaplaincy Services	\$ 293	\$ 261	
FTEs	2	2	
Lead-Pastor-Church Relations/SCE	\$ 959	\$ 939	
FTEs	6	6	
Lead-Candidacy	\$ 207	\$ 221	
FTEs	2	2	
Lead-Ecumenical Relations	\$ 131	\$ 111	
FTEs	-	-	
Lead-Network/Healthy Church	9	-	
FTEs	-	-	
Justice-Race Relations	\$ 463	\$ 510	
FTEs	4	4	
Justice-Safe Church Ministry	\$ 236	\$ 235	
FTEs	2	2	
Justice-Disability Concerns	\$ 284	\$ 233	
FTEs	2	2	
Justice-Social & Restorative Justice	\$ 727	\$ 549	
FTEs	5	5	
Justice-Ministries in Canada	\$ 1,009	\$ 1,046	
FTEs	5	5	
Faith-ChurchLink	\$ 120	\$ 139	
FTEs	2	2	
Faith-Church Resources (FA)	\$ 635	\$ 666	
FTEs	4	4	
MSS-Agency services	\$ 4,138	\$ 3,228	
FTEs	24	24	
MSS-Faith Alive (FA)	\$ 721	\$ 1,049	
FTEs	-	6	
MSS-Banner (FA)	\$ 1,172	\$ 1,139	
FTEs	4	4	
MSS-Libros Desafio (FA)	\$ 358	\$ 267	
FTEs	3	3	
MSS-Communications	\$ 200	\$ 231	
FTEs	3	3	
Worship-Worship Resources (FA)	\$ 410	\$ 392	
FTEs	3	3	
Grant Programs - Leadership Init., Connections, FTEs	\$ 458	\$ 814	
Total Program Service \$	\$ 12,530	\$ 12,030	
Total Program Service FTEs	77	77	
% of Total \$	99.8%	99.8%	
% of Total FTEs	98.6%	98.6%	
Support Services:			
Management & General	\$ -	\$ -	
FTEs	-	-	
D.D.M.	\$ -	\$ -	
FTEs	-	-	
Fund-raising	\$ 22	\$ 8	
FTEs	1	1	
Total Support Service \$	22	8	
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1	
% of Total \$	0.2%	0.1%	
% of Total FTEs	1.4%	1.3%	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 12,552	\$ 12,038	
TOTAL FTEs	78	78	
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ 340	\$ (434)	

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

	December 31, 2018				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 180	-	-	-	180
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	264		-	-	264
Equities	4,763		-	-	4,763
GICs / Stable Asset Fund	108		-	-	108
Property (nonoperating)			-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	5,315	-	-	-	5,315
Accounts Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Forfeitures Due Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	-	-	-	-	-
Net Assets	\$ 5,315	-	-	-	5,315
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)

	2017 Actual	2018 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	\$ 462	\$ 477
Participant Contributions	\$ 57	\$ 68
Investment Earnings	\$ 330	\$ (189)
Total Other Income	\$ 849	\$ 356
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS	849	356
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Distributions	\$ 519	\$ 414
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service \$	\$ 519	\$ 414
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-
% of Total \$	97.2%	95.6%
% of Total FTEs		
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 15	\$ 19
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -
Total Support Service \$	\$ 15	\$ 19
Total Support Service FTEs	-	-
% of Total \$	2.8%	4.4%
% of Total FTEs		
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 534	\$ 433
TOTAL FTEs	-	-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$ 315	\$ (77)

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

	December 31, 2018				
	Unstrr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ -	-	-	-	-
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	6,328		-	-	6,328
Equities	17,804		-	-	17,804
GICs / Stable Asset Fund	3,368		-	-	3,368
Diversified	5,985		-	-	5,985
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	33,485	-	-	-	33,485
Accounts Payable	8	-	-	-	8
Forfeitures Due Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	8	-	-	-	8
Net Assets	\$ 33,477	-	-	-	33,477
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)

		2017 Actual	2018 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	\$	2,487	\$ 2,321
Grants	\$	-	\$ -
Investment Income	\$	5,493	\$ (1,922)
Total Other Income		7,980	\$ 399
% of Total Income		100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS		7,980	399
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Distributions	\$	3,846	\$ 4,193
FTEs		-	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
Total Program Service \$	\$	3,846	\$ 4,193
Total Program Service FTEs		-	-
% of Total \$		96.4%	96.6%
% of Total FTEs		0.0%	0.0%
Support Services:			
Management & General	\$	144	\$ 146
FTEs		1	1
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Total Support Service \$		144	146
Total Support Service FTEs		1	1
% of Total \$		3.6%	3.4%
% of Total FTEs		100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$	3,990	\$ 4,339
TOTAL FTEs		1	1
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$	3,990	\$ (3,940)

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

	June 30, 2018				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 3,619	-	-	-	3,619
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	17,314	-	-	-	17,314
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	26	-	-	-	26
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	-	-	-
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	20,959	-	-	-	20,959
Accounts Payable	50	-	-	-	50
Notes/Loans Payable	15,044	-	-	-	15,044
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	15,094	-	-	-	15,094
Net Assets	\$ 5,865	-	-	-	5,865
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 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 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	\$ 922	\$ 863
Total Other Income	922	863
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME	922	863
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Loan Interest	\$ 447	\$ 313
FTEs	1	1
Provision for loan forgiveness (CRCNA)	\$ 1,948	\$ -
\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service \$	\$ 2,395	\$ 313
Total Program Service FTEs	1	1
% of Total \$	87.5%	45.4%
% of Total FTEs	33.3%	33.3%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 342	\$ 377
FTEs	1	1
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
Total Support Service \$	342	377
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1
% of Total \$	12.5%	54.6%
% of Total FTEs	66.7%	66.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 2,737	\$ 690
TOTAL FTEs	2	2
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ (1,815)	\$ 173

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

	December 31, 2018			
	Pension	S.A.F		Total
Cash	\$ 1,259	471	-	1,730
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	63	14	-	77
Inventory	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):				
Bonds	11,168	-	-	11,168
Equities	44,310	-	-	44,310
Partnerships	-	-	-	-
Real Estate (nonoperating)	2,117	-	-	2,117
PP & E	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	58,917	485	-	59,402
Accounts Payable	142	169	-	311
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	142	169	-	311
Net Assets	\$ 58,775	316	-	59,091
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 2017 Actual	MPF 2018 Actual	SAF 2017 Actual	SAF 2018 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Ministry Share	\$ 0.0%	\$ 0.0%	\$ 93	\$ 95
% of Total Income			95.9%	93.1%
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	\$ 3,167	\$ 1,147	\$ -	\$ -
Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Earnings/(Losses)	\$ 7,231	\$ 328	\$ 4	\$ 7
Total Other Income	10,398	1,475	4	7
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%	4.1%	6.9%
TOTAL ADDITIONS	10,398	1,475	97	102
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Distributions	\$ 2,890	\$ 3,093	\$ 7	\$ 174
FTEs	-	-	-	-
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service \$	\$ 2,890	\$ 3,093	\$ 7	\$ 174
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-	-	-
% of Total \$	77.9%	77.2%	100.0%	100.0%
% of Total FTEs	0.0%	0.0%		
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 818	\$ 911	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	1	1	-	-
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Total Support Service \$	818	911	-	-
Total Support Service FTEs	1	1	-	-
% of Total \$	22.1%	22.8%	0.0%	0.0%
% of Total FTEs	100.0%	100.0%		
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 3,708	\$ 4,004	\$ 7	\$ 174
TOTAL FTEs	1	1	-	-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$ 6,690	\$ (2,529)	\$ 90	\$ (72)

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

-----December 31, 2018-----					
	Pension	S.A.F			Total
Cash	\$ 6,749	168	-	-	6,917
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	196	-	-	-	196
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	17,776	-	-	-	17,776
Equities	60,775	-	-	-	60,775
Diversified / Alternative	6,562	-	-	-	6,562
Real Estate (nonoperating)	10,392	-	-	-	10,392
PP & E	236	-	-	-	236
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	\$ 102,686	168	-	-	102,854
Accounts Payable	38	57	-	-	95
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	38	57	-	-	95
Net Assets	\$ 102,648	111	-	-	102,759
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 - United States
Changes in Net Assets (000s)

	MPF 2017 Actual	MPF 2018 Actual	SAF 2017 Actual	SAF 2018 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 174	\$ 176
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	99.4%	98.9%
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	\$ 5,296	\$ 5,174	\$ -	\$ -
Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Investment Earnings	\$ 18,179	\$ (4,138)	\$ 1	\$ 2
Total Other Income	23,475	1,036	1	2
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%	0.6%	1.1%
TOTAL ADDITIONS	23,475	1,036	175	178
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Distributions	\$ 9,865	\$ 10,268	\$ 132	\$ 153
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Total Program Service \$	\$ 9,865	\$ 10,268	\$ 132	\$ 153
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-	-	-
% of Total \$	88.8%	89.4%	100.0%	100.0%
% of Total FTEs	0.0%	0.0%	-	-
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 1,245	\$ 1,223	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	2	2	-	-
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Total Support Service \$	1,245	1,223	-	-
Total Support Service FTEs	2	2	-	-
% of Total \$	11.2%	10.6%	0.0%	0.0%
% of Total FTEs	100.0%	100.0%	-	-
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 11,110	\$ 11,491	\$ 132	\$ 153
TOTAL FTEs	2	2	-	-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$ 12,365	\$ (10,455)	\$ 43	\$ 25

Resonate Global Mission
Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2018				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 5,878	-	-	-	5,878
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	424	-	-	-	424
Receivables & Advances	479	-	-	-	479
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	60	-	-	-	60
Investments (note 1):	-	-	-	-	-
Bonds	676	-	508	-	1,184
Equities	1,291	3,668	2,336	1,468	8,763
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	351	-	-	-	351
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	9,159	3,668	2,844	1,468	17,139
Accounts Payable	1,739	-	-	-	1,739
Notes/Loans Payable	42	-	-	-	42
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	187	-	-	-	187
Deferred Income	(8)	-	-	-	(8)
Other	712	-	-	-	712
Total Liabilities	2,672	-	-	-	2,672
Net Assets	\$ 6,487	3,668	2,844	1,468	14,467
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.	List supplied upon request (land/buildings overseas are off book)				
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

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

	Fiscal 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ 7,215	\$ 7,116
% of Total Income	33.8%	38.3%
Other Gift Income:		
Gifts & Offerings	\$ 10,046	\$ 9,807
Estate Gifts	\$ 1,429	\$ 766
Total Gift Income	<u>\$ 11,475</u>	<u>\$ 10,573</u>
% of Total Income	53.7%	56.9%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ 252	\$ -
Grants	\$ -	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$ 2,422	\$ 909
Total Other Income	<u>\$ 2,674</u>	<u>\$ 909</u>
% of Total Income	12.5%	4.9%
TOTAL INCOME	<u>\$ 21,364</u>	<u>\$ 18,598</u>
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Ministry Teams - N. America	\$ 2,970	\$ 2,399
FTEs	18	18
Ministry Development - Mission Innovation	\$ 751	\$ 1,866
FTEs	5	5
Africa & Europe	\$ 3,845	\$ 2,586
FTEs	18	18
Eurasia-reclassified 17-18	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	14	14
Latin America & Asia	\$ 6,015	\$ 3,660
FTEs	19	19
Global/other Int'l program	\$ 1,327	\$ 2,279
FTEs	40	40
Mission Educ. Engagement/Vol	\$ -	\$ 964
FTEs	2	2
Total Program Service \$	<u>\$ 14,908</u>	<u>\$ 13,754</u>
Total Program Service FTEs	116	116
% of Total \$	78.5%	76.7%
% of Total FTEs	85.9%	85.9%
Support Services:		
Management & General	\$ 2,117	\$ 1,585
FTEs	6	6
Operations and Logistics/PLC	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-
Mission Support & Fund-raising	\$ 1,954	\$ 2,592
FTEs	13	13
Total Support Service \$	<u>\$ 4,071</u>	<u>\$ 4,177</u>
Total Support Service FTEs	19	19
% of Total \$	21.5%	23.3%
% of Total FTEs	14.1%	14.1%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	<u>\$ 18,979</u>	<u>\$ 17,931</u>
TOTAL FTEs**	<u>135</u>	<u>135</u>
**Ptnr & Vol fte est. incl above	30	30
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	<u>\$ 2,385</u>	<u>\$ 668</u>

Synodical Administrative Services
Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2018				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 4,161	-	1,892	-	6,053
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	2,992	-	-	-	2,992
Inventory	829	-	-	-	829
Prepays & Advances	31	-	-	-	31
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	103	-	-	-	103
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	7,733	-	-	-	7,733
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	15,849	-	1,892	-	17,741
Accounts Payable	4,355	-	-	-	4,355
Notes/Loans Payable	1,240	-	-	-	1,240
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	68	-	-	-	68
Other	469	-	-	-	469
Total Liabilities	6,132	-	-	-	6,132
Net Assets	\$ 9,717	-	1,892	-	11,609
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property currently in use.	Canadian Cash Concentration and Netting for Interest Program.				
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Includes: \$68,000 AYOYC, \$66,000 DORR, \$1,265,000 Lilly, \$251,000 Bi-natl. Gathering, Chaplaincy 116,000, \$126,000 other.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

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

		Fiscal 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	\$	2,355	\$ 2,561
% of Total Income		53.3%	69.3%
Other Gift Income:			
Above Ministry Share	\$	85	\$ 322
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$ -
Total Gift Income		85	322
% of Total Income		1.9%	8.7%
Other Income:			
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$ -
Grants	\$	1,948	\$ -
Services & Misc	\$	33	\$ 812
Total Other Income		1,981	812
% of Total Income		44.8%	22.0%
TOTAL INCOME		4,421	3,695
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Synodical Services & Grants	\$	1,534	\$ 1,368
FTEs		5	5
Communications			
FTEs			
Sea to Sea expenses & grants			
FTEs			
Leadership Programs	\$	81	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Inspire			\$ 755
FTEs			1
Total Program Service \$	\$	1,615	\$ 2,123
Total Program Service FTEs		5	6
% of Total \$		53.6%	53.5%
% of Total FTEs		41.7%	46.2%
Support Services:			
Management & General	\$	1,144	\$ 1,078
FTEs		4	4
D.M.A.	\$	-	\$ 332
FTEs		2	2
Fund-raising (Foundation)	\$	253	\$ 435
FTEs		1	1
Total Support Service \$		1,397	1,845
Total Support Service FTEs		7	7
% of Total \$		46.4%	46.5%
% of Total FTEs		58.3%	53.8%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	3,012	\$ 3,968
TOTAL FTEs		12	13
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	1,409	\$ (273)

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

	Fiscal 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 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	\$ 6,433	\$ 6,644
Total Other Income	6,433	6,644
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME	6,433	6,644
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Advancement	\$ 845	\$ 829
FTEs	9	9
Finance & Payroll	\$ 2,344	\$ 2,506
FTEs	22	22
IT and Phones	\$ 1,508	\$ 1,520
FTEs	7	7
Human Resources	\$ 396	\$ 367
FTEs	2	2
Coordinated Services	\$ 152	\$ 177
FTEs	2	2
Total Program Service \$	\$ 5,245	\$ 5,399
Total Program Service FTEs	42	42
% of Total \$	81.5%	81.3%
% of Total FTEs	95.5%	95.5%
Support Services:		
Management & General		
FTEs		
Plant Operations/Debt Serv.	\$ 1,188	\$ 1,245
FTEs	2	2
Fund-raising (Foundation)		
FTEs		
Total Support Service \$	1,188	1,245
Total Support Service FTEs	2	2
% of Total \$	18.5%	18.7%
% of Total FTEs	4.5%	4.5%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 6,433	\$ 6,644
TOTAL FTEs	44	44
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$ -	\$ -

World Renew
Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2018				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 928	7,202	12,515	-	20,645
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	1,000	1,762	-	2,762
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	925	-	-	-	925
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	27	-	-	-	27
Equities	10,017	-	-	-	10,017
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	887	-	101	-	988
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	12,784	8,202	14,378	-	35,364
Accounts Payable	944	-	-	-	944
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	152	-	-	-	152
Deferred Income	8	-	-	-	8
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	1,104	-	-	-	1,104
Net Assets	\$ 11,680	8,202	14,378	-	34,260
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.			Term endowments as stipulated by board = \$7,419 GAC reserve \$783		
Note 3: List details of restrictions.		Mission home = \$101; Purpose-restricted gifts = \$13,430; Term endowments as stipulated by donors = \$847			
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

World Renew
Income and Expenses (000s)

	Fiscal 16-17 Actual	Fiscal 17-18 Actual
INCOME:		
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -
% of Total Income	-	-
Other Gift Income:		
Above Ministry Share	\$ 18,615	\$ 21,307
Estate Gifts	\$ 2,817	\$ 2,008
Total Gift Income	\$ 21,432	\$ 23,315
% of Total Income	61.2%	68.1%
Other Income:		
Tuition & Sales	\$ -	\$ -
Grants	\$ 12,597	\$ 10,094
Miscellaneous	\$ 1,004	\$ 835
Total Other Income	\$ 13,601	\$ 10,929
% of Total Income	38.8%	31.9%
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 35,033	\$ 34,244
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):		
Program Services:		
Overseas programs	\$ 11,734	\$ 13,044
FTEs	40	40
North American programs	\$ 125	\$ 108
FTEs		
Disaster relief programs	\$ 1,596	\$ 825
FTEs	13	13
Above-budget relief costs	\$ 12,413	\$ 9,991
FTEs	3	3
Education	\$ 1,578	\$ 2,629
FTEs	12	13
	\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ -
Total Program Service \$	\$ 27,446	\$ 26,597
Total Program Service FTEs	68	69
% of Total \$	86.2%	84.9%
% of Total FTEs	70.8%	68.3%
Support Services:		
Management & General	1,608	1,717
FTEs	7	7
Plant Operations	-	-
FTEs	-	-
Fund-raising	2,791	3,012
FTEs	21	25
Total Support Service \$	\$ 4,399	\$ 4,729
Total Support Service FTEs	28	32
% of Total \$	13.8%	15.1%
% of Total FTEs	29.2%	31.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 31,845	\$ 31,326
TOTAL FTEs	96	101

REPORTS OF AGENCIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND MINISTRIES

Introduction

It is the responsibility of the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA 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.

These reports provide helpful information. Some of the material supplies significant background for decisions that synod will be asked to make. Much of what is written provides the transparency necessary for our life together as a denomination. Together these reports present 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, I encourage you to respond with gratitude for what God is doing through the Holy Spirit, transforming lives and communities worldwide, by means of the Christian Reformed Church.

Steven R. Timmermans
Executive Director of the CRCNA

Calvin College

I. Introduction

At Calvin College our mission is to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. Our current strategic plan, *Calvin 2019: Strengthen, Support, Secure*, which concludes this year, has allowed us to advance our mission, to articulate our goals, and to find appropriate ways to measure our progress.

The college's aspirational vision, *Vision 2030*, has now been set to guide us through the next decade:

By 2030, Calvin will become a Christian liberal arts university with an expanded global influence. We envision Calvin University as a trusted partner for learning across religious and cultural differences and throughout the academy, the church, and the world. Calvin University will be animated by a Reformed Christian faith that seeks understanding and promotes the welfare of the city and the healing of the world. We welcome all who are compelled by God's work of renewal to join us in the formative pursuits of lifelong learning, teaching, scholarship, worship, and service.

As outlined in the *Vision 2030* rationale document (see calvin.edu/vision2030), this vision requires us to respond boldly to the challenges that higher education faces today. This vision does not require change to Calvin's mission or core values. It keeps faith with the institution's Reformed roots, its Christian liberal arts approach to learning, its tradition of residential undergraduate education, its vision of Christian faith shaping all aspects of life and work, and its commitments to diversity and inclusion. At the same time, *Vision 2030* is audacious in aspiring to reach new kinds of audiences and to increase global influence.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Calvin College (becoming Calvin University on John Calvin's birthday, July 10, 2019) equips its more than 3,700 students from 45 U.S. states, 65 countries, and five Canadian provinces to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. Calvin is proud to offer 100+ majors and programs, including graduate-level offerings in accounting, education, and speech pathology and audiology. Calvin students engage in intensive internships, community-based service learning, and significant research that results in publishing and presenting alongside world-class faculty. Through the missional work of this institution, we partner with the CRCNA in living out the denomination's five ministry priorities.

A. *Faith formation*

We aim to shape all courses, departments, and programming at Calvin through the Reformed Christian faith-and-life worldview. This past fall, the 2018 campus-wide Bible study, *Jesus Questions*, invited all members of the Calvin community to study the questions that Jesus asked, and to consider

how those questions relate to our daily lives. The Barnabas team is made up of a group of students who live in the residence halls and provide spiritual encouragement to fellow students in their daily lives. Throughout the course of their study at Calvin, all students have the opportunity to be formed in faith and discipled through studying God's Word and to walk alongside their academic and spiritual mentors.

B. Servant leadership

In the spirit of the CRCNA's dedication to "identifying, training, and recruiting leaders in the kingdom," our Calvin LifeWork program is cultivating student gifts and training leaders for future vocational pursuits. The college's vibrant Service-Learning Center program also continues to work with community partners to provide students with service-learning opportunities in the greater Grand Rapids, Michigan, area and around the country.

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) recently announced the establishment of the Ministry Leadership Fellows program—a two-year program available to incoming Calvin students who show potential for leadership in the local church. The initiative, open to students interested in any major or field of study, is available beginning with the 2019 incoming class.

C. Global mission

Throughout the years spent executing Calvin's recent strategic plan, the percentages of students of color and international students have increased to the highest levels in college history, creating a more diverse and global student population.

The college's global work includes, but is certainly not limited to, the work of the Clean Water Institute of Calvin College, the Nagel Institute, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, the Faith and International Development Conference (international studies), the Umm el-Jimal project (archaeology), and Calvin's close partnership with the International Network for Christian Higher Education. Additionally, our intentional off-campus programs for students continue to thrive.

D. Mercy and justice

Calvin remains committed to the adamant pursuit of mercy and justice, and to forming future Christian leaders who, through Christ, will bring about a more just and merciful society on earth. Leaders are formed through such programs and centers as the Calvin Prison Initiative, the Service-Learning Center, and the Intercultural Student Development Center, just to name a few. Teaching about biblical justice and mercy is woven throughout courses, worship services, and community partnerships.

A recent effort for justice, Calvin's Public Health Initiative has sparked collaboration among various disciplines at Calvin, deepened relationships with community partners, and produced research that is addressing the needs of area neighborhoods.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

Campus ministries staff at Calvin organize services for worship and Christ-centered, biblical teaching. Services include daily chapel on weekdays and LOFT (Living Our Faith Together) gatherings on Sunday evenings. We also continue to strive to proclaim the gospel and to exercise worship through teaching, learning, scholarship, and community engagement.

Students who are chosen as Ministry Leadership Fellows participate together in signature learning experiences and take a leadership role in CICW's annual Worship Symposium. It is our desire for these fellows, along with all students, to graduate equipped to live worshipful lives and declare the gospel to a world in need.

III. Board matters

A. Board officers

Board officers for the 2018-2019 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 3

Ms. Marsha Vandergaast will be completing her second term. The board presents the following to the classes in Region 3 for endorsement of the nominee to be presented to Synod 2019 for ratification:

Ms. Alicia (Smit) Sinclair is a 2015 political science and philosophy honors graduate of Calvin College. She received her M.A. in international security studies from Georgetown University in 2017. She is currently living in Toronto, Ontario, and working as a government relations and management consultant at StrategyCorp, Inc. She attends a church plant at the University of Toronto that was started by her home church, First CRC of Toronto. She served on the student senate while at Calvin and was a named scholarship recipient.

2. Region 7

Mr. Michael J. Den Bleyker will be completing his second term. The board presents the following to the classes in Region 7 for endorsement of the nominee to be presented to Synod 2019 for ratification:

Dr. Timothy Howerzyl is a 1995 English and philosophy graduate of Calvin College. He received his M.Div. from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1999 and a Ph.D. in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2015. He has served on the Calvin Theological Seminary board and occasionally teaches online classes for the seminary. He currently serves as the pastor at Bethany CRC in Gallup, New Mexico. He has served as a delegate to synod and has served on multiple church boards and committees. Calvin Theological Seminary President Jul Medenblik describes Dr. Howerzyl this way: "Tim is great. He left our board because he moved out of the area. He is thoughtful and pastoral. He was engaged, and he was a very positive contributor. . . . He served on our Academic Affairs subcommittee. He is now serving in a region where there is a great deal of ministry to and among Native Americans. He is a bridge builder."

3. Region 10

Rev. Chad Pierce was ratified by Synod 2018 to serve as the Region 10 delegate to the Calvin College board. However, he resigned his position in October 2018 due to a conflict of interest. The board presents the following slate of nominees to the classes in Region 10 for election, the results of which will be presented to Synod 2019 for ratification:

Dr. Robert De Wit graduated from Calvin College in 1976 with a B.S. degree, pre-med concentration. He received his Ph.D. in toxicology from the University of Michigan in 1983. He has served in a variety of scientific and leadership roles both locally and abroad. Dr. De Wit is a multiple business owner and is currently determining next steps as a consultant for profit and nonprofit organizations. His previous board service includes Kalamazoo Christian School Association and Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes.

Mr. Benjamin Ipema graduated from Calvin College in 1985 with a computer science degree. He is a multiple business owner and is currently serving as the COO at Level Data, Inc. He has served on numerous boards in the Kalamazoo area, including First National Bank, the Kalamazoo Christian School Association Board (as president), and the Young Life National Marketing Committee (as an adviser). Mr. Ipema has served as an elder and as a deacon at Southern Heights CRC and is currently chairing the congregation's pastor transition team.

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

IV. Finances

We are making progress toward a sustainable financial model and using both natural and financial resources to pursue our mission and make a positive impact on our world. Through the efforts of the *Calvin 2019* strategic plan, we implemented a comprehensive Campus Master Plan, which informed the following projects:

- renovating the Commons Dining Hall
- classroom upgrades with enhanced pedagogical technology and spaces
- planning for a new campus union
- reimagining the 200 level of the Hekman Library, including the installation of a Peet's coffee shop

A team of consultants from Campus Advantage, an external firm with expertise in campus housing, visited campus to complete in-depth analysis and market assessment. Following the visit, the firm provided a list of recommendations aimed at increasing overall housing occupancy and identifying a long-range strategic plan for on-campus housing at Calvin.

President Le Roy signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment. The college has been evaluating its energy use and implementing multiple projects in support of this commitment to lowering Calvin's carbon footprint.

The following developments have increased institutional and financial efficiencies within and across departments:

- a new access control system for increased campus safety, security, and efficiency
- implementation of Salesforce to pursue further student success and retention
- implementation of SLATE to manage relationships with prospective students and their families
- implementation of a LEAN Team to create improved collaboration, efficiency, and workflow in a number of areas across the college

The college remains grateful for God's faithfulness and guidance through the past five years of Calvin's strategic plan and the process of improving the college's financial foundation. Calvin's outstanding debt is \$75.3 million as of September 1, 2018, and the college is reducing its principal each year through an amortization schedule.

The college has spent much time this past year studying and analyzing the impact of 2018 tax-law changes for higher education. We have been addressing the increased interest costs on our tax-exempt debt and seeking approval for more favorable bond pricing.

Calvin is also working each year on infrastructure maintenance, as well as new donor-funded projects like educational and functional improvements to the Bunker Interpretive Center.

Charitable contributions to Calvin continue to strengthen student learning. Notably, Calvin recently received a \$1 million National Science Foundation grant to increase student retention in STEM fields.

We are also extremely grateful for continued financial support of student scholarships, our centers and institutes, and our general endowment. As of June 30, 2018, the college's endowment was \$160.8 million. These funds help keep Calvin affordable to students across all fields of study.

V. Academic initiatives

At Calvin, academic pursuits reveal truth and knowledge about the world God created. The following list details select developments since the college's previous report to synod.

- We are grateful that *U.S. News & World Report* ranks Calvin College as number one overall among Midwest regional colleges in its 2019 *Best Colleges Guidebook*. This marks the third consecutive year Calvin has topped its category.
- Calvin students rank among the best in the nation in their Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam pass rate. In 2017, 75 percent of Calvin students taking the CPA exam for the first time passed, a rate 25 percent higher than the national average.
- Calvin received recognition for its outstanding social work program, ranked in the top forty programs nationwide by *The Best Schools*.
- A reimagined honors program aims to expand the program's interdisciplinary focus and sense of community. The restructured program is built around a two-track model to improve program completion, community, and interdisciplinary learning.
- The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship recently launched the Teacher-Scholar program, a second stream of grants in its successful Vital Worship Grants Program.

- Calvin is collaborating with the Grand Rapids African American Health Institute and six area higher-education institutions to create “Pathways to Careers in Healthcare” for area students of color.

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 reappointments with tenure, effective September 1, 2019:

Ryan M. Bebej, Ph.D., associate professor of biology

Scott G. Lamanna, Ph.D., associate professor of Spanish

Jaclynn L. Lubbers, D.N.P., associate professor of nursing

Jesse R. Moes, Ph.D., associate professor of nursing

Kevin Timpe, Ph.D., professor of philosophy, William Harry Jellema Chair in Christian Philosophy (three-year appointment to chair)

Roman R. Williams, Ph.D., associate professor of sociology

- 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 launched at Synod 2015 as a new denominational initiative, and we are now marking our fourth birthday as we continue a multiyear 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 and volunteer) who are responsible for setting direction in faith formation. We serve them by listening, by developing relationships, and by providing coaching and adaptable resources to design and build a framework for lifelong faith formation that fits their setting.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

The Psalter begins by declaring, "Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night" (Ps. 1:1-2). The psalmist is celebrating an *immersive faith formation lifestyle*—that is, a way of life in which faith formation practices provide a shaping influence every moment of the day.

At Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) we understand our calling as walking with congregations as they equip believers to form Psalm 1 communities shaped by immersive faith formation lifestyles.

During the past year we have specifically focused on this goal by doing the following:

- Developing a rich array of resources to support faith formation in the home, recognizing that church and home must work intentionally and synergistically together to encourage immersive faith formation.
- Continuing to resource the church as an intergenerational community by supplementing our existing resources with faith formation materials for people age sixty and over (in the "third" of life). With our newest resources, we now have materials for all age groups in the church.
- Creating processes to refresh Reformed children's curriculum, filling the gap left when Faith Alive Christian Resources finished its work in 2013.
- Continuing to equip classis-based youth ministry champions, who support youth ministry (both as a separate ministry and as part of all that a church does) in the congregations of their classes.
- Publishing a faith formation primer—*Till Christ Be Born in Us*—providing a framework and vocabulary for congregational planning and implementation related to faith formation.

FFM's serving process is highly interactive. We are continually listening to feedback from church leaders as we serve them, and this feedback shapes our ongoing growth. This feedback has shaped our priorities: we heard needs expressed for supporting families and older members, and we recognized that many congregations found it difficult to be intentional about faith formation because a clear vocabulary did not exist. Synod 2018 affirmed the

need for a Reformed children's curriculum, and the Council of Delegates officially added this task to FFM's mandate last year.

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

Psalm 1 continues, "That person is like a tree planted by streams of waer, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers" (v. 3).

Immersive faith formation lifestyles are transformational: they bear fruit. In our short history at FFM we have continually reflected on the fruitfulness (or lack thereof) of our ministry, and we have learned the following:

1. It is easy to become busy. It is much more challenging to discern what ministry activities truly bear kingdom fruit.
2. It is quite easy to host inspirational events. It is much more challenging to host transformational events.
3. When a faith formation concept or term is unfamiliar to people, they need to hear it many times in various settings before it begins to "stick."

With these learnings in mind, we seek to connect with churches in the following ways:

1. We seek to form long-term relationships with church leaders, listening to them, resourcing them, following up with them, encouraging them.
2. We provide updates on our resources, mini-workshops, and—upon request—longer workshops at classis meetings, and we use these meetings to have multiple informal conversations with church leaders.
3. We host workshops on a wide variety of topics, and we structure our workshops so that they have capacity to form long-term "after the workshop" working relationships among participants who attend.
4. We place dozens of blog postings every year to share stories of transformation and to help make the terms and concepts of faith formation more familiar to readers and listeners.
5. We host user-friendly webinars on specific topics relevant for faith formation.

Our team of 15 members (6.4 FTE) feels both privileged by the task with which we have been entrusted and overwhelmed by the magnitude of our calling. In our short history we have experienced the Lord's goodness again and again.

IV. FFM leadership transition

Faith Formation Ministries launched in 2015 under the leadership of Dr. Syd Hielema. Dr. Hielema has indicated that he will leave this role on July 1, 2019, to take on the directorship of the Lilly-funded Connections II project. We expect that a successor will be appointed by the time synod convenes and that both Dr. Hielema and his successor will be present at synod.

V. Conclusion

In light of the developments described above, Faith Formation Ministries has processed several recommendations through the Council of Delegates for consideration by synod. (Please refer to the COD Report, Recommendations section.)

Our entire FFM team continues to find it a rich privilege to be entrusted with developing a young ministry for the Christian Reformed Church, and we are encouraged by ongoing responses to our service. We find ourselves thanking the Lord daily for his faithfulness present in the CRCNA as “Christ is formed in [us]” (Gal. 4:19).

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

I. Introduction

Since 1913, CRC ministers have responded to the spiritual care needs of people outside the church by serving as chaplains. In 1942 synod endorsed and aided CRC chaplains through the creation and approval of CRC Chaplaincy Ministry (now called Chaplaincy and Care Ministry). Despite having one of the CRC's smaller staffs (2 FTE) and budgets (a little over \$300,000), Chaplaincy and Care Ministry endorses 142 ordained clergy (over 10% of total CRC clergy) as full- or part-time chaplains, who annually provide the equivalent of over \$10 million in ministry to over two million individuals and families that the church would otherwise not reach. While institutions are the employers of chaplains, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, in collaboration with local CRC churches, supports their ministry through endorsement and joint supervision. Chaplaincy and Care Ministry has grown its number of endorsed chaplains by 5-10 percent each year for the past decade.

Mandate—“Chaplains are called by the church to extend the ministry of Christ to persons in institutional and specialized settings” (*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 685).

Mission—Chaplaincy and Care Ministry’s mission, overseen by the Council of Delegates, is to implement, regulate, and develop the denomination’s commitment to chaplaincy. We carry out this mission in the following ways:

- overseeing the denominational endorsement process for chaplains
- providing pastoral support and advocacy for endorsed chaplains
- facilitating shared supervision with chaplains’ calling churches
- informing and educating the CRCNA on chaplaincy and related ministries
- administering training grants
- recruiting chaplains
- conducting training
- promoting the development of chaplaincy
- participating in national endorsement-related organizations

Characteristics of chaplaincy ministry (*Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 685-86)

- Chaplaincy is pastoral. It seeks those separated from the settled congregation and extends a ministry of compassion, healing, and reconciliation.
- Chaplaincy is holistic. It is a ministry of Word and deed, concerned about the well-being of the whole person. It encourages healing in a hospital, hope in a prison, and freedom for the addicted. It speaks for the voiceless, and it advocates for justice, bringing God’s shalom to the broken parts of our world.
- Chaplaincy functions within “total institutions.” The military, the hospital, the prison, and the large corporation are all separate entities with environments that tend toward regimentation, depersonalization, and

- loss of freedom. Chaplains advocate for people's spiritual needs within these settings.
- Chaplaincy is public. Chaplains often serve in an interfaith setting where a witness to the faith is welcomed. An interfaith setting requires sensitivity to other faith traditions and readiness to work with people from those traditions, providing a unique opportunity to let the light of Christ shine.
 - Chaplaincy is team work. Chaplains work alongside other disciplines for the health and well-being of the people they serve.
 - Chaplaincy requires special training. The settings in which chaplains minister are different from those of parish ministry and require training that focuses 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.

II. Ministries of the Office of Chaplaincy and Care

A. Ministry that reflects our calling

1. Servant leadership

The lifelong equipping of leaders is essential for churches and ministries to flourish as servants in the kingdom of God. Chaplaincy and Care Ministry enlists, endorses, encourages, and enfolds leaders who are called to chaplaincy ministry while increasing awareness in congregations.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry enlists new chaplains through seeking out prospective students and pastors who show giftedness for specialized ministry. Every year we visit six to eight colleges and seminaries, and we interact with hundreds of churches and dozens of classes. In 2018 these interactions provided mentoring and guidance to over fifty students and seventy-seven other inquiring individuals as they sought to discern their calling and prepare for specialized ministry.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry also endorses chaplains, enabling them to work in specialized ministry. Endorsement is an official declaration by the CRCNA that the chaplain meets qualifications and demonstrates (through written essays, interviews, vocational assessment, training reports, and mutual discernment) the core competencies to serve in specialized ministry. Endorsement is an ongoing covenant relationship between the CRCNA, the chaplain, and the calling church. In 2018, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry endorsed six new chaplains: Harry Conner, Daniel Crapo, Chris Fluit, Albert Kae, Sheryl Leisman, and David Leung. Additionally, each endorsement is reviewed every five years. This past year, endorsements were renewed for twenty-eight chaplains.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry encourages and enfolds new chaplains through supporting specialized training. Endorsed chaplains are required to have a master's degree in pastoral care or theology as well as an additional 800 hours of specialized training (i.e., Clinical Pastoral Education or military chaplain training). Chaplaincy and Care Ministry provides grants, funded through the generous gifts of chaplains and churches apart from ministry share giving, to help prospective chaplains achieve this training. In 2018, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry provided \$20,047 in grants to fourteen students and prospective chaplains.

2. Gospel proclamation and worship

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry assists and equips endorsed chaplains to provide pastoral ministry in contextually appropriate ways. Chaplains work on the fringe of society, often within nonreligious institutions, in settings where the guidance and support of their faith community can be minimal. Chaplaincy and Care Ministry advocates for the chaplain within the denomination, in professional certifying agencies, and with employers. We also provide care, training, and resources to help chaplains flourish in ministry as they proclaim the gospel.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry provides care for chaplains through regular denominational contact. We connect with chaplains through cluster groups, emails, meaningful phone calls, and in-person visits. In 2018, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry provided support and advocacy for over 171 active and retired chaplains, totaling 1,412 distinct interactions with them.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry trains chaplains through an annual Chaplains Training conference. This three-day event provides education, spiritual formation, dynamic worship, and community building for chaplains across the United States and Canada. In 2018, 138 people attended this training.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry develops and shares pastoral resources for chaplains through social media groups, website updates, bimonthly newsletters, prayer requests, and articles for the Network and *The Banner*. With our change in staffing from a part-time administrative assistant to hiring a full-time communications specialist, we have revised and updated our communications to be more accessible to CRC chaplains and to share their ministry and impact with churches.

3. Faith formation

Chaplains extend the ministry of Christ on behalf of the church into the lives of people who are hurting, in crisis, uprooted, dislocated, lost, or feeling hopeless. As hands and feet of the body of Christ, chaplains bring change, healing, faith, hope, and justice to these individuals and families. Because they interact with so many lives each year, chaplains have significant potential for introducing and strengthening faith far beyond the walls of the church.

Chaplains influence the institutions they serve by calling them to ethical standards of care and concern. They offer help, show mercy, and often serve as key members of ethics committees or give moral advice to the organizations in which they work. Institutions respect chaplains for their insight regarding policies and procedures affecting justice issues. Additionally, chaplains lead in religious education and worship opportunities in places where the church might otherwise not be visible—in hospital chapels, veterans' facilities, long-term care facilities, prisons, college campuses, and military bases. Few other voices have access to such important cultural arenas.

Chaplains are also a formational resource for the church. They are highly trained and experienced and can educate local congregations, classes, and regional organizations on the art and theory of pastoral care. Chaplains do this by sharing resource materials, providing in-person training, sharing ministry stories, and leading in their local churches.

B. Collaborative efforts

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry often addresses issues that require collaboration with the offices of Candidacy, Resonate Global Mission's campus ministries, Pastor Church Resources, Worship Ministries, Leadership Development for Women and Ethnic Minorities, Safe Church Ministry, and Disability Concerns. As we recruit and develop chaplains, we work with various seminaries, the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, and professional chaplain certifying organizations. We collaborate with chaplains and the endorser for the Reformed Church in America, as well as with other faith group endorsers to advocate for chaplaincy and religious freedom issues in the United States and Canada.

C. Diversity and development of future ministry

In the past few years CRC endorsed chaplains have become more diverse, with 15-30 percent of newly endorsed chaplains being female or of an ethnic minority. Currently 30 percent of our endorsed chaplains are female, and 12 percent represent an ethnic minority group. Our students and other inquiring individuals represent a diverse group from a variety of ages, ethnic backgrounds, and levels of ministry experience. With this increase in student and prospective chaplain diversity, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry expects diversity to continue increasing in the future.

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

The Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry is serving the church through spiritual care resources and stronger connections with chaplains. Each chaplain formulates a Covenant of Joint Supervision, signed by the chaplain, the supervising church council, and the director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, in which the church agrees to support and supervise the life and doctrine of the chaplain, and the chaplain agrees to report regularly on his or her ministry and to an extent participate in church leadership.

Over the past year, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry has worked to update its communication materials and resources to more clearly reach chaplains and connect with churches. We have shared chaplain stories and resources through the Network, *The Banner*, our newsletter, and social media. We have developed new promotional materials to educate, inform, and include congregations in chaplaincy ministry. For Chaplaincy and Care Sunday, we provided bulletin inserts, liturgies, a video, and prayers for chaplains to use in their support of chaplains.

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry is meeting the *Our Journey 2020* ministry plan goal of ensuring that chaplain candidates receive appropriate guidance through the endorsement process. This is measured by training completion and the attainment of full endorsement. Currently, 81 percent of chaplains have completed their required 800 hours of specialized training. In 2018, Chaplaincy and Care Ministry approved 14 training grants for specialized training, totaling \$20,047, to help meet this goal. And 83 percent of chaplains are fully endorsed and in a chaplain role, while the rest are taking steps to complete the endorsement process.

IV. 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: 142 (full-time, 93; part-time, 38; endorsed and seeking employment, 11); in the United States, 121; in Canada, 21
2. Military chaplains: 15 on active duty in the United States; 2 on active duty in Canada; 4 in the U.S. National Guard and Reserves; 5 military chaplain candidates
3. Four chaplains retired in 2018: Rev. James Kok, Rev. Dr. Ricardo Orellana, Rev. Gordon Van Enk, and Rev. Steven Van Heest
4. In the past year, military chaplains who have served, or are currently serving, overseas are Jonathan Averill, Chad Haan, Richard Hill, Lloyd Wickers, and 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 for two three-year terms. Members of the board of directors are Mr. James Brewer (2021/1), Mr. Brad Bruinsma (2020/1), Ms. Chery De Boer (2019/2), Mr. Jack Meyer (2020/1), Mr. Kenneth Stienstra (2019/2), and Mr. Howard Van Den Heuvel (2021/1).

Ms. Chery De Boer and Mr. Kenneth Stienstra are completing their second term and are not eligible for reappointment. The board requests that synod appoint two members from the following slates of nominees to serve a first term of three years, renewable for a second term:

Position 1

Mr. Jeffrey Feikens is a member of North Hills CRC in Detroit, Michigan, where he has served as elder, deacon, treasurer, and council vice president. He is employed as an attorney with the law firm Beier Howlett, PC in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and has served as a member of the Southeast Michigan executive council for Wedgwood Christian Services, the Wayne County Character and Fitness Committee, and the Michigan State Bar. He is a member of the Detroit Bar Association. Mr. Feikens is a graduate of Calvin College and of the University of Michigan Law School.

Mr. Jason Zylstra is a member of First CRC in Grand Rapids, where he has served as deacon and as a member of the finance committee and capital campaign committee. He has also served on the finance committee of Safe Haven Ministries, the Grand Rapids Economic Club, and the Great Sports Great Kids student advancement foundation. Mr. Zylstra is a graduate of Calvin College and of Grand Valley State University and is employed by the RDV Corporation, which manages the family foundations of Amway cofounder Richard De Vos.

Position 2

Ms. Barbara De Boer is a member of Living Water Community CRC in Orange City, Iowa, where she has served as elder and in various volunteer roles. She has also served as treasurer for Classis Heartland. Ms. De Boer and her husband served for three years with World Renew in Uganda, East Africa. She is a CPA and is employed by the accounting firm Van Bruggen and Vande Verte, PC in Orange City, Iowa. She earned her accounting degree at Dordt College.

Ms. Nancy Wiesman is a member of Center Grove CRC in Greenwood, Indiana, where she has served as church treasurer for twenty-eight years and

now serves as business manager. She has served on the Women's Christian Fellowship Committee and as president of the Center Grove Elementary School PTO. Ms. Wiesman was formerly employed as accounting manager at the Westview and Columbus Regional hospitals in Indiana. She earned her accounting and business degrees from Indiana State University.

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 2018 fiscal year (June 30, 2018), a total of \$15,044,000 in interest-bearing Investment Certificates held by investors was outstanding. Interest rates vary from 0.75 percent to 2.5 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, 2018, the Loan Fund had \$17,208,000 in loans and interest outstanding. Loan delinquencies do occur from time to time, but they are closely monitored and are very low. There are no delinquencies at the present time. The fund maintains a loan loss reserve to help cover potential losses. The fund is blessed to have experienced minimal loan losses throughout its history.

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

	2018	2017	2016
Cash and equivalents	\$3,618,933	\$6,102,071	\$14,315,282
Net loans and interest receivable	17,297,235	17,563,541	20,560,566
Other assets	42,587	70,606	298,138
Total assets	\$20,958,755	\$23,736,218	\$35,173,986
Certificates, interest and fees payable	\$15,094,334	\$18,044,395	\$27,666,950
Net assets	5,864,421	5,691,823	7,507,036
Total liabilities and net assets	\$20,958,755	\$23,736,218	\$35,173,986

- E. A summary of the audited financial report as of June 30, 2018, 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 has no 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 the Loan Fund director or any members of the Board of Directors of the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S. when matters pertaining to the Loan Fund are discussed.
- B. That synod appoint two board members from the slates of nominees to the Board of Directors of the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S., to serve a first term of three years.

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

Pastor Church Resources (Ms. Lis Van Harten and Rev. Cecil Van Niejenhuis, codirectors)

I. Introduction

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 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 by introducing the regional pastor program and the mentoring program, encouraging continuing education and sabbatical time for pastors, promoting pastor peer groups, reviewing 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 in order 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 ministry 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. Kim Rankens (Aug. 2018) and Ms. Margie Brenner (Dec. 2018) as administrative coordinators. In summer 2018, Ms. Rachel Schelhaas left her role as administrative

coordinator, and Ms. Jeanne Kallemeyn retired after eleven years of serving PCR as its staff ministry specialist.

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 other 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 Classis Renewal. The typical entry point for engaging congregations—no matter what challenges may be under way—is via PCR's work with people serving in leadership roles.

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

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, suggesting resources when congregations are adding staff or considering a change in organizational structure, and helping with processes by which challenging congregational conversations can be planned and implemented. In 2018, PCR had such interactions with over 300 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 prospective ministers enrolled in the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC). At the event, 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 25 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. Regional pastors provide support, encouragement, and counsel to pastors and spouses (including commissioned pastors and spouses). They 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.
7. Sustaining Congregational Excellence (SCE) began in 2007 to support and encourage smaller congregations in a variety of ways. After 11 years of fruitful ministry, SCE ended on June 30, 2018. During that time, 75 percent of all eligible smaller congregations (or 88% of smaller Canadian churches and 72% of smaller U.S. churches) participated in SCE programming—*over 500 churches*. Churches looking to implement new ministries may apply for an Ignite grant (see crcna.org/Ignite).
8. PCR provides grants for pastor peer groups and biennial conferences for pastors' wives. Since peer group grants were launched in 2003, *nearly 900 pastors* have participated in 302 groups. A conference for pastors' wives (male spouses have not shown interest in such events) was held in September 2018 in Calgary, Alberta. Our first-ever pastors conference will be held in September 2019 in Calgary, Alberta.
9. Reading Ministry Contexts is a segment of leadership training provided by PCR staff for Calvin Theological Seminary students preparing for their first fieldwork assignment. 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. It can be downloaded from the PCR webpage (crcna.org/pcr) or ordered through Faith Alive (faithaliveresources.org). It provides guidance for the various steps of a healthy search process. 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. 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.
11. Vocational Ministry Assessment—In collaboration with Calvin Theological Seminary, PCR's vocational ministry consultant, Rev. Samantha DeJong McCarron, resources and facilitates various vocational assessments. These assessments help ministry leaders understand themselves, their calling, and the context in which they are likely to flourish. Since assessments were first offered in 2016, nearly 500 pastors and ministry

leaders have engaged in an assessment process, and 250 have specifically worked with the vocational ministry consultant. These persons include leaders who are just entering ministry, persons in a time of midlife discernment, persons focusing on developing their own leadership, and persons 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/pcr) 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 Discernment Process—For ten years, the Healthy Church Discernment Process (formerly known as the Healthy Church Initiative) has been helping churches become more vibrant and fruitful. Guided by trained coaches who administer the Healthy Church Survey, the process aims to energize congregations through reflective conversations about their present and future ministry. The conversations are designed to generate pathways toward more faithful and effective ministry. An executive version of the survey is also being used by a number of classes in a church visiting format.
14. Continuing Education (CE) for Pastors—An advisory team oversees the work of bolstering a culture of ongoing learning and formation in ministry for CRC pastors. A website that lists CE opportunities is continually being updated (crcna.org/pcr/pastors/continuing-education-pastors). This past year a Sabbatical Roundtable was hosted by video conference, led by a panel of pastors with recent sabbatical experience. Other round-table discussions are being planned, as this seems to be a fruitful way to gather pastors around specific learning topics.
15. Classis Renewal—at the request of Synod 2018, the new Classis Renewal Advisory Team has continued to explore and address challenges and opportunities facing classes, including analysis of the name and meaning of *classis*, and is in the process of pulling together ministry plans from classes in order to collate and share them with Synod 2020 via the Council of Delegates. The ongoing work of Classis Renewal continues to encompass two broad categories: direct engagement and supportive infrastructure. Regarding direct engagement, PCR has given varying levels of coaching and consultation support to twenty-one classes in the past year. PCR hosted or participated in multiple gatherings in this regard—for example, a gathering with classis leaders in the Great Lakes region. Regarding supportive infrastructure, PCR had been working collaboratively with various ministries to ensure that classes are receiving the support they need. The work of strengthening support for classis

functionaries, as related to the “Better Together” initiative (2013-2015), is also ongoing.

B. *Special ministry initiative projects*

1. Thriving Together program

Thriving Together is a new five-year program funded through a nearly \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. The overall purpose of this program is to create a stronger, more vital culture of mentoring around three undersupported, almost “invisible” transition moments pastors experience: early in a second call, late in career, and while privately wrestling with the question “Should I stay or go?” Through gatherings, resourcing, assessments, and developing mentoring relationships, the Thriving Together initiative crystallizes a trajectory already taking shape in the CRC—sharpening the focus on pastoral relationships.

2. Connections project

Connections is nearing the end 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. In 2018 staff connected with 420 churches and / or ministry leaders. Connections is leading a significant shift in how the denomination resources its congregations. Beginning in July 2019, the Connections II project will begin. This new five-year project will build on what has taken place to date as it seeks to engage all 48 classes. It will focus on equipping congregations by forming regional teams with the existing personnel of ministries such as Resonate Global Mission, Faith Formation Ministries, and others. Funding for both Connections projects is provided by grants from Lilly Endowment Inc.

3. Council/elder training

Many elders and deacons enter office with high hopes of serving the church. However, more and more of them feel unequipped to step in and serve well. Many of them wonder what it means to be an elder or deacon, what their duties are, and how to accomplish their work for the blessing of the church. PCR has taken on the task of providing focused support for councils, council leaders, and council members. Among other things, PCR hopes to develop an online toolkit that will provide guidance for council members and resources for training and ongoing council development.

4. Pastors’ conference

In September 2019 the first-ever PCR conference for pastors will be held in Calgary, Alberta. The theme will be “Refreshed for the Call.” This event will provide an opportunity for pastors to engage in learning while enjoying fellowship, encouragement, and support. This conference will be a joint effort with Faith Formation Ministries.

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*. (This has been translated into Korean and will soon be translated into Spanish.) A Flourishing in Ministry Study began in summer 2017 and will continue for some years to come. The new Thriving Together program builds on the recognized importance of creating space for pastors to be in relationships with colleagues, particularly amid disruptions that transitions can bring. 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.

Church communities that evidence the capacity to receive each other with thanks, and to be enriched by the challenge and reality of differences, are full of truth and grace, bearing witness to the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

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

Rev. Joel Sheeres is completing his second term on the U.S. Board of Pensions in 2019 and is eligible for reappointment to a third three-year term. Concluding service on the U.S. Board of Pensions is Mr. Howard Van Mersbergen. The board recommends the following single nominee for election to a three-year term:

Mr. Alan Van Dyke, a member of Pullman CRC in Chicago, Illinois, was a partner with Latham and Watkins, LLP from 2008 until his retirement in 2018. Mr. Van Dyke was previously an associate and then a partner for twenty-five years with the law firm currently known as Mayer Brown, LLP. He served as a tax lawyer specializing in transactional tax planning, and during the latter half of his career he specialized in representing sponsors of private equity funds in their fundraising and investing activities. In this work, he became familiar with pension funds, including corporate pension funds, pension funds for tax-exempt organizations, and U.S. and non-U.S. governmental pension funds (including, prominently, Canadian governmental pension funds). He is a graduate of Dordt College and an honors graduate of the University of Chicago Law School. Mr. Van Dyke has served several terms as an elder and has served on the board of Roseland Christian School.

B. Canadian Pension Trustees

Ms. Kathy Wassink is completing her first term on the Canadian Pension Trustees in 2019 and is eligible for reappointment to a second three-year term. Completing service on the Canadian Pension Trustees is Mr. Keith Oosthoek. The board recommends the following single nominee for election to a three-year term:

Mr. Dick Vreugdenhil, a member of Hope Fellowship CRC in Courtice, Ontario, is a retired Certified Public Accountant with over forty years of experience in public accounting, auditing, business analysis, controllership, finance, and administration. His experience includes financial management in provincial agency and regional government, including experience with two fully funded defined benefit pension plans. Mr. Vreugdenhil has a business degree (B Comm) from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He has been involved in Zion CRC, Oshawa, Ontario, and in Hope Fellowship CRC as a pastoral-care administrative elder, as a deacon, and as chair of finance.

He has also been involved in Christian education in his community, serving on boards and committees for a number of years.

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, 2018, 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	682	269	951
Ministers receiving benefit payments	592	152	744
Spouses and dependents	178	41	219
Withdrawn participants with vested benefits	117	30	147
Total	1,569	492	2,061

Independent actuarial firms are employed to prepare valuations of the plans. These actuarial valuations furnish the information needed to determine church and participant assessment amounts. The U.S. plan is required to have a valuation every three years while the Canadian plan is required to submit an annual valuation to provincial regulators. Information regarding church and participant assessment amounts will be presented later in this report.

1. Portfolio balances and performance

Plan assets are invested in diversified portfolios under the management of professional investment-management firms. These firms are required to adhere to the denomination's investment guidelines, and their performance is measured against established benchmarks and 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 approximately \$41.8 million for the Canadian plan (as of December 31, 2017). These amounts reflect the present value of the plans' future obligations to all participants including active, disabled, and retired pastors, widows, and dependents.

Market value of the portfolios is summarized as follows:

	December 31, 2018	December 31, 2017
United States (U.S. \$)	\$101,720,000	\$112,213,000
Canada (Can. \$)	58,464,000	61,102,000

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 in recent years, including those approved by synod, are as follows:

- 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.

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|------|---|
| 2011 | <p>Increased the normal retirement from age 65 to age 66.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Froze the final three-year average salary upon which benefits are calculated in Canada at the 2010 level.</p> <p>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.)</p> |
| 2019 | <p>Froze the final three-year average salary upon which benefits are calculated in Canada at the 2016 level and adjusted current benefit payments previously frozen at the 2010 level to reflect the new amounts as appropriate.</p> |

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 2019 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 or provincial 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, 2018, the balances in these plans totaled approximately \$33,475,000 in the United States and \$5,314,000 in Canada. As of that date, there were 339 participants in the U.S. plan and 87 in the Canadian plan, categorized as follows:

	United States	Canada
Active	224	85
Inactive	115	2

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 342 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 235 pastors and employees of local churches, 106 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 626 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 261 pastors and employees of local churches, 206 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and 159 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 to 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 2019 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, 2019.
- D. That synod, by way of the ballot, elect one nominee to a first term and re-appoint one member to a second three-year term on the Canadian Pension Trustees beginning July 1, 2019.

Pensions and Insurance

John H. Bolt, director of finance and operations

I. Introduction

Two years ago the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA affirmed a plan to combine the management of Timothy Leadership Training, Global Coffee Break, and Educational Care. The integration of these ministries optimizes resources and cultivates further growth of nonformal adult education and training. The combination of these three programs has now been named Raise Up Global Ministries.

Values – Raise Up Global Ministries is committed to developing Christian leadership around the world to spread the gospel through biblically based leadership training programs and supporting materials. These programs are guided by the following values: biblically grounded, gospel driven, spirit led, relationally focused, and accessibly delivered. Raise Up has three core divisions:

1. Raise Up Church Leadership – develops leadership skills among pastors and lay leaders through the practical and transformative Timothy Leadership Training program.
2. Raise Up Church in Community – deepens knowledge of the Bible, develops leaders, and strengthens relationships through the accessible Discover Your Bible curriculum and the Coffee Break program.
3. Raise Up Educator Development – develops skills, strategies, and capacities of educators or school administrators through the practical Educational Care program.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Raise Up Global Ministries 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 Coffee Break equips small group leaders within congregations. Through our programs, Raise Up is committed to providing accessible training for the development of these leaders within schools and churches.

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

Raise Up 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. *Raise Up church leadership* – The Timothy Leadership Training program (TLT) has been introduced in over 50 countries and translated into 26 languages, with more than 20 additional translations under way.
1. Partnerships – To provide training to church leaders worldwide, TLT has partnered with Back to God Ministries International, Calvin Theological Seminary, Resonate Global Mission, World Renew, Verre Naasten (an organization in the Netherlands), Providence CRC (Holland, Mich.), and other organizations, churches, and ministries. Used in collaboration with these partners, TLT 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 within training groups as participants discover and value diversity of denominational affiliation, gender, age, and ethnicity—all focused on the gospel. In the past fiscal year just under 1,000 basic trainers and just over 250 advanced trainers were certified in the TLT program.

2. Ministry plan – In this next ministry year TLT looks forward to regional gatherings of advanced trainers in India, Central America, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, providing our international partners the opportunity to learn from each other and deepen their skills.

B. *Raise Up church in community* – Coffee Break and Discover Your Bible equip small group leaders to facilitate Bible discovery in small groups in many countries. 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 multiply as people explore and share together in small groups. This simple method has gospel impact because experienced Christians and persons who are new to the Bible discover more about Jesus together.

1. Global reach – Coffee Break is active with English, Korean, Spanish, and Hindi speakers in 17 countries. The materials are used by congregations, church planters, missionaries, and college campus ministries.
2. Ministry plan – In the coming year, Discover Your Bible plans to launch a new web platform that will enable leaders to more easily purchase study materials and access resources to help them grow as leaders and as participants in the DYB program.

C. *Raise Up educator development* – Educational Care (EC) 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 EC program through our key partner Resonate Global Mission. The materials are available in eight languages, and several more translations are in progress. This past year EC was used in Indonesia, Liberia, Benin, Mali, Uganda, Korea, and the Middle East.
2. Growth – Now that Educational Care has been well tested over several years, plans are in progress to revise the modules for an updated curriculum release.

Thank you for your prayers and financial support that have enabled our ministries to make an impact on thousands of people around the globe 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.

Back to God Ministries International**I. Introduction—Mission and Mandate**

Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) serves as the worldwide media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. With ten indigenous ministry teams that reach nearly every country in our world, BTGMI has seen many changes and developments since it launched as an English radio program, *The Back to God Hour*, in 1939. Still, 80 years later, BTGMI has the same three goals it had in its original mandate: proclaim the gospel, disciple believers in their faith, and strengthen the church. BTGMI thanks you, as members and leaders in the Christian Reformed Church, for your partnership in making this possible.

Mission

The mission of Back to God Ministries International is to share the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen local churches worldwide through our six core strategies:

1. As an agency of the CRCNA mandated to communicate the gospel within and across diverse cultures, we commit to developing and practicing the principle of contextualization. What we say will be clearly and efficiently communicated in the cultural context in ways that ensure that the gospel is truly heard.
2. As an agency charged by the CRCNA to serve the church, we commit to affirming, strengthening, connecting to, and working with and through local gatherings of Christ's body and denominations—to see churches as both sending and receiving, serving and being served.
3. Because we are a witness to the unity of Christ's body, and because we value stewardship of resources, we commit to working in a variety of partnerships with like-minded organizations wherever and however that serves to build capacity, sustainability, and efficient use of resources.
4. We are stewards of God's good gifts, including the gifts of partner organizations and gifts entrusted directly to us. We commit to prayerful, thoughtful, wise allocation of resources, appropriate financial practices, and faithful assessment of both internal and external systems of programs.
5. We commit to creating an excellent staff that stresses participation and development. Our preferred way of working together is in teams where issues can be explored safely and thoroughly, in which decisions are clear and their follow-up is effective. Team leaders are held responsible for processes that ensure effective, efficient, decisions and accountability in follow-up with high morale.
6. We commit to pray together—that God will be glorified through our work, that we may faithfully discern and follow the Spirit's leading, that we may be empowered by the Spirit's presence in our organization and in our lives, and that God's kingdom may come on earth as in heaven.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

The main focus of Back to God Ministries International is global mission. All of our work is guided by the words in our Great Commission, found in Matthew 28. Naturally, though, much of our work also falls under other parts of the CRCNA's fivefold calling as we seek to work alongside churches and ministries worldwide.

A. Global mission

BTGMI carries out ministry in ten major world languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

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

For example, Leonel, a teacher from the southern area of Mexico, sent this letter: "We thank you for radio programs that provide good and practical examples on how to live a Christian life. Today these teachings are more and more needed in a country that faces so many challenges."

When one of Beijing's largest unregistered churches was shut down, its leaders were devastated. To continue sharing the gospel, they turned to technology, encouraging people to listen to audio sermons in small groups. Now BTGMI is working alongside this church and others like it to produce these audio sermons, offering the good news without boundaries or limitations.

1. BTGMI employs more than 191 indigenous staff members working around the world. BTGMI has a ministry presence in 60 countries through production and discipleship centers, broadcast locations, and resource distribution. In addition, BTGMI reaches people in nearly every country through Internet and mobile app resources.
2. BTGMI's international ministry teams have developed 33 ministry websites in 10 languages supported by 57 social media sites. BTGMI produces 58 radio / audio programs and 21 TV / video programs.
3. We distribute more than one million printed devotional booklets each year in five languages. In general, the number of print daily devotional guides has decreased as we are able to reach more people in more places digitally through email, Facebook, and smartphone apps. More than three million people globally receive our digital devotions—and this number increases every day.
4. A network of more than 5,800 prayer partners in North America and throughout the world pray regularly for people who respond to our media outreach.
5. BTGMI global outreach is strengthened through crucial networks of North American and international partners. Strong collaborations create effective partnerships for mission and allow resources to be invested wisely.

In addition to our sister ministries within the CRCNA, BTGMI works cooperatively with the following Reformed denominations worldwide:

North America (Reformed Church in America), Japan (Reformed Church in Japan), Brazil (Presbyterian Church of Brazil), Mexico (National Presbyterian Church in Mexico), Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church), Egypt (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of 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.

B. Faith formation on the global mission field

BTGMI provides faith formation resources in the English language under the brand ReFrame Media. To learn more about those resources, see section III, Connecting with churches, below or visit ReRrameMedia.com.

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.

1. Audio and video programs apply God's Word directly to people's lives through Bible teaching programs that offer Reformed, biblical perspectives on current cultural issues within the context of the nations in which we do ministry.

Jose, who follows programs from our Portuguese ministry, shared how this has helped him grow deeper in his understanding of the Christian faith. He shared, "I have grown a lot with your messages. God has used your [ministry] greatly. I am not a pastor, but I so much love the word of truth."

2. BTGMI offers print resources, including devotions in nearly every language ministry. This content is also available online. In every ministry BTGMI regularly hears from people who are grateful to receive meaningful reflections on God's Word.

In Indonesia, BTGMI's ministry partners produce devotions for four life stages—children, teens, adults, and senior citizens—sharing the gospel with relevant messages for any age group. Often groups will gather in community centers or in homes to read and discuss these devotions or BTGMI radio programs.

3. In 2018, BTGMI began working with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt, Synod of the Nile (EPCE) and Words of Hope, the media ministry associated with the Reformed Church in America, to expand ministry around the Arabic-speaking world. At the end of 2018, the EPCE appointed Ramy Gamal as leader for this ministry. Earlier in 2018, BTGMI and EPCE launched the ministry's first project—an Arabic translation of the CRCNA-produced *Seeking God's Face* devotional prayer book.
4. In Haiti nearly 350 new believers enrolled in our Bible study by correspondence course in 2018, in partnership with 19 local churches.

C. Servant leadership on the global mission field

Back to God Ministries International is blessed to work with indigenous leaders gifted in both ministry and media. These leaders and their teams provide culturally relevant outreach in each of our ten language ministries.

1. In addition to Ramy Gamal (see section II, B, 3 above), our international ministry leaders include Pastor Jerry An (Chinese), Rev. Steven Koster (English), Rev. Masao Yamashita (Japanese), Rev. Hernandes Lopes (Portuguese), Rev. Sergei Sosedkin (Russian), Rev. Guillermo Serrano (Spanish). French ministry coordinators include Rev. Marc Nabie in Burkina Faso, Rev. Jacky Chéry in Haiti, and Mr. Rabo Godi in Niger. YKB, the Indonesian ministry, is searching for a new leader.
 - a. In preparation for the retirement of Rev. Guillermo Serrano as Spanish ministry leader, Rev. Serrano and Rev. Kurt Selles, BTGMI director, met with potential local partners to discern a ministry base for ongoing Spanish media ministry. In December 2018, BTGMI signed a seven-month memorandum of understanding with the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico (INPM) in anticipation of a long-term partnership. Rev. Serrano will likely continue as a consultant and program host after his retirement.
2. BTGMI's Chinese ministry team produced an eight-part video series with interviews from renowned Reformed scholars, including Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Richard Mouw. Translated into Chinese, these videos gained tens of thousands of views in their first weeks of release and provided a model for Chinese scholars, including those who are studying at Calvin Theological Seminary. “[The video series] gives me another picture of how to be a Christian scholar as well as a father and husband—and that’s incredible,” said one student.
In addition, Pastor An facilitates symposia for church leaders in both Asia and North America to promote the use of media for gospel outreach.
3. The goal of all BTGMI-related training events is to equip leaders for sharing the gospel in the context to which God has called them. Our international leadership training events also included the following:
 - a. French ministry leader Rev. Marc Nabie expanded Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLTI) events in West Africa.
 - b. In India and nearby countries, BTGMI's Hindi ministry leader led leadership training events for pastors, church leaders, media producers, and VBS teachers.
 - c. Rev. Sergei Sosedkin and his team provided leadership seminars for Russian-speaking students and future church leaders who are attending universities in Russia and Ukraine.

D. Mercy and justice on the global mission field

While the mission of BTGMI is primarily global media missions, ministry teams and partners have opportunities to provide comfort and assistance to people who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and disadvantaged. Many BTGMI programs provide messages of hope for people who are living in incredibly difficult circumstances—questioning their beliefs in places where

that is not permitted, living in physical poverty, or suffering from sickness. In these ways, we also address issues of social justice through our various programs in several languages.

1. Our ministry partners in India practice a holistic approach, providing for physical as well as spiritual needs. The team ministers to women and children in poverty, providing a health clinic, tutoring for children living in local slums, and job-skills training for women. This outreach meets the practical needs of our listening audience and community members.
2. Our Japanese ministry team launched its *Words of Hope* audio program for people who suffered devastating loss after the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in northern Japan in 2011. Although the ministry team no longer produces new episodes of this program, they began sharing the messages in western Japan in 2018 after floods and landslides damaged at least 30,000 homes.
3. Since 2011, our *Family Fire* ministry (see point III, A, 4 below) has been producing materials for English speakers experiencing pain and brokenness in their lives, and in 2018 it began doing this in a new way. In October, *Family Fire* started a Facebook group for women looking to improve their marriage through prayer. Within the first day, more than 300 people signed up! Although the page is managed and mediated by *Family Fire* staff, it has been deeply encouraging to observe the ways in which group members have been lifting up and advising one another. This smaller, more specific group serves as a model for future opportunities.
4. With the goal of teaching and encouraging Christ-followers to live out their faith, ReFrame also produces the *Think Christian* online blog and the *Groundwork* audio program, regularly offering discussion on issues related to biblical justice. For example, in May 2018, when a popular rap artist released a music video that offered commentary on gun violence in the United States, *Think Christian* posted an article that draws comparisons to a call-to-action in the book of Nehemiah. “[The music video] asks us to take a long, hard look at things many of us would prefer to ignore, including those of us in the church,” the article states.

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 to call people into relationship with God:

1. We have increasingly moved to a model of partnership with local denominations and organizations in our international ministries. This provides a greater opportunity for local ownership and sustainability.

BTGMI's ministry in Japan has always been in partnership with the Reformed Church of Japan (RCJ), but in October 2016 this ministry officially became the first mission agency of the RCJ. With this transition to local ownership, RCJ congregations are increasingly seeing the value in this media ministry to their own people and are supporting it financially. As BTGMI transitions its leadership and ministry base for Spanish ministry

(see section III, C, 1, a above), we hope to draw from the successful partnership in Japan as a model for future ministry.

2. As our world in general moves to a more paperless society, BTGMI is expanding its use of digital outreach for sharing the gospel: developing new apps, expanding email and social media audiences, and sharing almost all content online, even if it is also available offline.
3. Gospel proclamation in French-speaking West Africa

In 2014 BTGMI staff were seeking God's guidance as it re-launched French ministry in West Africa. Looking to establish ministry in a Muslim majority country, develop local voices, and seek connections with already-established CRC-related ministries, BTGMI ultimately chose Burkina Faso as its new location for French ministry. Since then, we have been overwhelmed by God's provision.

In 2015, we began working in Burkina Faso under the leadership of Rev. Marc Nabie. Rev. Nabie had already been working with the Timothy Leadership Training Institute, and he was eager to see how God could use media to expand ministry to Muslim background believers. Since then, Rev. Nabie has helped to launch new programs that speak specifically to needs in West Africa, and he has helped to continue French programs that also reach Haiti and Niger.

As of this writing, BTGMI has not yet performed a three-year assessment of this new ministry, but that is scheduled for spring 2019. Nonetheless, through testimonies like the following, we know God has been leading the way for ministry there. A local listener called our offices to say, "After listening to your program several times, I decided to give my life to Jesus. Yesterday I went to a church, and I am very enthusiastic. I want to visit your office soon."

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. ReFrame Media

BTGMI's English ministry, ReFrame Media, offers a family of programs to help people of all ages and stages of faith reframe their lives in the light of God's Word. Resources available to churches, families, and individuals include the following and can be found at ReFrameMedia.com:

1. The *Today* devotions, produced since 1950, are available in print, on the web at TodayDevotional.com, by email subscription, Facebook posts, and digital apps. We print and distribute nearly 175,000 *Today* booklets six times each year, and more than 165,000 people have signed up to access the *Today* daily email; in addition, about 75,000 people use the *Today* devotional app on their mobile devices.

Today is also received by more than 9,000 prisoners throughout North America. We receive numerous comments from inmates whose lives have been changed by God through the *Today* devotional readings. As a prison ministry volunteer, Carol witnesses this life-change firsthand. She wrote, "I take the *Today* devotions to share with women in prison. They look

forward to getting them. Some read them together and talk about them. So many gals have given their heart to the Lord. It's so exciting!"

2. *Kids Corner* is a children's program for 6- to 12-year-olds. This program has transitioned from a single audio program to a growing collection of online resources delivered across North America for children's spiritual growth. *Kids Corner* launched a new website in 2018, making all 20 seasons of our audio series more readily available and—using online episode guides—more interactive. *Kids Corner* also launched two new pilot video series and ReFrame staff members are gathering feedback from those to discern ministry opportunities for 2019.
3. *Groundwork* is a 30-minute 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. You can listen on the air or online at GroundworkOnline.com.
4. *Family Fire* is an online community (Facebook and website FamilyFire.com) that provides resources to strengthen families through articles, devotions, email and social media interaction, and live retreat events.
5. *Think Christian* is a collaborative online magazine in which authors consider how popular culture and its cultivators interact with God's story. Rooted in the Reformed tradition, *Think Christian* recognizes 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.
6. *Church Juice* helps churches be intentional about how to use the wide variety of media tools available to them in order to effectively communicate with their congregations and communities. Whether it is through marketing, social media, internal communications, website development, or other avenues, *Church Juice* can equip you to energize your church's communications.

Church Juice staff also organize virtual and in-person opportunities for church communicators to come together, learn from, and encourage one another. These in-person opportunities include a workshop at Inspire 2019 on "The Effective Church Website."

Visit ChurchJuice.com for all of *Church Juice*'s free resources, including the following:

- a. Guides on how to use Facebook, Twitter, or other social media.
- b. Real-life examples and case studies from churches that have improved their communication strategies over the years.
- c. Free images that you can use on your church's website or to inspire your own creativity.
- d. Links to the *Church Juice* podcast episodes for on-the-go discussions and guides on church communications.

If you have questions about how your church can improve its communications, start a conversation with *Church Juice* producer, Bryan Haley. Email him anytime at bryan@churchjuice.com.

- B. *Other examples of BTGMI resourcing local churches over the past year*
1. Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) has partnered with the CRC's Korean Council since 2008 to publish the bilingual Korean-English version of *Today*.
 2. 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 the Lilly Foundation, Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, the Institute for Christian Worship, and others.
ReFrame Media has produced 19 ebooks as downloadable pdfs. Several are also available in print for group discussion or personal growth. Topics include forgiveness, ten rules for fair fighting (for couples); Lent and Advent series; the seven deadly sins; bullying, and more.
 3. BTGMI provides videos, bulletin inserts, and ministry update letters. See BackToGod.net for a list of church resources.

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

God's mission is central to our being and to our church! In our changed and changing world, Resonate Global Mission is committed to helping the Christian Reformed Church in North America continue to strive to join God's mission and to call everyone to know and follow Christ.

Resonate Global Mission wants to see the message of the gospel go out in every direction like an expanding, amplifying sound. As we walk alongside the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church, we are eager to find out what the Holy Spirit is doing in mission. Together with you, we are discerning how God is leading this denomination to respond to the challenges of mission work in new ways.

With renewed energy, Resonate is seeking to help churches focus on living out God's mission and proclaiming forgiveness of sins and new life in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit calls all believers to embrace God's mission in their neighborhoods and in the world—to feed the hungry, bring water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, free the prisoner, and proclaim good news to the poor.

Each of us has a vital role to play in God's mission! Resonate seeks to equip each church and each member for that role, for living and sharing the good news. Mission work is not only for an elite squad of missionaries or church planters—our prayer for the future of mission work is that each Christian will be emboldened in living out the good news!

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

Resonate's work is organized around three key outcomes designed to address the challenges our church faces in spreading the gospel. The five ministry priorities of the Christian Reformed Church flow through this work.

Of the five ministry priorities in Our Calling, Resonate's main area of focus is global mission. We start and strengthen churches in North America and around the world. Resonate is also actively engaged in the priorities of faith formation, gospel proclamation and worship, mercy and justice, and servant leadership.

As an agency, Resonate is charged with providing leadership to the Christian Reformed Church in sharing the gospel until it reverberates through the whole world. In doing this, we address the new reality of our globalized culture. The work of mission is not limited to sending people far away!

Here in North America, we need people experienced in international ministry to help churches effectively reach across cultural barriers and forge partnerships with new communities of faith. In other nations, we need expertise in church planting and campus ministry to help people in every nation discover God's plan for their church, community, and life.

Wherever Resonate goes to work, we find that 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 the following 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.

Resonate partners with churches at home and abroad in ministry by fanning the flames of mission and outreach in each congregation. We help Christians answer God's call to gospel proclamation and faith formation. In partnership with churches across the United States and Canada, Resonate plants new churches and walks alongside congregations that seek revitalization and revival. We want to see every church become shaped by God's mission!

Our work to help congregations around the world become mission-shaped is as follows:

1. Church planting

New churches are the most effective means we have to reach new groups of people. Resonate is investing in recruiting, training, coaching, encouragement, and resources for new churches and communities of faith.

2. Strengthening churches

Our local congregations are one of the richest resources for mission. Resonate helps established churches to discover and unleash God's plan for their community. Resonate is investing in strengthening and renewing churches for mission.

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 learning how to live as followers of Jesus.

4. Evangelism

Resonate is investing in training people and congregations to witness and proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ.

Example and story: Embedded faith

Ronnie Lopez's passion for the Reformed faith stems from his time growing up in the Philippines. That's where, 50 years ago, he met Vince Apostol, Resonate Global Mission's first missionary to this country, and became a member and seminary student in the CRC of the Philippines.

"It's embedded in me," Lopez said of the Reformed worldview. "And the moment you understand it, it leads you to a life of gratitude in the Lord."

Today Lopez shares this passion for all things Reformed in the Houston, Texas, area, where he is partnering with Resonate and New Life CRC (Spring, Tex.) to plant a church among Filipino immigrants.

Lopez says people who visit the church and attend Bible studies appreciate the Reformed approach to reading the Bible—as a whole story that we are also a part of today.

"I think they see themselves becoming more aware of their relationship with God and their status in him," said Lopez. "And because of that, they are becoming more familiar with the gospel and are more willing to share it."

Such is the case for Arnold Tamayo, a Filipino immigrant and member of the church plant's leadership team.

"When I first became a Christian, I felt a hunger for the Word of God," said Tamayo. "Now I'm experiencing the same passion I had, because I'm reading and listening to Reformed teaching."

Read more at www.resonateglobalmission.org/ronnie.

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, we need people to undertake mission-focused ministry and contribute to the transformation of their communities. Resonate partners with churches so that both current and future leaders can discover what God has planned for them and can make God’s mission their priority as they serve in the kingdom of God.

Our work to raise up missional leaders is as follows:

1. Campus ministry

Resonate engages universities and colleges in ministry on 37 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, for their fields, and for their universities.

2. Leadership development

We all have a job to do in God’s mission, and our mission field is all around us! Resonate is investing in identifying and equipping individual leaders and teachers worldwide as well as strengthening partnerships with like-minded churches, organizations, and movements for the ongoing formation of full-orbed disciples of Christ.

3. Global mission education

Our staff walks 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: Reunification and reconciliation

Several years ago, Marcial attended a workshop by Resonate Global Mission’s Winabelle (Win) Gritter that inspired him to attend seminary. Now he is helping pastors in Cancun, Mexico, spread God’s message of reconciliation to their churches and communities.

Win has led many workshops for pastors around the world as a Resonate missionary and now (in retirement) as a volunteer. When Marcial participated in one of her workshops several years ago, God changed the trajectory of his life.

Several years later, a number of pastors in Marcial’s area were also shaped by one of Win’s workshops on reconciliation. The pastors wanted to reach many more people than a few workshops would allow, however, so they asked Win to write a book. She agreed to work with them—but wanted the words to come from the pastors themselves.

So they put out a call to the local churches in Cancun, asking for help in writing the book. When Marcial heard of the project, he immediately joined the cause.

Seeing the need for reconciliation in his community, Marcial felt convicted to see this project through. Over the years, the project turned into not just one book but four.

Now the pastors have been able to distribute the lessons to other church leaders in the area, spreading God’s Word about reconciliation and reuniting as one in Christ.

Thank you for supporting Resonate volunteer opportunities that help to spark projects like this one. Please pray for Marcial and other local pastors as they work to share God's message about reconciliation with their churches and communities.

Read more at www.resonateglobalmission.org/marcial.

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 never the work of just one congregation or just one leader. Proclaiming and demonstrating the reconciliation found in Jesus means working together with and learning from others, especially those that may differ from us in culture or ethnic origin. It means not separating evangelism and discipleship from justice and mercy but seeing the gospel as good news for all of life. Resonate dreams of seeing this type of holistic mission network in each community and linking followers of Jesus globally.

Our work of connecting churches in holistic mission networks is as follows:

1. Coaching leaders of holistic mission networks to help local churches come together and accomplish more than they could alone.
2. Sending holistic mission network developers and community chaplains to work in partnership with local congregations.
3. Developing new experiments and methods of mission work so that networks around the globe can learn from one another.
4. 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: It takes a network to sustain a church plant

"I'm not the guy who goes to a conference and says, 'Oh, I found the secret formula to saving our church,'" said Jeff Heerspink, pastor of F Street Neighborhood Church in Lincoln, Nebraska—one of two Christian Re-formed church plants in Classis Heartland.

Located in the urban core of Lincoln, F Street Neighborhood Church does not look or operate like the established churches in its classis that have been around for decades.

"We as the church have a huge vision that we need to raise people in the neighborhood to be the next ministry leaders," he said. "I believe they will be the mighty warriors for the neighborhood. But as romantic as that is, as exciting as that is, that's a long journey with a lot of people who come and go."

That is why Jeff participated in Cultivate, a Resonate program that brings together a network of church planters for training and teaching on topics such as leadership development.

As Jeff notes, however, there is no "secret formula" for a sustainable congregation. That is why learning together as a network of ministry leaders is key.

"I think sometimes you can feel alone [as a church planter]," said Jeff. "Especially when you're a church plant in the middle of a classis of established churches. It's hard to find people who understand you . . . that's why I think

Cultivate is good. It brings you into a peer group of people to process and bounce some ideas off of."

"We're the church plant with hurting, broken, and messy people," said Jeff. "[Having that network] gives us ideas, it gives us encouragement, it gives us hope."

Read more at www.resonateglobalmission.org/jeff.

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

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 the 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 they are 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

East and Central Asia: Paul Yu

East and Southern Africa: Mwanya Wa Kitavi

Europe: Steve Van Zanen

Mexico and Caribbean: Luis Pellecer

Middle East: Name withheld

South and Southeast Asia: Joyce Suh

West Africa: Ron Geerlings

Example and Story: Engaging the changing shape of mission in Canada

When they moved to Western Canada, Ahmad and Haniya (not their real names) were curious about Christianity, but because they were living in a foreign land, they did not know where to begin their search.

Then they found the church pastored by Ray De Lange, a Resonate missionary. "They started coming to our worship services," said Ray. "About four weeks later, they prayed to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior."

North America is becoming increasingly diverse and multicultural. When Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions joined to form Resonate Global Mission, a unique opportunity opened for joining in God's work.

"[We're] living into the reality that mission is *to* everywhere *from* everywhere," said Rich Braaksma, Resonate's Regional Mission Leader for

Western Canada. “We know God is stirring something up. We want to partner with him in that. . . . The world is at our doorstep.”

Ray and his wife, Angie, are Resonate missionaries *to* North America from North America. They moved from the United States to the Greater Vancouver area in Canada to minister to people like Ahmad and Haniya with a Muslim background.

Ray notes that the worldwide movement of people offers a unique opportunity for churches to engage in mission. Resonate provides resources for churches to host mission events and thus join in God’s work not only abroad but also in local neighborhoods.

“Every church is a missional church,” said Rich, “—just as every person in every church is a missionary in the sense that every one of us is called to join in God’s mission.”

Read more at www.resonateglobalmission.org/ahmad.

B. Mobilizing congregations

Resonate comes alongside churches and individuals that want to take a more active role in the global church. Our staff wants 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 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 and Churches Learning Change, 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 email, mailings, and online postings that share news, prayer requests, and resources to share best practices. Our staff connect with classis committees, present at classis meetings and other events, and also preach at local worship services.

Example and Story: The potential of partnership

Emily Van Gerpen had considered becoming a counselor during college—she even studied psychology. But the thought of partnering with others through the grit of life intimidated her, and she wasn't sure she could handle it. But after experiencing a service-learning trip with Resonate Global Mission and Dispatch Project, she decided to return to school and become a counselor.

In June 2017, Emily was one of eight individuals who partnered with people and organizations in Nicaragua. Over the course of ten days, they assisted teachers in classrooms at Resonate's partner ministry Nicaragua Christian Academy in Matagalpa, learned how the organization Luke Society provides water to villages, and painted a building in Jinotepe.

"I was experiencing a country that has faced a lot of political struggle for a very long time, and this has affected every other aspect of daily life for Nicaraguans," said Emily. "It was overwhelming to be there and to want to make everything better—only to realize I never will."

"There's no way we could help to solve such big problems in a ten-day span," she added. "[But] we could be there to support [people]."

During the trip, Emily discovered the potential behind using her gifts in partnership with others. And when she returned home to South Dakota, she knew her life was changing. Just as God called Emily to Nicaragua, he was calling her to another path in life.

Now, more than a year after she volunteered with Resonate, Emily is back in school to earn a master's degree in education, specializing in school counseling.

"I want individuals to know what they're worth, that they have a purpose, and that they're not alone," she said. "I know that people have potential to make things better, both for themselves and for others, and I feel that my mission is to help them see that potential for themselves."

Now, however, she isn't afraid of being unable to handle counseling.

"One of the biggest takeaways [from the trip] was a greater appreciation for my own insignificance—in a good way," she said. "I think there's a lot of strength in knowing how small and powerless you are on your own. Only by knowing that can you know that true strength comes from a much more powerful source: God."

Read more at www.resonateglobalmission.org/emily.

IV. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the director of Resonate Global Mission, Zachary King, the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to Resonate Global Mission are addressed.
- B. That synod encourage all Christian Reformed congregations to recognize the following Sundays as significant opportunities to pray for and to receive an offering for Resonate Global Mission: Easter, Pentecost, the third Sunday in September, and Reformation Day Sunday.

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

Resonate Global Mission
Zachary J. King, director

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. The Centre for Public Dialogue works to encourage active Christian citizenship, studies critical issues facing Canadian society from a Reformed perspective, and interacts with policy makers and shapers in a constructive manner. Our focus issues are currently refugee rights and resettlement, Indigenous justice, and climate change. We also strive to be nimble and responsive on critical issues that come up; recently CCG has been responsive on the matter of the Canada Summer Jobs attestation requirement.

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:

- Providing liturgical and devotional resources connected to Indigenous justice, refugee rights, and climate care via our website and social media. We support binational efforts like the CRCNA Day of Justice (August) and provide devotional and action resources for justice for Indigenous children in connection with our Lenten challenge and offering Sunday. This past year more than one hundred churches across Canada marked our offering Sunday (Justice and Hope Sunday in March).
- Gathering local church members to tell stories and think together about Christ's call to justice through the *Do Justice* blog (dojustice.crcna.org). Through the *Do Justice* columnists initiative, CRC and RCA writers from across North America have regularly shared the ways they are wrestling with the call to do justice in their own local contexts. CCG added seven new columnists focusing on specific issues, from religious persecution to climate change to Reformed theological reflections to refugee sponsorship. We are also working to meet our diversity goal to increase the diversity of *Do Justice* writers to 25 percent persons of color. We also regularly run series to dig deeper into specific issues. Series topics this year have included maternal-child health, Israel-Palestine, Indigenous justice, and the connections between environmental degradation and racism.
- Working closely with the Canadian ministries justice mobilizer, Ms. Cindy Stover, to develop and animate learning opportunities on justice and reconciliation. This currently includes a collaboration with Resonate Global Mission, Faith Formation Ministries, Diaconal Ministries Canada, World Renew, and the Canada justice and reconciliation team to develop communities of learning and practice on justice and reconciliation among congregational leaders.

- The intensifying political and cultural turbulence of our day (related to populism, the digitization and consumerization of political decision-making, and digitally driven cultural individualism) requires a faithful liturgical (public good / service) and prophetic salt-and-light response. For this reason, and inspired in part by recent synodical deliberations, CCG is engaging in theological dialogue and discernment on biblical principles for public discipleship.

B. *Mercy and justice*

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

- Communicating with government through direct interaction with policy makers and shapers from our office in Ottawa and through mobilizing Christian citizens to speak to their elected representatives. We continue to work closely with World Renew, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, and Citizens for Public Justice to encourage local citizen interaction with Members of Parliament on issues related to Canada's refugee sponsorship system. We were especially excited this year to contribute to the elimination of interest on travel loans for refugees. Sponsoring churches have long identified this burdensome cost on newly arrived refugees as a barrier to successful integration. We are also working with the Climate Witness Project to encourage local responsibility and citizen advocacy for climate justice.
- Responding to requests for information from churches and members on current issues of concern.
- Working with CRCNA partners to bring justice-themed workshops to churches. We have worked with World Renew and refugee service providers to refresh *Journey with Me*—a tool that invites churches to hear and respond to the stories of refugees. *Faith in Action: Practicing Biblical Advocacy* is a practical citizen action and reflection tool that we have launched with the Canadian ministries justice mobilizer.

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.

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

A. *Engaging younger members*

Young people make up the largest portion of the *Do Justice* audience: just under one third of our readers are under age 34, and more than 50 percent are under age 44. We launched the Education Together campaign to help teachers engage their students in advocacy for improved Indigenous education (crcna.org/EducationTogether). Two of our young adult supporters actually provided their wedding guests with Education Together Advocacy postcards as *wedding favors!*

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.

E. Staff

As of January 2019, DC has three employees (totaling 1.7 FTE): a full-time director, Rev. Mark Stephenson, who works from the CRC’s Grand Rapids office; a volunteer and communications specialist, Ms. Miriam Spies, who shares her time with Disability Concerns and Safe Church Ministries (20 hours / 10 hours) and works from the CRC’s Burlington office; and a part-time church and volunteer associate, Ms. Dori Dykstra, who works from home.

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 in partnership with two other ministries: Friendship Ministries, which focuses especially on faith formation with persons who have intellectual disabilities, and the CRC's Faith Formation Ministries.

Though Friendship is a ministry independent of the CRC, DC's director 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 sales of Friendship Ministries' resources and the formation of Friendship groups.

Since the second half of 2018, Disability Concerns has placed an emphasis on ministry with older adults, leading two conferences to train advocates and church leaders to be aware of the needs, challenges, and opportunities for older generations in the church. Together with Faith Formation Ministries we are developing a toolkit for churches engaging in ministry with older adults, and we hope to have that ready to introduce at Inspire 2019. In addition, our partnership has produced two new Ten Ways tools: *Ten Ways to Bless and Be Blessed by Older Church Members* and *Ten Ways to Encourage Faith Formation in the "Third" of Life*. We pray that these, along with two other Ten Ways tools—*Ten Ways to Grow in Faith with People of All Abilities* and *Ten Ways to Be a More Inclusive and Welcoming Adult Small Group*—will encourage churches to grow as communities among whom all belong and all serve, including people with advanced age and/or disabilities.

B. Servant leadership

CRC and RCA DC ministries work in a variety of ways to develop people's leadership skills. Identifying and equipping disability advocates is the main way we go about this work.

We equip hundreds of volunteers across both denominations to serve churches and classes to accomplish the mandate, mission, and vision of Disability Concerns. In 2018, 438 church disability advocates and 35 regional disability advocates served Christian Reformed churches and classes.

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. In 2018 over 250 church and regional advocates and others from across North America received training from DC at connection and training events that took place in British Columbia, Michigan, and Ontario. Four churches (two CRC, two RCA) formed a learning community and met several times to learn better how to minister with congregation and community members who struggle with mental health. To network and encourage volunteer advocates, DC staff meet quarterly (by videoconference or in person) with six regional groups of disability advocates across North America.

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.

The CRC DC Advisory Committee and the RCA DC Guiding Coalition serve as one team that advises both ministries through meetings several times per year. CRC DC staff provide advice and assistance to other CRC staff on issues related to disability and ministry.

Faith Alive sold 714 copies of six titles related to disability and ministry. The DC web and Network pages continue to attract additional users, with pageviews up 7.9 percent in 2018 as compared to 2017.

In 2018 Rev. Mark Stephenson received the Ability Award from Disability Network/Lakeshore, presented to honor “those who persist in the vision of communities where people with disabilities can participate, contribute, and belong.”

C. *Global mission*

In addition to the worldwide outreach made possible by our web and Network pages, DC staff regularly consult with other ministries. This past year, Rev. Stephenson led a training session for Reframe Media staff on people-first language (emphasizing the dignity of personhood, in bearing God’s image, over a characteristic such as a disability—for example, saying “people who are blind” rather than “blind people”); approaching biblical healing stories from a non-ableist perspective; and website, email, and app accessibility. In addition, following up a referral from Resonate staff, our director connected people from several CRC and non-CRC ministries with a ministry in India that provides vocational training for people with disabilities. Agency disability advocates, who are CRC agency and educational institution staff, meet several times per year to discuss ways in which all CRC ministries worldwide can engage with people who have disabilities.

D. *Mercy and justice*

The mercy and justice aspect of our denomination’s calling animates and drives 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.

To measure progress in this work, among other things, we look at numbers in the accessibility section of the annual *Yearbook* survey. For example, 305 CRC congregations (30%) worship in barrier-free facilities, and another 644 (63%) have partially accessible facilities; so about 93 percent of CRC church buildings are fully or partially accessible. In addition, 554 churches (54%) have barrier-free sound, and 439 (43%) have barrier-free books/materials in print. Further, 555 churches (54%) offer transportation for people who cannot drive themselves, and 37 percent of congregations have adopted a church policy on disability. In our *Breaking Barriers* newsletter, on our Network pages, and in CRC Communications and *Banner* articles, DC tells encouraging stories of people in CRC and RCA churches who are engaging in disability advocacy, and of churches moving along in the Stages of Disability Attitudes.

Of the four offices identified in the CRC, our work aligns most closely with that 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” (Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons [2016]). 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.

Our director serves on the board of Pathways to Promise, a parachurch organization founded by CRC Disability Concerns and other ministries to help churches minister with people who have mental illnesses and their loved ones.

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

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*. DC consults with worship leaders on the best ways to include people who have disabilities in the church’s life, including worship life.

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

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.

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

Identity: In the Reformed understanding of vocation, God calls all of his people 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.

Collaboration: Through our work with RCA Disability Concerns and other ministries, through the Network, through regular gatherings of disability advocates, and through direct connections with churches, Disability Concerns seeks to foster collaboration that will enhance the ministries of congregations and advance the work of God’s kingdom.

Indigenous Ministries (Canada)

Lately, our Indigenous Ministries in 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 (trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3). Through ministries of compassionate community, awareness raising, and advocacy, ministry with Indigenous persons in Canada and in connection with local churches continues to grow increasingly faithful and strong. This has occurred in concert with both the Centre for Public Dialogue (CPD) and the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee (CIMC; crcna.org/indigenous/canadian). Key to this movement and maturation in our ministry efforts have been the thoughtful review and evaluation efforts of CPD and CIMC in 2018. CIMC now has an annual plan that is affirmed through the CRCNA Canada Corporation as a way of validating their work and its integration with partnerships at the local church level and beyond. In addition, the three Urban Indigenous Ministry Centres received in 2018 a new five-year evaluation of their ministry efforts. All of these evaluations have been processed through the governing board of the CRCNA Canada Corporation.

The Urban Indigenous Ministry Centres in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Regina, Saskatchewan; and Edmonton, Alberta, are funded by the Christian Reformed Church to help meet the spiritual and social needs of Indigenous Canadians and to help them live dignified and harmonious lives. These ministry centers are highly regarded by the communities they serve. In fact, the United Church of Canada recognized the Winnipeg Indigenous Family Centre as a chief example of positive ministry within which they also participate as an ecumenical partner. Ministry participants value the dignity and respect they experience as they attend and participate in the center's programs and community activities.

The **Winnipeg Indigenous Family Centre** had a difficult year amid the city's ongoing crystal-meth crisis. In November, a number of gun-related incidents occurred within blocks of the center, and staff spent many hours intervening with community members who were displaying challenging behaviors because of this drug.

This new year will bring a renewed focus on healing ministries—one-on-one counseling, sharing circles, and times of healing prayer, as well as activities that promote healing in body, soul, mind, and spirit. Intergenerational trauma has been a cause of many ills within the Winnipeg community, but the center is committed to showing that intergenerational love centered in God is stronger. In the light of God's love and Spirit, the ministry leaders request prayer for renewed hope, healing, and restoration.

In January the ministry center in Regina adopted a new operating name, *Indigenous Christian Fellowship* (ICF), to replace its original name, *Indian Metis Christian Fellowship*. ICF 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. A weekly cycle of receiving and sharing donated

clothing and household items, a ministry of repairing and distributing bicycles, and weekly meals served for the community are but some of the ways in which ministry takes place in the name of reconciliation to the people in Regina. ICF is funded primarily through the CRCNA but is also in constant partnership ecumenically with other faith traditions in an effort to raise up both funds and volunteers.

In autumn 2018, ICF celebrated forty years of ministry by holding a gala at Luther College, University of Regina, on October 19, and a “Come and Go Tea” at the ministry center on October 20. Mr. Ray Aldred, Indigenous ministry director for the Vancouver School of Theology, spoke at the gala. The gala was attended by an ecumenical Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience who responded favorably to Mr. Aldred’s address. The “Come and Go Tea” attracted a number of people from throughout the community. The work of the ministry was affirmed by greetings from Dr. Darren Roorda, the CRCNA’s Canadian ministries director, and Bishop Sid Haugen of the Saskatchewan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

The **Edmonton Native Healing Centre** (ENHC) started a counseling program in January 2018 and continues to develop that program more fully. A counselor and practicum student are currently meeting with about fifty-four people each month in an upstairs office space renovated to provide a safe, quiet place for counseling.

A fitness studio, run by Ms. Michelle Nieviadomy, a certified fitness trainer and fourteen-year employee of the center, features classes for yoga, boot camps, a running club, and Zumba. Ms. Nieviadomy also led a women’s retreat at Wabamun Lake for thirty-five women who enjoyed good food, yoga, meditation, and traditional Cree teachings. They endured a cold, wet weekend and came back refreshed.

The center’s drop-in program had around 10,000 visits in the past year. Through this program people have access to a cup of coffee, computers, phone, and fax—as well as sandwiches on Mondays and soup and bannock on Wednesdays.

The center has four permanent employees and seven board members, and all are serving the community of ENHC well. The ministry’s finances have been strong this past year, incurring no new debt while covering a kitchen renovation. The only debt is the mortgage, which is less than \$100,000, so the ministry leaders give thanks for continued blessings. A major funding need for the current year is \$40,000 for a new roof; the current one is thirty years old and in need of replacement. (To contribute to the roof fund, please visit www.e-nhc.org, select the “Donation” button, and follow the instructions. Thank you!)

To increase the local community’s capacity to grow stronger and more vibrant in 2019, ENHC hopes to provide programming such as sharing circles for men and women and a continued focus on mental health issues while creating more education opportunities around health issues.

The Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee consists of key volunteers, the Urban Indigenous Ministry directors, and other ecumenical partners (Reformed Church in America and Presbyterian Church Canada), who continue to urge churches to grow in structuring their ministry toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. CIMC also works on educating churches about

colonialism and its negative influences on Indigenous peoples and how the church and Indigenous peoples need reconciliation with one another.

Educational resources, studies, and other tools are increasingly available. A highlight this year included worship content focusing on the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. CIMC's key hope is for all churches to access the many tools and resources available as reconciliation becomes a stronger theme in our churches—not only reconciliation with God through Christ, but also reconciliation with people in our nation. Given the history of the church in Canada, the process of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is an important way in which the Canadian CRC can work toward shalom.

Together with the Centre for Public Dialogue and KAIROS, CIMC coordinates the use of the KAIROS Blanket Exercise throughout Canada. This 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 Indigenous rights is another important component of Indigenous ministry in Canada. In addition, efforts toward Indigenous education reform carried out by the Committee for Contact with the Government/Centre for Public Dialogue (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 of the Committee for Contact with the Government.)

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) All Nations Heritage celebrations; and (3) 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: *Our Journey 2020 (Ministry Plan)*

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 workshops and resources. We provide several workshops: Widening the Circle (in Canada), Building Bridges, and Church 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 and later contextualized for use in the United States, the Blanket Exercise provides 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.

III. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Servant leadership

In the past year we helped to support servant leadership in the following ways:

- coaching new multiethnic leaders in Classis Greater Los Angeles and Classis California South
- working with Consejo Latino to leverage opportunities with various classes for church planting strategies in California, Arizona, Texas, and New Jersey
- coaching First CRC of Vancouver, British Columbia, on the Diversity and Inclusion report
- sponsoring four students who attend CRC-endorsed institutions under our Race Relations Scholarship Program. More information is available, including the application forms, on our website at crcna.org/race/scholarships.

B. Mercy and justice

We promote mercy and justice efforts in many ways. In 2018 we accomplished the following:

- revamped the Dance of Racial Reconciliation workshop into a new workshop, Looking Back, Moving Forward, which debuts this year in Grand Rapids, Michigan
- created the History of Whiteness workshop for denominational staff in Grand Rapids
- created the Art of Remembering, a new Canadian interactive workshop
- conducted a Cultural Intelligence workshop at Grant (Mich.) CRC
- developed a denominational racial climate survey for the Grand Rapids and Burlington (Ont.) offices. The survey provides an initial baseline toward evaluating a diverse work environment.
- began raising awareness of the theological error of kinism
- provided consulting services to churches on matters of discrimination in Canada
- conducted the Blanket Exercise at the CRCNA denominational building and at Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids with Navajo facilitators
- conducted a Diversity Training workshop at Synod 2018
- led the Racial Justice Film Festival in Canada
- increased the circulation of Race Relations newsletters by 50 percent

C. *Gospel proclamation and worship*

The Office of Race Relations held a Stand Against Racism service (with the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action) at the CRCNA denominational office building in Grand Rapids.

The Office of Race Relations provides bulletin covers and inserts for All Nations Heritage celebrations on the first Sunday in October each year. The 2019 All Nations Heritage Sunday will be Sunday, October 6. Many of our materials are translated in several languages.

IV. Conclusion

The racial climate has become toxic, and the power and witness of the gospel is increasingly vital. The Christian Reformed Church in North America 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. For more information on Race Relations matters, please visit us on the Internet at crcna.org/race and at facebook.com/crccracerelations.

I. Introduction

Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response, to help build communities where 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." The dehumanizing effects of abuse are devastating and can last a lifetime. It is important for each CRC congregation to do its part to prevent future harm and to respond appropriately to this issue that affects so many both in and outside of our churches.

B. Leadership development

The sustainable strategy for Safe Church is to invest in volunteer and paid leaders at all levels of ministry across the United States and Canada. Therefore, we align our ministry 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 2019 we are further developing the role of safe church classis coordinator to equip and support safe church teams.

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

Safe Church Ministry—abuse awareness, prevention, and response—entails all of us working together. Our goal is to see active safe church teams in every classis and in every congregation.

Decisions made at Synod 2018 have led to an increase of information requested annually from churches regarding Safe Church Ministry goals. Initial data show that of 760 churches responding to a recent survey,

- 86 percent have a written safe church or abuse prevention policy.
- 36 percent have protocols in place for responding to church leader misconduct.
- 28 percent have a safe church team or committee.
- 16 percent require training for pastors, elders, and deacons regarding the use and potential abuse of power associated with their position.
- 7 percent use a prevention program with children and youth (Safe Church Ministry recommends *Circle of Grace*).

It is important to note that not all CRC congregations are included in this data. In addition, we have noted discrepancies between these numbers and what our safe church coordinators report. We hope to resolve these discrepancies through greater interaction with churches to gain a more accurate picture as we become more accustomed to tracking this data.

Synod 2018 also requested that Safe Church Ministry report annually regarding classis safe church teams. The data we have received from 48 classes indicates that 12 have an active safe church team (defined as meeting twice annually), 13 do not have a team, and 23 left the question blank. However, many of those reported working toward getting an active team and / or provided the name of a safe church contact for the classis. At the time of this writing, we are only beginning to discuss how these metrics will guide our ministry going forward.

In 2018 we facilitated several training events and hosted our binational Safe Church conference for about 90 people representing 26 classes. We recorded over 770 interactions with churches and individuals responding to various questions, needs, and situations. New resources were created, including *Responding to Abuse: A Toolkit for Churches* and a new promotional video for the *Circle of Grace* program. Most of our Safe Church resources can be found online and are available free of charge. You can find Safe Church at crcna.org/safechurch, on The Network (network.crcna.org/safe-church), and on Facebook (facebook.com/safechurchministry). Over 550 people receive our e-newsletter every other month, and about 30 people subscribe to our monthly prayer guide and have committed to pray for Safe Church Ministry.

Safe Church staff consists of a full-time director and a half-time associate, Rev. Eric Kas, based in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, office. A volunteer and communications coordinator, Ms. Miriam Spies, based in the Burlington, Ontario, office, works ten hours per week for Safe Church Ministry and 20 hours per week for Disability Concerns. We are assisted by a volunteer Advisory Committee (six members), which seeks to reflect the diversity of the denomination with regard to location, nationality, gender, ethnicity, skills, and interests. The majority of our work happens through safe church volunteers and coordinators who serve in their own congregations and classes. We are so thankful for each one. Pray with us that more people may find their calling in serving with 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).

This past year the new Committee for Guidance and Support of the Office of Social Justice was appointed by the Council of Delegates and has begun its work of assisting OSJ in

effectively addressing all relevant levels of U.S. government on significant and pressing issues of the day from an integrally biblical, theological, and confessional perspective, expressed in terms of a Reformed worldview, emphasizing whenever possible the official positions of the CRCNA as adopted by synod.

(COD Minute 5822)

III. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

1. In partnership with Faith Formation Ministries, we continue to promote 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 750 congregational members in more than 100 Christian Reformed 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.
4. This year we produced a new “Faith in Action: Practicing Biblical Advocacy” workshop with CRC partners in Canada to equip CRC members to engage in biblical advocacy. We also continue to use and promote our *Biblical Advocacy 101* pamphlet, available at our Action Center ([justice.crcna.org /action-center](http://justice.crcna.org/action-center)).

B. Servant leadership

1. *Do Justice* (dojustice.crcna.org), a blog in partnership with the Centre for Public Dialogue, provides a diverse, Reformed space for thoughtful voices in the denomination to discuss issues of justice and faith today. The blog specifically elevates the voices of marginalized people on justice issues. Through our *Do Justice* columnists initiative, 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. We added seven new columnists to focus on specific issues from religious persecution to climate change to Reformed theological reflections to refugee sponsorship. We are also working to meet our diversity goal to increase the diversity of *Do Justice* writers to 25 percent persons of color.
2. We continue to nurture networks of justice leaders across the continent. Our Climate Witness Project—a joint project with World Renew—has nine regional organizers across the United States and Canada to help equip CRC members in their regions to learn about the realities of climate change, take steps to better steward resources, and serve as advocates of creation care to elected representatives. In the United States we also equip six immigration organizers who support churches in their areas in loving and advocating with their immigrant neighbors. This past year we were joined by the Reformed Church in America in supporting this network.

C. Global mission

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 year our office and World Renew released the video series *Bangladesh: The Canary in the Coal Mine*, which shows how World Renew is motivating people in Bangladesh to respond to climate change by developing floating gardens, initiating alternative livelihood projects such as raising ducks, and addressing health issues. The series of five videos, accompanied by a study guide, is designed for adult education classes, small group gatherings, and personal use.

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. 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 we updated our World Refugee Day toolkit in partnership with World Renew and the Centre for Public Dialogue, calling CRC members to prayer, welcome, and advocacy in response to our refugee neighbors (see crcna.org/WorldRefugeeDay). CRC members responded enthusiastically to action alerts in support of refugees, with more than 800 online advocacy actions taken by people in both the United States and Canada, reinforcing our denomination's long-standing commitment to refugees by urging their elected representatives toward increasing, not decreasing, our welcome.
2. This year we continued our work on abortion issues by producing Sanctity of Human Life Sunday materials, presenting a series on maternal-child health via our *Do Justice* blog, and sharing posts and discussions about ending abortion via our social media. An unprecedented number of congregations from both sides of the border ordered Sanctity of Human Life bulletin inserts (272 congregations) this year.
3. Through our Climate Witness Project, CRC members in the United States and Canada had thirty 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 from OSJ and World Renew—continues to be our most widely read and shared publication, with over 3,500 subscribers this past year.
2. OSJ produced bulletin inserts for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, focusing this year on the persecution of the church in North Korea. The inserts were well received; 223 churches placed orders.
3. After gathering worship resource submissions from CRC members and editing them with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and CRC

Worship Ministries, we were excited to launch a new set of creation care worship resources, including prayers, liturgies, visuals, sermon notes, songs, and much more (see justice.crcna.org/worship).

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 5,200 recipients, supplying a unique Christian Reformed perspective on social justice news and events. Our *Immigration News* list remains our largest issue-based list with over 2,800 subscribers. To subscribe to any of our publications, visit crcna.org/justice and click on "Connect" in the menu bar.

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

1. We provide focused training and leadership development through the Blanket Exercise, *Church Between Borders*, and restorative justice consultations and trainings.
2. OSJ naturally engages younger generations, and this year we engaged in strong connections with young adults through our *Changed for Life* short-term missions curriculum, immigration workshops in Christian schools, our *Do Justice* blog, the Climate Witness project, youth-led justice initiatives like the Faith and International Development Conference at Calvin College, and our social media coverage of timely issues. Young people make up the largest portion of our *Do Justice* audience: just under one third of our readers are under age 34, and more than 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 twelfth year with a shared full-time coordinator. We have also added a part-time staff member in Canada, in partnership with other Canadian ministries, 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 congregations across the U.S. and Canada. Our work with churches includes challenging and equipping CRC members to personally and publicly commit to take action to make their communities and nations better places to live for immigrants; trainings and tools that empower congregations to respond to the crisis of climate change; and creating resources that help churches and families respond to current, pressing justice issues that allow their faith to come alive in the world.

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 1950, synod was overtured to “consider the advisability of appointing a Synodical Diaconal Committee” (*Acts of Synod 1950*, p. 63). By 1962, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) approved the formation of the denomination’s diaconal agency. Its mandate 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.”

For 56 years World Renew has fulfilled this mandate, reaching out in Christ’s name to people in need around the world. In its essence and existence, World Renew makes every effort to offer to those who hunger and thirst access to the “river of life”: the stream of justice and mercy that flows from the throne of God, and through his church worldwide, to bring healing to the nations.

B. Mission and ministry

In 2018, God accomplished immeasurably more through World Renew than we asked or imagined. By his miraculous power, the opportunities for change that World Renew offered in communities of poverty were transformational. People recognized their God-given resources and turned them into resilience. They built on the confidence that comes with success and developed abiding self-respect. And they heard the whisper of the Spirit saying that their identity bears the imprint of the Holy God. The miraculous changes made in the lives of the people World Renew served are his: we give God the glory for the power of his love at work through all generations!

With your prayers, involvement, and support of many kinds, World Renew was able to partner globally with Christian leaders from 65 churches and outreach organizations in community development last year. Together we ministered in 1,297 communities with 359,950 participants in 21 countries, helping them build new health, literacy, income, agriculture, and leadership skills that improved their long-term living. World Renew also responded to disasters in 19 countries in 2018, assisting 575,093 people with emergency food assistance, clean water, shelter, livelihood rehabilitation, and long-term home repair and rebuilding.

World Renew has never received CRC ministry shares. Instead, the agency depends primarily on the generous donations and offerings of God’s people to resource its mission in communities of poverty. Through its membership in international alliances, World Renew leveraged more than \$26 million (U.S.) in gifts received from generous individuals and churches in 2018 into nearly \$36 million (U.S.) in ministry work. This work was supported by 3,268 volunteers who donated 279,409 hours of their time and gifts to people in need, equivalent to the work of 139 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 five ministry priorities 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 2018, 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." 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 powerful 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. Thank you for contributing faithfully and generously in so many ways to the rebirth of God's kingdom through the work of 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 see the Savior's abundant love for them.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations" (Eph. 3:20-21).

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. *Faith formation*

1. North America

a. Church and family education and classical support

In 2018, 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 ministry. 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 kinds of interactions during classis meetings are becoming increasingly rare, as some classes are changing the focus of their agenda and moving away from this form of dialogue.

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 "Helping without Harming" workshops were offered last year.

Throughout 2018, World Renew's church relations team made opportunities to talk 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 about World Renew's work and

to participate in various church-related events and activities (small groups, Sunday school, youth groups) to share more broadly the work of World Renew. With respect to church and family education, the World Renew annual gift catalog continues to create new resources that both churches and families can use. These not only increase support for World Renew's work but also provide educational tools for Sunday schools and families.

The church relations team continued to create an extensive variety of workshops for 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 17 workshops available for churches and church groups to use. The team has been developing a list of regionally available speakers for churches, sub-church groups, schools, and individuals. The response to these workshop offerings has been very positive. The church relations team has also continued to develop webinars on specific topics. An example of one of these was a webinar in December on the topic of "Helping That Helps (at Christmas and Beyond)."

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. Last year, 34 schools used World Renew's gift catalog and hurricane response materials from Disaster Response Services for learning and raising support. World Renew staff made many academic presentations on poverty and disaster in elementary, middle, and high schools. U.S. World Renew director Ms. Carol Bremer-Bennett provided keynote presentations at several gatherings last year, including the Faith and International Development Conference at Calvin College and the Christian Educators Association. World Renew staff also facilitated workshops at several educator's conventions in 2018.

The King's University in Edmonton, Alberta, has an emeritus staff member who is supported by World Renew and is instrumental in initiating various constituent events in northern Alberta. 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 again facilitating an educator's learning event in July 2019. Students, particularly those in the senior grades, are involved in implementing 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 more learning opportunities in the year ahead.

c. Refugee Office, Canada

In Canada, World Renew's refugee program has the privilege of supporting sponsoring churches and groups from coast to coast as they welcome refugees to their communities and walk alongside them during their resettlement.

Over the past fiscal year, 40 Christian Reformed churches across Canada welcomed refugees from 11 different countries through the refugee program. World Renew is grateful for the many ways that these churches extended a generous welcome to displaced individuals and families seeking safety and a new life in Canada.

This work is particularly meaningful as anti-immigrant sentiment continues to grow in North America and other parts of the world. The work that Christian Reformed churches in Canada do as refugee sponsors, and with refugee claimants and other newcomers, is an inspiring testament to their commitment to living out the gospel call to welcome the stranger.

Considering that the global refugee crisis continues to worsen and there are now over 68 million displaced peoples around the world living mainly in developing countries, it is heartening to see the enthusiasm for this important work continue to be strong. It is also heartening to see the emergence of new cross-border partnerships, as churches in the United States are beginning to support the refugee sponsorship efforts of churches in Canada.

2019 marks the 40th anniversary of the private refugee sponsorship program in Canada and, with it, the 40th anniversary of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada's involvement in refugee sponsorship. To mark this occasion, celebration events are being planned in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, and a special 40th anniversary video has been created. We look forward to celebrating what God has done through the love and compassion of the many refugee-sponsoring churches across Canada.

2. International volunteer opportunities

More than 475 international volunteers participated in justice and compassion ministries with World Renew in 2018. 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 their own faith in the context of global ministry and to faith formation in lives that touched their own.

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

In 2018, World Renew's service opportunities placed 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 power and grace.

B. *Servant leadership*

World Renew's ministry is addressing the pain of a hurting world as the corporate expression of the office of deacon in the body of Christ, his church. As such, World Renew raises up and equips 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 a key outcome of World Renew's activities.

1. Global Volunteer Program

"I was asked by a member of my church what difference we can make," said Pastor James Halstead. "Over the next four years, God provided an answer to that question. In that time, we have seen the development of a new water source, electricity in the village, and a new church building—but it is more than that. World Renew kept telling us, 'It's more than a project, and it's not just about a partnership—it's about a relationship with the church.'"

"I had traveled before on a youth trip to Nicaragua, but I didn't realize how much I would struggle with homesickness, being so far away from family while I was in Uganda," said Embark program volunteer Alex Kloostera. "During my first Sunday worship, I truly experienced the Holy Spirit. I felt a sense of peace and calm, and I knew that God had brought me there and wanted me there. One of the things our Embark group discussed quite often was the difference between a spirit of independence and a spirit of dependence. These discussions helped me to consider a perspective that I had not experienced before."

World Renew's Global Volunteer Program (GVP) 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, semester programs, and youth and young adult opportunities in North America and around the globe.

GVP placed 468 volunteers in ministry positions in 2018, 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 included the Embark discipleship program and short-term opportunities for individuals and teams. Young adults also engaged in college semester programs and three- to six-month immersion opportunities. Medium- and long-term placements, internship opportunities, and professional development opportunities for adults are also available in communities overseas.

2. Disaster response volunteer programs

a. International relief managers

Each year, individuals choose to serve Christ through volunteering with World Renew's international relief manager (IRM) program. These volunteers are highly specialized and provide management support in the context of international disaster work. From writing reports to government donors to overseeing project finances and strengthening the capacity of local partners, these volunteers are critical to the success of disaster-response projects.

In 2018, volunteers served for 596 days in Madagascar, Bangladesh, and Niger. In Madagascar, IRMs worked with a local organization to implement a project that provided food to 7,040 people who were

experiencing significant drought. In Bangladesh, IRMs contributed to the design of an initial response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, providing more than 314,000 people with much-needed assistance. In Niger, IRMs worked with the World Renew office and a local partner to design a community survey that determined the severity of food insecurity that families were experiencing.

Without the support of IRMs, these World Renew responses to international disasters could not have taken place. We are incredibly grateful for the faithfulness of our volunteers who continue to make the ministry of World Renew possible.

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. Nearly 2,800 DRS volunteers from the United States and Canada connected with more than 12,000 households of low-income, elderly, or disabled disaster survivors to provide them with, or connect them to local support for, cost-free labor, support, and resources to help them recover from a flood, fire, tornado, or hurricane in 2018.

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 more than 240,200 hours of their time in 50 disaster-affected communities in North America, repairing and rebuilding 368 homes, helping 46 families with cleanup and debris removal, assessing the needs of more than 2,512 households through personal interviews, and building the capacity of local long-term recovery groups.

World Renew DRS volunteers represented 35 different denominations in 2017-2018 in addition to individuals from 343 CRCs as well as members of the Reformed Church in America, a partner with World Renew DRS in domestic disaster response. DRS volunteers included 566 who were 18 years old and under, and 333 from ages 19 to 30.

3. International development programs

World Renew's international development programs are strengthened through their implementation by servant leaders from Christian partners and churches in local communities. World Renew comes alongside these partners in ways that strengthen their capacity to lead transformation in their communities 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 a servant's heart in their work in their churches and communities, are better able to mobilize local congregations to become catalysts for change. 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 area of mercy and justice, it is work done in the context of global mission. World Renew 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 can powerfully change people's lives, well-being improves and God's kingdom expands.

In Haiti, World Renew works with the Christian Reformed Church of Haiti (ECRH), which has grown to 45 congregations that are celebrating the denomination's 20th anniversary in 2019. The leaders of the ECRH received theological training through Resonate Global Mission last year, and World Renew offered opportunities for community transformation by working through local churches to facilitate community organization, capacity building, and development programs. In this process, local leaders evaluated their community's strengths and growth areas, created a plan to achieve that growth, and shared their results with their church and community members.

In addition to increasing community strength in the ECRH, World Renew helped organize local groups to work on income generation, savings and credit groups, and literacy training, while also helping parents register their children for school. In 2018, World Renew also introduced a community assessment framework in Haiti called the Community Capacity Indicator (CCI).

The ECRH was part of a sample of World Renew ministry partners and communities that participated in the CCI pilot in Haiti. The assessment measured five of our partners' capacity areas: sustainable community ownership, effective and participatory community organizations, equity and equality for vulnerable groups in the community, program quality and results, and spiritual formation.

World Renew Haiti staff hosted ten meetings to ask community members a series of questions and to give each participant a handful of beans to indicate their replies. As the group heard the questions, each member responded by putting their bean by a word at their table indicating their answer: *yes*, *no*, or *not yet*. (World Renew uses this method to involve nonliterate participants in the process.)

The process resulted in a dynamic discussion, with participants challenging each other's answers, clarifying their positions, and sharing information that helped others increase their understanding. The lively discussion brought about a consensus among community members who had started with different opinions and views on how community issues should be understood and addressed. As they identified strengths and weaknesses in their community's capacity, they created step-by-step plans to be accomplished by the community in collaboration with ECRH and World Renew.

This community involvement, *also called capacity building*, requires regular check-ins to monitor progress, and the prospect of achieving those in a short time makes this crucial part of community planning possible. World Renew Haiti reports that the involved communities were very satisfied that they were able to assess and plan for their communities in a short time. World Renew's efforts in strengthening the local leadership in Haiti in 2018 has proved to be a wise investment.

While dealing with the effects of a crisis in denominational leadership four years ago, the ECRH, in accordance with their by-laws, suspended funding for their national programs. During World Renew's evaluation with the ECRH in 2018, national leaders recognized that their local leadership had continued firmly in their work in the community, thanks to World Renew's support. Then, when denominational leadership issues were resolved and program funding resumed, the work bounced back into action. In 2018, denominational leaders looked back with satisfaction at the resilience in their communities, acknowledging that the ECRH as a whole has emerged as strong as ever.

In 2018, World Renew partnered with 65 Christian and community organizations worldwide that reached out to almost 1,300 communities to minister to people with the greatest needs. Helping these partners improve their ministry capacity is a key part of World Renew's mission to give people opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty. We are grateful that this work has been used by God to powerfully transform worldviews, vision, values, and community assets. World Renew, in its calling to justice and mercy, builds the capacity of the church to demonstrate the good news of Jesus Christ.

D. Mercy and justice

The CRCNA formally acknowledges mercy and justice as an integral piece 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 wholeness that God intends in relationships between people and God, their neighbors, and creation.

World Renew's mandate and mission rely on God's mercy and justice to sustain the motivation and movement for the powerful transformation and restoration of a troubled world to God. He graciously chooses to use us, his church worldwide, to accomplish this.

1. International community development

In 2018, World Renew touched the lives of more than 350,000 people in impoverished communities around the world. World Renew's community-based programs in agriculture, health, literacy, saving and 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 facilitated fourteen economic livelihoods projects in eleven countries last year as part of village savings and loan (VSL) programs that were integrated into other local World Renew efforts, where appropriate, such as health and food security. VSL programs remain an essential part of World Renew's economic livelihoods strategy. A key goal is to come alongside local partner groups in each country to strengthen the economic livelihoods and resilience of local communities by forming community savings and loan groups, helping poor families get more access to goods, services, resources, and markets for economic activities, thus helping people earn an adequate income to support themselves.

World Renew's VSL programs grew by more than 45 percent between 2017 and 2018, supporting 10,000 people in forming savings and loan groups, enhancing income generating activities, improving household funding for health and food security, and/or improving market linkages

last year. In Bangladesh, World Renew's VSL programs are being integrated with improvements in the health of mothers and children. With longtime partner SATHI, World Renew's VSL activities are providing loans for sanitary latrines. Jesmin is one of the women who is improving her family's health and income through this project.

Born into a poor family in a remote Bangladeshi village, Jesmin dreamed of going to school when she was young and living a better life. But as she grew, Jesmin's dream became less and less likely, and without much formal education, she married young. She and her husband barely earned enough income to meet their needs even though they worked multiple jobs to make ends meet. There was no time or money for their health, nutrition, or hygiene needs.

Jesmin joined a World Renew-supported women's group in her village through SATHI and started to save money in her group's fund and to attend health classes from World Renew-trained health volunteers. She also discovered that she was pregnant and received counseling from a SATHI-trained traditional birth attendant and prenatal care checkups from a nearby public health facility. When it was time to deliver her baby, she went to her mother-in-law's house, according to her tradition, and safely gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

Soon afterward, Jesmin's community group became eligible to apply for a loan to build a latrine through the World Renew VSL program. Jesmin's application was approved, and a sanitary latrine was placed on the family's property. Aware of health nutrition and hygiene issues from her group training, Jesmin shared her knowledge with her husband and put it into practice at home. Their knowledge is helping them maintain their health and hygiene in practical ways.

Jesmin not only shared her learning and experience with her family but is also educating her community, encouraging them to practice a healthy lifestyle. She especially encourages pregnant women to have prenatal check-ups at least four times at the nearby health facility. Jesmin is now a well-educated, knowledgeable community leader who wants everyone to have the opportunity to enjoy a healthy life. Through World Renew's presence in her community, her life has changed and her childhood dream has come true.

Significant learning emerged from the economic livelihoods and VSL projects of World Renew's development programs in 2018. We are incorporating this learning to spur further growth in the year ahead, including expanding and strengthening VSL groups, further integrating VSL activities into other parts of our work, increasing VSL members' access to financial services, increasing market linkages, and increasing the use of Internet technology.

World Renew's livelihoods and related 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. Leadership development and Bible-based values training encouraged by World Renew also 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.

2. Disaster response

a. International disaster response

Natural disasters and conflict changed the lives of millions of people across the world in 2018. Women and girls, the elderly, and people with disabilities experienced the effects of many of these crises most strongly. In a world broken by sin, World Renew is privileged to be the hands and feet of Christ in his redemptive plan. Through the generous support of churches, individuals, organizations, and institutions, World Renew provided assistance to 575,093 people in 17 countries worldwide. The following stories provide a glimpse of how faithful prayers and generous support equip World Renew to bring the justice and mercy of Christ to families in crisis.

When war enveloped his community in South Sudan, Angelo, who uses a wheelchair, fled into northern Uganda. When he reached his destination, the nearest latrine was far away and difficult for him to access. Without a latrine, Angelo was at risk of infection from cholera and typhoid. Through World Renew's local partner in Uganda, 710 latrines were constructed in 2018, ensuring that Angelo and other refugees seeking shelter would have accessible latrines.

Sayedha, a mother of five, lost her husband in a violent attack by the Myanmar military against innocent Rohingya families. Sayeda left everything behind to find freedom and peace for her children. Now her family lives in a crowded refugee camp, and Sayeda is worried about more than putting food on the table. For women and girls living in refugee camps, a simple trip to collect firewood or to use a communal latrine can be dangerous. World Renew is constructing community kitchens in the camp to give women and girls a safe space to cook and socialize. These opportunities for community can be transformative to Sayeda and other women as they cope with the unimaginable tragedies they have experienced.

For a young girl growing up in Syria, war permeates every corner of her life. Her parents' savings have slowly eroded since the civil war began eight years ago, leaving the family without enough money to buy adequate food to eat. Since 2012, World Renew has walked alongside many Syrian families like this one, providing a total of \$13.8 million (U.S.) in assistance to over 204,000 people affected by the Syrian civil war. Yet the needs of Syrian families continue to increase; World Renew's response remains critical for the survival of families living in a region engulfed by conflict.

Every morning, Cleofe is awake hours before sunrise, baking bread for her daily customers. Along with five other women, she owns a successful bakery in the Philippines. Five years ago, Cleofe's life was much different. When Typhoon Haiyan struck their community in 2013, Cleofe and her husband lost everything. Now, with support and opportunities from World Renew, the couple owns a successful business, and they are thriving. One day, Cleofe dreams of baking the best bread in town.

Six years ago, Doreen and her family struggled to make ends meet in their village in northern Uganda. They didn't have enough money to send their children to school, and poor harvests often left them with little food on the table. They were unable to save money as well. But through a World Renew project in her community, Doreen's life changed. Using lessons she learned from World Renew and a local partner, she began using improved agricultural practices and became a beekeeper. Now Doreen can feed her entire family, and she has earned enough money to build her own home. Doreen dreams of one day sending her children to college.

When Jeremy Benjamin, a Canadian singer-songwriter, learned about World Renew's work in Nigeria, he was inspired. Violence had forced millions of Nigerians to leave their homes and livelihoods in search of safety. For displaced families in such situations, the challenges of daily life are enormous. Without reliable sources of income, many cannot afford to feed themselves adequately. Through a Christian partner in Nigeria, World Renew is providing 8,000 people with enough cash each month to give them the ability to buy what they need most.

World Renew's work in Nigeria inspired Jeremy to share stories of transformation with communities in North America by touring from coast to coast to raise money so that World Renew can continue to provide such critical assistance to conflict survivors. Near the end of 2018, World Renew had received \$56,000 (CDN) from the tour, which was designated for World Renew's work in Nigeria through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGGB) and other partners. CFGGB matched these funds 4-1, creating a total of \$167,626 (CDN) in ministry dollars.

The enthusiastic engagement of Christian Reformed churches, church members, and Christians across Canada with worship, music, Nigeria, CFGGB, and World Renew's responses to poverty, hunger, and injustice was outstanding in 2018. We enter 2019 with full and grateful hearts.

b. Disaster Response Services in North America

World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) provided volunteer-based assistance in communities affected by disaster across the United States and Canada in 2018. DRS volunteers traveled to disaster sites to help provide safe, secure housing for survivors who were income-limited, disabled, elderly, or otherwise unable to recover on their own. These volunteers were from 34 denominations in addition to the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. They helped more than 400 home owners repair, rebuild, or clean up their disaster-damaged homes in the United States and Canada.

Hurricane Maria slammed into Puerto Rico in September 2017 and destroyed Linda's home. "Linda is a single mom who is raising five of her kids by herself," said George and Helen Andringa, World Renew DRS volunteers. "After the hurricane, Linda felt lost and hopeless. She faced losing custody of her kids because the family was homeless.

"World Renew DRS is partnering with the Adventist Disaster and Reconstruction Agency (ADRA) in Puerto Rico, and they were in touch with Linda about her needs. A team of volunteers from World Renew

DRS and ADRA built a three-bedroom house for Linda and her family using hurricane-resistant materials. Linda can once again live with hope and raise her children in their new home.”

DRS plans to continue to send volunteers to Puerto Rico for some time, and to address damage by other hurricanes that hit in 2017 and 2018, along with the destruction by California wildfires and disasters in West Virginia, Mississippi, Florida, and Illinois. As the ministry of DRS grows in response to increasing disasters and interested volunteers, a new staff position has been created. It includes responsibility for tools and vehicles, safety administration, construction supervisors, and warehouse volunteers. This new program operations coordinator position focuses on construction projects and increases the capacity of the ministry as a whole.

In addition to helping communities build capacity to respond to disasters and addressing home rebuilding and repair, World Renew DRS provides communities with spiritual and emotional support during some of the most critical times of their lives. In Williams Lake, British Columbia, for example, World Renew DRS provided both help and healing that resulted in powerful change in the community.

A wildfire destroyed homes and property in Williams Lake last year, with 57,000 people forced to evacuate, including Jim Tanis, pastor of Cariboo Community Church. World Renew DRS worked with Mennonite Disaster Services (MDS) to help families repair and rebuild their homes and help them recover.

As World Renew DRS reached out to residents and church members, the congregation ministered to their neighbors by organizing trauma-healing groups led by World Renew-trained facilitators. Trauma-healing training is done in partnership with the American Bible Society. It has been used by World Renew staff in response to ethnic and religious violence around the world.

In Williams Lake, many trauma-healing participants were Indigenous ministry leaders who worked in communities affected by the fire. “Having a framework that is rooted in the hope we have in the living Word has tremendous value in my life and ministry,” a participant said. “I am eager to take this training back to my reserve.”

The hope and healing that people experienced through World Renew’s intervention in Williams Lake is an example of World Renew’s integrated, holistic ministry approach. Physical and spiritual nurture helps people discover hope in the overcoming power of God’s presence, and to seek to share it with others who are vulnerable and traumatized. By God’s grace, this approach leads to powerful change in people’s lives.

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 2018 more than 270 congregations in the United States and Canada were involved in addressing justice issues in relation to community outreach, poverty alleviation, equity and reconciliation, climate adaptation, peace building, and refugee and immigration policies.

a. United States

In 2018 the U.S. Congregational Justice Mobilization (CJM) partnered with the CRC Office of Social Justice and over 135 congregations, especially in the areas of energy stewardship, creation care, and immigrant and refugee rights, deepening one another's understanding of systemic causes of poverty and advocating on behalf of people who suffer injustice worldwide.

On the topic of creation care, the Climate Witness Project (CWP) mobilized members across the United States and Canada to take action to reduce their own energy footprints and to meet with local policy makers to encourage policies that would care for creation at both local and national levels. CWP partner congregations hosted studies of the film series *Bangladesh: Canary in the Coal Mine*, which looks at the impact of climate change in Bangladesh, how their creation care practices are changing because of climate change, and what these changes mean for Christians in North America. In addition, three congregations in the CRC continued to be Energy Star certified.

On the topic of immigration, more than 70 congregations and groups took specific action. Activities included praying for asylum seekers at the U.S./Mexico border and learning from the stories of asylum seekers. Forty *Church Between Borders* workshops took place, and participants learned about the challenges that people face when trying to gain or maintain legal status in the U.S. immigration system.

b. Justice mobilization Canada

World Renew in Canada is working 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 justice mobilizer position, which was increased from a half-time to three-quarter-time position in 2018.

The Justice Mobilizer position in Canada is focused on analyzing the current engagement of congregations in social justice and their future interests. This analysis was completed in 2018. The justice mobilizer is now using that data to build a network among these congregations and their justice leaders, developing coaching activities that will more deeply engage them in their justice involvements and introduce them to new opportunities.

Continuing their long-standing partnership with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFG) and the Gates Foundation, World Renew began a multiyear participation in CFG's new iCare Campaign, which encourages Canadian citizens to communicate to their Members of Parliament that they care deeply about international aid, with the aim of increasing Canada's funding commitments for programs that support agricultural development around the world.

The World Renew director in Canada, board members, and staff participated in the advocacy by contacting Parliament and partnered with CFG to host various advocacy events for the iCare Campaign. A particularly rewarding outcome resulted from Jeremy Benjamin's "I Am Not My Own" concert tour, which visited CRC churches and communities across Canada, raising awareness and funds for World Renew,

CFG, and other justice ministries of the CRCNA. The tour events also provided a venue for signing and sending of hundreds of CFG “iCare cards” to Canadian government officials.

World Renew supported Canadians with resources to further advocate for just domestic and international policies. The *Biblical Justice 101* resource was expanded to include a four-session workshop called Faith in Action: Practicing Biblical Advocacy. The workshop explains each step of the advocacy process, from research, to letter writing, to planning and carrying out meetings with elected officials. The activity was piloted in various settings (churches, schools, public groups) with more than 100 participants last year.

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, the organization, and many people we work with—issues relating to refugees, immigrants, creation care, religious discrimination, and racism.

The World Renew-Canada director, Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, presented to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, not only encouraging them to sign on to the United Nations Global Compact on Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration but also explaining the importance of keeping commitments that the government of Canada makes to protect vulnerable refugees, whether they are arriving in Canada or are experiencing displacement around the world. Since that presentation, the government of Canada joined 152 countries who voted in favor of the resolution to endorse the compact at the United Nations General Assembly on December 19, 2018. The United States, Hungary, Israel, the Czech Republic, and Poland voted against it, while twelve other countries abstained.

In 2018, World Renew staff and directors continued to stand with social justice coordinators and to appear before elected officials. These advocacy activities are resulting in greater support for refugees and distressed migrants, for greater climate justice, for protecting vulnerable children and adults, and for strengthening gender and racial justice.

c. International justice

World Renew’s mandate to alleviate suffering in the world is based on principles of biblical mercy and justice. In justice education, we create opportunities for teaching and learning that are implemented through existing church networks to advance basic human and civil rights. This includes advocacy action, servant leadership, good governance, peace building, and trauma healing. Our long-term work in Uganda provides an example from 2018 of World Renew’s justice activities in building peace in discordant circumstances.

As nomadic herders, the Karamojong are the poorest people group in Uganda. They have raised cattle and sheep in this semi-arid region for hundreds of years, but recent changes in climate and frequent livestock raids have driven them out of the desert and into a more settled lifestyle of raising crops. In the process, they are starting to lay down their spears and rifles. World Renew program consultant Edward

Okiror commented that they truly are, as Isaiah 2:4 says, beating “their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”

But change often does not come easily, and the Karamojong lacked the seeds, tools, and farming skills to successfully transition to an agricultural lifestyle. World Renew, working jointly with TEAR Australia and the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church in Karamoja, is piloting a new food security and health project in the Karamojong communities. The work focuses on building agriculture skills and improving hygiene and sanitation practices.

Rose Lokwi and her family are one of more than 300 households experiencing powerful change through this project. “I’m excited that my family can now produce enough food to eat,” Rose said excitedly. “We started to learn how to grow crops. We have successfully harvested mung beans, sorghum, and cassava.” With her increased income, Rose and her neighbors have begun a community savings and loan group with World Renew’s support. Other communities involved in the project are organizing their own similar groups.

“We ask God to continue transforming these communities,” Okiror said. “World Renew is just starting to work in Karamoja, and it is a challenging area.” Though health and hygiene projects are also under way, said Okiror, many of the Karamojong do not have access to basic education. The nearest school is 25 kilometers (15 mi.) from the project activities.

In communities like Karamoja, powerful social and political systems exist to oppress and marginalize the voices of vulnerable people. World Renew values working with local communities and organizations to amplify their voices to confront and change unjust systems. Each community with whom World Renew works has a different context and a different challenge that requires them to work with their neighbors and others to bring about significant changes to inequitable systems. World Renew and its partners discover the injustices faced by communities by using participatory methods with local communities. This learning and listening process ensures that every response is contextualized to local realities.

E. Gospel proclamation and worship

In contexts where the gospel can be preached freely, 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 outreach capacity and the proclamation of the gospel. In some communities, World Renew works collaboratively with Resonate Global Mission and other CRC agencies worldwide, opening the door to a greater ministry presence through community outreach in development and disaster-response programming.

In other communities, World Renew uses a variety of resources to strengthen churches and community partners through Bible-based teaching. Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) is one of the resources World Renew uses to equip Christian leaders for service and relationship building in their churches and communities. TLT uses Scripture to help leaders recognize that Christian behavior needs to come from spiritual growth. TLT participants studied Romans 12, for example, which encourages Christians to continually depend on God to transform and renew their spirit for God's kingdom, cultivating internal attitudes that are pleasing to God.

Pastor Gerald Francis is a certified TLT training facilitator who began teaching a group of church leaders last year. He taught the participants that "the Bible teaches us how the Word of God relates to our lives and work, so we must carefully reflect on and talk about what God is saying to us and our community as well." One participant who took the words to heart and implemented them with positive outcomes in his church and community was Pastor John.

"Thanks to TLT training on *Caring for God's People*, I implemented a system of regular home visitation with our church and community members," Pastor John said. "Our church now has four newly converted members," including a man named Ankouni.

Ankouni, an older, Muslim man, became paralyzed after falling out of a tree. Pastor John visited him regularly at his home for several months, and eventually Ankouni agreed to pray with John. Ankouni gave his life to Jesus on one of John's visits and has become reinvested in his community and church family.

Yoaoumou, married to a man who has two other wives, was mocked for being married for three years without bearing a child. After receiving regular home visits from a Christian women's fellowship group in her community, Yoaoumou gave her life to Christ and attends church regularly. She is also pregnant, and her church community is praying for the safe delivery of her child.

Ankouni and Yoaoumou are just two examples of people whose lives were powerfully changed through leaders involved in World Renew's outreach programs with Christian churches and community partners around the world. In one primarily non-Christian country last year, World Renew reached nearly 1,500 men, women, and youth in 16 churches and communities with TLT programs alone.

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 in their essence and nature point people to a personal response to the saving grace of Jesus' death and resurrection.

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

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 2018 these denominationally approved Sundays included the World

Hunger Campaign, the Gift Catalog Campaign, Canadian Foodgrains Bank (Cdn)/DRS Sunday, and Free A Family®/Maternal and Child Health Sunday (Cdn).

2. Reaching and growing into constituency beyond the CRC

In 56 years of ministry, World Renew has engaged with and blessed many people around the world, from participants to constituents to others 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 2018, 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 beyond the CRC linking into and supporting World Renew's programs and projects. In addition, World Renew continues to partner officially with the Reformed Church in America and the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.

World Renew is also a member of several international collaborative networks, including the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Growing Hope Globally, ACT Alliance, and Integral Alliance. These networks provide access to funding and grants from donors beyond the CRC who also support other member organizations in these networks.

3. Events

Throughout 2018, World Renew's church relations team was involved in more than eighteen conferences and workshops beyond those planned and implemented by CRC churches or classes, including the Global Leadership Summit, the Hunger Walk, the Calvin College Faith and International Development Conference, the Jubilee Conference, the Wild Goose Festival, the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) annual conference, and conventions for Christian Schools International.

4. Church engagement highlights

Through the development of Global Engagement Opportunities (GEO) materials, World Renew is providing more ways to come alongside churches to help them flesh out their global engagement strategy and opportunities that fit their congregation. In these opportunities, World Renew acts as both a consultant and a resource provider. This program is meeting the needs of congregations as they work toward uncovering how God wants them to interact globally. One of these programs is the Global Partnership Program (GPP), in which CRC congregations in North America structurally interact with, learn from, and serve congregations and communities in locations other than North America. There are currently well over twenty of these partnerships.

The process of initiating the GEO program involved developing more flexible Connections Tours for our field staff. In 2018, several of these tours were facilitated for World Renew's frontline workers in Latin America, Asia, and Africa as they interacted, engaged, inspired, and connected with churches, schools, groups, and individuals across Canada and the United States. In 2019, more tours are being planned to 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. Workshops, simulation activities, resources, and speaking engagements are also being planned to continue to engage churches and individuals in World Renew's international ministry.

Since June 3, 2018, singer-songwriter Jeremy Benjamin has been touring across Canada telling the story of, among other things, World Renew's work in Nigeria. By the end of the tour, at the Canadian CRCNA Gathering in Edmonton, Alberta, in May 2019, he will have led worship in over 100 Canadian CRC churches, CSI schools, and other venues, encouraging discipleship and invigorating worship.

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, using Asset-Based Community Development, Economic Development, and Equity (ABCDE²). (See the report of Communities First Association on page 391.)

IV. Board matters

The board of delegates is a key support of World Renew's ministry. The board's primary function is to set the vision and mission of World Renew and to encourage and track the accomplishment of that vision.

World Renew's governance structure is made up of delegates from each CRC classis along with as many as 27 members-at-large, who together constitute the Board of Delegates of World Renew.

The delegates serve as a vital communication link with CRC 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 Canadian 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; Lacombe, Alberta

Rebecca Warren, vice president; Edmonton, Alberta

Jason De Boer, treasurer; Jerseyville, Ontario

Marguerite Ridder, secretary; Guelph, Ontario

Andrew Geisterfer, member-at-large; Edmonton, Alberta

Julie Vanden Heuvel, member-at-large; Calgary, Alberta

Marguerite Van Oord, member-at-large; Jewetts Mills, New Brunswick

Rita Klein-Geltink, pastoral adviser; Ancaster, Ontario

Board of Directors of World Renew-U.S.

Charles Adams, president; Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Roy Herrema, vice president; Hawthorne, New Jersey

Barry J. Haven, treasurer; Rockford, Michigan

Monika Grasley, secretary; Merced, California

Rachel Conley, member-at-large; Holland, Michigan

Shirley VanHeukelom, member-at-large; Denver, Colorado

Ramon Orostizaga, pastoral adviser; Princeton, New Jersey

A. *World Renew board nominations, reappointments, and terms completed*

1. Canada member-at-large delegate

The board of World Renew recommends that synod appoint each of the following nominees to a first term of three years as Canada members-at-large:

Ms. Mary Blydorp is an active member of the First CRC in Guelph, Ontario, where she has served several terms as a deacon and is currently serving on the education and discipleship committee. She has many years of teaching experience at Christian schools, the most recent being Guelph Community Christian School, where her deep desire has been to help children discover the full meaning of being precious children created in God's image. Her passion for World Renew has grown over the years, particularly after doing a Discovery Tour to see World Renew's work in Cambodia, and in learning principles of effective aid and development from books like *When Helping Hurts* and *Toxic Charity*. Ms. Blydorp is recommended to serve as a member-at-large for the Classis Huron region in Canada.

Mr. Dennis DeGroot is an active member of Willoughby CRC in Langley, British Columbia, where he serves on their refugee and resettlement committee. He has also served on the church council and in the office of deacon. Mr. DeGroot is currently employed in a part-time position as director of Global Partners in Christian Education, the global partnership arm of Surrey Christian School, which supports the operation of Christian schools in Honduras and Sierra Leone. His career included 38 years in roles as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. His involvement with World Renew has already included strengthening connections of CRC churches from the two classes in British Columbia with newly founded CRC churches in Sierra Leone. Mr. DeGroot is recommended to serve as a member-at-large for the B.C. South-East region.

Mr. Sheku Koroma currently attends the St. Jerome Church in Brampton, Ontario, and he served as a deacon at CrossPoint CRC in Brampton from 2011 to 2014. He has vast experience working with World Renew, having served as a community development supervisor and staff trainer for many years with Christian Extension Services, a partner of World Renew in Sierra Leone. He also has experience in leading justice and development movements and training others in poverty reduction strategies in Sierra Leone. In Canada, Mr. Koroma has also served on the Regional Diversity Roundtable, as an executive board member at the United Steel Workers Union, and on the union's human rights committee. He shares a deep passion for community development, justice, and peace-building. Mr. Koroma is recommended to serve as a member-at-large for the Toronto region.

2. Reappointment of Canada members-at-large

The following Canadian delegates are completing their first terms on the board and are recommended for reappointment to a second three-year term: Mr. Daniel Muthui and Rev. Joseph Hamilton (pastoral adviser).

3. Reappointment or changing appointment of Canada classis members

The following Canadian delegate is completing his first term on the board and is recommended for reappointment to a second three-year term: Mr. David Mayer (Classis B.C. North-West).

Ms. Ko Spyksma is moving from the member-at-large role to serve as a classis delegate from B.C. South-East.

4. Canada members completing board service

World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following board members on completing service on the board of delegates: Mr. Rob Aukema (Classis B.C. South-East), Mr. Jerry Aydalla (member-at-large), and Ms. Marguerite Ridder (member-at-large).

5. U.S. delegate appointments

a. U.S. member-at-large nominees

The board of delegates requests that synod appoint the following as U.S. at-large delegates to a first term of three years: Ms. Rebekah De Lange (young adult at-large – Calvin College) and Ms. Olivia VanderHaag (young adult at-large – Dordt College).

Ms. Rebekah De Lange is a member of Crossroads Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she leads worship. She is a student at Calvin College, a resident assistant for Noordewier-Vanderwerp Hall, and a student admissions assistant for Fridays at Calvin. She grew up in a multicultural Reformed church in Illinois, where she learned the importance of racial reconciliation and unity in the body of Christ. Her greatest desire is to serve the Lord with all her heart by seeking justice and sharing the love of Christ. Ms. De Lange believes that God intends for Christians to create change here and now, and she greatly desires to be a part of that change.

Ms. Olivia VanderHaag is a member of Sanborn (Iowa) CRC where she has been involved in children's worship, Sunday school, and the praise team. She also served on her church's Serve team, traveling to Cary, Mississippi, each summer on a mission trip. Ms. VanderHaag is currently studying to become an elementary school teacher with emphases in reading and early childhood/special education. She is eager and excited to learn about and spread the news of the work God is doing through World Renew.

b. U.S. classis nominations

The board of delegates requests that synod appoint the following as U.S. delegates to a first term of three years: Mr. Doug Kallemyn (Classis Northcentral Iowa) and Mr. Daryl Switzer (Classis California South).

6. Reappointment of U.S. classis members

The following U.S. delegates are completing their first term on the board and are recommended for reappointment to a second three-year term: Mr. Michael Hendrikse (Classis Atlantic Northeast), Ms. Monika Grasley (Classis Central California), Ms. Becky Vander Zee (Classis Greater Los Angeles), Mr. William Haverkamp (Classis Grand Rapids East), Mr. Marc Faasse (Classis Grandville), Ms. Karen Walker (Classis

Hackensack), Mr. Daniel L. Pell (Classis Muskegon), Mr. Jay A. deBoer (Classis Pacific Northwest), Mr. Charles Adams (Classis Wisconsin), and Mr. Ramon Orostizaga (pastoral adviser).

7. U.S. members completing board service

World Renew would like to recognize and thank the following board members completing their service on the board: Mr. Barry Haven (Classis Grand Rapids North), Mr. Roy Heerema (Classis Hudson), Ms. Cheri Dykstra (Classis Kalamazoo), Ms. Mary Rupke (Classis Lake Erie), Ms. Erika Izquierdo (Classis Southeast U.S.), Ms. Hyacinth Douglas Bailey (member-at-large), Ms. Nasreen Fynewever (member-at-large), and Ms. Sarah Rinsema-Sybenga (member-at-large).

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	5	1	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 2019—Financial and Business Supplement*.

C. Human Resources management

World Renew continually evaluates the excellence of its programs and relies on its human resource (HR) systems to provide support to its teams. World Renew's diverse, professional, skilled staff is expected to meet the goals set around its vision and mission.

World Renew has a rigorous recruiting process and successfully hired more than thirty highly skilled staff last year. We continually expand our recruitment activities to ensure that we meet our diversity and professional learning goals. To that end, we promote professional development and learning, and we continue to develop competencies across the organization.

World Renew is also committed to gender mainstreaming, with the goal of gender equality across our structure and in our staffing processes. As part of its gender plan, World Renew regularly tracks goals for the number of 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 practice gives staff an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments and critically review their 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 nearly \$36 million (U.S.) from all sources in the United States and Canada. Of this funding, nearly \$26.5 million (U.S.) came from churches and individual donors. These funds were then leveraged into greater ministry dollars through grants, partnerships, and collaborations. World Renew's connections to international organizations such as the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, ACT Alliance, Integral Alliance, and Growing Hope Globally (formerly Foods Resource Bank) provided technical and financial resources that expanded our reach to more people and communities.

In 2018 these partnerships included leveraging more than \$1 million from predominantly European organizations through the Integral Alliance. In addition, Canada director Ms. Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo was elected to a four-year term on the governing and executive boards of the U.K.-based ACT Alliance. World Renew leadership also made plans to launch a Combined Fundraising Campaign (CFC) over four years to strengthen its relationships with CRC congregations as well as churches and donors beyond the denomination. By World Renew's 60th anniversary in 2022-2023, we pray that the CFC will gain greater support for work in health, agriculture, disaster response, justice, and improved livelihoods.

World Renew's fundraising efforts in 2018 resulted in just over \$1 million from government grants, and more than \$6 million from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for emergency disaster response and food security programs internationally. World Renew received more than \$1 million in grants from organizations in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, and over \$800,000 from investments and other income. World Renew also finalized income received from the 2017 Sea to Sea Bike Tour, with riders raising \$1,683,981 (CDN; or \$1,326,543 [U.S.]) through the event. World Renew phased out its ongoing partnership with Sea to Sea in 2018 but anticipates participating in future campaigns.

World Renew directed approximately \$11.4 million (U.S.) of its 2018 financial resources toward core international development programs, and \$13.6 million (U.S.) went to disaster response. Nearly \$300,000 (U.S.) was used for community development in North America, and just over \$2 million (U.S.) was directed to constituent education.

World Renew continued to receive accolades from non-profit monitoring organizations for its financial and management practices in the United States and Canada, including a high rating (4) from Charity Intelligence Canada and a spot in *Canada's Top 100 Charities in 2018* in the International Aid category. In the United States, World Renew was approved by the BBB's Wise Giving Alliance and achieved a Gold Star of Transparency from Guide Star. We continue to maintain excellent standing with Christian monitoring organizations, CCCC in Canada and ECFA in the United States, and we thank God for these recognitions of World Renew's values: faith, people flourishing, effectiveness, and stewardship.

World Renew used about 15 percent of its resources for general management and fundraising purposes in 2018, meaning that 85 percent of the money you entrusted to World Renew directly helped people who experience poverty, injustice, and disaster with life-saving, life-changing programs that build up the church worldwide.

V. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. Charles Adams, 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 2019 with gratitude to God for his provision in the 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 144 years since 1876 and was the first agency or institution developed by the Christian Reformed Church.

Mission Statement: 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 year 38 percent 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 mission 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 the priority of 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, we recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Center for Excellence in Preaching. This ministry tool has served church leaders in one-on-one settings with thousands of website resource users every month.

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

Making and maintaining connections with churches is a foundational component of education for Calvin Theological Seminary. Whether this involves church-based internships or assignments related to the local church environment, the local church is the key partner for nurturing, developing, and training students.

In fall 2017, Calvin Theological Seminary set up a new way for all incoming M.A. and M.Div. students to fulfill their contextual learning requirements through internship hours coordinated with churches during the ministry year. The office of Vocational Formation, led by Geoff Vandermolen and administrative assistant Chris Wright, 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, Grace Reformed Church, 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, River Rock CRC, Second Byron Center CRC, South Grandville CRC, and Woodlawn CRC, as well as numerous churches involved with our distance-learning students in the United States and Canada.

Because internship hours may now occur during concurrent internships throughout the academic year, we have opened a new way of connecting students to churches for summer service. We appreciate the number of churches that have served as “additional” places of formation, including these cross-cultural and international sites: Providence CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.; First CRC, Handford, Calif.; Escalon (Calif.) CRC; Korean Grace CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Aetna CRC, Falmouth, Mich.; Borculo (Mich.) CRC; Ellsworth (Mich.) CRC; First CRC, Red Deer, Alta.; Degage Ministries, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Granite Springs CRC, Lincoln, Calif.; Sierra Leone; Disciple-Making Church, Fresh Meadow, N.Y.; Lifereach Ministries, Philippines; Uganda; Refugee Education Center, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Toronto (Ont.) Urban Missionary Apprentice; Lithuania; Shanghai, China; Liberti Church–Center City, Philadelphia, Pa.; Omouri Presbyterian Church, Seoul, Korea; Valley Ridge Community Church, El Paso, Tex.

Calvin Theological Seminary also 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 2018, a new group of twelve 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. The launch of the distance education M.Div. degree has created significant interest in CTS, and we are now offering a distance delivery format for M.A. and M.T.S. degree programs.

We are excited to announce the launch of a new Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership degree. This streamlined degree is designed for emerging Christian leaders who want to focus their training in a key area of ministry. Students can choose from a variety of delivery formats, including online access so that students can enjoy the life-changing benefits of a Calvin Seminary education while staying in their home community, work, and ministry. This new delivery system will also be helpful in developing certification programs that will expand the scope of theological training to church workers and church leaders. To learn more about the new M.A., visit www.calvinseminary.edu/ma.

The seminary is grateful for overall enrollment numbers for the 2018-2019 academic year of 252 degree-seeking students, with 83 new students, including 42 M.Div. students (30 residential and 12 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.

As we continue to develop ministries and programs to serve the church, Calvin Seminary would note that it is working with the Candidacy Committee of the Christian Reformed Church to survey key stakeholders among other avenues of study to evaluate the goals and effectiveness of the

Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC). It is hoped that a preliminary report on the background and recent growth of the EPMC program will be provided to synod by way of a supplemental report proposing that synod recommend a final report be provided to Synod 2020.

The following data for 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 downloaded	Avg. unique visitors per month
2006	86,411	242,871	5,649
2018	370,000	1,567,000	19,000

Calvin Theological Seminary, through the Center for Excellence in Preaching, 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 Seminary also received a sustainability match grant (2017-2019) from the Lilly Endowment for \$125,000 in order to build on several of the goals from our 2013-2016 grant of \$250,000 under the Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers initiative.

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 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 we were pleased to write a letter of support for their grant submission to Lilly Endowment Inc. titled “The CRCNA Financial Shalom Project.” We were even more pleased that they were awarded the requested grant, and we look forward to possibilities of collaboration in pursuing financial shalom in our respective places of ministry.

The executive committee of the CTS Board of Trustees recently approved a number of reappointments for visiting faculty members for three years (July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2022): Dr. Gary Burge as visiting professor of New Testament (part-time), Dr. Young Ahn Kang as visiting professor of philosophical theology (part-time), and Dr. Robert Keeley as visiting professor of discipleship and faith formation (part-time).

On September 8, 2015, Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary were blessed to open prison doors by beginning classes at Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan, 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 75 students are enrolled in the program. This program began in response to a request from 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 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, and 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 2018, 13 high school students experienced theological education at the seminary, followed by ministry in the Chicago area as well as in Toronto, Ontario. Churches and individuals can learn more about this vital ministry at dig.calvinseminary.edu/.

Finally, Calvin Theological Seminary can report that following a comprehensive evaluation visit by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in March 2018, the ATS Board of Commissioners voted to reaffirm the accreditation of Calvin Theological Seminary for a period of ten years (longest term possible). We are grateful for this affirmation of our ministry by ATS peers.

V. Administration

The seminary administration includes Rev. Julius Medenblik, president; Ms. Margaret Mwenda, chief operating officer; Dr. Ronald J. Feenstra, academic dean; Rev. Geoff Vandermolen, 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.

VII. Board of Trustees

The board met in plenary session in October 2018 and via conference call in February 2019. It anticipates a plenary session in May 2019.

The board officers are Mr. Sidney Jansma, Jr., chair; Rev. Curt Walters, vice-chair; and Ms. Heather Garretson, secretary.

Trustees Mr. Victor Chen (Region 1), Rev. Daniel Brown (Region 3), Mr. Henry Lane (Region 12), and Ms. Heather Garretson (at-large) have completed one term of service and are eligible for reappointment. Dr. Yudha Thianto (at-large) has completed his second term and is eligible for reappointment to a third term. The board recommends that synod reappoint each of these board members to a subsequent three-year term.

Completing service on the board (three terms of three years) is Mr. Sidney Jansma, Jr. (at-large). This is the second time Mr. Jansma has completed a full cycle of at-large terms, meaning that he has served 18 years as a CTS Board of Trustees member over the past two decades. In recognition of the breadth, depth, and length of his board service, the CTS Board of Trustees has voted to confer the title of Board Chair, *emeritus* on Mr. Jansma. We are very grateful for his service and wise counsel to the seminary and to the church.

At-large nominee

The at-large positions on the board enable the board to pursue balance with regard to diversity and skill sets. The following at-large nominee is recommended to synod for election to a first term on the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees:

Mr. Hessel Kielstra, a member of Emmanuel CRC in Calgary, Alberta, is the president and CEO of a number of family businesses in western Canada. Mr. Kielstra will fulfill a need for extensive administrative and board executive leadership. He has served eight years as a trustee for Calgary Christian School, twelve years as elder at Emmanuel CRC, six years as a trustee for each of the following: Calvin Theological Seminary, the CRCNA Board of Trustees, and Dordt College. In addition, he has served nine years on the Back to God Ministries International advancement board and Edu-Deo Ministries board. Mr. Kielstra also recently served two years as chair of the Dordt College board during a key time of strategic planning and growth through new programs.

VIII. Students 2018-2019

The composition of the seminary's student body indicates a growing national and ethnic diversity. The following statistics from fall 2018 indicate the impact the seminary is having beyond the Christian Reformed Church:

A. Denominational affiliation

Christian Reformed: 103 (41%)

Non-Christian Reformed students: 149 (59%)

Presbyterian: 55

RCA: 18

Other Reformed: 19

Baptist: 9

Other/None listed: 48

(31+ total denominations)

B. Geographical information

U.S. students: 135 (53%)

Canadian students: 22 (9%)

International students, other than Canadian: 95 (38%)

Korean: 52 (21%)

Chinese: 13 (5%)

Other: 30 (12%)

Total countries represented: 17

C. Student body

Male students: 194 (77%)

Female students: 58 (23%)

D. Programs and students enrolled

M.Div.: 135

Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy: 29

M.A. (English): 17

M.A. (Spanish): 6

M.T.S.: 18

Th.M.: 47

Ph.D.: 29

Hybrid/Distance Learning: 61 (this number does not reflect residential students who also take a hybrid/distance class)

Certificate/diploma: 1

Unclassified: 9

E. Nondegree students

It should be noted that we currently have 22 students in the Handlon Correctional Facility who are also considered noncredit students of Calvin Theological Seminary. In addition, we have 75 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 44 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 Medenblik, president, when seminary matters are presented.

B. That synod, by way of the ballot, ratify the election and reappointment of trustees from the slates of nominees presented.

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
Heather Garretson, secretary

Worship Ministries (Rev. Joyce Borger, director)

I. Introduction

The staff of Worship Ministries is blessed to be able to serve the denomination by supporting worship leaders through networking and equipping opportunities. Because we are a young ministry, it has been helpful that our staff (totaling 2.3 FTE) has remained consistent. Ms. Diane Dykgraaf serves as program coordinator, and Ms. Laura Meyering serves as administrative specialist. Last year a number of our advisory committee members stepped down, and we now welcome four new members to the group. Our advisory members also serve as regional representatives. We continue to be grateful for their willingness to volunteer their time and energy to serve the church in this way. We rely heavily on the diverse voices that make up our advisory committee:

Elly Boersma, Region 2, Eastern Canada (chair)

Gary Bomhof, Region 1, Western Canada (vice-chair)

April Jackson, Black and Reformed representative (located in California)

Joyce Jackson, Region 3, U.S. East/Black and Reformed representative

Darlene Silversmith, Region 6, U.S. West/Native American/First Nations representative

Sandra Van Opstal, Region 5, U.S. Central/Latino representative (secretary)

We are particularly excited that our **Endorsed Coaches** program has launched this past year. These coaches are located throughout the United States and Canada and offer specific areas of expertise. While our list continues to grow, at present the following individuals have received endorsement:

Elly Boersma, St. Catharines, Ontario

Tom Dykstra, Olympia, Washington

Joy Engelsman, Denver, Colorado

James Lee, East Islip, New York

Adam Perez, Durham, North Carolina

Katie Ritsema-Roelofs, Washington, D.C.

Greg Scheer, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Ruth Ann Schuringa, Brampton, Ontario

Sandra Van Opstal, Chicago, Illinois

Chris Walker, Grand Haven, Michigan

So far, our coaches have been contacted by worship leaders looking for individual feedback, churches desiring workshops on worship theology, and a worship director wanting a clinic for musicians. More information on this program is available at www.crcna.org/worship/endorsed-coaches.

II. Reflecting on Our Calling

A. Faith formation

In a conversation about worship, it does not take long before formative and pastoral elements enter in. Worship forms our faith. Faith formation is a prominent theme in many of our presentations. We note this especially in our work related to vertical habits, which played a role in presentations given at the Calvin Symposium on Worship, for delegates to Classis Lake

Superior, and with churches in Thunder Bay, Ontario. In addition, Worship Ministries looks for ways to collaborate with Faith Formation Ministries, as in recent work on their toolkit related to aging.

B. Servant leadership

One of the challenges that churches face is the ongoing development of musicians and worship leaders. Worship Ministries has contracted with Rev. Joy Engelsman to do research into best practices from among CRC churches and beyond. That research and learning has already resulted in a webinar on mentoring, and ideas for additional articles and webinars are in the works.

C. Global mission

Our corporate worship should lead into lives of worship characterized by a desire to participate in the mission of God at home and around the world. This past year that theme can best be seen through many of the articles and resources in *Reformed Worship*, including resources shared from the Anglican church in Kenya and a worship series on everyday spirituality.

D. Mercy and justice

This past year has seen the fruition of a collaborative effort with the Climate Witness Project, World Renew, and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to resource the church with worship material focused on creation care.

We also worked with the office of Disability Concerns to host a conference: "Beyond Singing Hymns: Engaging Older Adults in Worship." Learnings from this event provided the backbone for our June 2019 theme issue of *Reformed Worship* on aging adults and worship.

E. Global proclamation and worship

1. Reformed Worship

Worship Ministries has continued to publish the *Reformed Worship* (RW) journal, available by subscription for print issues and / or access to a digital library, to which nonsubscribers may also have limited access. RW currently has 1,692 subscribers from many denominations around the globe. According to a recent worship survey of CRC churches, 62 percent of CRC churches use RW in some way. Last year's focus was on mental illnesses and worship, featuring many articles and resources to help worshiping communities better include and minister to individuals living with mental illnesses.

Despite some changes in registration requirements in the past year, the RW website had 557,298 unique users viewing a total of 1,019,407 pages. We also continue to post weekly blogs on the website and send out a monthly e-newsletter to 6,684 individuals. In addition, our Facebook page has 5,337 followers.

2. Peer learning groups

Healthy churches have leaders and members who are eager learners. One way for our worship leaders to learn is through the formation of peer learning groups. Worship Ministries supported twelve peer learning groups with a total of eighty-eight participants who chose to study either "Caring Worship" by Howard Vanderwell or "The Worship Pastor" by Zach Hicks.

In response to a request from CRC clergywomen, we also helped organize book groups in the spring and fall. The spring groups had a total of twenty-five participants, and the fall groups had forty. In each case the groups either met in person or online, which brought together women ministering from across North America and as far away as China.

3. Webinars

Another way to support ongoing learning is through the creation of free webinars. This year we provided the following webinars:

- Working Together: The Worship Leader and Pastor (Elly Boersma and Bob Loerts)
- Preparing and Leading Worship (Ruth Ann Schuringa)
- Creative Use of the Psalms in Worship (Martin Tel)
- The Mentoring Project (Joy Engelsman)

Seventy-one individuals joined us live for these learning opportunities, but then more viewing followed. Each webinar was soon posted online with additional resources, making them available 24/7. Our webinars in this growing library had 2,481 viewers in 2018.

4. Denominational support

Worship Ministries also provides additional support to various ministries, agencies, and the denomination as a whole. In addition to overseeing the planning and leading of worship at synod, Worship Ministries staff helped curate worship resources for the denominational Day of Justice, Day of Prayer, Memorial Day, Trinity Sunday, and the start of the fall season. We also provide ongoing customer and copyright support to various worship products sold through Faith Alive Christian Resources.

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

A. *The local church*

This past year we were privileged to engage with churches through Lake Superior and Georgetown classis meetings; in workshops for Thunder Bay, Ontario, area churches; and in worship services at several Christian Reformed churches: All Nations (Halifax, N.S.), Fellowship (Brighton, Ont.), Covenant Life (Grand Haven, Mich.), and African Community Fellowship (Kentwood, Mich.).

In addition, we connected with CRC worship leaders through our Facebook group, which has grown to 343 members and provides a great place to ask questions and receive support. Our monthly e-news reaches 2,283 people in the CRC and is perhaps the best way to learn about opportunities in and outside the CRC related to worship leadership. In the past year Worship Ministries interacted with 332 churches in our denomination. We encourage worship leaders to sign up for our monthly email through our website (crcna.org/worship) or to join us at facebook.com/groups/crcworshipministries.

B. *Other partners*

Many of our efforts continue to be supported by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) through grants and *Reformed Worship* staff support. In addition, CICW has provided free registration to the Worship Symposium

as a thank-you to our advisory members, and CICW has endorsed coaches, peer learning group conveners, and clergywomen book group participants. Much of our ongoing staff development and learning in the area of worship occurs through events and opportunities offered through CICW.

This past year we saw the completion of a worship survey that was sent to all RCA and CRC churches, the result of a collaborative effort by our office, the RCA, and CICW. We are just beginning to digest the information provided through that survey, and we look forward to sharing from its results in the coming year.

Worship Ministries has been blessed with a great relationship with the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, through which we are able to offer reduced tuition to groups of CRC members who take the university's Certificate of Worship Leadership course. This is an amazing opportunity to gain knowledge in historical, theological, and practical foundations of worship leadership. Last year's cohort included seven CRC members from the United States and Canada, new and seasoned worship leaders from large and small, rural and urban, established and emerging congregations. All participants greatly appreciated what they learned. This year eleven CRC members are participating. Other ecumenical partners include the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Consultation on Common Texts (group overseeing the *Revised Common Lectionary*), the Center for Congregational Song, and the Hymn Society of the United States and Canada.

Our biggest partner and supporter is you, the members of the CRC, who continue to give through ministry-share offerings and individual donations. As staff, we work hard to be stewards of all that we have been given. While we cannot do without financial resources, the greatest resource in the CRC continues to be its people. It is an honor to serve the ministry of the local church and to find ways to utilize the gifts of worship leaders across the denomination in serving God, the church, and each other. In all of this may God continue to glorified.

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 (crcna.org/candidacy). Our report to Synod 2019 is more lengthy than in most years. The various sections of the report are as follows:

- I. Introduction
- II. Committee membership
- III. Response to Synod 2018 regarding format and changes to Church Order and related documents (with Appendices A and B)
- IV. Update on the uses of Church Order Article 8
- V. Reflection on the RCA/CRC Orderly Exchange of Ministers Agreement
- VI. Review of the committee's work
- VII. Recommendations

II. Committee membership

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.

The following people currently serve on the Candidacy Committee: 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), Pastor James Jones (2021/2), Rev. Susan LaClear (2021/2), Rev. Henry Jonker (2021/1), 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. Mark Hilbelink and Rev. Andrew Vander Leek are completing their first terms on the committee and are willing to serve a second term. Rev. Fernando Valencia and Dr. LaVerne Jordan are completing their second terms and are not eligible for reappointment. Therefore the Candidacy Committee presents to synod the following slates of nominees for appointment to fill these two vacancies:

Position 1

Rev. Felix Fernandez is ordained as a minister of the Word and currently serves as pastor of South Kendall Community CRC near Miami, Florida. He entered the CRCNA by way of Article 8 in 2010 and has served on the classical renewal committee and the classical missions committee of Clasis Southeast U.S. He is a child of immigrants, is fluent in both English and Spanish, and is eager to bring a fresh perspective on the subject of ordination.

Mr. Juan Sierra is ordained as a commissioned pastor serving Iglesia Sunlight Español CRC in Port St. Lucie, Florida. He has an M.A. in Bible and theology from Calvin Theological Seminary, and he has been a high school English teacher for ten years. He has been a member of the CRCNA for over

20 years and is eager to serve, bringing experience of the Latino community. He served as an elder delegate to Synod 2014.

Position 2

Ms. Judy Cook, a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ontario, is a retired marriage and family therapist. She has served on a denominational study committee on beginning of life issues, on the Safe Church Advisory Committee, and on other committees in Classis Hamilton. She loves the CRC and has been a deacon, an elder, a synod delegate, and a contributor to *The Banner*.

Ms. Leah Zuidema, a member of Hope CRC in Hull, Iowa, serves as the associate provost and dean for curriculum and instruction at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. She has experience in the academic review process. Ms. Zuidema is the spouse of a CRC pastor and is well acquainted with the candidacy process. She would approach this assignment with a sense of calling.

III. Response to Synod 2018 regarding format and changes to Church Order and related documents

The careful observer of synod will have noticed that in the past few years the Candidacy Committee has been facilitating a denominational discussion regarding our Church Order and its related documents as they pertain to the office of commissioned pastor. Also of concern has been the task of clarifying the process by which ministers of the Word who are ordained in other contexts may affiliate with our denomination.

Most recently Synod 2018 received a number of proposals on these matters. In order to allow the church opportunity to reflect on these proposals, the Candidacy Committee recommended deferring action on the proposals until Synod 2019. The changes to the Church Order itself (see section A below) were recommended by Synod 2018 to Synod 2019 for adoption, in keeping with the rules of synod regarding major changes to the Church Order. The changes to the Church Order Supplement and the related plan to expand and reformat the Commissioned Pastor Handbook were discussed by the advisory committee of Synod 2018. Synod 2018 affirmed the plan of the Candidacy Committee and instructed the committee, in turn, to reformat the Commissioned Pastor Handbook and to present the updated document to Synod 2019 for approval. A similar process took place with regard to reformatting Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F, and the related sections of the Journey Toward Ordination document (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 465).

In related action, Synod 2018 considered matters regarding the discipline and accountability of persons ordained to pastoral service. In informal conversation those concerns arose in connection with this project and are now included in this report. Synod also instructed the Candidacy Committee "to provide guidelines for exams done by video and to clarify how Article 8 may be used for receiving an individual ordained by an independent congregation" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 488).

The Candidacy Committee, through its various members and its staff, have devoted numerous hours to this project. We have consulted many persons serving in a variety of positions within denominational and classical

ministry positions. We have shared drafts of this material and have integrated the input of others into what follows.

We recognize that there is much material to absorb and that it may appear confusing and seem redundant at points. We also acknowledge that there are various opinions regarding how to approach the matters being addressed. The material below represents our best attempt to serve the church at this point in time.

This section of the committee's report contains the following:

- A. Proposed Church Order Articles 23-24
- B. Proposed Church Order Supplements to Articles 23-24
- C. Proposed addition to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84
- D. Proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F
- E. Two special assignments from Synod 2018
- F. Proposed new draft of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook (also Appendix A)
- G. Proposed Modifications to the Journey Toward Ordination Document (also Appendix B)

It is the prayer of the Candidacy Committee that this work may serve the church. The committee aims to continue to be responsive to the church regarding matters of ordination.

A. Proposed Church Order Articles 23-24

The Candidacy Committee in recent years suggested that the Church Order statements pertaining to the office of commissioned pastor could well be updated for clarity and logical flow. Synod agreed, and the committee proposed a number of Church Order changes to Synod 2018. With some minor changes in wording Synod 2018 decided to propose the following reformatted Church Order Articles 23-24 for adoption by Synod 2019. (*Italics* indicates text proposed for adoption by synod.)

Article 23

(Note: The following text proposed as Art. 23-a, 23-b, and 23-c currently exists as Art. 24-a, 24-b, and 23-a, respectively. The text has not been changed, but the articles are being reordered.)

- 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

(Note: For improved content flow, the earlier proposed text of Article 24-e is presented here as Article 24-b, with the successive lettered sections reordered accordingly.)

- a. *Commissioned pastors may serve in a solo or senior pastor 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 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.*
- c. *Commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their councils and classes.*
- d. *A commissioned pastor position may be concluded 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.*
- e. *A commissioned pastor who has reached retirement age may, upon the judgment of classis, be given the title of commissioned pastor emeritus.*

B. Proposed Church Order Supplements to Articles 23-24

In keeping with the goal of reformatting the Church Order articles and their supplements related to the office of commissioned pastor, the Candidacy Committee proposed a significant reorganization of the Church Order Supplements to Articles 23 and 24. The announced strategy included making greater use of the document called the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. Because the Supplements to Articles 23 and 24 had become lengthy, it seemed worthwhile to propose a reorganization of these supplements for the sake of clarity and brevity and to move some of that material into the Commissioned Pastor Handbook, recognizing that the handbook will serve well as an extension of the Church Order and its Supplements in communicating the directions and regulations of synod regarding the office of commissioned pastor. Synod 2018 agreed with that strategy and acknowledged an initial draft of the reformatted Supplements to Articles 23 and 24 (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 465).

In addition, Synod 2018 deliberated on several points regarding issues of accountability and discipline relating to pastors in general. That prompted the Candidacy Committee to consider similar parameters with regard to accountability concerning commissioned pastors. Please note, therefore, a statement inserted in the proposed Supplement, Article 24-d: “*Synod also instructs classes to make an appropriate declaration reflecting the status of any commissioned pastor who concludes service. . . .*” As explained in the proposed Commissioned Pastor Handbook (Appendix A), this statement would commit classes to recording in their minutes a declaration such as those listed in Church Order Supplement, Article 14-b to describe a minister of the Word’s conclusion of service. Such a declaration would serve the church well by

communicating the general assessment of classis regarding those whose service as commissioned pastors has ended, and it would serve the commissioned pastors by demonstrating their readiness to live with accountability regarding their ministry.

Except for the addition just noted, the Supplement statements as they appear below are similar to those presented in the Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2018. These statements are presented with the presumption that some material previously included in the Supplement will now appear in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook (see Appendix A). The Candidacy Committee proposes for synodical approval the following newly formatted Supplements to Church Order Articles 23 and 24. (*Italics* indicates text proposed for adoption by synod.)

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.]

All commissioned pastor positions must be approved by classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies, to determine whether or not the position fits these guidelines adopted by Synod 2001. All commissioned pastors must demonstrate through an examination their 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.

(*Acts of Synod 2019, p. ____*)

Commissioned pastor job descriptions related to the ministry of chaplaincy must be approved in consultation with Chaplaincy and Care Ministry. 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 serve in positions of solo leadership in an established church only in specified circumstances. These circumstances were specified before 2019 in Church Order Articles 23-b, 23-c, and 23-d and are now presented and explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. A classis may decide to make such appointments contingent upon implementation of a learning plan leading toward meeting the qualifications for minister of the Word, as described in Church Order Article 24-b. In all cases in which a commissioned pastor serves in a solo leadership position in an emerging or organized church, it is mandatory that such a person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan for denominational orientation, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee, as described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Supplement, Article 24-b

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.

Supplement, Article 24-c

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-d

Synod has offered, on various occasions, guidelines regarding the conclusion of an approved commissioned pastor position, the resignation of a commissioned pastor, and the release of a commissioned pastor. Synod also instructs classes to make an appropriate declaration reflecting the status of any commissioned pastor who concludes service. These guidelines and options regarding status are the same as those for minister of the Word and can be found in Supplement, Article 14-b, c, 2 or in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Supplement, Article 24-e

A commissioned pastor emeritus may, upon the judgment of classis, retain the authority to perform official acts of ministry in ways consistent with their ordination prior to retirement. Supervision of a commissioned pastor emeritus shall remain with the church last served unless transferred to another congregation with the approval of the classis(es) involved.

C. Proposed addition to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84

Some introductory comments in the previous section mentioned Synod 2018's concerns regarding "accountability and discipline." Within this context the advisory committee of Synod 2018, with the agreement of Candidacy

Committee representatives who were present, withheld action on the portion of the committee report related to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84. The advisory committee then proposed having the Candidacy Committee consider further revisions to that supplement for presentation to Synod 2019. Synod 2018 endorsed that strategy (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 465).

In its presentation to Synod 2018, the Candidacy Committee, aiming to raise the bar with regard to the communal accountability of commissioned pastors, had proposed adjusting the protocol for suspension and deposition of a person ordained as a commissioned pastor. The proposal suggested that at least those commissioned pastors serving in a senior or solo role should be treated in the same manner as are ministers of the Word.

After consulting a number of persons, including the Safe Church Advisory Committee, the Candidacy Committee now proposes that an additional statement be added to section e of Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84 to clarify that “the deposition of a commissioned pastor shall not be effected without the approval of the classis in which the commissioned pastor was approved for ordination.”

Adding this statement would help to clarify an ambiguity regarding classis involvement in the suspension or deposition of a commissioned pastor, stating overtly that the classis needs to be involved—and this change would provide a parallel to the process for ministers of the Word (described in section f, 3).

Thus, the revised proposal for consideration by Synod 2019 involves two actions:

1. The adoption of a protocol for occasions when commissioned pastors conclude service, as noted in the previous section of this report in connection with Church Order Supplement, Article 24-d.
2. The addition of a statement in Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84 clarifying the role of classis in suspending or deposing commissioned pastors.

The Candidacy Committee proposes the addition of the following statement in Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, as section e, 3 as follows (with new text indicated by *italics*):

- 3) *The deposition of a commissioned pastor shall not be effected without the approval of the classis in which the commissioned pastor was approved for ordination.*

D. Proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F

Also proposed to Synod 2018 through the report of the Candidacy Committee were some changes in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F, to clarify and update the process for persons who have been ordained as ministers in other settings and are now affiliating with the CRCNA (see *Agenda for Synod 2018*, pp. 223-26). Synod decided to propose these statements to Synod 2019 for adoption (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 465).

With one minor change the statements presented to Synod 2018 are being recommended to Synod 2019. The change entails the addition of a sentence in section E, 3 as follows: “Once the council, pastor, classis, and Candidacy Committee all agree, the affiliation process and procedures prescribed in the Journey Toward Ordination document shall be followed.”

The Candidacy Committee therefore proposes that synod adopt the following revised statements of Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F:

E. Calling Ministers from Other Denominations

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.

(*Acts of Synod 2005*, p. 742)

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.
3. A council shall not nominate a minister from another denomination for a call without the approval of its classis and the Candidacy Committee. Key elements of the discussion are to involve the “need” criteria included previously in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, E, 4, and now presented in the Journey Toward Ordination document in the section on Article 8. Once the council, pastor, classis, and Candidacy Committee all agree to the proposed call, the affiliation process and procedures prescribed in the Journey Toward Ordination document shall be followed.
4. *At the completion of the affiliation process the classis, with authorization 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.*
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 *Acts of Synod 1984*, pp. 642-43)
(*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. ____)

F. Determination of Need

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.
2. *Synod calls all parties concerned to review the criteria for “need” offered in the Journey Toward Ordination document (section III, C, 1).*

(*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. ____)

E. Two special assignments from Synod 2018

Synod 2018 gave the Candidacy Committee two assignments that fit naturally into this section of its report to Synod 2019. Synod instructed the Candidacy Committee to provide guidelines for Article 8 exams done by video and to clarify how Article 8 may be used for receiving an individual ordained by an independent congregation (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 488).

1. Guidelines for exams done by video

The Candidacy Committee consulted classes that have already used video in conducting examinations. In one case, a classis examined a candidate who was living in Korea. In another case, a candidate who was in the military was examined while on a base in Alaska. The Candidacy Committee also spoke to persons who have technological expertise. The following notes are intended to offer some guidelines for use by classes in examinations of ministers of the Word and of commissioned pastors, whether by use of Church Order Article 8, Article 10, or Articles 23-24. These notes may also provide assistance as classes consider other uses of video technology.

The potential uses of video-conferencing technology cover a broad range:

- Sermon reviewers may observe a video of a preached sermon rather than being present in person.
- A pre-examination video conference may be conducted with a small team or even one appointed person interviewing the person who will be examined, and then a recording of the video could be distributed to classis delegates before the examination meeting. This process could allow the classis meeting examination to be more focused and perhaps more efficient.
- A video-conference option may be used for an examinee, a delegate, and/or a synodical deputy who is not present at the classis meeting (due to extreme distance or prohibitive cost of traveling to the classis meeting).
- A totally “virtual” meeting could be conducted by video conferencing, with all delegates participating from their individual computers/devices.

Other uses are likely possible and will be discovered as the use of technology in our daily lives continues to progress. At this point classes have reported using the first three examples described here, and at least one classis is thinking about experimenting with the final example.

As Synod 2018 has requested guidelines regarding the use of video for examinations, the Candidacy Committee offers the following suggestions:

- Meeting in person is always preferable to meeting via video conference—the use of video conferencing, at least for the near future, should be the exception rather than the norm. Especially in the setting of examinations and interviews, the nuances of a person’s expression and voice are much stronger in face-to-face settings, and both the person being examined and the other persons present will be best served with an in-person atmosphere. Video meetings are more useful once a relationship has been established.

- Synodical deputies have been advised in the past that their physical presence is highly recommended where classis deliberation needs to occur. Yet there are certainly cases where routine matters such as approving a clearly presented job description or a noncontroversial release of a pastor can be done via video conference, or conference call, or email.
- Where distance and cost factors are prohibitive, and where a classis is of a unified mind to experiment, video conferencing may be a useful tool, especially in the first few examples described above. Such experimenting may indeed result in experiencing a learning curve that may bless the rest of the denomination.
- Any successful experiment and use of video-conference technology will depend on the following:
 - having adequate and experienced technical support available at the time of the classis meeting
 - ascertaining beforehand that the connections, bandwidth, and equipment will be suitable in advance of the meeting; online participants will also need to test their equipment ahead of time to ensure that the technology parameters will be adequate
 - anticipating and planning for the technical ability to facilitate questions from the assembly, and for managing any needed periods of executive session
 - assigning the technical functions (managing connections, chat questions, etc.) to someone at the meeting who does not already have responsibility for chairing or recording the minutes of the meeting

It should be noted that our CRCNA IT staff have gathered suggestions for well-functioning video-conference meetings and have placed them in a Network article: “Top 6 Tips for Improving Video Conferencing” (see network.crcna.org/church-communications/top-6-tips-improving-video-conferencing).

The Candidacy Committee offers these comments with the suggestion that they be received as fulfilling the assignment given by Synod 2018 and be placed in appropriate sections of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook and the Journey Toward Ordination document.

2. Clarification on how Article 8 may be used for receiving an individual ordained by an independent congregation

The Candidacy Committee and various classes have encountered this kind of situation at least eight times over the past decade. Our theology of the church recognizes that neither the CRCNA nor any denomination is the sole expression of the current-day body of Christ. There are also numerous congregations with a polity that claims and owns an “independent” identity. In varying degrees and in unique expressions these “independent” congregations also interact with neighboring congregations and with the broader church.

The only Church Order procedure available to us as a denomination for offering a door to affiliation for a person ordained in one of these independent settings is the process presented in Church Order Article 8.

Church Order Article 8 was written before the proliferation of independent congregations, so it refers only to denominations. The Candidacy Committee believes that the concern of the Church Order is not that a “literal denominational affiliation” be required for pastoral affiliation via Article 8. That would potentially exclude a number of gifted, qualified, and experienced pastors. Rather, the Candidacy Committee believes that the concern of the Church Order is that any pastor who affiliates is able to demonstrate that they have lived in a godly, accountable relationship with respect to the expression of the local and broader church, and that they have the requisite educational requirements expected of an ordained minister of the Word in the CRCNA.

Our affiliation process requires letters of recommendation, demonstration of appropriate training, discernment by a local congregation and a classis, and many other forms of vetting appropriate for an individual who would serve among us. All of these requirements are applied to pastors seeking to affiliate with the CRCNA from what would be called a denominational setting and from what would be called an independent church setting.

For the sake of clarity, the Candidacy Committee proposes that the title of Church Order Supplement, Article 8, section E be changed from “Calling Ministers from Other Denominations” to “Calling Ministers Ordained Outside of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.” Similar editorial changes would be made in items E, 1 and E, 2 and elsewhere as appropriate. This change would work well with the title of section D, “Calling Ministers from the Reformed Church in America,” while also more clearly expressing what we believe to be the intent of this section of the Church Order Supplement.

The Candidacy Committee offers these comments with the suggestion that they be received as fulfilling the assignment given by Synod 2018 and placed in appropriate sections of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook and the Journey Toward Ordination document.

F. Proposed new draft of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook

The Commissioned Pastor Handbook has functioned in our denomination for nearly seven years as a record of the actions of synod with regard to the office of commissioned pastor. Synods 2017 and 2018 responded positively to the suggestion of the Candidacy Committee that many of the Church Order Supplement statements regarding the office of commissioned pastor could be more helpfully presented in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Synod 2018 instructed the Candidacy Committee to reformat the Commissioned Pastor Handbook to coordinate with the proposed changes to Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements and to present the updated handbook to Synod 2019 for approval. Appendix A to this Candidacy Committee report presents the updated text of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook in fulfillment of that assignment.

It should be noted that the updated handbook includes all the updated Church Order and Supplements material being considered by Synod 2019 with regard to the office of commissioned pastor, in anticipation that the proposed materials will be approved as presented. Further adjustments, if required, will be incorporated into the updated handbook before it is posted and ready for use.

The Candidacy Committee offers the updated Commissioned Pastor Handbook, as presented in Appendix A, to Synod 2019 for approval.

G. Proposed modifications to the Journey Toward Ordination document

The final piece of this section of the Candidacy Committee report presents proposed modifications to the Journey Toward Ordination document. These modifications are presented in Appendix B. As has already been stated, they include the material previously discussed pertaining to video examinations, and pertaining to clarification on how Church Order Article 8 may be used for receiving individuals ordained by independent congregations. In presenting Appendix B, the Candidacy Committee anticipates that all materials within it reflecting changes presented to Synod 2019 will be approved. Further adjustments, if required, will be incorporated into the updated Journey Toward Ordination document before it is posted and ready for use. Note that Appendix B does not contain the Journey Toward Ordination document in its entirety, since that would require much more space.

The Candidacy Committee offers the updates to the Journey Toward Ordination document, as presented in Appendix B, to Synod 2019 for approval.

IV. Update on the uses of Church Order Article 8

Our denominational practice of using Church Order Article 8 has encountered some challenges over the past 10-15 years. Article 8 is the Church Order article that regulates the process by which a person ordained in another church setting can affiliate with the CRCNA and serve in our ministries. The challenges center on two elements.

First, there has been difficulty discerning the proper learning plan for the CRCNA orientation expected of pastors affiliating with us. Second, there has been difficulty quantifying the phrase “sustained and realistic effort” as it pertains to seeking first a pastor already ordained in the CRC (and/or RCA) before making use of the Article 8 route to ordination. In both of these challenges the Candidacy Committee has been transparent with synod as it has sought a way forward. On numerous occasions in the past decade we have reported to synod the nature of the judgment calls we are making in this area of our work. Synod has had opportunities to affirm or redirect our efforts, and we have been grateful for the encouragement and wisdom we have received.

Regarding the first challenge, one of the initial actions of the Candidacy Committee after its formation was to propose a standardized learning plan, done through accredited work at Calvin Theological Seminary. This proposal was approved by Synod 2006, and for a period of time all Article 8 applicants were required to participate in the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC). The MEPMC uses the course work required of candidates trained in seminaries other than Calvin Theological Seminary but does not require the full candidacy process because the Article 8 process covers many of the candidacy process elements. The expectation for using the MEPMC was written into the Church Order (see Art. 8-c).

It became evident within a short while that the MEPMC as a program had some limitations. It required a significant amount of effort to complete, it cost over \$6,000 per person, and it was not able to be contextualized for many of our affiliating ethnic-minority pastors. Thus the Candidacy Committee

proposed to synod that a broader working definition of the MPPMC be recognized. We referred to "Individualized Learning Plans" or "Contextualized Learning Plans," and we set up one-on-one mentorship relationships between Article 8 applicants and classis-appointed mentors. The essential elements of denominational orientation were covered in the context of those relationships, with an agreed-upon accountability to the classis team and the Candidacy Committee. Synod endorsed this broader definition of MPPMC, and we believe the nonaccredited, mentor-focused, less costly learning plan strategy has served us well in many cases.

Regarding the second challenge, as mentioned in our report to Synod 2018, we are finding that our congregations and classes desire a more flexible definition of "sustained and realistic effort." In previous years we had reported to synod that we were working with a general guideline that interpreted "sustained and realistic effort" as requiring at least two years of vacancy and at least two unsuccessful calls from within the CRC and / or RCA. Yet in many circumstances local search committees, with support from their classes, have pressed for greater flexibility.

As we reported to Synod 2018, we have granted more flexibility in the criteria in some cases, dependent on support of the classis and dependent on a commitment to use a more rigorous learning plan (the accredited course work at Calvin Seminary, as mentioned above). Our rationale in this has been that (1) the course work at Calvin is excellent, and (2) the readiness to do a more costly learning plan and to expend greater effort is a strong indicator of the pastor's desire to assimilate into the denomination, and of the congregation's desire to honor our denominational covenants. Although the CTS educational program will not work for all, it is surely good for the cases in which it will work.

We currently have six pastors engaged in this program. They represent congregations in five different classes. In each case the congregational search process led them to a prospective Article 8 pastor in a way that did not conform to our narrower definition of "sustained and realistic effort." In each case the classis has been fully supportive of the congregation's desire to enlist the service of the pastoral applicant. And in each case there have been unique elements regarding the relationship of the pastor to the community or to the congregation, and those elements have encouraged the use of Article 8.

At this point the Candidacy Committee provides these reflections mainly for information to synod. On the matter of the second challenge, we reported to Synod 2018 that we would keep synod apprised of our implementation of a more flexible strategy and of a greater use of the Calvin Seminary-accredited curriculum. In both of these challenges the Candidacy Committee plans to watch the trends associated with them, and to inform synod as appropriate.

As we consider these challenges, the Candidacy Committee believes that since there are other changes to the Church Order being proposed this year in connection with our ordination processes, two additional changes may serve the church well. We believe it would be helpful and clarifying to change the wording of Article 8-c to describe more accurately the flexibility we have built into the required learning plans. We also believe that changes in the wording of Article 8-c and 8-d describing ministers who use

Article 8 should be clarified to include ordained ministers from independent congregations as well as those from other denominations. These matters are discussed in section III, E of our report in connection with Church Order Supplement, Article 8, section E.

The Candidacy Committee therefore proposes the following changes to Church Order Article 8 (underlining indicates changes to the text):

- c. Ministers ordained outside of the CRCNA who desire to become ministers in the Christian Reformed Church shall be required to complete a learning plan endorsed by the Candidacy Committee.
- d. Ministers ordained outside of the CRCNA who have not been declared eligible for a call shall not be called unless all synodical requirements have been met.

The Candidacy Committee deems that these changes are not substantive in nature and are therefore recommended for adoption by Synod 2019.

V. Reflection on the RCA/CRC orderly exchange of ministers agreement

Synod 2005 approved an agreement for orderly exchange of ministers between the CRCNA and the Reformed Church in America (see Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, section D; *Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 741-42). Sometime later, after discovering that similar agreements between the RCA and three other denominations include an additional statement explaining that the agreement is not intended for a minister's first call, the Candidacy Committee requested that such a statement be included in Church Order Supplement, Article 8 as well. Synod 2011 approved the addition (now included as statement 12 in Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, section D) with the understanding that it would also be adopted by the RCA and inserted into the RCA Book of Order (*Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 824-25). At that time, our denominational leadership had verbal assurance from RCA leadership that this would be done. We have recently discovered, however, that the RCA Book of Order has not yet been updated to include statement 12, and in recent conversations with RCA officials there seems to be no record or memory of the 2011 discussion to include this statement. Unfortunately, the task has become a bit complicated because leadership in both denominations has changed considerably since 2011.

Statement 12 was and is important to the Candidacy Committee because its absence could threaten the integrity of our EPMC program. So in this regard the Candidacy Committee wishes to bring two proposals to synod:

1. That the executive director be instructed to work with the appropriate bodies in the CRC and the RCA to bring the text of the orderly exchange of ministers agreement into consistency in both denominations, including statement 12 as found in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, section D.
2. That Synod 2019 approve that, in the meantime, the following note be placed after Church Order Supplement, Article 8, D, 12: "Due to unknown factors, this statement currently does not appear in the RCA Book of Order; yet it is accepted as valid within the CRC."

VI. 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. In fact, in 2018 we saw a historic shift as almost 60 percent of the candidates presented to synod entered candidacy through the EPMC.

As the Candidacy Committee works with Calvin Theological Seminary in developing ministries and programs to serve the church, a joint committee was formed this past year to review the EPMC. This committee is surveying key stakeholders and using other avenues to evaluate the goals and effectiveness of the EPMC. It is hoped that an initial report on the background and recent growth of the EPMC would be provided to Synod 2019 by supplemental reports recommending that synod request a full report be provided to Synod 2020.

B. Implementing a two-year candidacy process

A prominent feature of our reports to synod is always the presentation of ministerial candidates. The Candidacy Committee proposed to Synod 2015 a process by which, prior to eligibility for call, each candidate would have an active two-year relationship with a mentor, a local ministry, and a regional classis. Synod 2015 approved this process 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 second 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 process 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.

C. 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. This committee has now been formed, and it is active under the leadership of Pastor Church Resources. We are grateful for this initiative, 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.

D. An assessment project for pastors

An assessment project to help aspiring and current pastors discern "ministry fit" 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.)

E. Other initiatives

Numerous other initiatives could be described, including pastor orientation programs in Korean and in Spanish, Clinical Pastoral Education initiatives with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, continuing updates on our candidacy website, and more. As our report this year is already quite extensive, we will conclude simply by expressing our gratitude to the church and to the many partners who work with us in the candidacy processes. We covet your continuing prayers and your input.

VII. 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 two new members to the Candidacy Committee from the slates of nominees presented and reappoint Rev. Mark Hilbelink and Rev. Andrew Vander Leek to second three-year terms.
- C. That synod adopt the following recommendations concerning Church Order Articles 8, 23, 24, and 82-84, and their Supplements:
 1. That synod adopt the reformatted Church Order Articles 23-24 as proposed by Synod 2018 and as presented in this report (III, A).
 2. That synod approve the proposed reformatted Supplements to Church Order Articles 23-24 as acknowledged by Synod 2018 and as presented in this report (III, B).
 3. That synod approve the proposed changes to Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, sections e and f, as presented in this report (III, C).
 4. That synod adopt the revised statements of Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F, as presented in this report (III, D).
 5. That synod receive the comments offered by the Candidacy Committee in section III, E of this report regarding guidelines for video examinations and regarding the use of Church Order Article 8 for receiving an individual ordained by an independent congregation, as fulfilling its assignment by Synod 2018 (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 488), and instruct the committee to place these comments in appropriate sections of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook and the Journey Toward Ordination document.
 6. That synod approve a change of title for Church Order Supplement, Article 8, section E, "Calling Ministers Ordained Outside of the Christian Reformed Church in North America," along with related editorial changes in the text of that section and in the Journey Toward Ordination document.
 7. That synod approve the updated Commissioned Pastor Handbook, as presented in Appendix A (III, F).
 8. That synod approve the updates to the Journey Toward Ordination document, as presented in Appendix B (III, G).

9. That synod instruct the Candidacy Committee to work with the Office of Synodical Services in making both the Commissioned Pastor Handbook and the Journey Toward Education document readily available in PDF format on the CRCNA website, and also, potentially, available in print-on-demand format through Faith Alive Christian Resources.
10. That synod approve the following changes to Church Order Article 8, as discussed in section IV of this report (underlining indicates changes to the text):
 - c. Ministers ordained outside of the CRCNA who desire to become ministers in the Christian Reformed Church shall be required to complete a learning plan endorsed by the Candidacy Committee.
 - d. Ministers ordained outside of the CRCNA who have not been declared eligible for a call shall not be called unless all synodical requirements have been met.
11. That synod approve the following two proposals related to the orderly exchange of ministers agreement between the CRC and the RCA, as discussed in section V of this report:
 - a. That the executive director be instructed to work with the appropriate bodies in the CRC and the RCA to bring the text of the orderly exchange of ministers agreement into consistency in both denominations, including statement 12 as found in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, section D.
 - b. That Synod 2019 approve that, in the meantime, the following note be placed after Church Order Supplement, Article 8, D, 12: "Due to unknown factors, this statement currently does not appear in the RCA Book of Order; yet it is accepted as valid within the CRC."
- 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 A Commissioned Pastor Handbook

This handbook of information on the office of commissioned pastor in the Christian Reformed Church in North America is intended as a resource for individuals, church councils, and classis leaders as they consider the various ways to make use of this office and the procedures that are involved. This volume reports actions synod has taken and policies synod has approved. It also offers commentary on these actions and policies (noting appropriate sources).

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I. An Overview of the Development of the Office of Commissioned Pastor and the Use of this Handbook (updated by Synod 2019)

The CRC denominational Candidacy Committee, in its 2007 report to synod, called the church to give the office of commissioned pastor “more use, more status, and more support.” The committee suggested this goal in the context of aiming to return to a more historical use of Church Order Article 7 entry into ordination as minister of the Word, and to use Church Order Article 23 as the route to ministry for persons who do not have the academic training required for ordination as a minister of the Word.

Over the past decade a variety of issues have been identified through various formal and informal conversations among leaders, councils, classes, the Candidacy Committee, and synod. A brief review of this discussion, especially at the formal level of synod, would include the following:

1. In its report to Synod 2009 the Candidacy Committee suggested a variety of initiatives to support and honor persons serving as commissioned pastors. As of 2019, a number of those initiatives have been implemented.

- a. Many classes now formally acknowledge the retirement of commissioned pastors, and synod acknowledges them in its yearly meeting as classes report information to the Synodical Services office.
 - b. The denomination's official magazine, *The Banner*, often highlights the ministries served by commissioned pastors and includes commissioned pastors as contributors. In fact, the current *Banner* editor is an ordained commissioned pastor.
 - c. Numerous leaders in the CRCNA are currently ordained as commissioned pastors, including the executive director, the director of ministries and administration, and a number of lead staff in Resonate Global Mission.
2. Synod 2015 received an overture from Classis Hamilton requesting clarification in a number of areas regarding the practice, process, and use of the office of commissioned pastor. Synod referred the overture to the Candidacy Committee, prompting key contributions to the discussion via Candidacy Committee reports to Synods 2016, 2017, and 2018. A number of the statements in this handbook reflect actions of synod in response to those Candidacy Committee reports.
 3. More specifically, Synod 2016 approved "observations for our practice" related to twelve areas of clarification regarding the use and practice of the office; Synod 2017 approved statements regarding a number of follow-up matters; and Synod 2018 approved for recommendation to Synod 2019 a reformatting of Church Order Articles 23 and 24 regarding the office of commissioned pastor. This action of Synod 2018 also acknowledged an initial draft of updated supplements to Articles 23 and 24 and greater use of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook in anticipation of proposals to Synod 2019 to update these supplements and the handbook in connection with the proposed changes to Articles 23 and 24.

As the office of commissioned pastor has been evolving over the past two decades and in anticipation of its continuing evolution, this handbook is intended to be a helpful guide to and reminder of the rules and statements of synod related to the office of commissioned pastor. It serves alongside the Rules for Synodical Procedure, the Journey Toward Ordination, and other approved statements of practice providing guidelines for ministry and life within the CRCNA.

II. General Description of the Office of Commissioned Pastor

The office of commissioned pastor is recognized in the Christian Reformed Church as a flexible, very localized ordination into pastoral ministry. *Commissioned pastor* is an "umbrella term" for a variety of ministry positions such as evangelist, chaplain, pastor of outreach, of youth, of congregational life, and more. As the Church Order Supplement to Article 23-a says, "The office of [commissioned pastor] may be understood to have the character of pastoral extension." Quoting guidelines adopted by Synod 2001, the supplement explains that this office serves to extend "the ministry of organized congregations into specialized areas, including, but not limited to, youth ministry, education, pastoral care, worship, and evangelism."

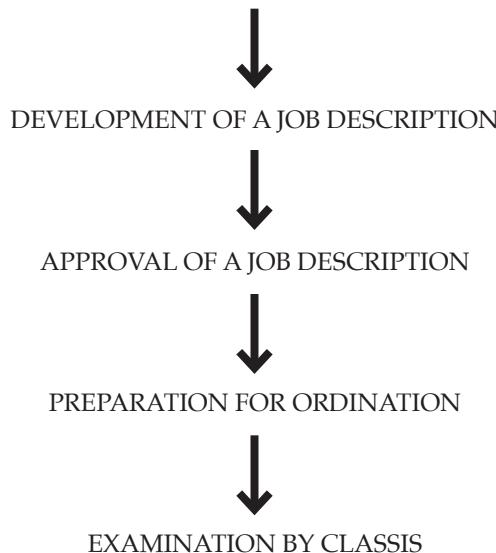
Ordination to the office of commissioned pastor arises out of a local ministry context in which a ministry will (a) show the need for ordained leadership and (b) create a job description. The job description will be considered by the classis in consultation with representatives from three neighboring classes (i.e., the synodical deputies). Once all are agreed that the ministry as described in the job description fits the intention of Article 23 (as described by the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001), the process toward ordination will continue. This process involves verifying relevant ministry skills, designing and engaging in a learning plan (where appropriate), gathering necessary documents, preparing a sermon to be critiqued (if preaching is part of the job description), and preparing for an oral exam at the classis level.

It is noteworthy that up to this point very little has been said about the individual to be ordained. There is an underlying assumption that an individual will emerge who can fit the ministry position being created or recognized. All parties concerned need to be in prayer that such a “match” will occur and be affirmed through this process of discernment.

If your local ministry is doing work that would be well served by the ordained leadership of a commissioned pastor, you are encouraged to speak to the classis leadership in your area. If you are an individual who wishes to be used in ministry as an ordained commissioned pastor, talk to your local church or classis leaders. Seek out especially the members of an area Classical Ministerial Leadership Team. Together as a church, we are actively asking “the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2).

Flow Chart Summarizing the Process of Ordaining a Commissioned Pastor

RECOGNITION OF A MINISTRY NEED FOR ORDAINED LEADERSHIP



III. Church Order Article 23 and 24 Statements

(as proposed to synod; *italics* indicate new text or changes to be approved 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.

Supplement, Article 23-a (general notes regarding the administration of the office)

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.]*

All commissioned pastor positions must be approved by classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies, to determine whether or not the position fits these guidelines adopted by Synod 2001. All commissioned pastors must demonstrate through an examination their 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.

(Acts of Synod 2019, p. ____)

Commissioned pastor job descriptions related to the ministry of chaplaincy must be approved in consultation with Chaplaincy and Care Ministry. 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)

Article 24

- a. *Commissioned pastors may serve in a solo or senior pastor 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 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.*
- c. *Commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their councils and classes.*
- d. *A commissioned pastor position may be concluded 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.*
- e. *A commissioned pastor who has reached retirement age may, upon the judgment of classis, be given the title of commissioned pastor emeritus.*

Supplement, Article 24-a

Commissioned pastors may serve in positions of solo leadership in an established church only in specified circumstances. These circumstances were specified before 2019 in Church Order Articles 23-b, 23-c, and 23-d and are now presented and explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. A classis may decide to make such appointments contingent upon implementation of a learning plan leading toward meeting the qualifications for minister of the Word, as described in Church Order Article 24-b. In all cases in which a commissioned pastor serves in a solo leadership position in an emerging or organized church, it is mandatory that such a person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan for denominational orientation, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee, as described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Supplement, Article 24-b

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.

Supplement, Article 24-c

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-d

Synod has offered, on various occasions, guidelines regarding the conclusion of an approved commissioned pastor position, the resignation of a commissioned pastor, and the release of a commissioned pastor. Synod also instructs classes to make an appropriate declaration reflecting the status of any commissioned pastor who concludes service. These guidelines and options regarding status are the same as those for minister of the Word and can be found in Supplement, Article 14-b, c, 2 or in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

Supplement, Article 24-e

A commissioned pastor emeritus may, upon the judgment of classis, retain the authority to perform official acts of ministry in ways consistent with their ordination prior to retirement. Supervision of a commissioned pastor emeritus shall remain with the church last served unless transferred to another congregation with the approval of the classis(es) involved.

IV. Material Previously Contained in Supplement, Article 23

Until 2019 the Church Order Supplement for Articles 23 and 24 was quite lengthy. Synod 2018 approved the concept of making greater use of the Commissioned Pastor Handbook as a vehicle to communicate the various detailed rules and practices regarding the office of commissioned pastor. Synod 2019 approved the handbook in its current form, with the understanding that updates will be made as time continues, with appropriate related notations included in the handbook. This section of the handbook contains numerous statements previously included in the Church Order Supplement. Relevant additional statements received and approved by synod are included under many of the topic areas. The expectation of synod is that these statements remain esteemed and useful in the administration of the office of commissioned pastor. As is stated in Church Order Article 29, decisions of ecclesiastical bodies, including synod, shall be considered "settled and binding."

A. Job Descriptions

In the past, the Synodical Services office received inquiries seeking help in determining the elements of an acceptable job description. The Candidacy office also received occasional similar requests from classes and local ministries. Synod 2012 therefore added to the Church Order Supplement the following statement now appearing in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook:

Elements of a Good Job Description

1. A description of the functions and responsibilities that are ministerial in nature (see the first paragraph of Church Order Supplement, 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.

The Candidacy Committee, in its report to Synod 2016, offered “observations for our practice” in connection with various concerns about job descriptions (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 265-66; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 848). This advice was offered in the context of parallel guidance for approval of job descriptions for minister of the Word as presented in Church Order Articles 12-b, 12-c, 13-b, and 13-c. The following observations were received and recommended to congregations and classes as helpful advice in the administration of Church Order Articles 23-24:

- a. When approving a job description that involves a commissioned pastor serving in a position outside of North America, it would be wise for the classis, the calling church, or the potential commissioned pastor to secure a letter of endorsement from our denominational missions agency. World Missions [now part of Resonate Global Mission] has developed a straightforward protocol for such endorsement, which will assure all parties concerned that the ministry proposed will be done responsibly. It will also enable such commissioned pastors to receive the support and encouragement of our regional missions teams across the globe.
- b. When approving a job description involving a commissioned pastor serving in a position that has chaplaincy embedded in the work, it would be wise for the classis, the calling church, or the potential commissioned pastor to secure a letter of endorsement from the denominational Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry. Such a letter would be a blessing to the chaplain and the church as it would enable a connection to the growing cadre of endorsed CRC chaplains.
- c. With the current and broadening use of the office of commissioned pastor it becomes clear that a common description of a commissioned pastor position as “confined to the boundaries of the classis that ordains them” is erroneous. Church Order Article 24-c states that “commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their councils and classes.” The boundaries or limits placed on a commissioned pastor are determined by the field of labor as defined in the job description, not by geography.
- d. We suggest that it would be wise for a job description to state explicitly whether a commissioned pastor will preach, and whether

the preaching will occur in the form of occasional service as a “pulpit supply pastor” in neighboring churches. There is an erroneous belief that any commissioned pastor who preaches has license to preach anywhere in the classis. The Church Order in Article 23 does not specify this. Rather, limits and boundaries of the work of a commissioned pastor are specified in the job description. If the preaching responsibilities of a commissioned pastor are intended to enable this person to serve as pulpit supply at other churches in the classis, it would be best for the job description to say so and for the classical examination to be of the same nature as those given before granting such licensure.

The Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2016 also addressed the phenomenon of ministry positions evolving over time beyond their stated job descriptions and the responsibility of classes with regard to such changes. The Candidacy Committee offered the following “observations for our practice”:

The Candidacy Committee suggests that this is one of many areas in church life where spiritual discernment and common sense need to guide us, rather than increased procedure and rule. We have observed a number of cases in which a classis interim committee has responsibly deliberated regarding a changing job description, determining whether it has become something new which needs approval by classis, or whether it remains the same at its heart. Classis interim committees are free to share their decisions with classis, or even to present a motion that their judgment regarding a changing job description be approved. Synodical deputies can also be consulted, formally or informally, and they would, of course, be invited to the conversation if indeed a job description were to change so much as to be judged “new.”

(*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 267)

B. Learning Plans

The next area of discussion has to do with preparing for the examination of a commissioned pastor. The Candidacy Committee has often received questions regarding the nature, design, implementation, and timing of learning plans. Relevant questions have to do with who supervises the design and implementation of a plan, and how a classis can be assured that a potential commissioned pastor is prepared to do well when examined by classis. (See the Candidacy Committee report in the *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 272-73.)

One particular concern of the denomination regarding learning plans and the preparation of those seeking ordination to the office of commissioned pastor is that any person serving in a lead role (senior or solo pastor) in a congregation identified with the CRCNA is going to in some way represent the CRCNA. Note, then, that Synod 2013 approved the following requirement (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 557):

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.

Grounds:

- a. This ensures that those who provide primary spiritual leadership in CRC congregations have been adequately trained in the basic denominational information that the church expects of its primary spiritual leaders.
- b. This enables a classis to have flexibility in the training mechanisms it uses for commissioned pastors, as a given learning plan can include many elements and learning experiences.
- c. This balances local flexibility and contextual sensitivity with a denominational voice via the Candidacy Committee, which is advantageous for consistency in denominational awareness among leaders in the CRC.

The Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2016 observed that the grounds of this approved motion indicate the growing regard that the church has for the office of commissioned pastor. Those in positions not specified by this 2013 addition may still be required by classis to engage in a learning plan consistent with an approved job description. All learning plans originate at the classis level, with significant planning done by the person involved as well as the classis team. In the case of those who fit the 2013 requirement, material for developing a learning plan is available from the Candidacy Committee office (email: candidacy@crcna.org).

The following “observations for our practice” were received and recommended as helpful advice by Synod 2016 (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 272-73):

- a. Note that Synod 2013 added a paragraph to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a that requires “a contextualized learning plan, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee,” for all persons who will be examined for a position involving solo pastoral work in an emerging or organized church. For these persons the learning plan needs to be completed before an examination takes place, and the learning plan is to be developed in consultation between appropriate classis leaders and the Candidacy Committee.
- b. Note also that since 2004 Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a has included an extended description of ministry standards that classes can use in judging readiness for ministry as an ordained commissioned pastor. These can surely guide the preparation phase for anyone contemplating this ordination.
- c. Previous study reports of synod have referred to a “principle of proportionality” relative to the preparation and readiness for commissioned pastor ordination. A potential commissioned pastor should demonstrate a given area of knowledge and skill in proportion to the degree that such knowledge and skill are part of the approved job description.
- d. The Candidacy Committee has created a list of training programs and ministries aimed at potential commissioned pastors. The list is included in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook on the Candidacy pages of the denominational website (crcna.org). There is opportunity to add to

this list, and it has been prepared in the hope that it might be of service to churches, classes, and potential commissioned pastors as they contemplate learning plans.

- e. A consult meeting sponsored by the Candidacy Committee in the fall of 2011 resulted in the agreement by various advocates of the commissioned pastor office that classis has often proceeded too quickly toward an examination for ordination. It is much more wise, the group decided, for classis to prescribe a series of steps by which a potential commissioned pastor meets members and functionaries of the classis a few different times before a scheduled exam.

Synod 2018 also approved the requirement that the learning plans for commissioned pastors serving in a senior or solo pastor role include notice of a criminal background check and a psychological assessment (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 465).

Synod has also addressed one further matter regarding learning plans for commissioned pastors in recent years. In the adjustment to the 2013 requirement for learning plans, the Candidacy Committee reported to Synod 2017 that in a number of cases classes have proceeded with an examination for a commissioned pastor serving in a solo pastor role without consulting the Candidacy Committee. The Candidacy Committee observed that "this specific issue is one in which the denomination, its ministry, and its reputation are well served by consistent practice. It is in the interest of both the denomination and the local church to ensure that commissioned pastors charged with primary leadership at the local level are able to represent and support the denomination's values" (*Agenda for Synod 2017*, p. 324).

In its 2017 report to synod the Candidacy Committee pondered this matter and considered a few possible solutions. In the end, the committee proposed the following statement for approval by synod:

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.

(Acts of Synod 2017, p. 689)

The Candidacy Committee's report called synod's attention to the limited nature of the proposed role of the synodical deputies and the new step being required for classes. A classis acts only to affirm that they have evidence that a learning plan has been formed and carried out in consultation with the Candidacy Committee. The synodical deputies concur only that such an action has taken place. It is conceivable, and likely, that such concurrence could be done via email and that the physical presence of the deputies at the classis meeting is not required. The task of synodical deputy concurrence with classis judgment of fitness for ministry is not required because commissioned pastors, as locally ordained servants, serve under the authority of the local classis, not the denomination. The stated hope of synod and the Candidacy Committee is that this approach will mitigate concerns regarding denominational overreach while still ensuring that the interests of the denomination

are served (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 318-28; *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 685, 688-90).

C. *Qualifications for a Commissioned Pastor*

Synod 2004 approved a document to guide classes in defining the qualifications of a person being considered for ordination as a commissioned pastor. The document was included in the Church Order Supplement for a number of years, and it remains as a synodically endorsed description of the standards for pastoral ministry. The statement is included here to give applicants, churches, and classes an idea of the sought-for qualifications of a candidate for ordination as a commissioned pastor.

Character

The commissioned pastor is mature in Christ. “Christ-likeness” covers all of what it means to be godly. The following guidelines, which are rooted in Scripture (references are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive), suggest many aspects of godly character:

1. **Devoted to Jesus**—The commissioned pastor is “in Christ” (John 15:5), filled with his Spirit (Acts 1:8), and exercises personal spiritual disciplines.
2. **Committed to the church and its mission** (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 5:22)—The commissioned pastor is a person in Christian community. She/he has been tested and proven. She/he has been recognized as prepared for ministry by the community of believers and evidences accountability to it.
3. **Called and gifted** (Matt. 28:16ff.; Acts 1:8)—The commissioned pastor has a calling from God that is confirmed by the church. That calling provides her/him with a mission, with vision, and with intrinsic motivation. She/he ministers out of giftedness (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; etc.).
4. **Filled with love** (Matt. 22:37-40)—The commissioned pastor is characterized by love—love of God, love of self, and love of others, including lost and diverse people.
5. **Possesses the fruit of the Spirit** (Gal. 5:22-23)—The commissioned pastor gives evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.
6. **Possesses the qualities of an officebearer** (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9)—The commissioned pastor demonstrates such qualities as being reputable, loyal, self-disciplined, respected, hospitable, mature, honest, sincere, teachable and able to teach, emotionally stable, blameless, lover of God and not money, resilient, responsible, not quick-tempered, not overbearing, not quarrelsome, not abusive (of others or substances), managing her/his own household well (including spousal support of ministry), risk-taking, flexible, adaptable, etc.
7. **Has a servant’s heart** (Matt. 20:26)—The commissioned pastor is a servant-leader.
8. **Possesses wisdom** (Prov. 1:1-7)—The commissioned pastor lives according to God’s design, recognizes Christ as “wisdom from God” (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 2:3), and seeks wisdom from above (James 1:5; 3:13).

9. **Manages life well**—The commissioned pastor practices good stewardship of time, talents, finances, and physical creation (Gen. 1:27-28; Ps. 8:6-8).
10. **Eager to learn**—The commissioned pastor is a lifelong learner, ever studying God's Word and world (Ps. 19) and demonstrates that she/he has been and is currently being mentored.

Biblical Knowledge

The commissioned pastor has a working knowledge of the Bible in her/his native language, and

1. is able to identify Scripture's main themes (covenant, kingdom of God, missio Dei, etc.) and to locate their place in the redemptive history that is centered in Christ;
2. has command of the divisions of Scripture (law, prophets, gospels, epistles, etc.), the historical and literary contexts of each biblical book, and basic hermeneutical principles required to interpret them;
3. is able to demonstrate knowledge of key Scripture passages, and to apply them appropriately to life and ministry.

Based on the above, the commissioned pastor is able to prepare and preach/teach meaningful and motivational messages/lessons that are true to Scripture. The commissioned pastor is able to communicate clearly the gospel to unbelievers and believers.

Theological Knowledge

1. The commissioned pastor has knowledge of doctrinal standards and systematic theology at the level of Berkhof's *Manual of Christian Doctrine*. This would include knowledge of Reformed systematic theology, the ecumenical creeds, and the three confessional standards of the Christian Reformed Church. Furthermore, the commissioned pastor is able to differentiate and defend the Reformed faith biblically from other systems of thought, both Christian and non-Christian. She/he is able to reflect from a biblical perspective on the cultures, circumstances, and events of everyday life and ministry.
2. The commissioned pastor has a basic knowledge of church history (including Christian Reformed Church history and culture) and is able to apply its lessons to present reality and ministry.

Skill—Practice of Ministry

Commissioned pastors give evidence of ministry skills. The skills necessary for ministry are many, and not all commissioned pastors possess them in the same measure. Someone in a ministry position will be expected to demonstrate skills in relation to the particularity of her/his position. Commissioned pastors, whether in specialized ministry within an organized congregation or in new church development, use skills to lead the church of Jesus Christ to fulfill the New Testament purposes of outreach, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. Some necessary ministry skills are

1. **Leadership and Administration**—The commissioned pastor is able to help people and the church move from where they are to where God

wants them to be. To do this, commissioned pastors possess such skills as casting vision; creating ownership; creating functional, organizational systems; resolving conflict; developing gift-based ministries; planning ministry; developing and mentoring leaders; and managing time, money, and people (according to principles of CRC polity).

2. **Outreach**—The commissioned pastor is able personally to share (witness); to defend (apologetics) the faith; and to lead the church in reaching out to the lost, in receiving them, and in developing new churches.
3. **Worship**—The commissioned pastor is able to prepare and deliver messages/teach lessons (homiletics), administer the sacraments, and lead in worship and prayer.
4. **Pastoral Care**—The commissioned pastor possesses relational skills that enable her/him to provide personally and through the church (corporately) pastoral care, visitation, small groups, youth ministry, spiritual counsel, and conduct of weddings and funerals.
5. **Fellowship**—The commissioned pastor is able to foster a nurturing Christian community.
6. **Discipleship**—The commissioned pastor is able to raise up, teach, and nurture disciple-making disciples.
7. **Service**—The commissioned pastor is able to respond to personal and community needs by mobilizing the church for ministry.
8. **Specialized**—The commissioned pastor has any necessary skills specific to her/his particular calling within the church.

(See *Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 619; *Agenda for Synod 2004*, pp. 373-75
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2009*, pp. 583-84)

D. *Examination Protocol*

The Synod of the CRC has adopted guidelines for the examination of persons being ordained to the office of commissioned pastor. A general guideline adopted in coordination with the standards noted in section IV, C above states, “The classis shall ensure that the candidate meets the standards of character, knowledge, and skill adopted by Synod 2004 (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 619).” It is important to note that these standards were adopted with the presumption that what has been called “the principle of proportionality” would be applied. In other words, a potential commissioned pastor should demonstrate ministry skill “in proportion to” what the proposed and approved job description would require.

Synod has also specified a set of documents that should be presented prior to any examination. These documents were listed in the Church Order Supplement and are now noted in this handbook as follows:

Presentation of the following documents

- 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

Note that Synod 2018 also approved the requirement that a criminal background check and a psychological evaluation be done for those who are examined for positions involving solo or senior leadership in a given ministry. This is in addition to the requirement that such individuals complete an approved learning plan for orientation in denominational matters (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 465).

This list of required documents does not need to be seen as exhaustive from a classis point of view. A given classis is free to broaden their list of required documents as the context of their classis and of a given ministry might require. The Candidacy Committee website includes some tools that a classis may want to consider as templates in the process of preparing a person for an examination as a commissioned pastor.

Synod has specified that the following elements shall also be included in the classical examination:

Where applicable, presentation of a sermon

- 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.

Examination in the following areas

- a) Knowledge of Scripture
- b) Knowledge of Reformed doctrine
- c) Knowledge of the standards of the church and the Church Order
- 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

Some additional observations

1. By rule of synod the concurrence of synodical deputies is not required for the examination of a candidate for the office of commissioned pastor.
2. There is greater flexibility for a classis in the examination for the office of commissioned pastor than there is in the examination for the office of minister of the Word (see the careful protocol for those examinations as articulated in Church Order Article 10). Classes are free to contextualize their examinations for commissioned pastor relative to the number of questioners, the time set aside, the timing of the exam in relation to the rest of the process for ordination, etc.
3. See section V, A, 3 in this handbook for further thoughts about the practice of examining commissioned pastors.

E. Accountability and Supervision of Commissioned Pastors

Synod has declared that the classis shall ensure that commissioned pastors, especially those working at some distance from their calling congregations, will have proper supervision and support for their ministry (a statement in the former Church Order Supplement). Through the past decade some issues of accountability, supervision, and even discipline concerning commissioned pastors have been dealt with by synod at various times.

First, we consider some comments relative to the supervision of commissioned pastors working in a setting outside of a local congregation (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 262-75; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 849). A 2015 overture from Classis Hamilton stated that there is "lack of clarity over how a commissioned pastor is supervised with integrity" (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 435). The potential lack of clarity was attributed to confusion that arises when a commissioned pastor serves outside the boundaries of a local church (in a parachurch agency, or even with multiple ministries). The overture also suggested that local churches need help in understanding their role in supervision. Specifically cited was the challenge of supervising a missionary living in a foreign country.

In their 2016 response to this overture, assigned by Synod 2015 to the Candidacy Committee, the committee recognized the need for clarity in supervision. As is recognized by the overture of Classis Hamilton, such complication in supervision is faced in certain ministry assignments of ministers of the Word as well as in those of commissioned pastors. Whenever an ordained pastor's work brings them outside the bounds of a local congregational ministry, there are challenges in supervision that need to be addressed.

The Candidacy Committee then proceeded to offer some "observations for our practice" that were received and recommended" by Synod 2016 as helpful advice:

- a. Church Order Article 13 addresses this matter for ministers of the Word who serve in a ministry other than their calling church. A distinction in roles is called for wherein the local council supervises "doctrine and life" and the other ministries, institutions, and/or agencies involved supervise the ministry duties and performance. The Church Order article offering direction for ministers of the Word calls for an implied communication as required by circumstances between the council of the calling church and the supervising agencies that may be involved. We suggest that this very same principle provides adequate guidance for church councils and classes as they face the challenges implicit in supervising commissioned pastors who work beyond the bounds of their calling church.
- b. It seems wise, then, that a job description should clearly delineate who the appropriate ministries and supervisors are in the case of a commissioned pastor role taking place outside the bounds of a calling church. This point is stated rather explicitly in the 2012 addition to the Church Order Supplement to Article 23-a dealing with "elements of a good job description." For supervision of doctrine and life it may be helpful to specify in a letter of mutual covenant the frequency and nature of expected reports and visits to the calling church. Ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors who serve outside the bounds of the

local church, along with their calling churches, will be enabled to enjoy a meaningful relationship through such explicit statements of understanding. The Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry has a template for such a letter, called a "Covenant of Joint Supervision," and it is available on their website (crcna.org/chaplaincy).

F. Discipline of Commissioned Pastors as Officebearers

The issue of accountability in discipline came before Synod 2018 in a number of contexts. As it relates to commissioned pastors, *two actions* of Synod 2019 should be noted in response to concerns raised at Synod 2018 (see *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. ____):

1. In Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, a line was added in section e to clarify that the classis must be involved when a commissioned pastor is deposed. The statement says, "The deposition of a commissioned pastor shall not be effected without the approval of the classis in which the commissioned pastor was approved for ordination."
2. Relative to Church Order Supplement, Article 24-d, a provision was added in which classes are instructed to make a determination of the status of any commissioned pastor who concludes service. Note the following comment in Church Order Supplement, Article 24-d:

Synod has offered, on various occasions, guidelines regarding the conclusion of an approved commissioned pastor position, the resignation of a commissioned pastor, and the release of a commissioned pastor. Synod also instructs classes to make an appropriate declaration reflecting the status of any commissioned pastor who concludes service. These guidelines and options regarding status are the same as those for minister of the Word and can be found in Supplement, Article 14-b, c, 2 or in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

The intent in this second action is that a public record is created with regard to the service of all commissioned pastors. When they conclude service, whether the reasons are positive or negative, the church will be well served by being able to know the general disposition of classis toward that service. The commissioned pastor will also be well served by such a public record. For ministers of the Word who conclude service before retirement there are four categories of designation: *honorable released, released, dismissed, and in the status of one deposed* (see Church Order Supplement, Article 14-b, c, 2). Synod suggested that classes use and note in their minutes one of these designations each time a commissioned pastor concludes service before retirement (see also section IV, L of this handbook).

G. Moving and Transitions

When 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 (a statement in the former Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a).

This statement approved by synod is still operative, and it has raised a variety of questions that synod has addressed in the past decade:

1. Do commissioned pastors who move need to be reexamined?

The Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2009 addressed concerns regarding the need for a new classical examination for commissioned pastors who move from classis to classis. Those ordained in the office of minister of the Word may move throughout the denomination without being reexamined, but commissioned pastors require a new examination each time they take a new position.

The committee report observed that a new congregation, ministry, or classis calling a commissioned pastor from another congregation, ministry, or classis is entitled to such a reexamination, not only as a matter of Church Order regulation but also as a matter of principle. By definition, a commissioned pastor is ordained to, and judged to be qualified for, a particular ministry. A different church and classis must thoroughly discern whether a commissioned pastor is qualified to serve in a different congregation and likely a different role. A different congregation and classis contemplating the call of a commissioned pastor is only being responsible in making a fresh assessment of a commissioned pastor's qualifications *for this particular congregation and position.*

However, the committee also pointed out that the wording of the Church Order allows for classis discretion in this area. Note this statement in Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a (italics in first sentence added for emphasis):

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.

In practice, many classes have accepted as sufficient the examination of a "previously ordained commissioned pastor." In such cases the reputation of that person, the similarity of the ministry positions, and / or the recommendation of the previous ministry and classis have been judged by the classis as strong enough to merit no further local examination.

The Candidacy Committee reported to synod that it judges that the reexamination requirement, when balanced with the freedom to forgo the examination under certain circumstances, gives congregations and classes the proper balance of due diligence and flexibility as they contemplate calling a commissioned pastor from another ministry setting. Synod accepted this report of the Candidacy Committee (see *Agenda for Synod 2009*, p. 218; *Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 583).

This matter came up again in 2015 through an overture from Classis Hamilton. The overture was referred to the Candidacy Committee, which responded via its report to Synod 2016 (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 262-75; *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 848-49).

In their overture Classis Hamilton asked, "Under what circumstances should a commissioned pastor be reexamined in order to enter a different position under Article 23?" (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 436). The committee responded by observing that the Church Order does not allow for a "transfer"

of ordination for a commissioned pastor. Ordination in each position is linked only to that position. Yet the committee report went on to observe that Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a suggests that a classis has some latitude in deciding whether or not to reexamine a commissioned pastor who has previously served in a different ministry, citing the reference used in 2009 regarding installation of “a previously ordained commissioned pastor in a new position.”

The Candidacy Committee report of 2016 noted further that considering the reality that ordination in this office does not transfer, “the person can bring testimonies, but ordination is new with the commissioning to each position” (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 270).

The 2016 Candidacy Committee report went on to offer some “observations for our practice” that can help classes weigh each given case of “requested transfer” and decide how best to proceed (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 270-71):

- a. Practically speaking, the first official step in any change to a new assignment is to ascertain that the relevant job description is approved. If it has not been approved previously, such approval requires an action of classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.
- b. Then, judging on the similarity of the previous service of the potential commissioned pastor and the new proposed service, and judging on the effectiveness of the potential commissioned pastor in their previous ministry, the classis leadership could propose that classis offer permission to move toward ordination based on the examination conducted for the previous service.
- c. A letter of recommendation from a previous ministry and from a previous classis of service is required and should serve usefully for a commissioned pastor to present to a classis leadership team seeking to discern the nature and need of a “reexamination” for a new position in the same or in a different classis.
- d. Keep in mind that the “default practice” is that of examining a person for each commissioned pastor assignment.
- e. Recognize the option that a briefer examination, more akin to an interview, may be a useful substitute to a full examination. This would enable the classis to get to know the new commissioned pastor and give occasion to offer prayer for the person and the ministry involved. It occurs to the Candidacy Committee that although this option is not prescribed in the Church Order for either a commissioned pastor or a minister of the Word who is new to a classis, it might be a beneficial practice at classis for both.

2. Is it possible to move a commissioned pastor’s credentials from one calling church to another?

Another issue dealt with via the Candidacy Committee reports to Synods 2016 and 2017, prompted by the helpful 2015 overture from Classis Hamilton, was the consideration of occasions in which it might be appropriate to transfer the credentials (and supervision in doctrine and life) of a commissioned pastor while the commissioned pastor continues in the same ministry assignment. The cases being addressed here are presumably those in which a commissioned pastor is serving in a ministry outside of a local church

and desires to move his/her membership to another church, whose council would then supervise the pastor's doctrine and life.

Classen Hamilton suggested a procedure for the transfer process, and the Candidacy Committee adapted that into a set of guidelines it presented to Synod 2017, which approved them for inclusion in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. The Candidacy Committee observed that the cases in which such guidelines may be needed are rather rare but that with the evolving use of the office of commissioned pastor such cases may become more common. The protocol approved by synod mirrors the accepted practice for ministers of the Word who transfer their credentials from one congregation to another while remaining in their same ministry role (outside of a given congregation, in missions, chaplaincy, or some approved agency work). This practice requires statements of agreement from both the current calling church and the new calling church. It also presumes that the job description is not changing. Finally, the transfer is noted in the minutes of whichever classes are involved (for appropriate record keeping, awareness, and accountability).

The approved protocol is as follows (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 320-21; *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 688).

Protocol for Transferring Credentials of a Commissioned Pastor from One Calling Church to Another

1. A commissioned pastor who serves in an approved ministry not lodged in a local church may request transfer of their church membership and transfer of their call from one congregation to another.
2. Both the "sending church" and the "receiving church" must agree to the transfer with the understanding that the receiving church agrees to extend such a call and take over the supervision of the doctrine and life of the commissioned pastor.
3. The call must be approved by the classis and duly noted as part of the history of the approval of the related job description.
4. The job description must remain unchanged, since alteration of the job description would require the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies.
5. If the "receiving church" is in a classis other than that of the "sending church," the "receiving church" classis must approve the transfer and job description, with the concurrence of the synodical deputies, and the receiving classis will have the option of conducting an interview or examination of the commissioned pastor.

3. In what ways can our process encourage and support commissioned pastors as they face transitions in ministry?

Related to the previous item is the challenge of offering appropriate support to commissioned pastors as they face life transitions. In some cases, transitions occur as a person moves from one ordained position to another. In other cases, the transition involves a movement out of ordained ministry or a potential return to ordained ministry after a period of time away from ordained ministry.

In its report to Synod 2017 the Candidacy Committee observed that our Church Order gives clear, and sometimes complex, processes for ministers of the Word in transition (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 318-28). The general principle regarding ordained service is that ordination is tied to ministry rather than to a person. In this regard, an active ordained minister of the Word who is not eligible for retirement and who exits an assigned ministry is given a period of two years to enter another approved ministry assignment (Church Order Article 17-c). That period may be extended on a yearly basis for reasons that are weighty in the judgment of classis with the concurrence of synodical deputies. Ministers of the Word who leave ordained ministry and enter a vocation that is judged to be nonministerial are expected to be released from office within one year of that judgment (Church Order Article 14-d). Any former minister of the Word may be eligible to reenter ordained service with the approval of the classis that approved the release from office (Church Order Article 14-e).

With respect to the sense of calling and the meaning of ordination, the assumptions about ordination for commissioned pastors are similar to those for ministers of the Word; however, when a ministry assignment concludes for a commissioned pastor, there is no specified “period of grace” built into the process. Rather than waiting one or two years, or more, to declare a person as no longer ordained, the expectation is that when a commissioned pastor leaves a ministry assignment, they are no longer considered to be ordained.

As observed in the Candidacy Committee report to synod there can be, however, an inherent period of grace in the process even for commissioned pastors. The ordination status of a commissioned pastor may not be officially considered as concluded until it is reported to classis and recognized as such. In consideration of this reality, a classis has the option of offering a reasonable period of time, depending on the circumstances, in which a transitioning commissioned pastor can facilitate a transition to either a new ministry or a nonministerial vocational assignment. These matters are discussed in detail in the Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2016 (Appendix A, sections 6-8; *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 268-71).

The Candidacy Committee did not believe it to be wise to add a new layer of Church Order direction in this matter; however, they suggested that Synod 2017 address these issues by approving for insertion in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook the following statements of guidance for churches and classes as they deal with persons who are ordained as commissioned pastors and are experiencing a transition of ministry assignment and vocation (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 321-22; *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 688-89):

1. The Church Order articles on transitions for ministers of the Word offer some helpful principles for grace-filled treatment of commissioned pastors who are in transition (Church Order Articles 14 and 17).
2. The report of the Candidacy Committee to Synod 2016 reflects on various options that a classis and church council can consider as they deal with individual cases of transition (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 268-71).
3. It is extremely important for the proper maintenance of records by the classis clerks, and by the synodical office, that classes note in their minutes, with clarity, any action taken regarding a transition of a

commissioned pastor. The official transition cannot be recognized until classis declares it to have happened, and delinquency in reporting transitions can create numerous problems.

4. Because the offices of minister of the Word and commissioned pastor differ from one another with regard to “automatic portability” (since a minister of the Word is ordained for ministry denomination-wide, and a commissioned pastor is ordained only for a specific ministry task), it is wise for the classis to be deliberative and discerning in the process of acknowledging the transition of a commissioned pastor. Approval of the new ministry position, as well as a thoughtful practice for a contextualized examination for the new position, needs to be taken into account (see Appendix A, section 8 of the Candidacy Committee report, *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 270-71).

H. Termination of Positions and Personnel

A painful part of church life for a commissioned pastor, for a ministry, and for a classis is any occasion in which a ministry position is eliminated or when a person serving in a ministry position is asked to leave. Synod has dealt with this matter on a number of occasions in the past decade.

Synod 2009

The report of the Candidacy Committee to Synod 2009 observed that our denominational regulations for ministers of the Word provide a detailed protocol for ending a relationship between a minister of the Word and a congregation (see Church Order Article 17). The report noted that as the office of commissioned pastor has been developing, concern have arisen that some degree of “protection” or “guidance” be given regarding a congregation that wishes to conclude (or dismiss) the service of an approved commissioned pastor, or regarding a commissioned pastor who wishes voluntarily to conclude service.

Synod 2009 inserted the following statement into the Church Order Supplement, and this statement is now lodged here in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook (see *Acts of Synod 2009*, pp. 583-84):

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.

The ground given in 2009 reads as follows: “This provision is consistent with the frequent practice in our polity of the ecclesiastical body’s involvement in the beginning and ending of a ministry position or a person’s service in that position.” The intent is to create a conversation within the classis (the body that approved the person in the position) that will ensure that appropriate care and respect are being shown by both parties (a ministry and a commissioned pastor) as a relationship is concluded.

Some classes are finding that the protocol used in Church Order Article 17 for ministers of the Word offers some helpful principles for determining behavior that honors the ministry, the departing commissioned pastor, and the Lord. Because each situation in the ministry setting of a commissioned pastor is unique (i.e., the length of service, whether or not the person serves part-time or full-time or is a volunteer, etc.) and because the office of

commissioned pastor is still evolving, a more precise protocol in this area has not been formed and, indeed, may not be needed. Classes, rather, are called to bear in mind the learned wisdom of Article 17 and to discern and decide in each circumstance what factors should come into play as they concur with the conclusion or dismissal of the service of a commissioned pastor.

Synod 2016

Synod 2016 received from the Candidacy Committee and recommended as helpful guidance for churches and classes a few “observations for our practice” (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 268-69). The report noted that this is an area in our practice of commissioned pastor ordination in which pastoral sensitivity and spiritual wisdom are needed. Each case will have different dynamics, and the relevant supervising bodies and classis leaders need to be in open communication in order to serve the church well. Here are the observations synod has recommended for guidance in this regard (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 268-69):

- a. It is important to recognize the potential damage that could be done to the spirit of a commissioned pastor who is told that the very next day after leaving a ministry position they are no longer ordained. Though this should not come as a surprise, it may well be experienced as such. Such cases require much gentleness, and we urge that they be treated tenderly.
- b. It is also important to recognize the commitment we have made to tie ordination to a ministry calling, making it rather hard to comprehend the situation of a commissioned pastor without an active call.
- c. It is possible for classis leaders to pastorally provide time by declaring that the official conclusion of the ministry does not occur until classis has declared it concluded. Thus, there can be a period of adjustment between the action of leaving a ministry and classis’ approving the conclusion of that ministry assignment. This is in keeping with [the] statement “A calling church that terminates the service of a person in an approved commissioned pastor position must seek the concurrence of the classis in which approval was given.”
- d. Particularly for a person in a chaplaincy position as commissioned pastor, it may happen that the position is terminated but the commissioned pastor may actively search for and be able to find a new chaplaincy position. In such a case the commissioned pastor in question, the calling church, and the classis leaders need to be in conversation regarding whether the original call is still in place, adjusted, or terminated. Such a process would not be concluded until completion is affirmed by classis. The ordination of the commissioned pastor could thus be assumed to remain in effect until both the church and the classis rule it otherwise.
- e. Any commissioned pastor who leaves a ministry assignment and who intends to begin another ministry assignment should be encouraged to express their intentions and desires to the classis leadership. The classis leaders may then decide to postpone their declaration of a “ministry conclusion” for an agreed upon period of time while the commissioned pastor involved searches for a new ministry assignment. Should this

raise issues regarding title or compensation during a period of transition, we trust that such matters would be handled by the classis.

A further set of observations dealt more directly with termination at a local church (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 269-70). The committee report recognized that although termination can be voluntary or involuntary, the sad reality is that there have been cases in which a commissioned pastor has not been treated fairly in the conclusion of ministry service. Especially when the ministry service is at a local church, our corporate covenants require that we confer together to be sure that the pastor has been treated fairly when terminated. We are all well served by the reminder that, since commissioned pastors are ordained to office, they may not be simply dismissed as at-will employees.

What follows are some further observations and suggestions considered and received as helpful by Synod 2016 regarding the practice of approving a release or termination of ministry service for a commissioned pastor (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 269-70):

- a. Our Church Order specifies a protocol to be followed when a minister of the Word is released from a ministry assignment. This protocol is described in Church Order Supplement, Article 17-a, and it involves both the local ministry leaders and the classis in a conversation and journey that seeks to lead toward honorable treatment of a released minister of the Word as well as healing for the congregation. The Candidacy Committee views this protocol as containing elements that can wisely guide a commissioned pastor's release from service.
- b. Certainly the circumstances in each case will vary, including the needs of the commissioned pastor, the responsibilities that were given to the commissioned pastor, the length of service, and other factors. For example, a full-time ministry position is likely more appropriately offered a severance package than is a part-time position. These issues need to be weighed as severance is discussed, and as readiness to recommend for future ministry is decided upon. A well-worded note in the minutes of classis describing the reality of concluded service and any appropriately public provisions will serve both the church and the commissioned pastor. This will also provide helpful documentation for denominational records and for potential future ministry.
- c. In all cases of "termination" (conclusion) of a commissioned pastor's service it is assumed that classis will take note of the change in status through its official minutes.

Synod 2017

Synod 2017 looked again at the issue of ways to provide fair treatment of and good practice in cases where a commissioned pastor is terminated. The report of the Candidacy Committee to Synod 2017 observed that the vulnerability of ordained commissioned pastors has been recognized by previous synods. Synod 2009 approved an addition to the Church Order Supplement (which in 2019 transferred to this handbook). This statement of synod has proved to be helpful; however, the Candidacy Committee asserted that it is necessary to speak with greater strength and clarity regarding this matter. People serving in ordained ministry positions, whether ordained as a

minister of the Word or as a commissioned pastor, deserve respect and just action regarding matters pertaining to their continuing service. At stake are the morale of our ordained pastors and also the reputation of the church as an agency of justice and mercy.

Thus the Candidacy Committee presented the following proposed addition to Church Order Supplement, Article 23 in order to offer such provision to commissioned pastors:

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.

As Synod 2017 approved this statement, it noted the intention of the Candidacy Committee that decisions regarding this area of managing the office of commissioned pastor stay, as much as possible, within the authority of the classis. The proposed statement is carefully worded to apply only to those who express a desire for such support and to those cases that the classis may judge would benefit from such review and support. The protocol of Church Order Article 17, with its supplemental material, is rather extensive and provides wise guidance that can serve as a template for the classis, should it wish to apply that material to a case involving the release of a commissioned pastor (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 319-20; *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 685.)

Synods 2018 and 2019

The issue of accountability in discipline came before Synod 2018 in a number of contexts. As it relates to commissioned pastors, *two actions* of Synod 2019 should be noted in response to concerns raised at Synod 2018 (see *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. ____; see also Section IV, F of this handbook).

1. In Church Order Supplement, Articles 82-84, a line was added in section e to clarify that the classis must be involved when a commissioned pastor is deposed. The statement says, "The deposition of a commissioned pastor shall not be effected without the approval of the classis in which the commissioned pastor was approved for ordination."
2. Relative to Church Order Supplement, Article 24-d, a provision was added in which classes are instructed to make a determination of the status of any commissioned pastor who concludes service. Note the following comment in Church Order Supplement, Article 24-d:

Synod has offered, on various occasions, guidelines regarding the conclusion of an approved commissioned pastor position, the resignation of a commissioned pastor, and the release of a commissioned pastor.

Synod also instructs classes to make an appropriate declaration reflecting the status of any commissioned pastor who concludes service.

These guidelines and options regarding status are the same as those for minister of the Word and can be found in Supplement, Article 14-b, c, 2 or in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

The intent in this second action is that a public record is created with regard to the service of all commissioned pastors. When they conclude

service, whether the reasons are positive or negative, the church will be well served by being able to know the general disposition of classis toward that service. The commissioned pastor will also be well served by such a public record. For ministers of the Word who conclude service before retirement, there are four categories of designation: *honorable released*, *released*, *dismissed*, and *in the status of one deposed* (see Church Order Supplement, Article 14-b, c, 2). Synod suggested that classes use and note in their minutes one of these designations each time a commissioned pastor concludes service before retirement (see also section IV, L of this handbook).

I. Appointment to Service in an Established (Organized) Congregation

The office of commissioned pastor began in the CRCNA as way to ordain persons who had not had the required academic training for ordination as a minister of the Word and were doing evangelistic work in church planting. The office soon expanded to cover a variety of potential ministry positions, as guided by the statement of Synod 2001 quoted in Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a.

Three Scenarios

Prior to 2019 the Church Order cited three scenarios in which a commissioned pastor could serve as a lead or solo pastor in an established (organized) church:

1. Commissioned pastors who are planting a church may continue to serve for “a reasonable period of transition” after the church becomes an organized congregation.
2. Commissioned pastors who serve in an organized church alongside a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, move into the senior/solo role if the minister of the Word leaves.
3. In unique ministry contexts a commissioned pastor may be called to serve in an organized congregation.

The Church Order as approved in 2019 refers to these three circumstances in Church Order Article 24-a:

Commissioned pastors may serve in a solo or senior pastor 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.

The Synodically Approved Rules

The synodically approved rules, previously cited in the Church Order itself, remain valid and are stated below:

Regarding scenario 1 above:

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.

(Former Church Order Article 23-b)

Regarding scenario 2 as cited above:

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.

(Former Church Order Article 23-c)

Regarding scenario 3 above:

Commissioned pastors may be called to serve as solo pastors in organized congregations if the classis, with 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.

(Former Church Order Article 23-d)

Synod 2008 approved the following note to offer guidelines related to this third scenario:

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.

(Former Church Order Supplement, Article 23-d)

Reflection on the Rules of Synod

It is obvious that great wisdom is needed in decisions regarding approval of a commissioned pastor for service as a solo or lead pastor in an organized congregation. In all three scenarios above, the deliberation of classis and the advice of synodical deputies are required. Terms used in these statements of synod have a purposeful flexibility allowing for a contextual decision. Synod 2010 received an overture requesting that the phrase “reasonable period of transition” be quantified for clarity. The Candidacy Committee suggested, and synod agreed, that flexibility is a virtue in this matter and that the words should remain unchanged (see *Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 328-30; *Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 836). It is important to note, however, that these are exceptional situations and ordinarily ministers of the Word are called to serve as pastors of organized congregations.

Required Learning Plans

It should be noted that a learning plan is to be approved and completed in all cases in which a commissioned pastor is approved for service in a solo leadership position, whether in an emerging church or in an established (organized) church. As discussed in section IV, B of this handbook, it is in the interest of the pastor, the ministry, and the denomination for solo and lead commissioned pastors to be well acquainted with denominational distinctions. Thus, Church Order Supplement, Article 24-a says:

Commissioned pastors may serve in positions of solo leadership in an established church only in specified circumstances. These circumstances were specified before 2019 in Church Order Articles 23-b, 23-c, and 23-d and are now presented and explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook. A classis may decide to make such appointments contingent upon implementation of a learning plan leading toward meeting the qualifications for minister of the Word, as described in Church Order Article 24-b. In all cases in which a commissioned pastor serves in a solo leadership position in an emerging or organized church, it is mandatory that such a person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan for denominational orientation, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee, as described in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

J. Use of the Commissioned Pastor Office as a “Bridge” to Becoming a Minister of the Word

The phenomenon of commissioned pastors serving as lead or solo pastors in organized (established) congregations has been noted numerous times by the Candidacy Committee, by synod, and by others.

There have been some cases in the past few years in which an organized congregation has developed a close relationship with a current commissioned pastor or a current seminary student. The relationship between congregation and potential pastor has been so compelling that the congregation has sought ways to engage the person's service before the person is eligible for candidacy as a minister of the Word.

The rules of synod allow for an organized congregation to call a commissioned pastor to serve them, under a specific set of circumstances, requiring classis approval and concurrence of synodical deputies (see scenario 3 in section IV, I above). Yet, according to the note approved by Synod 2008 (also cited with scenario 3 above), the congregations eligible for this scenario are very specific and unusual. They are related to particular ministry contexts that are different from the dominant culture of the denomination and its seminary.

The Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2016 (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 273-74; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 848) addressed the practice of established churches calling persons as commissioned pastors. The report offers some “observations for our practice,” received by synod and recommended to churches and classes as helpful advice:

- a. It is wise for the appointed church counselor to direct the attention of the organized congregation desiring to call a person to serve as commissioned pastor to the reality that we have a considerable number of

- fully qualified and ready candidates for minister of the Word and currently ordained ministers of the Word eligible for call.
- b. Further, the church counselor is responsible to direct the congregation to the unique criteria cited in Church Order Supplement, Article 23-d [now presented in this handbook as “scenario 3” in section IV, I above]. The decision to take this step is not only that of the local council or congregation. It also requires the support of classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies.
 - c. Having offered these first two items of reflection to those inquiring about this matter, the Candidacy Committee has suggested that any such arrangement to call a commissioned pastor to a lead position in an organized church be done with an explicit condition that the commissioned pastor make progress toward attaining an M.Div. degree and approval as a candidate for minister of the Word. The condition can be written into the motion of approval relative to the use of Article 23-d [now Article 24-b], with a suitable time line, with expectations of reporting, with expectations of support by the calling church, and with recognition that the approval can be reversed at a given point if the conditions are not met. With such understandings as have just been cited, there are some effective relationships currently under way in which a commissioned pastor is serving an organized church while also making progress toward ordination as a minister of the Word. At the appropriate time (i.e., when the person is declared a candidate) these commissioned pastors receive a call to continue to serve, as a minister of the Word, and all the appropriate and normal steps of classical examination are conducted. We continue to monitor how such arrangements are faring, and, should they prove beneficial to both the commissioned pastor and the congregation, our committee may eventually recommend that they be codified as a provision in the Church Order.

An Approved Practice of Commissioned Pastor as a “Bridge Ordination”

The Candidacy Committee advanced this practice further in its report to Synod 2017, proposing a new Church Order article that would allow the office of commissioned pastor to be used as a “bridge ordination” while a person completes the requirements for candidacy as a minister of the Word (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 322-23; *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 689). The proposed article was adopted by Synod 2018 (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 465) and now appears as Article 24-b of the Church Order:

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.

It should be noted that this article is not intended to apply to all cases in which a commissioned pastor is approved for a lead or solo position in an established congregation (under one of the three scenarios described in section IV, I above). The statement uses the qualifier “may,” not “shall.” Individual circumstances will vary. Yet this highlights an opportunity that

the classis and synodical deputies have to encourage accredited theological education toward meeting the expectations for the office of minister of the Word. In many cases the pastor, the congregation, the classis, and the church at large will be blessed by such effort. Note the following words of Church Order Supplement, Article 24-b as it speaks to this:

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.

The Candidacy Committee is eager to serve the church through consultation with local pastors, synodical deputies, and classis functionaries as these conversations are conducted.

K. Special Mention on Chaplaincy and the Office of Commissioned Pastor

It bears special mention that one of the most productive uses of the office of commissioned pastor has been in the area of chaplaincy. The Office of Chaplaincy and Care was instrumental in the 2003 change of the office title from “evangelist” to “ministry associate.” Their concern was that the title of the office appropriately honor the unique ministry of the chaplain.

Synod 2003 also approved a key statement that validates the work of chaplains ordained as commissioned pastors (see *Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 613). This statement now appears in Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a:

Commissioned pastor job descriptions related to the ministry of chaplaincy must be approved in consultation with Chaplaincy and Care Ministry. The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define chaplains ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to chaplains ordained under Article 23.

For more information and reflection on this issue, consult the *Agenda for Synod 2003*, pp. 67-71 and the *Acts of Synod 2003* pp. 609-13.

L. Status of Commissioned Pastor Emeritus

In recent years synod has reviewed and considered the matter of ordination status for persons who retire from service as a commissioned pastor. The Candidacy Committee first formally mentioned this issue in its report to Synod 2016 (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 272, 274). Note the reflections in the report:

Under our current Church Order there is no provision of a “ministerial status” for a commissioned pastor who retires. Church Order Article 18 offers provision for “emeritus” status for ministers of the Word who retire, allowing them to continue performing official acts of ministry.

As we seek to place more value on the office of commissioned pastor and offer more support to those who serve in this office (remember the words of Synod 2007), we recognize that it is a worthy

challenge to look for ways to honor and continue to make use of commissioned pastors who retire after having served well. Perhaps not all job descriptions or all persons serving in the office would appropriately lead toward some sort of "emeritus" status. Yet surely those who have served in a solo pastor role, and those who have served in a full-time capacity for a number of years would be appropriately honored in this way. The church could be blessed by their ability to continue as ordained pulpit supply, and they would be blessed as they retained a pastoral identity.

At least two of our classes have taken the step of creating a category called "commissioned pastor emeritus." In doing so, they confer this title on respected commissioned pastors in their retirement. The minutes of the classis record this status and indicate that the commissioned pastor has authority to do the official acts of ministry (preaching, administration of sacraments, officiating at weddings, etc.) as long as they are mentally and physically able. These classes are extending the intent of Church Order Article 18 to their treatment of commissioned pastors.

Although this practice is not currently in the Church Order, the Candidacy Committee judges that the practice of conferring "commissioned pastor emeritus" status on a retiring commissioned pastor is within the classical scope of authority and that a classis might well consider doing so. It may well be that the practice may increase and may result in an eventual overture to synod that more officially recognizes the practice.

Synod 2017 considered and approved a formal motion that would establish in our Church Order the practice of conferring on certain commissioned pastors the title *commissioned pastor emeritus* (see *Agenda for Synod 2017*, pp. 318-19, 326-27, and *Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 685). The motion was recommended for approval by Synod 2018. With major refinement of the format of Church Order Articles 23-24 also being considered by Synod 2018, the following statement was presented and approved by Synod 2019 as Church Order Article 24-e (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. ___):

A commissioned pastor who has reached retirement age may, upon the judgment of classis, be given the title of commissioned pastor emeritus.

The following Church Order Supplement to Article 24-e was also approved:

A commissioned pastor emeritus may, upon the judgment of classis, retain the authority to perform official acts of ministry in ways consistent with their ordination prior to retirement. Supervision of a commissioned pastor emeritus shall remain with the church last served unless transferred to another congregation under the authority of the classis(es) involved.

It is appropriate to note here that when classis receives notice of the retirement of a commissioned pastor, the act of granting the title *commissioned pastor emeritus* need not be automatic. Surely a commissioned pastor who had not

been authorized to preach or to administer sacraments would not be authorized to do so upon retirement. A judgment needs to be made by the classis and the calling church regarding what types of service are appropriate for a given individual in retirement, and that judgment will be influenced by the types of experience and the gifts the person possesses and is desirous of offering. The minutes of classis should reflect any case of a person being given the title *commissioned pastor emeritus* and also the nature of the authority given regarding official acts of ministry. All other commissioned pastors whose retirement is celebrated by classis should be noted in the minutes of classis.

V. Other Matters Addressed by Synod

The Candidacy Committee, in its 2007 report to synod, urged the church to give the office of commissioned pastor “more use, more status, and more support.” This goal emerged in the context of aiming to return to a more historical use of Article 7 entry into ordination of minister of the Word, and to utilize Article 23 as the route to ministry for those who do not have the academic training required for ordination as minister of the Word. (See *Agenda for Synod 2007*, pp. 292-311; *Acts of Synod 2007*, pp. 651-53, 664-67.)

Since then the Candidacy Committee has spoken to a number of persons engaged in various roles related to the office of commissioned pastor. This section notes issues that have been identified and addressed but have not yet been mentioned in this handbook.

A. Practical Issues Pertaining to Titles, Purpose of the Office, and Timing

1. Title of the office

Numerous concerns have come up over the title of this office. *Ministry associate* seemed to some to be a “second class” designation. Synod 2012 addressed this experience of discouragement and approved the current title, *commissioned pastor*, noting the intent to “give encouragement and support to those serving in this office” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 741-42).

All offices, according to our Church Order, “differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor” (Church Order Article 2). This is a matter of biblical and polity principle for the Christian Reformed Church, and misperceptions to the contrary must be so identified and challenged. Just as the office of deacon is no longer viewed in most circles as “second class” to the office of elder, but as a distinct office with a different focus than that of the office of elder, the church must squarely challenge negative misperceptions of the office of commissioned pastor.

The Candidacy Committee has observed that both *commissioned pastor* and *minister of the Word* are mainly Church Order terms used to designate the two offices. In practice the churches use a variety of other terms to designate those serving in pastoral and staff roles (e.g., Pastor, Reverend, Evangelist, Chaplain, Pastor of Education, Pastor of Youth, Minister of Congregational Life). The reality is that local classes, congregations, and communities develop their own language to describe both ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors.

This is in keeping with the intent of synod, as stated in the *Acts of Synod 2001* (p. 506) and now in Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a:

"The office of evangelist [term used in 2001] may be understood to have the character of pastoral extension. Evangelists extend the work of pastoral leadership by founding and working in new congregations and by extending the ministry of organized congregations into specialized areas, including, but not limited to, youth ministry, education, pastoral care, worship, and evangelism [cf. Church Order Article 24]. By the broader application of the office of evangelist, with its existing regulations, to a variety of ministry positions, the church avoids the multiplication of offices and provides a way of recognizing and regulating a variety of pastoral positions in our churches. These positions may be identified by titles that indicate their ministry distinctiveness such as chaplain, pastor of education, pastor of youth, minister of congregational life, and so forth."

2. Regarding the intended purpose of Article 23

An overture from Classis Hamilton to Synod 2015 observed that some people have the impression that the change of the name of the office by Synod 2012 (from *ministry associate* to *commissioned pastor*) indicated a desire to keep commissioned pastors marginalized in some sense. In the words of the overture from Classis Hamilton, some believe the intent was to see the commissioned pastor role as a "mini-minister" or a "minister lite" position.

Synod tasked the Candidacy Committee with responding to this overture through its report to Synod 2016 (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 262-75). The committee response noted, "The reality is, as the Hamilton overture observes, that synod intended 'to provide *limited* but *real* ecclesiastical authority for a *specific* ministry role for a *particular* area of ministry in God's kingdom (be it the local church, mission field, educational institution, etc.)' (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 434). The grounds for the decision of Synod 2012 speak to this matter with clarity:

- "a. Such a change [in naming the office] will give encouragement and support to those serving in this office.
- "b. Such a change will show a positive response to many who have expressed a feeling of marginalization because of the current title.

(*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 741-42)

"The grounds of synod's action in 2012 go on to cite the statement of Synod 2007 regarding giving 'more value, more use, and more support' to those serving in the office."

Thus the report of the Candidacy Committee to Synod 2016 included a few "observations for our practice" that synod received and recommended to the churches and classes as helpful advice (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 263; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 848).

It seems wise for each classis, each officebearer, and each ministry context to recognize the affirmations of Synods 2007 and 2012 relative to the office of commissioned pastor.

Commissioned pastors represent one of two pastoral offices recognized by our denomination (the other being minister of the Word). The differences between the two offices involve (a) limits on the scope of ministry for a commissioned pastor, (b) less specific educational qualifications required for commissioned pastors in

solo pastor positions, and (c) no denominationally specified educational requirements for other commissioned pastors.

These differences delineate what the overture is asking synod to reaffirm—that commissioned pastors are not the same as ministers of the Word.

3. Classis approval relative to timing

The Classis Hamilton overture to Synod 2015 also reported a lack of clarity in how classis approves a commissioned pastor position and the person seeking ordination under Article 23. In our use of Article 23 two actions are required by classis (approval of the position, and examination and approval of a person to fill the position). Classis Hamilton's overture suggested that a proper approval process should ordinarily involve two classis meetings in order to avoid an awkward situation in which a position is not approved but a candidate is standing ready to be examined to fill the position. Classis Hamilton went on to request in the overture "that synod clarify that a candidate cannot be called to a position that has not been approved by classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies" (*Agenda for Synod 2015*, p. 435).

In offering advice, the Candidacy Committee observed that the Church Order is clear in the area of a two-step process of approval but is perhaps not clear in the way some persons would like. The Church Order Supplement at the time stated, "Before examining a person for the office of commissioned pastor or granting permission to install a previously ordained commissioned pastor in a new position, the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, will determine whether or not the position to which the person is being called fits the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001." The two steps are clearly defined, although there is no reference to two meetings being required.

The Candidacy Committee therefore offered to Synod 2016 the following "observations for our practice," which synod received and recommended to the churches and classes as helpful advice (see *Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 263-65; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 848):

- a. It may indeed be wise in some cases for a classis to be sure that the matter of a job description be dealt with in a meeting distinct from a meeting in which a potential commissioned pastor filling the proposed position is examined.
- b. It is surely wise for any person who has been called to a position as a commissioned pastor to recognize the tentative nature of the call. The call is conditional upon successful examination, as is also the case for candidates for the office of minister of the Word. The call is also conditional upon the approval by classis of the job description.
- c. Frequently the proposed job description is intimately tied to an individual. In such cases the approval process can unavoidably get personal and potentially awkward.
- d. Circumstances may sometimes require that both approvals occur at the same classis meeting. Sequentially, of course, consideration of the issue of a position approval would precede the examination of a potential person to fill a position. It may in fact show wisdom on the part of classis and its leadership to schedule both the approval of the position

and the examination of the potential pastor at the same meeting. There are many cases in which classes meet only twice a year, so requiring extended approval time could impede ministry. Funding and approval processes may require more swift action than could be taken over the course of two meetings of classis.

- e. It is vital to the *highly versatile* nature of the office of commissioned pastor (see the SMCC report to Synod 2007) that the leadership of each classis wrestle with these issues associated with timing, the conditional nature of calls, and the ways best to serve ministry opportunities with responsive nimbleness.
- f. It also seems wise for the appropriate classis team and the mentor involved in a given case to adequately prepare a person who will be examined by classis for the office of commissioned pastor. Preparation includes completion of an appropriate and agreed upon learning plan. (Remember that in the case of commissioned pastors serving as solo pastors this plan must be created in consultation with the Candidacy Committee.) It is also a gift to provide adequate coaching of a potential commissioned pastor so as to handle with grace the dynamics of a classis meeting and examination. The coaching practice can mitigate some of the awkwardness described by the overture of Classis Hamilton.

B. *Service of Commissioned Pastors at Synod and on Denominational Boards, Committees, and Task Forces*

Synod 2007 decided that a commissioned pastor serving as a solo pastor in an organized congregation may be delegated by a classis to synod as a ministerial delegate. Note the following statement added to Church Order Supplement, Article 45, b, 2: "A commissioned pastor serving as a solo pastor of an organized congregation may be sent as a ministerial delegate to synod and nominated to serve in other denominational functions where a person must normally be a minister of the Word" (see *Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 665).

Synod 2013 made adjustments to Church Order Article 23-a, removing a reference to commissioned pastors as "elders" (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 556-57). The same synod made clear that commissioned pastors may be delegated to synod and may be appointed to serve on denominational boards and committees, adding the following statement to Church Order Supplement, Article 45, b, 3: "Commissioned pastors serving in emerging churches and associate staff positions may be delegated as elder delegates to synod and nominated to serve in other denominational functions where a person must normally be an elder" (*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 559-60).

Thus, ministry leaders ordained as commissioned pastors are offered the full range of opportunity to serve the broader church as delegates to synod or as appointees to a denominational board or committee. Where the appointment is dependent on a designation as a "minister delegate," only a commissioned pastor serving as a solo pastor in an organized congregation would be eligible. In appointments where an "elder designation" is required, or no designation is required, all other commissioned pastors would be eligible.

C. *Compensation and Benefits*

The following discussion is adapted from the Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2009 (see Agenda for Synod 2009, pp. 218-19; *Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 583).

Insurance Plans

In current practice, ministers of the Word as well as commissioned pastors need to negotiate both insurance and retirement plans with their congregations and sponsoring ministries. As churches and ministries seek to support their ordained commissioned pastors by providing a health-care insurance plan, there may be local resources and plans that prove to be very beneficial. Information about the denominational insurance plans available for those ordained as commissioned pastors can be obtained by contacting the Personnel Office of the CRCNA.

Tax Benefits

Concerns have been raised that ministers of the Word have benefits with the IRS and Revenue Canada that commissioned pastors do not have, or are not aware of. As a matter of fact, in the policies of the IRS and Revenue Canada, ordination is the key factor, not the ordination called *minister of the Word*. Our denominational office, through the director of finance and administration, John Bolt, is available to consult with and give guidance to any ministry that wants to know how best to make use of the tax benefits that pertain to their commissioned pastor or minister of the Word.

Salary Scale

Concerns have been raised that commissioned pastors are underpaid and undervalued. The same concerns have been raised for ministers of the Word. Synod has repeatedly exhorted the churches to adequately pay their pastors. The official letter of call for a minister of the Word speaks of churches offering salary to pastors, "knowing that laborers are worthy of their hire, to encourage you in the discharge of your duties and to free you from material needs while you are ministering God's Word to us." Synod spoke to this issue in 2004 when it defined proper support this way: "Proper support of a church's minister is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, a housing provision, payment to the denomination's minister's pension plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items" (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 611).

Although these particular exhortations apply to those serving as ministers of the Word, the principle behind these exhortations also applies to those serving as commissioned pastors, especially those in full time service. Since educational requirements for ministers of the Word exceed those of commissioned pastors, it is likely and defensible that the pay scales will vary some between the two. However, this does not justify the underpaying of commissioned pastors. The church is called to provide a living wage for ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors alike.

The following discussion on salary matters is from Synod 2018 (see Acts of Synod 2018, pp. 459-60).

Synod 2018 received an overture from Classis Niagara seeking to establish an annual compensation survey for commissioned pastors. Synod did not accede to the overture, citing the following grounds:

1. The role of commissioned pastors encompasses many diverse roles and responsibilities that limit the validity of any survey within the CRCNA.
2. The churches can access resources such as the *2018 Compensation Handbook for Church Staff* by Richard Hammar, which provides detailed compensation analyses for most ministry positions.

D. Retirement and Pension Issues

The following discussion draws from and expands on the Candidacy Committee report to Synod 2009 (see Agenda for Synod 2009, pp. 218-19; Acts of Synod 2009, p. 583).

In current practice, ministers of the Word as well as commissioned pastors need to negotiate both insurance and retirement plans with their congregations and sponsoring ministries. In this sense, equity in our policies and regulations in this area between persons ordained as commissioned pastors and as ministers of the Word already exists.

While the denomination has a defined-benefit retirement plan (pension plan) for ministers of the Word, local congregations and ministries are encouraged to create a pension plan for those ordained as commissioned pastors (and any nonordained staff working 20 or more hours per week). A number of options are available for commissioned pastors and the ministries that support them. In the United States these include IRA (Individual Retirement Account) plans and 403b plans. In Canada these include RRSPs (Registered Retirement Savings Plans). Such plans (in comparison to the defined-benefit plan in place for ministers of the Word) are defined-contribution plans, and these plans are actually preferred by many for the advantages they offer participants.

A suggested contribution to such a plan is 10 percent of the offered salary and housing allowance, within limits allowed by law. For the sake of reference it can be noted that the Reformed Church in America recommendation to churches is 11 percent, and in the CRC denomination staff who are not ordained ministers of the Word can contribute 6 percent or more of salary within legal limits and will receive up to a 4 percent match for a total of 10 percent or more.

Commissioned pastors and representatives of the ministries that support them are welcome to contact the CRCNA pension and employee benefits office for advice and resources on commissioned pastor retirement planning.

The following discussion about retirement plans is from Synod 2018 (see Acts of Synod 2018, pp. 459-60).

Synod 2018 received an overture from Classis Niagara seeking to establish a defined-contribution pension plan for commissioned pastors. While affirming the “intent and need to establish defined-contribution pension plans for commissioned pastors,” synod did not accede to the overture, citing the following grounds:

1. Centralized administration of multiemployer defined contribution plans require a level of uniformity and coordination not available within our denominational structure.
2. For churches that decide to provide such a plan, the denomination’s pension office has information and resources available to local congregations to assist in establishing individual plans.
3. Assistance in meeting the cost of establishing such plans is available through the Financial Shalom Project.

(Acts of Synod 2018, p. 460)

E. Guidance for Video Examination

Synod 2018 instructed the Candidacy Committee to provide guidelines for exams done by video (see *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 488). The Candidacy Committee consulted classes that had already used video in conducting examinations. In one case, a classis had examined a candidate who was living in Korea. In another case a candidate who was in the military had been examined while on a base in Alaska. The Candidacy Committee also spoke to persons who had technological expertise. The following notes are intended to offer some guidelines for use by classes in examinations of commissioned pastors according to Articles 23-24. These notes may also provide assistance as classes consider other uses of video technology.

The potential uses of video-conferencing technology cover a broad range:

- Sermon reviewers may observe a video of a preached sermon rather than being present in person.
- A pre-examination video conference may be conducted with a small team or even one appointed person interviewing the person who will be examined, and then a recording of the video could be distributed to classis delegates before the examination meeting. This process could allow the classis meeting examination to be more focused and perhaps more efficient.
- A video-conference option may be used for an examinee, a delegate, and/or a synodical deputy who is not present at the classis meeting (due to extreme distance or prohibitive cost of traveling to the classis meeting).
- A totally “virtual” meeting could be conducted by video conferencing, with all delegates participating from their individual computers/devices.

Other uses are likely possible and will be discovered as the use of technology in our daily lives continues to progress. At this point classes have reported using the first three examples described here, and at least one classis is thinking about experimenting with the final example.

As Synod 2018 has requested guidelines regarding the use of video for examinations, the Candidacy Committee offers the following suggestions:

- Meeting in person is always preferable to meeting via video conference—the use of video conferencing, at least for the near future, should be the exception rather than the norm. Especially in the setting of examinations and interviews, the nuances of a person’s expression and voice are much stronger in face-to-face settings, and both the person being examined and the other persons present will be best served with an in-person atmosphere. Video meetings are more useful once a relationship has been established.
- Synodical deputies have been advised in the past that their physical presence is highly recommended where classis deliberation needs to occur. Yet there are certainly cases where routine matters such as approving a clearly presented job description, or a noncontroversial release of a pastor, or the retirement of a pastor can be done via video conference, or conference call, or email.

- Where distance and cost factors are prohibitive, and where a classis is of a unified mind to experiment, video conferencing may be a useful tool, especially in the first few examples described above. Such experimenting may indeed result in experiencing a learning curve that may bless the rest of the denomination.
- Any successful experiment and use of video-conference technology will depend on the following:
 - having adequate and experienced technical support available at the time of the classis meeting
 - ascertaining beforehand that the connections, bandwidth, and equipment will be suitable in advance of the meeting; online participants will also need to test their equipment ahead of time to ensure that the technology parameters will be adequate
 - anticipating and planning for the technical ability to facilitate questions from the assembly, and for managing any needed periods of executive session
 - assigning the technical functions (managing connections, chat questions, etc.) to someone at the meeting who does not already have responsibility for chairing or recording the minutes of the meeting

It should be noted that our CRCNA IT staff have gathered suggestions for well-functioning video-conference meetings and have placed them in a Network article: “Top 6 Tips for Improving Video Conferencing” (see network.crcna.org/church-communications/top-6-tips-improving-video-conferencing).

VI. Tools Available for Administering the Office of Commissioned Pastor

The Candidacy Committee website of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (www.crcna.org/candidacy) offers a variety of tools and resources related to the administration of the office of commissioned pastor. These include forms and instructions for the various routes to ordination.

Section Five on the resource site offers useful documents in this regard. Each document is numbered in the upper right-hand corner for easy identification. The following list of documents is available as of June 2019:

Section Five: Commissioned Pastor Resources (Church Order Articles 23-24)

5.0.1 Commissioned Pastor Handbook

Basic Tools

- 5.1.1 CP – Process Overview
- 5.1.2 CP – Checklist for Appointing and Ordaining a Commissioned Pastor
- 5.1.3 CP – Application Form for Classes in Appointing a Commissioned Pastor
- 5.1.4 CP – Learning Plan Design Template
- 5.1.5 CP – List of Training Programs for Commissioned Pastors

Additional Tools for Commissioned Pastors

- 5.2.1 CP – Suggested Documents to Be Gathered for Ordination

Sample Call Letters and Certificates

- 5.3.1 CP – Letter of Call – Commissioned Pastor
- 5.3.2 CP – Classical Certificate for Commissioned Pastor

- 5.3.3 CP – Example of Ordination Certificate – Jeremy Pool
- 5.3.4 CP – Form for Ordination and Installation – Commissioned Pastor

Sample Ordination Service Tools

- 5.4.1 CP – Sanders Ordination Service Aids
- 5.4.2 CP – Sanders Ordination Worship Bulletin
- 5.4.3 CP – Hsieh Ordination Service Aids
- 5.4.4 CP – Hsieh Ordination Worship Bulletin
- 5.4.5 CP – Burma Ordination Service Aids
- 5.4.6 CP – Ordination Service for Jeremy Pool

Sample Job Descriptions

- 5.5.1 CP – Sample Job Description – Glen McCarthy

Sample Learning Plans

- 5.6.1 CP – Sample Learning Plan for Wayne Ondersma

Please contact the director of the Candidacy office, Rev. David Koll (dkoll@crcna.org), if you need any help finding your way to these resources, or if you have any questions regarding the office of commissioned pastor.

VII. Invitation to Share Resources and Concerns regarding the Office of Commissioned Pastor

The Candidacy Committee is well aware that our use of the office of commissioned pastor is relatively new and evolving. Although by definition the office has a local focus and the responsibility for the office needs to remain localized, the Candidacy Committee is open to serving the CRC, its congregations, and its classes as a resource center that can help gather and distribute ideas, practices, and concerns regarding this office. This handbook is one effort at performing that task. If you have any further questions or suggestions that may be of benefit to local congregations and classes, please contact the director of Candidacy, Rev. David Koll. He will compile a record of the suggestions and concerns and pass them along to other ministries as appropriate.

Contact:

Rev. David Koll

Director of Candidacy

email: dkoll@crcna.org

phone: 1-800-272-5125 x2779

1700 28th Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407

Appendix B

Updates to the Journey Toward Ordination Document

This appendix presents adjustments to the Journey Toward Ordination document, a helpful tool for introducing the process of pastoral ordination in the CRCNA. These adjustments follow from changes that we anticipate Synod 2019 will make to the Church Order and Its Supplements regarding the office of commissioned pastor (Art. 23-24) and the affiliation of pastors already ordained in other contexts (Supplement, Art. 8).

The Journey Toward Ordination document was first approved by Synod 2006 as one of the initial contributions of the Candidacy Committee (then known as the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee). The document has seen various revisions since that time, with synod approving all changes that have been judged substantial.

The Journey Toward Ordination adjustments presented in this appendix include the following:

- updating the Church Order and Supplement statements to include the reformatted Articles 23-24 and their Supplements
- updating the explanation of the office of commissioned pastor to reflect the actions of Synod 2019
- updating the explanation of the affiliation process for pastors already ordained in other contexts to reflect the actions of Synod 2019 regarding Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F
- guidelines for video examinations

I. Reformatted Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements

[The changes approved by Synod 2019 will be inserted into the Journey document, section I; current page 5.]

II. Updated explanation of the office of commissioned pastor

[See Journey document, section III, D; current page 24.]

D. Commissioned Pastor (Church Order Articles 23-24)

(This section of the Journey to Ordination document has been updated with the approval of Synod 2019 to accommodate approved changes and updates to Church Order Articles 23-24 and their Supplements.)

The office of commissioned pastor is recognized in the Christian Reformed Church as a flexible, very localized ordination into ministry. *Commissioned pastor* is an “umbrella term” for a variety of ministry positions in which this ordination may occur: evangelist, chaplain, pastor of outreach, of youth, of congregational life, and more. The Church Order Supplement to Article 23-a indicates that “the office of commissioned pastor is applicable to a variety of ministries, provided that these ministries fit the 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.]"*

Ordination to the office of commissioned pastor arises out of a specific, usually local ministry context. The relevant ministry will document the job description showing the need for such ordained leadership. The job description will then be considered by the classis in consultation with representatives from three neighboring classes (i.e., the synodical deputies). Once all are agreed that the ministry as detailed in the job description fits the intention of Article 23 (as described by the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001), the process toward ordination can continue. This process involves verifying relevant ministry skills, designing and engaging in a learning plan where appropriate, gathering appropriate documents, preparing a sermon to be critiqued (if preaching is part of the job description), and preparing for an oral exam at the classis level. This process is described in greater detail in Church Order Supplement, Articles 23-24 and in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

It is noteworthy that up to this point very little has been said about the individual to be ordained. There is an underlying assumption that an individual will emerge who can fit the ministry position being created or recognized. All parties concerned need to be in prayer that such a "match" will occur and be affirmed through this process of discernment. Thus, persons seeking to be ordained as commissioned pastors should pray that God will lead them to a ministry need more than that they will be led to an ordained position. And ministries seeking a leader for a ministry should pray that God will send the right leader more than that "the right job description" will be created.

If your local ministry is doing a work that would be well served by the ordained leadership of a commissioned pastor, you are encouraged to speak to the classis leadership in your area. If you are an individual who wishes to be used in ministry as an ordained commissioned pastor, talk to your local church or classis leaders. Seek out especially the members of an area Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT). Together as a church we are actively praying to the Lord of harvest that workers will be sent into his harvest field (see Luke 10:2).

Note that the denominational Candidacy Committee has also prepared a Commissioned Pastor Handbook for use in the administration of the office of commissioned pastor. This resource presents all of the Church Order and synodical statements about commissioned pastors and provides a number of tools and resources that a local ministry and classis may find useful. The handbook is available on the Candidacy Committee website (crcna.org/candidacy) under the "Commissioned Pastors" section.

III. Updated explanation of the ordination route for pastors ordained in other settings

[See Journey document, section III, C; current pages 21ff.]

C. Already Ordained Outside the CRCNA (Church Order Article 8)

(This section of the Journey to Ordination document has been updated with the approval of Synod 2019 to accommodate approved changes and updates to Church Order Supplement, Article 8, sections E and F.)

1. Expression of Interest

- If a minister ordained outside of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) expresses interest in entering ordained ministry in the CRCNA, he or she will contact the Candidacy Committee (see Church Order Supplement, Article 8, E, 2). Alternatively, after a period of sustained effort to call a minister from within the CRCNA, a council may express a desire to call a pastor from outside the CRCNA. When that is the case, the council must contact the Candidacy Committee (see Church Order Supplement, Article 8, E, 3). Whatever the origin of the contact, the Candidacy Committee will direct all parties to the procedures described in Church Order Article 8 (see especially the discussion of “need” in Supplement, Article 8, F,1).
- The discussion of “need” has been significant in the use of Church Order Article 8. Prior to 2019, “need” was mentioned at two different points in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, when discussing criteria for use of this article. Synod 2019 approved placing this criteria in this Journey Toward Ordination document, which serves as an extension of the Church Order and its Supplements in communicating the directions and regulations of synod regarding these matters. The need for calling a minister ordained outside of the Christian Reformed Church in North America shall be acknowledged when one or more of the following conditions apply:
 - 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.
 - b. The need of a particular congregation for a pastor is so urgent that it can be met only by calling a minister of another denomination.
 - c. The minister is a new-church developer and is being called to start a new church.
 - d. There is a need for indigenous leadership in a multicultural or ethnic-minority church.
- The denominational Candidacy Committee has reflected on these criteria often (see Candidacy Committee reports in the agendas to Synods 2009, 2012, 2013, and 2017 and in the committee’s supplemental report to Synod 2018 [*Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 399-400]). The committee has found criteria c and d above to be fairly straightforward, but the other two criteria require very subjective judgment.

- In addition, defining what constitutes a “sustained and realistic effort” to find a minister from within the CRC or the RCA (Church Order Supplement, Art. 8, E, 1) is potentially very arbitrary. Thus, the “need” discussion is complex, and judgments regarding when and how to apply Article 8 are complex. The most recent development, as reported to Synod 2018, is the Candidacy Committee’s readiness for more frequent use of Article 8 if and when the classis and local church are in agreement, and when both parties and the applying pastor agree to use the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC), involving accredited study through our denomination’s seminary.

2. Inquiry Stage

- The Candidacy Committee offers the interested individual (or council) encouragement, answers their questions, and determines whether Article 8 is the appropriate Church Order article for this pastor or council to use in the process toward ordination. If the situation meets the criteria for use of Article 8, the Candidacy Committee then outlines the affiliation process for entering ministry in the CRC, in consultation with the appropriate Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT).
- Synod has instructed the Candidacy Committee to use two additional criteria in discerning the qualifications of an individual for this route to ordination:
 - a. ability to speak, or learn, the English language
 - b. ability to adjust to the American/Canadian situation

These criteria were previously part of the Church Order Supplement. A third additional criteria was purposely omitted by Synod 2019: “age limit of forty years (as a general rule).”

- Note from Candidacy Committee guidelines in evaluating appropriateness of Article 8 and the related learning covenant:

“The person shall be duly ordained, recommended by an appropriate ecclesiastical authority, and theologically trained. Theological training will ordinarily include a documentable program of training that covers the knowledge, character, and skills standards for ministry in the CRC.”

(This guideline calls for the Candidacy Committee, local councils, and CMLTs to evaluate potential candidates’ ordination and theological training. While that evaluation must be made on a case-by-case basis, it is safe to say that in the case of Article 8 applications, we are looking for ordination and theological training that is roughly equivalent to the CRC’s practices and standards, as expressed through the Church Order Article 6 process.)

3. Affirmation of Gifts and Character

- The CMLT and the interested minister gather the other initial documents required in the Ministry Readiness Profile, including an autobiography, a personal statement of faith, and the application from a local CRC council (see the Article 8 Process Checklist; or see resources at crcna.org/candidacy).
- Where possible, the minister's former council (or other similar local governing body) submits a reference to the CMLT testifying to the minister's character, knowledge, and skills.
- Where possible, the minister's former classis (or other regional body) also submits a reference to the CMLT testifying to the minister's character, knowledge, and skills.
- A statement previously placed in the Church Order Supplement, slightly edited, is relevant at this point:

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 a positive testimonial. Should such be the case, a careful preliminary investigation must be made in consultation with the Candidacy Committee. The report of this investigation will serve under such circumstances in lieu of the testimonial.

- Synod 2019 also received from the Candidacy Committee a requested report regarding the process for affiliating a pastor from an independent church background. The Article 8 process is indeed appropriate in such cases, and would include equivalent testimonials from persons and groups familiar with the applicant's faith journey.
- After submitting the materials noted above, the minister appears before the CMLT or its designated committee for a personal interview.
- If, as a result of this interview, the minister is endorsed by the CMLT, the CMLT completes a Classis Endorsement Form and forwards this form, along with the other initial documents to the Candidacy Committee for initial endorsement and for licensure to preach in the CRC.

4. CMLT Interview

- The minister then appears before the CMLT, or its designated committee, for a personal interview.
- If, as a result of this interview, the minister is endorsed by the CMLT, the CMLT completes a Classis Endorsement Form and forwards this form, along with the other initial documents to the Candidacy Committee for initial endorsement and for licensure to preach in the CRC.

5. Admission to the Affiliation Process

- The Candidacy Committee reviews the initial documents in the Ministry Readiness Profile (i.e., the items indicated on the Article 8 Process Checklist) and, as appropriate, gives initial endorsement to the affiliation process under the provisions of Church Order Article 8. At this point in the process the Candidacy Committee (a) grants licensure to preach in the CRC and (b) grants “Declaration of Need” under Church Order Supplement, Article 8, F. The local classis is free to decide whether a classis interview is needed at this point, or whether a report from the committee of classis will suffice.

6. The Preparation and Stated Supply Phase

- To advance in the affiliation process, the licensed minister serves as stated supply for a period of at least six months. In some cases, the CMLT may need to provide assistance in finding an appropriate ministry setting or a sponsoring partnership via a calling church.
- Upon endorsement into the affiliation process, the CMLT and the minister together will develop a learning covenant. The learning covenant will indicate the areas of study (if any) the individual needs to pursue and how the identified objectives will be met (potentially through a combination of academic study at a university or seminary, online learning, mentoring, and/or independent study). The covenant will also include participation in the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC) or an approved contextually shaped, individualized, alternative learning plan. Based on the minister’s experience, the covenant will also specify what type of stated-supply position will be sought and the duration of the position (ordinarily six months).
- In addition to developing the learning covenant, the minister, council, and CMLT will also draft a financial plan indicating how they intend to finance the affiliation period with the CRC. This plan may include several sources of funding, including prior savings, loans, and spousal income. One of the primary sources of funding is likely to be the income received through a stated-supply position.
- The learning covenant and the financial plan will be forwarded to the Candidacy Committee for their endorsement. The Candidacy Committee may suggest changes to the learning covenant or the financial plan before providing their endorsement. Once the Candidacy Committee, the CMLT, and the minister are agreed upon the learning covenant and the financial plan, the minister will work with the CMLT to complete the program laid out in the learning covenant.
- During this phase the CMLT and minister gather the other documents required in the Ministry Readiness Profile, including a copy of ministerial credentials, a copy of the minister’s academic degrees, a criminal background check, and an evaluated psychological report. The individual also makes full disclosure of any acts of official discipline, criminal

charges, or ecclesiastical complaint. This material is forwarded to the Candidacy Committee.

- The CMLT, in consultation with the minister, ensures that the minister has established a mentoring relationship with a CRC pastor.
- The CMLT maintains contact with the minister throughout the affiliation process, showing an active and ongoing interest in the individual's progress toward the goals identified in the learning covenant.
- Where there are changes to the minister's financial plan or learning covenant, the CMLT endorses these changes and notifies the Candidacy Committee. The Candidacy Committee may also suggest additional changes to these plans during this period. The Candidacy Committee, the CMLT, the council, and the individual shall communicate any revisions to one another in writing.
- At fitting points in the minister's affiliation process, the classis will find appropriate means for celebrating and giving thanks to God for his provision of faithful and gifted leadership for his church.

7. The Candidacy Stage

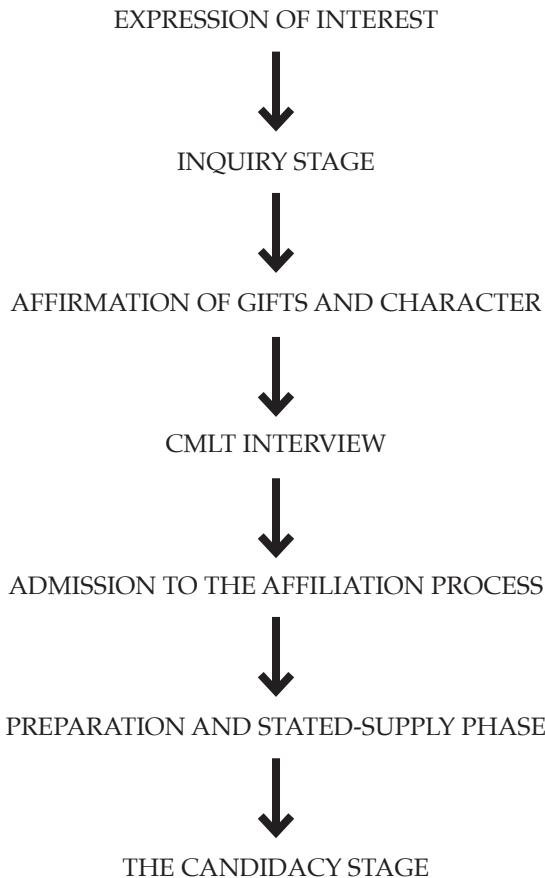
- As the minister nears the end of the affiliation process, the council of the congregation in which the stated supply was served will provide a final endorsement to the CMLT and the Candidacy Committee for the minister to seek candidacy.
- The CMLT reviews the progress of the minister and at the appropriate time offers its final endorsement. The CMLT also seeks from the designated mentor a statement of endorsement.
- The Candidacy Committee ensures that the learning covenant and the Ministry Readiness Profile (i.e., the items indicated on the Article 8 Process Checklist, plus any other material that has been gathered) have been satisfactorily completed and that a favorable endorsement on each has been received from the appropriate parties. Once the Candidacy Committee is satisfied that all requirements have been met, the Candidacy Committee gives the classis permission to proceed with a doctrinal conversation (also known as the colloquium doctum).

8. The Colloquium Doctum

- Note this statement in Church Order Supplement, Article 8, E, 4:

At the completion of the affiliation process the classis, with authorization 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.

The Journey of Affiliation: Article 8 (Flow Chart)



IV. Guidelines for video examinations

[To be included in Journey document, section II, C; current page 10.]

Synod 2019 received the following guidelines for cases in which remote video technology is used for an examination of a commissioned pastor, candidate, or affiliation via Article 8 and the colloquium doctum.

Guidelines for exams done by video

(To be inserted after review by Synod 2019.)

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, 2019, are Rev. Andrew Beunk (2020/2); Rev. Anthony Elenbaas, chair (2019/2); Rev. Emmett Harrison (2019/2); Rev. InSoon Hoagland (2020/1); Mr. James Joosse (2021/1); Dr. William Koopmans (2021/1); Ms. Lenore Maine (2019/1); Ms. Ruth Palma (2020/1); Rev. Kathy Smith (2021/2); and Rev. John Tenyenhuis (2021/2). 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 2018 and January 2019. A conference call meeting is scheduled to be held in April 2019.

III. Nominations for membership

Rev. Anthony Elenbaas (chairperson the most recent year) and Rev. Emmett Harrison 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.

Ms. Lenore Maine is completing her first term on the EIRC, and, given her contributions and willingness to continue, the EIRC recommends that synod reappoint Ms. Lenore Maine to a second three-year term.

In keeping with the synodical guidelines and requirements for diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, geographical location, and ordination, and the current membership of the committee, the EIRC presents a single nominee for election to the Eastern Canada position and a slate of two names for the Great Lakes regional position.

Eastern Canada position

The EIRC recommends that synod appoint the following single nominee to a first term:

Dr. Michael Wagenman currently serves as a CRCNA campus minister and professor of theological and biblical studies at a number of institutions (Western University, Huron University College, Redeemer University College, and the Institute for Christian Studies) and has served with the Canadian Council of Churches. He is a member of Redeemer CRC in Sarnia, Ontario, and serves on the Classis Chatham church plant team.

Great Lakes Region (U.S.) position

The EIRC recommends that synod elect one member to a first term from the following slate of nominees:

Dr. Lyle Bierma is a professor of the history of Christianity at Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS); prior to his appointment at CTS, he was on the faculty of Reformed Bible College (now Kuyper College). He has served on a variety of CRC committees and boards (Historical Committee, CTS board, Interchurch Relations Committee, CANAAC, U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue, and on the CRC-RCA Common Confessional Texts Task Force). He is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary and Duke University; he is a member of Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Rev. Brian White is the pastor of worship and administration at Seymour CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Prior to beginning his service there, he served in Japan, teaching and providing pastoral support; in the U.S. he served a large Korean church in New Jersey as a youth pastor. He has studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary with a focus on interreligious dialogue. He came to know the CRC while serving a CRC Korean congregation in the Los Angeles area.

IV. Bilateral relationships

The CRC maintains a relationship of *ecclesiastical fellowship* with 25 denominations and partners with 12 *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; five partners in Central and South America (including the Caribbean); two partners in Europe; seven 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. *Bilateral partnership reports*

Interchanges with two bilateral partners 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 (Soutpansberg Synod) (RCSA-SP)

The Soutpansberg Synod is a group that separated from the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA) during apartheid, and since the end of apartheid in the 1990s, they have elected to remain independent from the larger GKSA. They have 47 churches with 40,000 members and operate both a Bible institute and Heidelberg seminary. The leader of Heidelberg seminary, Dr. Tshililo Liphadzi, was a delegate from the Soutpansberg Synod to the CRC Synod 2018, and Dr. Mwaya Wa Kitavi of Resonate Global Mission represented the CRC at their synod meeting in January 2019. Our partnership together focuses on theological education and leadership development as well as Christian education. The Church Leadership Center and Christian Schools International are additional partners in our work together as a denomination in *ecclesiastical fellowship* with the RCSA-SP.

2. The Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC)

Partnering by means of our *other ecumenical relationships* category, our work with the EKHC has included Resonate Global Mission (via the Global Prayer Safari in February 2019) and Timothy Leadership Training Institute in concert with the Bible League Ethiopia. Their deputy general secretary made a visit to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in November and observed our processes and teamwork among our agencies and ministries with great interest. By means of a special project, retired Office of Social Justice coordinator Peter Vander Meulen has been working, along with an Ethiopian colleague, with the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church. Following the strategy of a similar model of peace work in Nigeria, they are assisting the EKHC as they step into reconciliation and peace-building among ethnic groups within their denomination and beyond. An initial meeting took place in October, with surprisingly positive results growing among church leaders and spreading to the Ethiopian Parliament, and a second training of church leaders took place in December. In summary, a community-based peace-building process that has begun in the churches is taking root in this denomination—the second largest on the African continent.

3. Activities with North American bilateral partners

Our *ecclesiastical fellowship* arrangement with the Reformed Church in America, enhanced by the accord we forged in Pella, Iowa, in 2014 leads us to many collaborative efforts, including church planting, Disability Concerns, and World Renew disaster relief. Most recently the RCA and the CRC received a grant to establish a joint Reformed Collaborative for Congregational Revitalization, explained in the Council of Delegates section of this *Agenda for Synod*, to provide a practical means for working together with CRC and RCA congregations seeking renewal. In addition,

last summer the RCA general synod and our synod adopted plans to work via a combined Interfaith committee, not yet initiated (the RCA is first addressing staffing issues).

The RCA Regional Synod-Canada has relocated their offices to the CRC Burlington, Ontario, facility, given the convenience and space availability in the newly remodeled offices there. This provides opportunities to discuss, plan, and implement various aspects of the "Pella Accord." In addition, a subcommittee of the EIRC meets two or three times a year with the director of the RCA Regional Synod-Canada and the Presbyterian Church of Canada—a denomination with whom we enjoy a *church in dialogue* relationship—as defined by a memorandum of understanding.

4. Formal exchanges

The following delegated ecumenical representations to bilateral partners occurred during the past year:

- a. To the general assembly of the Reformed Church in Japan, Dr. Zachary King (director of Resonate Global Mission)
- b. To the general synod of the Reformed Church in America, Dr. Jim Payton (former chair of the EIRC)

B. Emerging bilateral partnerships

Two new partnerships have been emerging and, although not ready for proposal toward ecumenical affiliation, these efforts call for mention here.

1. The Presbyterian Church of Pakistan (PCP) has begun connecting to the CRCNA as they navigate a climate of persecution in their home country. Initial conversations with Back to God Ministries International are taking place to explore partnership in media ministry. In addition, persecution, lack of funds, and a paucity of church leaders has led the PCP to seek assistance in leadership development. Dr. Gary Bekker, director of Raise Up Global Ministries, has visited and is seeking to determine ways in which the Timothy Leadership Training Institute, along with Calvin Theological Seminary, can participate in meeting this need.
2. The CRC Association of India has been looking to the CRCNA as it takes steps from being an association of churches to a denomination. Rev. Kathy Smith, professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, has provided lectures and consultation in the process of this transition.

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.

A. World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

The WCRC is divided into nine regions, six of which are represented by regional councils. One such group is the Caribbean and North America Area Council (CANAAC). Colin Watson, Sr., director of ministries and administration, attended a meeting of the group in November and was asked to serve

on their steering committee as they seek to define their vision and strategies for their regional efforts in the WCRC.

B. Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT)

The CCT draws together leaders from a diverse group of U.S. Christian churches. Steven Timmermans, Colin Watson, and Zachary King have all participated in CCT activities related to their roles with the CRCNA.

C. Canadian Council of Churches

Darren Roorda and other EIRC members routinely participate in gatherings of the Canadian Council of Churches, an organization ably led by CRC member Mr. Peter Noteboom.

D. Evangelical Fellowship Canada

Darren Roorda regularly contributes to and benefits from our participation in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Noteworthy in this past year has been their release of the report *Renegotiating Faith*, a study of the religiosity of young people and young adults.

E. Other multilateral organizations and efforts

We benefit from our partnership with the National Association of Evangelicals; we participate in the U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue on various subgroups and commissions (e.g., of the Canadian Council of Churches' Commission of Faith and Witness); and via Mwaya Wa Kitavi's leadership we participate in the World Reformed Fellowship's Africa Council.

F. The EIRC appoints representatives and observers to many of these multilateral ecumenical organizations and to other ecumenical efforts; often Christian Reformed Church members are asked by these organizations to serve as well.

1. Colin Watson, Sr., serves as the CRCNA's representative on the board of directors of the National Association of Evangelicals and Sojourners and on the steering committee of the WCRC's Caribbean and North American Area Council. He also alternates with Steven Timmermans to represent the CRC at meetings of Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. and the Global Christian Forum.
2. Darren Roorda and Anthony Elenbaas serve on the governing board of the Canadian Council of Churches; Ms. Kathy Vander Grift is a vice-chair of the board. Dr. Peter Schuurman represents the CRC on the Commission of Faith and Witness of the Canadian Council of Churches. Working groups from the commission are served by Dr. Jim Payton (National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee), Dr. Jim Rusthoven (Faith and Life Sciences Group), and Ms. Janiece Van Oostrom (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity). Another CCC group, the Commission on Justice and Peace, includes Ms. Bernadette Arthur on the commission's Canadian Ecumenical Antiracism Network and Dr. Michael Wagenman on the Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning.
3. Rev. Tim Wood serves on the board of KAIROS; a number of CRC members serve on KAIROS's partnership circles.

4. Darren Roorda represents the CRCNA to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.
5. Dr. Matthew Lundberg serves as the representative on a commission of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A.
6. Dr. Ronald Feenstra and Dr. Sue Rozeboom serve as representatives of the CRC in its participation in the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue.

VI. Interfaith activities

The Interfaith subcommittee of the EIRC continues its work. Membership includes Dr. Bernard Ayoola, Ms. Priscilla Brink, Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollemans, Mr. Manato Jansen, Ms. Jessica Joustra, Dr. Jim Payton, Rev. Greg Sinclair, Dr. Steve Timmermans, Ms. Femke Visser-Elenbaas, and Dr. Cory Willson. Departing during this year are Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollemans and Ms. Femke Visser-Elenbaas; their service is to be noted with gratitude.

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. In addition, members are able to participate in local, national (e.g., the Canadian Council of Churches' Christian Interfaith Reference Group), and international (e.g., Parliament of the World's Religions) gatherings as leaders from a variety of traditions come together to learn from each other.

Jim Payton, chair of the Interfaith subcommittee, has also been serving as the ecumenical representative on the RCA's Commission for Christian Unity. Greg Sinclair leads Resonate Global Mission's Diaspora project. Manato Jansen is a Calvin College student leader. Cory Willson annually leads Calvin Theological Seminary's *Loving Your Neighbor* conference. And Steven Timmermans has served as the link to the planning committee of Inspire 2019 for interfaith matters.

VII. Synodical assignments

A. U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue

Synod 2018 instructed the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to make the latest round of the report of the U.S. Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue, *The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World*, accessible to the churches, along with study materials; and synod asked the EIRC to evaluate the recommendations in the report for applicability to the CRCNA and to report its conclusions to Synod 2019. Unfortunately, the final release of the report (introduced in summary form to synod last year) has not yet occurred, necessitating postponement of work on these assignments.

B. Categories of affiliation

Synod 2016 instructed the executive director to task an ad hoc committee with the following mandate: to consider creation of a new category of affiliation by which a (non-Canadian and United States) congregation or groups of congregations could associate with the CRCNA. Then, in 2017, synod adopted the following revised mandate of the ad hoc group: "To consider creation of a new category of affiliation and / or a revision to current

ecumenical categories by which a (non-Canadian and United States) congregation or groups of congregations could associate with the CRCNA" (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 684). Given the degree to which this ad hoc committee was to focus on matters stemming from our Ecumenical Charter, the ad hoc committee reported regularly to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee. The final report, approved by the EIRC for presentation to synod, is found in a series of appendices, and its recommendations are included in the Recommendations section below as well as in Appendix B. The appendices are organized as follows:

- Appendix A: Executive Summary of the Categories of Affiliation Report
- Appendix B: Categories of Affiliation Report
- Appendix C: Revised Ecumenical Charter—with Proposed Changes Shown
- Appendix D: Revised Ecumenical Charter—with Proposed Changes Incorporated
- Appendix E: Pertinent Revised Church Order Sections—with Proposed Changes Shown
- Appendix F: Proposed Condensed Ecumenical Charter for Congregational Use

VIII. Closing comments

We continue to explore the interfaith dimensions of our mandate; our interactions via all of our 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 Rev. Anthony Elenbaas, 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. Anthony Elenbaas and Rev. Emmett Harrison for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC, noting in particular Rev. Elenbaas's service as chair and Rev. Harrison's service as vice-chair. In addition, that synod express its gratitude to Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollemans and Ms. Femke Visser-Elenbaas for serving the cause of interfaith interchange by their participation on the EIRC's Interfaith subcommittee.
- 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, 2019.
- D. That synod reappoint Ms. Lenore Maine to a second three-year term.

E. That synod take note of the postponement of fulfilling instructions from Synod 2018 regarding the work of the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue due to delay in the final release of the report *The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World*.

F. That synod propose to Synod 2020 the adoption of revisions to the Church Order as found in Appendix E.

Grounds:

1. This is a necessary step to effect the changes proposed to the ecumenical categories of affiliation and the Ecumenical Charter.
2. These revisions make for substantive changes to the Church Order.

G. That synod receive the ad hoc committee's Categories of Affiliation Report as provided by the EIRC (Appendix B) and adopt the following recommendations contained within the report, noting that implementation of the recommendations is subject to the adoption of the accompanying Church Order changes by Synod 2020:

1. That synod adopt the proposed changes to the Ecumenical Charter (see Appendices C-D), including the revised, two-category bilateral system with its provisions and titles *churches in communion* and *churches in cooperation*, as explained in the report (Appendix B).

Grounds:

- a. This revision makes our ecumenical categorization system a more hospitable and relationally integrated avenue for affiliation with the CRCNA for churches outside of the United States and Canada.
- b. This revision takes into account the rich diversity of engagement with other churches and denominations already present throughout the life of the CRCNA at its various organizational levels.
- c. This revision simplifies and makes more usable the system of bilateral categories for all the organizational levels of our church.
- d. This revision recognizes and seeks to resolve the relational inconsistency of recognizing or *being* with another church without *doing* actions appropriate to the relationship, and vice-versa.
- e. This revision strikes a balance between organizing and regulating what *is* and giving the freedom needed for missional responsiveness.
- f. This revision cleans up and simplifies the language and function of the Ecumenical Charter.
- g. This revision is an important step toward creating a larger functional/cultural shift toward engaging in ever-healthier ways relationally with other Christian churches.

2. That synod adopt the following operating principles for use by denominational agencies and ministries:

- CRCNA agencies and ministries should be encouraged, where possible and feasible, to give priority to CRCNA/EIRC established relationships in their collaboration efforts with partners.
- CRCNA agencies should keep the EIRC updated annually about their current ecclesial partnerships via the executive director, Ministries Leadership Council, and annual strategic conversations directly with

the EIRC. The other denominational ministries should update the EIRC via the Ministries Leadership Council and by representation of the director of ministries and administration or the Canadian ministries director.

Grounds:

- a. CRCNA agencies and ministries already follow the Ministries Leadership Council's approved guidelines and processes for establishing collaboration with non-CRC entities.
- b. These principles provide another step toward effecting a functional/cultural shift that narrows the gap between our *being* and *doing* with other churches/denominations.
- c. These principles are in line with the corresponding changes proposed in the Ecumenical Charter revision.

H. That synod recommend the condensed version of the Ecumenical Charter as found in Appendix F to local churches and classes as a guide for their engagement with other churches and denominations.

Grounds:

- a. This is a useful tool for helping congregations and classes to ground and frame their own work with other Christian denominations/churches biblically and practically.
- b. This action is another cultural/functional step in bridging the gap between the diversity of relationships engaged at the various levels of our denominational life.

I. That synod express its gratitude to the ad hoc committee members: Gary Bekker (CR World Missions, then TLTI), Peter Bulthuis (World Renew), Moses Chung (CR Home Missions, for the first half of the work), Anthony Elenbaas (EIRC), Zachary King (Resonate Global Mission, for the final year of the work), Jim Payton (former EIRC chair, for the final year of the work), Darren Roorda (chair, CMD), and Kurt Selles (BTGMI).

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee
Anthony Elenbaas, chair
Steven R. Timmermans, executive director (*ex officio*)

Appendix A

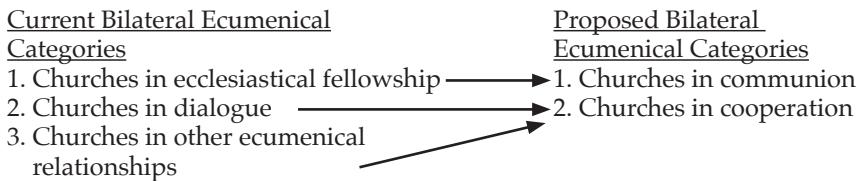
Executive Summary of the Categories of Affiliation Report

In 2016 the CRCNA Board of Trustees provided synod with background information and advice concerning church planting outside of North America, prompted in part by initiatives of Classis Pacific Northwest (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 70-75). Synod responded by declaring that "caution and care" should be taken in the future in such situations, keeping in mind certain "principles and covenants," and synod tasked the executive director to form two ad hoc committees to deal with matters arising from this situation (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 837-39). One ad hoc committee would investigate potential collaborations in Korea in response to Classis Pacific Northwest's activities. The other ad hoc group would "consider creation of a new category of affiliation by which a (non-Canadian and United States) congregation

or groups of congregations could associate with the CRCNA" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 838). The EIRC now forwards the report and recommendations of this "categories of affiliation" committee to Synod 2019.

The ad hoc committee dealing with categories of affiliation presented an initial response to Synod 2017 via the EIRC, requesting a modification that would broaden the scope of its mandate from considering "creation of a new category of affiliation" to considering "creation of a new category of affiliation *and/or a revision to current ecumenical categories.*" Synod approved the revision to the mandate (*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 684). The following year, Synod 2018's advisory committee on interdenominational matters reviewed a preliminary version of a new categorization system being considered and provided feedback. Synod noted this action and recognized the current diversity of healthy ecumenical partnership practices exercised by CRCNA churches and agencies across the world, a diversity of partnerships which do not all fit into our current ecumenical categories (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 480).

The present report lays out a simplified revision of the current bilateral ecumenical categorization system, as it is found in the Ecumenical Charter of the CRCNA. The intent is that this revision of bilateral categories should effect a cultural shift in the way that the EIRC and denominational agencies and ministries communicate and collaborate around partnerships formed with churches outside the CRCNA. It is also hoped that this cultural shift will inspire local congregations and classes to continue to engage ever more critically and deeply with non-CRCNA churches in their communities, regions, and around the world. This revision should help to address the currently uncategorized diversity of relationships present in the denomination; the gap between the churches the CRCNA recognizes as fellow churches of Jesus Christ and the churches the CRCNA partners with; and the usefulness and usability of the ecumenical categories as a missionally responsive means for churches outside of Canada and the United States to affiliate with the CRCNA. Following is an abbreviated graphic of the proposal:



Churches in communion, the closest category of relationship proposed, would replace the current category of *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship*. No changes are proposed to this category of relationship, aside from the change in name.

The other proposed category, *churches in cooperation*, represents the combining of the two current categories of *churches in dialogue* and *churches in other ecumenical relationships* into a single category. All of the church relationships categorized as either *churches in dialogue* or *churches in other ecumenical relationships* would fall into this new category, together with any church partnership held by a denominational agency (Back to God Ministries International, Resonate Global Mission, World Renew) or ministry (e.g., Disability Concerns, Faith Formation Ministries, Safe Church Ministry, etc.). The responsibility for managing relationships formed by the EIRC would remain

with the EIRC, and the responsibility for managing denominational agency and ministry relationships would remain with the denominational agencies and ministries who formed them via their approved policies for doing so. Recognizing all of these ecclesiastical relationships within the category of *churches in cooperation* serves to affirm them as relationships that the CRCNA has with fellow churches of Jesus Christ.

Synodical approval would not be required for a church to be added to this category of *churches in cooperation*, because the category is intended simply to be a reflection of the current reality of relationships engaged at the national or binational expression of the CRCNA, which is far broader than that recognized by our current bilateral categories (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 480). Synod will, however, be informed via the EIRC of all relationships, as has been the case regarding the current category of *churches in other ecumenical relationships*.

It is recommended that, to enact these changes, synod adopt the revised Ecumenical Charter (Appendices C and D), the resulting proposed Church Order changes (Appendix E), and the correlating operating principles for denominational agencies and ministries (see Recommendation B, 2 in the report). Additionally, to inspire deeper local and classical engagement, it is recommended that synod commend a condensed form of the Ecumenical Charter to the churches (Appendix F).

Outline of Categories of Affiliation Report

- I. Introduction
- II. History
- III. Observations and considerations
 - A. *General observations*
 - 1. An unrecognized diversity of relationships
 - 2. A gap between *being* and *doing* with other churches and denominations
 - 3. Different approval processes and authority
 - B. *CRCNA agency and ministry partnerships*
 - C. *The Ecumenical Charter and bilateral ecumenical categories*
- IV. Ways forward
 - A. *General principles*
 - 1. Usability
 - 2. Integrated relationships
 - 3. Missional responsiveness
 - 4. Internal coherence
 - B. *Specifics*
 - 1. Ecumenical Charter
 - a. Usability
 - b. Integrated relationships
 - c. Missional responsiveness
 - d. Internal coherence
 - 2. CRCNA agencies and ministries
 - 3. Church Order
- V. Recommendations

Appendix B

Categories of Affiliation Report

I. Introduction

In 2016 a question was asked about how the CRCNA might respond missionally to churches—both denominations and congregations, both established and freshly planted—that together wished to see national borders dissolve as far as the unity and structure of the CRCNA were concerned (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 70-75; *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 837-39). It was a question of possibility that sought to discern what the future might look like for Christians living ever more fully into a vision of the kingdom of God: a kingdom that includes “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7:9) and transcends the boundaries between them. While not phrased in quite those words, that was the substance of the question and its context (for specifics, see section II, History, below).

An ad hoc committee was appointed to struggle with this question. That committee brings its report to Synod 2019 via the EIRC, having determined that we as a denomination are not yet in a place to fully grasp the vision of a borderless church.

This does not mean there is no work to be done to align our denominational posture more fully to the vision of a borderless, reconciled church: a church that is already the reality in Christ—if only invisibly. So instead of a “new category of affiliation,” as was originally suggested by synod (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 838), this report recommends revising, minimizing, and simplifying the CRCNA’s bilateral ecumenical “categories of affiliation” so as to be less “siloed” across the organizational levels of our church, more user-friendly for local churches seeking deeper fellowship across borders, and thus more missionally responsive to “surprising manifestations of the working of the Spirit” (Ecumenical Charter, II, B, 3).

Can that really be achieved through some policy changes at the synodical level? Not by itself, but it would be a start. This report aims toward a cultural change—a change in the way our bilateral ecumenical categories, denominational agencies, and local churches *function in relationship* with other churches. This means, of course, that changes will take effect and bear fruit only insofar as all the various organizational levels of the CRCNA catch this vision and live into it.

This report is therefore presented to that end, in trust that Jesus remains the head of his church—the “holy catholic church” of our confession—and continues to accomplish his will in, for, and through his church. Thanks be to God!

II. History

In 2016 the CRCNA Board of Trustees provided synod with background information and advice concerning church planting outside of North America, prompted in part by initiatives of Classis Pacific Northwest. As a result, Synod 2016 declared that “classes and congregations considering planting churches under the CRCNA name outside of Canada and the United States and/or the affiliation of congregations outside of Canada and the United States should do so only with utmost caution and care” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 837-38). Further, in addressing the desire of congregations outside of

North America to seek affiliation with the CRCNA, synod pointed to established principles for church planting in other nations and to requirements in the Church Order and the limits of classis leadership. Synod then asked if there were other ways such ecclesiastical relationships could be developed and tasked the executive director to form an ad hoc committee with the following mandate (providing considerations and grounds):

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

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

Grounds:

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

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 838-39)

An ad hoc committee composed of leaders of denominational agencies (Resonate Global Mission, Back to God Ministries International, and World Renew) and EIRC members formed and began its work, reviewing current CRCNA connections with churches outside of Canada and the United States, assessing current options for those churches to connect or affiliate with the CRCNA, and discussing the possibilities, precedents, risks, and constraints that might bear on new opportunities for affiliation. Kathy Smith, professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, was also invited to join a meeting to help flesh out those realities more fully. A brief snapshot of this review follows.

There is a process in Church Order Article 38 for congregations to officially affiliate with (become full members of) the CRCNA, but there would be a number of challenging and perhaps unforeseen legal barriers to facilitating such an affiliation from outside the United States or Canada. Further, should international (outside Canada and the United States) affiliation of this sort become more common, each new country and context would present a new set of unique legal affiliation issues. Each of these issues would come with additional costs and challenges, not only for our denominational offices but also for the future of classis fellowship. Anything is possible, but on these grounds this option was soon deemed unwise.

The committee next looked at the CRCNA's current bilateral ecumenical categories. While not offering the full, official Church Order Article 38 affiliation, these categories do offer opportunities for robust fellowship, particularly within the *ecclesiastical fellowship* category. No immediately obvious issues arise from use of these bilateral ecumenical categories, since they do not involve any legal challenges to navigate. The committee noted, then, that the bilateral ecumenical categories would provide a navigable route for churches outside Canada and the United States to affiliate with the CRC. The only detraction was that these categories of relationship are our own (i.e., they are internal distinctions). Only a few other churches around the globe use similar methods of categorizing relationships. At the same time, categories remain important for the CRCNA's internal conversation, as they provide a means for the CRCNA to navigate its relationships with the global family of Christians.

The committee wondered if Synod 2016's mandate of considering a "new category of affiliation" might allow for fit *between* these two avenues of relationship—a category that might be more official and institutionally integrated than the current bilateral ecumenical categories but less official and less institutionally integrated than full affiliation via Church Order Article 38. The committee pondered this possibility but found the gap between these two options so narrow as not to offer reasonable possibilities that would serve to enhance the CRCNA's missional responsiveness (i.e., the committee did not see a way to envision an extra bureaucratic layer that would bless the CRCNA in new ways sufficient to justify its creation).

The committee also entertained the idea of facilitating each new request for affiliation on the basis of memoranda of understanding (MOU) outlining the particularities of each new relationship. But the group realized that even if there were a set MOU framework on which to base such agreements, this option would be so time- and resource-consuming as to be prohibitive and thus, again, unhelpful as a missionally responsive model.

After taking stock of these possible avenues for affiliation, the committee surveyed the landscape and made some observations about current realities connected to matters of affiliation, many of which are found below in the body of this report.

In brief, the committee recognized that the work of the CRCNA's denominational agencies, ministries, the EIRC, local churches, and regional classes is disparate. The EIRC holds one set of relationships with churches domestically and abroad, CRC agencies and ministries have a number of other church-partner relationships with less overlap between the two than one might imagine, and local churches and classes have still other relationships with congregations abroad and at home through ministerial and other collaborations—which are, again, not always aligned with the other existing relationships in the denomination. Thus no single answer can be given regarding how the CRCNA currently affiliates with other Christian churches across its organizational levels. This reality complicates the matter of proposing a "new category of affiliation." Indeed, this complicated reality of different affiliations is a contributing factor to the confusion that brought this committee's mandate into existence—arising in part from a situation in which church planting (and thus affiliation) initiatives by a classis in a foreign context went unnoticed (for a time) by other entities of the CRCNA.

Finally, the committee looked at the benefits and responsibilities of the affiliations the CRCNA currently uses.

Full affiliation via Church Order Article 38 offers accountability, credentialing, and relationship via classis and denominational structures, as well as the support of denominational services and ministries (e.g., Pension Fund, Pastor Church Resources, Faith Formation Ministries, etc.). Responsibilities are also inherent: covenanting around the confessions, ordering church life on the CRCNA's contextually North American polity, contributing to ministry shares according to ability, and intentionally and actively relating to fellow CR churches in North America (a reciprocal responsibility).

The ecumenical category of *ecclesiastical fellowship* offers the possibility of pulpit and table exchange, expedited transfer of membership, and more intentional relationship whereby the CRCNA might give and receive not only ecumenical delegates at major assemblies but also words of "concern and encouragement" and support via denominational agencies (Ecumenical Charter, III, B, 1). The other bilateral ecumenical categories (*churches in dialogue* and *churches in other ecumenical relationships*), while less formal, also provide a tangible base for relationship via conversation, support, and mutual ministry through the EIRC and denominational agencies and ministries. Examples of this kind of support and exchange with ecumenical category partners have included Back to God Ministries International ministry partnerships, Resonate Global Mission connections, Timothy Leadership Training workshops, conversations on polity and organizational structure, access to discipleship resources, and development and relief partnership via World Renew.

The committee noted that a fairly robust and embodied relationship can be exercised via bilateral ecumenical categories, depending on the case and the parties involved. While not offering credentialing or as full or direct an accountability structure, the entities of the CRCNA which might be most helpful to a church in a foreign context (i.e., denominational agencies and ministries that work internationally) are open to conversation, consultation, and support via the bilateral ecumenical categories of affiliation.

Taking all of this information together—the challenges inherent in international affiliation via Church Order Article 38, the disparate methods of affiliation currently exercised by the CRCNA at its various organizational levels, the lack of missional responsiveness that arises as a result of this siloed reality, and the possibilities for simple yet robust relationship that are nevertheless inherent in the CRCNA's current bilateral ecumenical categories—the committee reasoned that these categories were worth a further look.

On the basis of these reflections, then, the ad hoc committee, via the EIRC, requested a change in mandate that would open the possibility of deeper exploration of the CRCNA's bilateral ecumenical categories. The following recommendation was adopted by Synod 2017:

That synod adopt the following revised mandate of the ad hoc group considering the new category of affiliation, assigned by Synod 2016 (addition provided in bold):

To consider creation of a new category of affiliation **and/or a revision to current ecumenical categories** by which a (non-Canadian and United States) congregation or groups of congregations could associate with the CRCNA.

Ground: Initial work by an ad hoc group has indicated the need to reconsider current categories before consideration of an additional category because our current categories

- a. fail to capture the full range of interactions of CRCNA churches and ministries with ecumenical partners.
- b. are not always responsive to missional initiatives and needs that arise in the ministry of CRCNA congregations and agencies.
- c. are not always immediately meaningful to other denominations.

(*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 684)

The EIRC and the ad hoc committee therefore applied this revised mandate to their work, identifying a preliminary new direction and possible shape for the bilateral categories, the intended result being greater clarity and a shift in the way these categories function practically, so that both ecumenical relationships and the CRCNA's work and ministry as a denomination through local churches, agencies, and ministries might be strengthened.

To that end, the ad hoc committee forwarded to Synod 2018 by way of the EIRC Supplement a report for further input and sharpening. Synod's advisory committee gave input,¹ and synod took note, directing that the work continue for an additional year:

5. That synod recognize the current diversity of healthy ecumenical partnership practices by our churches and agencies in various regions and across the world. These partnerships do not all fit our current ecumenical categories.

Grounds:

- a. Our "glocal" realities and familiarity with our own contexts mean that locally we are already engaging fruitfully across denominational lines through ministerial associations and partnerships among other local entities.
 - b. We recognize the fruit that has come to our work denominationally via good and prudent partnerships.
6. That synod take note that the advisory committee discussed a possible new categorization system for ecumenical partnerships being considered by the EIRC (Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee Supplement) and provided a summary report of the discussion to the EIRC.

Ground: Because this work is currently at an early stage, an advisory committee was well suited to hold a discussion on this conceptual shift or broadening of direction and to provide a summary of that discussion.

7. That synod direct the EIRC and its ad hoc committee formed in 2016 to continue their work on this possible new categorization system for an additional year and report to Synod 2019 using the feedback from Synod 2018's advisory committee.

(*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 480)

The ad hoc committee has taken the feedback given, worked on the possible categorization system and desired cultural/functional shift, and now, via the EIRC, presents its final report to Synod 2019.

¹ The advisory committee of synod expressed no particular concerns; in fact, the feedback was largely in step with the observations found later in this report. Conversation also focused on local implications and stories of ecumenical engagement and how categories could be used to restrict or give permission. The feedback leaned toward using categories to give permission.

III. Observations and considerations

A. General observations

1. An unrecognized diversity of relationships

CRC agencies and ministries partner in healthy and fruitful ways with a wide variety of denominations, many of whom are not recognized ecclesiastically within the CRCNA's bilateral ecumenical categories of relationships. For example, in El Salvador, Resonate Global Mission partners with Semillas de Nueva Creación. Semillas de Nueva Creación is a network of evangelical Christians from all of the major denominations in El Salvador—none of which are in a formal ecclesiastical relationship with the CRC. This is not an isolated case.

Similarly, local pastors, churches, and even classes, through ministerial associations (local ecumenical clergy groups) and local / regional ministry agreements, are also interacting, ministering, witnessing, and worshiping in healthy and fruitful ways with a much more diverse set of denominations than our bilateral ecumenical categories recognize.

Immanuel CRC of Hamilton, Ontario, for example, interacts with a local network of churches “together for the good of the city” called True City. This network includes Fellowship Baptists, Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, Be (formerly Brethren) in Christ, Mennonites, Associated Gospel churches, Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) congregations, and other evangelical churches (including other CRCs). At the same time, Immanuel CRC is also building relationships via Resonate Global Mission, World Renew, and the Nehemiah Center with three Pentecostal churches in Nicaragua from Missionary Alliance and Church of God backgrounds. Of all these relationships, only one is with a denominationally categorized church: the Mennonite Church of Canada, a relationship included in our most distant relationship category: *churches in other ecumenical relationships*.

Many other local congregations have similar stories of engagement with diverse ecclesiastical partners, from ministerials to joint vacation Bible school ventures, all based on their local contexts, ministry goals, and missional opportunities. This level of diversity in relationship is unaccounted for in our current ecumenical categorization system.

2. A gap between *being* and *doing* with other churches and denominations

Synod’s recognition of a church within our ecumenical categorization system does not necessarily lead to engagement with that church through denominational agencies and ministries or through local CRC churches.

An example of this point is that while the CRCNA is formally in ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRC of Myanmar and the CRC of Sri Lanka, the EIRC has had no contact with these churches aside from occasionally bumping into their representatives every seven years at a World Communion of Reformed Churches gathering. Our denominational agencies and ministries do not have any active connection with these churches either. Our bilateral categories may recognize another church as a fellow church of Jesus Christ, but without actions to embody and bring life to the relationship, it lamentably fades from any tangible expression of the fellowship supposedly recognized through the category.

A gap is apparent, then, in the way the various organizational levels of the CRC connect ecumenically with other churches and denominations. The gap is between the *practical things we do* with other churches / denominations and *the fellowship or relationships* that synod recognizes via the EIRC.

Our *doing* and our *being* with other ecclesiastical bodies is disparate in that while CRCNA congregations, classes, and agencies work locally or globally with other congregations or denominations, the CRC does not always explicitly recognize those bodies ecclesiastically through its ecumenical categorization system as fellow members of the body of Christ. Likewise, while synod, via the EIRC, may ecclesiastically recognize other churches and denominations by means of the CRC's bilateral ecumenical categories, working together practically in ministry with them does not always occur.

So the question arises: Are there better ways to integrate the reality of the breadth and depth of our current connections ecclesiastically, better ways to organize what already is?

3. Different approval processes and authority

There is also a difference in approval processes for each organizational level of the CRCNA. Most levels have autonomy to decide for themselves who to partner with and recognize (local churches, classes, ministries, and agencies), while the EIRC seeks approval from synod.

Even if our particular organizational level (council, classis, etc.) does not need the approval of a higher assembly or of the broader denomination in order to form a relationship, we all together bear the name *Christian Reformed Church* as we face and interact with the world outside of our own congregations, classes, and agencies. Just as our grade-school teachers were always careful to tell us before we headed out for a field trip, "Remember to behave well, because you represent the school," so we similarly together represent the CRCNA.

The committee therefore wonders if there might be ways to work together as a denomination and as its component parts a bit more fluidly for the sake of mission, witness, and fellowship. Are there better ways to align the function and culture of our current ways of relating and affiliating with church bodies outside the CRCNA? Can the various organizational levels of our church be a bit more integrated as they seek to embody good, healthy relationships with other churches? This report suggests that the answer can be yes, and that, with some tweaks, the current bilateral ecumenical categories can help in bringing about such results.

B. CRCNA agency and ministry partnerships

A few more specific notes bear mentioning with regard to the ways our denominational agencies and ministries form relationships, and with regard to the possibilities inherent in their work for embodying the CRCNA's ecclesiastical (ecumenical category) relationships. By *agencies and ministries* we mean particularly those that form partnerships with churches outside of the CRCNA. The *agencies* are World Renew, Back to God Ministries International, and Resonate Global Mission. And the *ministries* are Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, Disability Concerns, the Centre for Public Dialogue, the Office of Social Justice, Safe Church Ministry, Timothy Leadership Training Institute, and others.

Our agencies recognize the importance of working together with other Christians throughout the world as they seek to faithfully carry out their mandates, both because of our common faith and to maximize the gifts, strengths, and resources of the body of Christ that can be realized when various entities collaborate.

This leads our agencies to engage in partnerships with other churches and parachurch organizations and to participate in various ways with nonecclesiastical associations, alliances, and networks both domestically and abroad. The Ministries Leadership Council uses an internal document titled “Partnership Agreements: Agency and Ministry Agreements for Organizational Ties” that gives guidelines for boundaries and accountability around these relationships. (*Note:* This is a different document and process from those used by the EIRC.)

There is no current mandate or guideline on the agency or ministry side that would encourage communication about or collaboration between agency or ministry partnerships and denominational relationships as defined by the bilateral ecumenical categories of relationship. This kind of communication and collaboration nonetheless happens from time to time, however, on an informal, ad hoc basis.

Where the work of CRCNA ministries and agencies has coincided with ecclesiastical relationships, great fruit has been borne in deepening and embodying these relationships. The church envisioned this at Synod 1993 when the Interchurch Relations Committee declared its intent to “continue to explore specific ways in which we may be of service to these churches through our denominational agencies” (*Acts of Synod 1993*, p. 409). Both the EIRC and the agencies and ministries have recognized this to be true as agency staff abroad bring a personal face to relationships with churches that the CRCNA cannot otherwise easily interact with, and as things like Timothy Leadership Training workshops and Back to God Ministries International media partnerships develop fruitful avenues for laboring, learning, and growing together.

The committee also believes it is important to strengthen this connection if indeed the CRCNA’s bilateral ecumenical categories should fit a larger spectrum of situations, such as connections with churches that classes have planted and may continue to plant abroad (as in the initiatives of Classis Pacific Northwest). With the support of denominational agencies and ministries, we have more capacity to connect and relate in an embodied, personal, face-to-face way that fosters maturity for church plants and perhaps even connects them into a larger network of church relationships in their country or region than any of our U.S.- or Canadian-based congregations may have within the structures of their classes—even if such church plants were to affiliate fully and officially with the CRCNA via the Church Order provisions.

C. The Ecumenical Charter and bilateral ecumenical categories

The preface of the current 2010 synodically approved Ecumenical Charter² states that in the ecumenical world “current discussions are about covenants, agreements, and partnerships—all of which presuppose the existence of churches that are independent of each other, equal to each other, and open to an ecumenical relationship.” It goes on to state that “the EIRC of the CRC

² See the Ecumenical Charter in full at crcna.org/eirc/ecumenical-charter.

has learned that requiring such uniformity [as we had done in the past] for ecumenical relationships is no longer a meaningful option” and that “ecumenical relationship can be built on common interests and commitments to the ministry of the gospel and the mission to which that gospel calls the whole church.”

The charter’s preface provides language that fits the missionally responsive direction this report hopes to see, anticipating changes in the bilateral ecumenical categories of affiliation in response to some of the challenges, realities, and opportunities noted above. The charter speaks of a diversity of churches affiliated through mutual relationship where churches are viewed as “independent . . . equal . . . and open to . . . relationship.” It speaks to relationships where common interests, work, and mission can be pursued. Much that follows in the charter grounds these statements biblically and confessionally. A brief tour of those statements may be helpful.

In a section on “biblical principles on the unity of the church,” the charter states that the unity we have in Christ is both a gift that the church has been given (for “there is one Lord” cf. Eph. 4:3-6) and a goal that the church must pursue (John 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 1-4). It further notes that this pursuit, this “ecumenical task is the responsibility of the church at all its organizational levels” (Ecumenical Charter, I, C, 3).

In that same section the charter speaks about “diversity in unity,” stating that “unity does not mean uniformity. Indeed, the manifold wisdom of God is to be made transparent through the church (Eph. 3:10). It is displayed not in the obliteration but in the reconciliation of diversity. The uniqueness of tribes, tongues, customs, and culture is reflected in a rich diversity of worship, confessional forms and formulations, and church structure” (Ecumenical Charter, I, D). This again speaks to some of the diversity of relationships already engaged across the CRC, as noted in the observations above.

Of course, in confronting a diversity of churches in which the theology and practice differ from our own, the question always arises: *Where is the line between preserving truth and the pursuit of Christian unity?* In speaking about “unity and truth,” the charter notes that

The biblical witness leads us to draw two complementary conclusions:

- Passion for the truth of Christ impels us to reach out to the people of God everywhere, striving for the visible oneness of the church.
- Passion for the truth of Christ calls us to reject all forms of unity that compromise unequivocal witness to Jesus Christ (see Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

(Ecumenical Charter, I, E)

Belgic Confession Article 29 is, of course, the article dealing with “the marks of the true church.” For wherever that church is present, no matter how different from us, we are compelled to recognize it and, to put it in the context of this report, be willing to affiliate with it.

The charter itself recognizes that “the CRC is in a period of transition” and that “some bilateral (church-to-church) relationships remain a challenge for the CRC because the earlier approach to ecumenical relationships has not yet been fully supplanted by the present perspective” (Ecumenical Charter, Preface).

In reflection on the wisdom of the charter, the EIRC has recognized, through its *churches in other ecumenical relationships* category, that the required “theological affinity” necessary to develop a relationship with another

church or entity is fairly basic (“unequivocal witness to Jesus Christ”). Through the charter we as a denomination have also articulated a desire and need for expanding our ecclesiastical relationships to visibly reflect the diversity of the global church.

Within this biblical and confessional framework of the charter (to which no modifications are proposed), there is space and indeed encouragement to begin opening and utilizing the CRC’s existing bilateral ecumenical categories for a broader scope of relationships—a scope that encompasses at least the current reality of diverse relationships, and that perhaps allows leeway to discerningly form relationships with new churches as well.

IV. Ways forward

In order to put in place a new system of bilateral ecumenical categories in response to the above challenges and opportunities, this report proposes the following:

That synod propose to Synod 2020 the adoption of revisions to the Church Order as found in Appendix E.

Grounds:

1. This is a necessary step to effect the changes proposed to the ecumenical categories of affiliation and the Ecumenical Charter.
2. These revisions make for substantive changes to the Church Order.

That synod receive the ad hoc committee’s Categories of Affiliation report as provided by the EIRC and adopt the following recommendations, noting that implementation of these recommendations is subject to the adoption of the accompanying Church Order changes by Synod 2020:

1. That synod adopt the proposed changes to the Ecumenical Charter shown with strikethrough and underline in Appendix C. The final, clean copy of the charter, reflecting the changes, are provided in Appendix D. The explanation and rationale for these proposed revisions, including the revised, two-category system with its provisions and titles *churches in communion* and *churches in cooperation* are supplied in section IV, B, 1 of this report (below).
2. That synod adopt the corresponding operating principles for use by denominational agencies and ministries as described in section IV, B, 2 (below).
3. That synod recommend the condensed version of the revised Ecumenical Charter as found in Appendix F to local churches and classes for their use—not as a governance document, but as a handbook of ecumenical wisdom for engaging with the diversity of Christians and Christian churches in their context. In this way, it is hoped that the vision of this report may be carried also into the local expressions of our church.

The effects of the above recommendations are described in the remainder of this report.

A. *General principles*

These proposed changes are all guided by the following main principles:

1. Usability

It is hoped that the proposed revision of the Ecumenical Charter will find broad acceptance and use throughout the life and organizational levels of the CRCNA toward thinking about relationships with other Christians and other Christian churches. However, the EIRC has found the implementation of the current charter and its bilateral categories to be somewhat confusing at times, so classes and local churches may find that to be even more so. To really bring about a living document that carries a cultural change, it should be user friendly, easy to grasp, and conceptually useful. This is also why, in addition to the full revised charter document, this report invites synod to commend a condensed version of the charter to be taken up and used by local churches and classes (see Appendix F).

2. Integrated relationships

This really is an overriding concern, as this report has noted. The revision of our bilateral categories seeks to make more explicit the relationship between our recognition of other Christian churches (*being*—which is the current charter’s main concern) and our action (*doing*) with other Christian churches. Aside from the more substantial changes to the system of bilateral categories that this principle leads to, you’ll notice the insertion of words like *mission*, *witness*, and *practical* to reflect this intent.

3. Missional responsiveness

As noted above, not only church-planting opportunities drive the considerations for these category revisions. Our local congregations, agencies, and classes are engaging with church traditions well beyond the pale of our current ecumenical categorization system. The various organizational levels of our church are not, by and large, waiting for synod’s pronouncement on denominations approved and categorized for relationship before recognizing and acting together with those churches in contextually and missionally appropriate ways within their scopes of authority. This is true across the spectrum of churches in the CRCNA. So how do we best organize what already is and encourage it in healthy, missional, and biblically sound ways? In answer, this report sides with the words of the charter: “The pursuit of visible unity [which is very much intertwined with mission] needs to be diverse and flexible, open to surprising manifestations of the working of the Spirit in various communions” (Ecumenical Charter, II, B, 3).

4. Internal coherence

An institution’s policy can look a lot like the institution itself. Just as our church buildings go through multiple renovations over the years that can result in complex and incongruous spaces (for example, some of the hallway networks in older church basements), so our policies can also wind up with add-ons and leftovers that don’t always leave us with a congruent whole. The Ecumenical Charter, as well, has developed through various stages of revision and modification for various reasons at various times, leaving the current three bilateral categories with a few particular but incomplete or overlapping provisions. The proposed revision seeks to “clean the place up while we’re in there making changes.” The result, we anticipate, will be a simpler, more congruent policy.

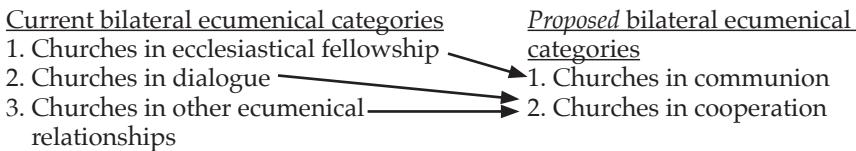
B. Specifics

1. Ecumenical Charter

The proposed revision of the charter makes one fairly substantial change to the structure of the bilateral ecumenical categories, and then a few other changes to the operations of those categories.

The most significant structural change proposed is to narrow the current number of bilateral categories from three to two. It is interesting and perhaps ironic that an initial mandate that invited consideration of an *additional* category has resulted in (a revised mandate and) a proposal for *fewer* categories, but this proposal best reflects the intent to make these bilateral categories user friendly, relationally integrated, and missionally responsive.

The proposed change to the number and configuration of the bilateral ecumenical categories is as follows:



Churches in communion, the closest category of relationship proposed, would replace the current category of *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship*. No changes are proposed to this category of relationship, aside from the change in name. Synod would still need to give approval for churches to enter this category, and all current churches listed as being in *ecclesiastical fellowship* would remain in the category as the name changes to *churches in communion*. The name *churches in communion* highlights strength of fellowship and the possibility of pulpit and table fellowship shared with these churches.

The other proposed category, *churches in cooperation*, represents the combining of the two current categories of *churches in dialogue* and *churches in other ecumenical relationships* into a single category. All the church relationships currently categorized as either *churches in dialogue* or *churches in other ecumenical relationships* would fall into this new category, together with any *church* partnership held by a denominational agency (Back to God Ministries International, Resonate Global Mission, World Renew) or ministry (e.g., Disability Concerns, Faith Formation Ministries, Safe Church Ministry, etc.).

The responsibility for managing relationships formed by the EIRC (normally via a memorandum of understanding) would remain with the EIRC, and the responsibility for managing denominational agency and ministry relationships would remain with the denominational agencies and ministries who formed them via their approved policies for doing so.

However, recognizing all of these ecclesiastical relationships within the category of *churches in cooperation* serves to affirm them as relationships that the CRCNA has with fellow churches of Jesus Christ.

Synodal approval would not be required for a church to be added to the category of *churches in cooperation*, as the category is intended simply to be a reflection of the current reality of relationships engaged (churches

the CRCNA is “cooperating” with) at the national/binational level of the CRCNA, which is far broader than the current bilateral categories recognize (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 480). Synod will, however, be informed via the EIRC of all relationships, as is now the case with the current category of *churches in other ecumenical relationships*. A further description of the changes proposed within this category, together with a rationale, is laid out in the remainder of this report, using the general principles (see section IV, A, 1-4) above as a framework.

a. Usability

Simplifying the categorization system from three bilateral categories to two makes it more manageable for “synod’s committee of contact,” the EIRC, as well as denominational agencies and ministries. With additional relationships coming into the category system and more entities of the denomination working with these bilateral categories, manageability becomes an important point.

Within the complexity of the current three-category system, EIRC members constantly need to be refreshing themselves about which churches are in what category and what that means for our relationship with them. If that is true for EIRC members, who are arguably delving into these bilateral categories more often than the broader church membership, what of others? The intent is that this categorization system be known and used not just by the EIRC but also by agencies, ministries, classes, and congregations as a framework for their engagement with non-CRC churches, even if informally (classes and congregations will not be bound to this system of categorizing relationships). In order for a cultural shift like that to become possible (even if it is just wishful thinking), the bilateral categories must be user friendly, easy to grasp, and conceptually helpful. This change helps to accomplish these ends.

b. Integrated relationships

The most significant aspect of this emphasis is encouraging denominational agencies and the EIRC to work more closely together, recognizing that in a relationship, *being* and *doing* cannot be divorced from one another.

So it is proposed that from now on, all partnerships with other churches and denominations held by our denominational agencies and ministries should be recognized as ecclesiastical relationships within our ecumenical categorization system. All denominational agency and ministry relationships with churches, formed through each agency and ministry’s particular method of forming partnerships, would automatically fall into the category of *churches in cooperation*. This recognition would show that these are fellow churches of Jesus Christ with which our agencies and ministries are in partnership. (Note: This provision would recognize churches within the category system, but not organizations or networks).

More on this provision can be found in the specific section on agencies and ministries (IV, B, 2) below.

Beyond the organizational levels of synod that this report addresses, it is hoped that local churches and classes might choose to use the Ecumenical Charter for their relationships as well. The biblical principles

in the charter give a robust, coherent, and missional framework for ecumenical engagement. The bilateral categories can also prove to be a helpful frame for relationships. A local church might recognize that it “cooperates” with the majority of the neighboring churches it is in contact with. But there may be a few fellowships with whom a much deeper bond is formed, so, under the direction of the elders, “communion” is shared in recognition of that fact.

In the same way that there is hope in this report for denominational agency relationships to inform synodically categorized relationships and vice-versa, so these bilateral categories might help local churches engage in the denomination’s broader ecumenical process, with local church relationships, by way of overture and communication through their classes, informing and recommending synodically held relationships. Again, the proposed condensed version of the charter for local church and classis use can be found in Appendix F.

c. Missional responsiveness

In part, this principle proposes to organize what already is: a broad and categorically unrecognized diversity of relationships held across the life and organizational levels of our church. The forward flow of our life together as a denomination will also continue to bring us into contact with new churches and denominations, including churches we have helped to plant. For that reason, the “organization” proposed seeks to be empowering rather than restrictive and cumbersome, following the wisdom of the charter, which tells us: “The pursuit of visible unity,” which is very much intertwined with mission, “needs to be diverse and flexible, open to surprising manifestations of the working of the Spirit in various communions” (Ecumenical Charter, II, B, 3).

For the new category of *churches in cooperation*, then, the approval mechanism proposed would be the process used for the current *churches in other ecumenical relationships* category rather than that of the current *churches in dialogue* category. As a result, this means that synod will need to approve only those churches with which the CRC is in closest relationship—that is, *churches in communion*. The *churches in cooperation* category will be open to the discretion of the synodically mandated EIRC as it forms relationships (as happens now with the *churches in other ecumenical relationships* category), and of the denominational agencies and ministries as they form partnerships with churches. Again, this change in categories gives a more accurate picture of the relationships that already exist, and will continue to do so into the future.

This proposal is also grounded in the fact that there are no Church Order implications for the current category of *churches in dialogue*, aside from requiring synodical approval. Only our closest relationship category, *ecclesiastical fellowship*, brings a church into the Church Order provisions of our governance (see Appendix C).

And yet, according to the current categorization system, a church must be approved twice by synod—once to become a *church in dialogue* and again to become a church in *ecclesiastical fellowship*. In this proposal, however, we suggest that a single synodical approval is sufficient (when a church enters into “communion” with the CRCNA), and

we submit that this brings an appropriate balance to the continuum between discerning checks and balances and the freedom to respond to missional opportunities.

This proposal maintains that synod would be notified via the EIRC of all ecclesiastical relationships held in the two new bilateral categories. And this approach will necessitate close collaboration and conversation between the EIRC and the denominational agencies and ministries. This report envisions and proposes an annual conversation at an EIRC meeting between EIRC members, agency directors, and representatives of ministries, such as the director of ministries and administration and the Canadian ministries director. This gathering can be sufficiently flexible to allow for strategic configurations of conversation partners, but the commitment to create the space for this annual conversation should remain constant. A description of this process appears in the agency and ministry section (IV, B, 2) below.

d. Internal coherence

Under the scrutiny of revision and modification, as one finds when remodeling a home by stripping it down to the studs, the current charter reveals some historical debris, incongruity, and broken functionality (i.e., dead policy) in the categorization section.

For example, the EIRC did some internal research a few years ago to discern the intent of the *churches in dialogue* category. In doing so, the EIRC found there are actually two or three types of relationships held within this category. The first (Ecumenical Charter, III, B, 2, a) speaks of Reformed churches in a temporary period of dialogue who are seeking closer relationship with the CRC. The second (Ecumenical Charter, III, B, 2, b) speaks of “selected other communions [i.e., non-Reformed] with whom the CRC is in dialogue to develop closer ties or to develop a ministry partnership.” This second subset of *churches in dialogue* includes both non-Reformed churches who have reached the terminal limit of their relationship with the CRC via an MOU and non-Reformed churches with whom the CRC is seeking to develop closer ties but who cannot, categorically, get any closer to the CRC—the only closer category of relationship being *ecclesiastical fellowship*, which can only be entered into with Reformed churches.

There are some inconsistencies here (for example, the stated intent for developing closer relationships with “selected other communions,” which isn’t currently possible). Further, the EIRC could not immediately find any process, procedure, or timeline for conducting dialogues that would lead to a closer relationship, and no committee members at that time could recall such a dialogue happening. The category of *churches in dialogue* is, at least in these cases, then, a misnomer.

This proposed revision of the charter therefore includes some simplification and cleanup of the text in attempts to make the language clearer than it has been.

Some may ask, Is significant history lost in the cleanup and changes proposed? The committee does not think so. The history of how these bilateral categories have developed in the history of the CRCNA is all recorded in the *Agenda* and *Acts of Synod*. Further, charter provisions

like those in section III, B, 3, a-c that begin with the words “The CRC will be responsive to churches . . .” in the category of *churches in other ecumenical relationships* are not necessarily less true if they go unsaid in a policy (see examples of strikethrough in Appendix C). The CRC would respond to any inquiry of any church that would seek us out, and each conversation would go further (or not) on the basis of its own merits.

2. CRCNA agencies and ministries

To encourage deeper and more intentional collaboration on the part of agencies and ministries, this proposal seeks to make the operational connection manifest between agency and ministry partnerships and denominationally held bilateral ecumenical categories of relationship.

To this end, as noted above, the proposed Ecumenical Charter revision recognizes all current and future denominational agency and ministry relationships with ecclesiastical entities (only churches, not parachurch organizations, NGOs, or other entities) within the proposed ecumenical categorization system under *churches in cooperation*. This change is already written into the proposed charter revision (see revised Ecumenical Charter, III, B, 2 in Appendices that follow) and is simply noted again here. The charter category of *churches in cooperation*, as proposed, would not require synodical approval (only regular reporting from the EIRC), and this would leave intact the sanctified, discerning responsibility that has been entrusted to the CRCNA’s agencies and ministries to form partnerships on their own via their approved policies for doing so.

At the same time, it will be important to give some further recommendations for future partnerships with ecclesiastical entities in anticipation of cultural/functional changes, as noted earlier in this report. So as not to “muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (1 Tim. 5:18), the committee aims to keep these recommendations prudent and concise in the form of “operating principles” in order to support current structures and policy and yet encourage and formalize hoped-for behaviors and functional shifts with regard to *being* and *doing*, as described earlier.

Following are the proposed operating principles:

- CRCNA agencies and ministries should be encouraged, where possible and feasible, to give priority to CRCNA/EIRC-established relationships in their collaboration efforts with partners.
- CRCNA agencies should keep the EIRC updated annually about their current ecclesial partnerships via the executive director, Ministries Leadership Council, and annual strategic conversations directly with the EIRC. The other denominational ministries should update the EIRC via the Ministries Leadership Council and by representation of the director of ministries and administration or the Canadian ministries director.

3. Church Order

The proposed Church Order changes follow directly from the changes to the Ecumenical Charter described above. Most of the changes involve a simple substitution of language, as in *churches in communion* for *churches in ecclesiastical fellowship*. The proposed changes to Church Order Article 49, though similar, would require slightly more extensive changes. All proposed changes to the Church Order can be found in Appendix E.

Because these changes to the Church Order are substantive in nature, the EIRC asks Synod 2019 to propose the changes to Synod 2020 for adoption.

V. Recommendations

- A. That synod propose to Synod 2020 the adoption of revisions to the Church Order as found in Appendix E.

Grounds:

1. This is a necessary step to effect the changes proposed to the ecumenical categories of affiliation and the Ecumenical Charter.
2. These revisions make for substantive changes to the Church Order.

- B. That synod receive the ad hoc committee's Categories of Affiliation report as provided by the EIRC and adopt the following recommendations, noting that implementation of the recommendations is subject to the adoption of the accompanying Church Order changes by Synod 2020:

1. That synod adopt the proposed changes to the Ecumenical Charter (see Appendices C-D), including the revised, two-category bilateral system with its provisions and titles *churches in communion* and *churches in cooperation*, as explained in this report.

Grounds:

- a. This revision makes our ecumenical categorization system a more hospitable and relationally integrated avenue for affiliation with the CRCNA for churches outside of the United States and Canada.
- b. This revision takes into account the rich diversity of engagement with other churches and denominations already present throughout the life of the CRCNA at its various organizational levels.
- c. This revision simplifies and makes more usable the system of bilateral categories for all the organizational levels of our church.
- d. This revision recognizes and seeks to resolve the relational inconsistency of recognizing or *being* with another church without *doing* actions appropriate to the relationship, and vice-versa.
- e. This revision strikes a balance between organizing and regulating what is and giving the freedom needed for missional responsiveness.
- f. This revision cleans up and simplifies the language and function of the Ecumenical Charter.
- g. This revision is an important step toward creating a larger functional/cultural shift toward engaging in ever-healthier ways relationally with other Christian churches.

2. That synod adopt the following operating principles for use by denominational agencies and ministries:

- CRCNA agencies and ministries should be encouraged, where possible and feasible, to give priority to CRCNA/EIRC-established relationships in their collaboration efforts with partners.
- CRCNA agencies should keep the EIRC updated annually about their current ecclesial partnerships via the executive director, Ministries Leadership Council, and annual strategic conversations directly with the EIRC. The other denominational ministries should update

the EIRC via the Ministries Leadership Council and by representation of the director of ministries and administration or the Canadian ministries director.

Grounds:

- a. CRCNA agencies and ministries already follow the Ministries Leadership Council's approved guidelines and processes for establishing collaboration with non-CRC entities.
 - b. These principles are another step toward effecting a functional/cultural shift that narrows the gap between our being and doing with other churches or denominations.
 - c. These principles are in line with the corresponding changes proposed in the Ecumenical Charter revision.
- C. That synod recommend the condensed version of the Ecumenical Charter as found in Appendix F to local churches and classes as a guide for their engagement with other churches and denominations.

Grounds:

1. This is a useful tool for helping congregations and classes to ground and frame their own work with other Christian denominations or churches biblically and practically.
2. This action is another cultural/functional step in bridging the gap between the diversity of relationships engaged at the various levels of our denominational life.

Appendix C

Revised Ecumenical Charter—with Proposed Changes Shown

Preface

The state of ecumenical relations is in constant transition. The days of merging likeminded denominations, at least for now, are over. Current discussions are about covenants, agreements, and partnerships—all of which presuppose the existence of churches that are independent of each other, equal to each other, and open to an ecumenical relationship.

There are also substantial changes in the way churches relate. There was a time when ecumenical relations were initiated and maintained primarily with those who shared the same faith, viewpoints, confessions, and theological heritage. For the Christian Reformed Church, that meant that our church-to-church relations were initiated and developed with churches that were, in significant respects, most like the CRC. Historically, ecumenical contacts of the CRC were exclusively with denominations in the Reformed tradition who shared the viewpoint that ecumenical partners assume responsibility for keeping each other confessionally Reformed. Not only did synods consult each other on important theological issues, but the one partner could hold the other partner accountable for deviations or practices that were considered to be objectionable.

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee of the CRC has learned that requiring such uniformity for ecumenical relationships is no longer a meaningful option. The requirement that ecumenical partners think

biblically, theologically, and confessionally like the CRC can soon make the circle of ecumenical relationships very small. Furthermore, such a demand for similar perspectives exposes the risk of being perceived as being theologically arrogant. That risk is real because the demand for similar perspectives sets up a dynamic of monitoring and control instead of the development of healthy relationships with ecumenical partners. Perhaps every denomination can cite instances when it was subjected to such monitoring and controlling behavior when another denomination judged that they had moved beyond the pale of theological and biblical integrity.

These changes in ecumenical relationships prompted Synod 2006 to revise its Ecumenical Charter. The Charter was revised again in 2010. The CRC is less insistent than it once was that our ecumenical partners understand issues in the same way as ~~these same~~those issues are understood in the CRC. This change in attitude allowed the CRC to expand its ecumenical involvement beyond the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) and become a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) {~~soon to be now merged as~~ the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)}. The CRC also now participates in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), Sojourners, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF), the Global Christian Forum (GCF), Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT-USA), and develop a relationship with the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). At the same time, some bilateral (church-to-church) relationships have remained a challenge for the CRC because the earlier approach to ecumenical relationships has not yet been fully supplanted by the present perspective.

The reality is that the CRC is in a period of transition, and transitions can cause one to live with certain contradictions. As such contradictions become visible, it is important to address and correct them. This 2018 revision of the Ecumenical Charter seeks to do just that. If it is possible for the CRC to accept the theological diversity present in the NAE, and WARC, WCRC, WRF, GCF, and CCC, then why not with a greater number of bilateral (church-to-church) relationships even if there are substantial differing perspectives on ethical and theological issues? The CRC does not need to endorse every position taken by all ecumenical partners; nor do we need to (cf. Church Order Art. 50-c). Rather, the present understanding in ecumenical circles is that churches learn from each other and discuss differing perspectives. Ecumenical relationship can be built on common interests and commitments to the ministry of the gospel and the mission to which that gospel calls the whole Christian church. When the CRC believes that a particular denomination is part of the universal church of Christ, then the CRC can be in an ecumenical relationship with that church and consider such a church an ecumenical partner, especially in areas where we share values and a common mission. The Ecumenical Charter of the CRC that follows this introduction reflects the CRC's desire for such ecumenical relationships.

Four-Three configurations of ecumenical relationships are identified in the Ecumenical Charter. First, there are churches with which the CRC has a particular affinity, which are called churches in communion-ecclesiastical fellowship. Second, there are churches with which the CRC is in a stage of exploration for a closer relationship, or with which there is a memorandum of understanding or some other form of partnership, which are called

~~churches~~ *churches in dialogue* ~~cooperation~~. (Note: Churches in dialogue the CRC is in cooperation with may or may not become churches *churches in communion* ecclesiastical fellowship, since each relationship within this designation is governed by particular circumstances.) It is significant to point out that Third, some of these relationships are more distant and episodic, and therefore, are yet remain important to the extent that the CRC considers such churches to be part of the global Christian family. This third classification is called *churches in other ecumenical relationships*. These first two classifications are at times referred to as bilateral ecclesiastical relationships. And, fourth Finally, there is a classification for participation in ecumenical organizations. This last classification is at times referred to as multilateral relationships. The Ecumenical Charter provides room for all these types of relationships and for some variation within each classification of relationships.

The CRC does not relinquish any of its principles or convictions by engaging in a variety of ecumenical relationships. Rather, by broadening its ecumenical engagement, there is increased opportunity to be involved in the discussion with Christians who together seek to be faithful to the mission of God in the world.

Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church

I. Biblical principles on the unity of the church

[Not included here, no revisions proposed. See Appendix D for full, revised Charter.]

II. Values that shape ecumenical relations

A. The unity we seek

[Not included here, no revisions proposed. See Appendix D for full, revised Charter.]

B. The path we take

1. As we draw closer through conversion and renewal, the search for greater visible unity may be pursued along various avenues and take a variety of forms, such as the following:
 - a. mutual understanding
 - b. cooperation in ministry through partnership agreements
 - c. common witness—mission and evangelism
 - d. collaboration in ethical-social testimony
 - e. fellowship
 - f. combined worship
 - g. pulpit and table fellowship (as decided by a church council)
 - h. regular combined prayer for unity
 - i. organic union
2. The pursuit of visible unity shall be guided by biblical principles on the unity of the church as articulated in section I above and by consideration of the historical, confessional, practical, and missional aspects of the envisioned relationship, both historical and confessional considerations.

3. The pursuit of visible unity needs to be diverse and flexible, open to surprising manifestations of the working of the Spirit in various communions.

III. The ecumenical responsibility of the Christian Reformed Church

A. General principles for the ecumenical task of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)

1. The CRC recognizes its ecumenical responsibility to cooperate and seek unity with all churches of Christ in obedience to the gospel.
2. For the purpose of pursuing the CRC's ecumenical calling, ecumenical relationships are categorized into four three(43) classifications.
 - a. churches in communion. Reformed churches with whom the CRC is in ecclesiastical fellowship:
~~Churches of Reformed heritage and selected other communions with whom the CRC is in dialogue to develop closer ties or to develop a ministry partnership.~~
 - b. churches in cooperation. Other Christian denominations and independent churches (evangelical), as well as the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches—the ecumenical relations of the CRC with churches in this classification, called other ecumenical relationships, may vary in depth and intensity of fellowship, determined by the degree of our affinity with them.
 - c. ecumenical organizations in which the CRC chooses to participate:
3. The CRC may enter into relationships that are church-to-church (bilateral) or into a relationship with an ecumenical organization (multilateral). A church-to-church (bilateral) relationship is established with a particular denomination or church. A relationship with an ecumenical organization (multilateral) is established when the CRC joins with other denominations or churches for the purpose of fellowship, and common witness, or action.
4. 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) through the work of the church and its agencies and ministries.
5. Ecumenical relationships on the synodical level are initiated, promoted, and maintained by a standing committee on ecumenical relations, as articulated in Church Order Article 49:
 - a. Synod shall appoint a committee to encourage ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches, especially those that are part of the Reformed family, as articulated in the synodically approved Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church so that the Christian Reformed Church may exercise Christian fellowship with other denominations and may promote the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

- b. Synod shall designate the churches with whom the Christian Reformed Church is in ecclesiastical fellowship~~communion~~, the churches with whom the Christian Reformed Church is in dialogue; and the ecumenical organizations in which the Christian Reformed Church holds membership or significantly participates.
6. Ecumenical relationships at the local level can be expressed by joint involvement in areas such as worship, witness, service projects, prayer, and address to social / ethical issues.

B. *The specifics of ecumenical relationships*

1. Churches in communion Churches in ecclesiastical fellowship

The CRC, in accordance with Church Order Article 49, values ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches, particularly those that are confessionally Reformed. With some such churches, synod may establish a close relationship; and if such is decided with reference to a particular group of churches, then the category is designated as churches in communion.~~churches in ecclesiastical fellowship~~. The purpose of such a close relationship is to

- a. encourage joint action in Christian endeavors, where possible, and a common Christian witness to the world (ecclesiastically and via the work of denominational agencies and ministries).
- b. explore whether the unity we share with such churches may include various forms of organizational expression—the shape of such organizational unity shall be determined in keeping with prudence and such circumstances as language, distance, and nonessential differences in formal standards and practices.
- c. provide the opportunity to exchange fraternal delegates at major assemblies.
- d. make possible the engagement in pulpit and table fellowship.
- e. exercise mutual concern and encouragement with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity (*Acts of Synod 1974*, p. 57).
- f. communicate on major issues of common concern.
- g. remain abreast of current developments to assure that such fellowship continues to grow in vibrancy.

2. Churches in cooperation Churches in dialogue

a. Churches in a stage of exploration leading to ecclesiastical fellowship

This classification recognizes all the other varied bilateral relationships the CRC has with Christian churches. Some of these relationships have originated through correspondence around mutual interests, others from historic ties, and still others through mutual ministry, whether by way of ecclesiastical connection, the work of CRC agencies, or a specific MOU. The CRC encourages churches in the Reformed family to explore the possibility of being in ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRC. During such an exploration phase the CRC designates

such relationships as churches in dialogue. The very purpose of such exploration implies that the classification is of a temporary nature. The following general provisions shall apply to relationships designated as churches in cooperation as churches in dialogue:

- a. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will normally accompany each new relationship begun via the work of the EIRC.
- 1)b. Invitations will may, at the discretion of the EIRC in consultation, where appropriate, with CRC agency or ministry leaders, periodically be extended to send delegates to each other's broadest assemblies where delegates may be recognized by the assembly.
- 2)c. When ecumenical delegates are not exchanged, the primary contact for the relationship, whether the EIRC or an agency or ministry, will be expected to communicate periodically with these churches and, when appropriate, to inform synod of such correspondence.
- 3)d. The EIRC shall regularly offer the *Agenda for Synod* and *Acts of Synod* (and any other relevant information) to each of these churches to keep them informed about the CRC and thereby demonstrate our continuing interest in them. In turn, the EIRC shall encourage each of these churches church in dialogue to inform us by correspondence about itself themselves and its their activities.
- 4)e. The EIRC shall continue to explore specific ways in which we may be of service to these churches through our denominational agencies; for example, through opportunities for higher education of pastors and teachers in our educational institutions, availability of teaching and training materials from agencies and ministries through Faith Alive Christian Resources, and services of our various boards and committees. Such services will require the cooperation of these agencies and ministries with the EIRC. The EIRC shall likewise be alert to services and help that these churches may be able to contribute to the CRC (*Acts of Synod* 1993, pp. 408-10).
- f. Denominational agencies and ministries shall continue to inform the EIRC of opportunities to recognize or deepen the relationships formed with other churches that arise through an agency or ministry's work.
- b. Selected other communions with whom the CRC is in dialogue to develop closer ties or to develop a ministry partnership

This classification is for a relationship with Christian churches with which the CRC has mutual interests, or with which the CRC has a ministry partnership even though a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship is not envisioned. In cases where a ministry partnership is involved the agreement shall be described in a specific "memorandum of understanding" between the two churches. The general provisions specified in section III, B, 2, a above shall also apply to this classification.

3. Churches in other ecumenical relationships

The CRC may establish relationships with Christian churches that, though not necessarily Reformed, will enrich the CRC's ecumenical fellow-

ship. This category of relationship is called churches in other ecumenical relationships. The purpose of such relationships, while less formal than what pertains to churches in ecclesiastical fellowship and churches in dialogue, is to maintain contact, correspondence as circumstances may dictate, and conversation. Churches in this classification may include a wide range of Christian churches with a view to being informed about their ecclesiastical life, their relationships, and how such churches address current issues. The following general provisions shall apply to relationships with churches classified as churches in other ecumenical relationships.

- a. The CRC will be responsive to churches that desire to establish contact with the CRC because of its Reformed theology, polity, and particular emphasis on education, evangelism, and benevolence.
- b. The CRC will be responsive to churches that previously have broken ecclesiastical ties with the CRC or have withdrawn from fellowship with the CRC due to previous doctrinal, creedal, Church Order, or ethical decisions.
- c. The CRC will be responsive to churches from differing historical and confessional backgrounds that are willing to address matters of common interest or issues that require clarification.

It is synod's prerogative to decide with which denominations the CRC will maintain ecclesiastical fellowship ~~be in communion~~, and with which churches the CRC will be in dialogue. The EIRC shall keep synod informed about the status of all ecclesiastical relationships. Such reporting provides synod the opportunity to monitor the EIRC's involvement in the broader Christian family.

4.3. Ecumenical organizations

[Not included here, no revisions proposed. See Appendix D for full, revised Charter.]

IV. Specific responsibilities of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

[Not included here, no revisions proposed. See Appendix D for full, revised Charter.]

Appendix D Revised Ecumenical Charter—with Proposed Changes Incorporated

Preface

The state of ecumenical relations is in constant transition. The days of merging likeminded denominations, at least for now, are over. Current discussions are about covenants, agreements, and partnerships—all of which presuppose the existence of churches that are independent of each other, equal to each other, and open to an ecumenical relationship.

There are also substantial changes in the way churches relate. There was a time when ecumenical relations were initiated and maintained primarily with those who shared the same faith, viewpoints, confessions, and theological heritage. For the Christian Reformed Church, that meant that our church-to-church relations were initiated and developed with churches that were,

in significant respects, most like the CRC. Historically, ecumenical contacts of the CRC were exclusively with denominations in the Reformed tradition who shared the viewpoint that ecumenical partners assume responsibility for keeping each other confessionally Reformed. Not only did synods consult each other on important theological issues, but the one partner could hold the other partner accountable for deviations or practices that were considered to be objectionable.

The CRC has learned that requiring such uniformity for ecumenical relationships is no longer a meaningful option. The requirement that ecumenical partners think biblically, theologically, and confessionally like the CRC can soon make the circle of ecumenical relationships very small. Furthermore, such a demand for similar perspectives exposes the risk of being perceived as being theologically arrogant. That risk is real because the demand for similar perspectives sets up a dynamic of monitoring and control instead of the development of healthy relationships with ecumenical partners. Perhaps every denomination can cite instances when it was subjected to such monitoring and controlling behavior when another denomination judged that they had moved beyond the pale of theological and biblical integrity.

These changes in ecumenical relationships prompted Synod 2006 to revise its Ecumenical Charter. The Charter was revised again in 2010. The CRC is less insistent than it once was that our ecumenical partners understand issues in the same way as those issues are understood in the CRC. This change in attitude allowed the CRC to expand its ecumenical involvement beyond the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) and become a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) now merged as the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). The CRC also now participates in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), Sojourners, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF), the Global Christian Forum (GCF), Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT-USA), and the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). At the same time, some bilateral (church-to-church) relationships have remained a challenge for the CRC because the earlier approach to ecumenical relationships has not yet been fully supplanted by the present perspective.

The reality is that the CRC is in a period of transition, and transitions can cause one to live with certain contradictions. As such contradictions become visible, it is important to address and correct them. This 2018 revision of the Ecumenical Charter seeks to do just that. If it is possible for the CRC to accept the theological diversity present in the NAE, WCRC, WRF, GCF, and CCC, then why not with a greater number of bilateral (church-to-church) relationships even if there are substantial differing perspectives on ethical and theological issues? The CRC does not endorse every position taken by ecumenical partners; nor do we need to (cf. Church Order Art. 50-c). Rather, the present understanding in ecumenical circles is that churches learn from each other and discuss differing perspectives. Ecumenical relationship can be built on common interests and commitments to the ministry of the gospel and the mission to which that gospel calls the whole Christian church. When the CRC believes that a particular denomination is part of the universal church of Christ, then the CRC can be in an ecumenical relationship with that church and consider such a church an ecumenical partner, especially in areas where we share values and a common mission. The Ecumenical

Charter of the CRC that follows this introduction reflects the CRC's desire for such ecumenical relationships.

Three configurations of ecumenical relationships are identified in the Ecumenical Charter. First, there are churches with which the CRC has a particular affinity, which are called *churches in communion*. Second, there are churches with which the CRC is in a stage of exploration for a closer relationship, or with which there is a memorandum of understanding or some other form of partnership, which are called *churches in cooperation*. (Note: Churches the CRC is in *cooperation* with may or may not become *churches in communion*, since each relationship within this designation is governed by particular circumstances.) It is significant to point out that some of these relationships are more distant and episodic, yet remain important to the extent that the CRC considers such churches to be part of the global Christian family. These first two classifications are at times referred to as bilateral ecclesiastical relationships. Finally, there is a classification for participation in ecumenical organizations. This last classification is at times referred to as multilateral relationships. The Ecumenical Charter provides room for all these types of relationships and for some variation within each classification of relationships.

The CRC does not relinquish any of its principles or convictions by engaging in a variety of ecumenical relationships. Rather, by broadening its ecumenical engagement, there is increased opportunity to be involved in the discussion with Christians who together seek to be faithful to the mission of God in the world.

Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church

I. Biblical principles on the unity of the church

A. Made one in Christ

From a fallen and broken humanity, God gathers a new humanity—the church. For this purpose God called Abraham and Israel and then acted in a unique and definitive way in Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection are the foundation of the church. Unity is therefore central to the being and mission of the church. As there can be but one Lord, there can be but one church; one Head, one body; one Husband, one bride; one Shepherd, one flock (Eph. 4:5, 15; 5:25-33; John 10:16). The church is as indivisible as Christ is indivisible (1 Cor. 1:13; see Belgic Confession, Art. 27; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).

Focusing on the continuation of his ministry and mission in the world, Christ prays for the unity of the church, a unity as deep and wondrous as that between him and the Father: "that all of them may be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). At stake in the unity of the church is the witness in and for the world to the unity of God, the one Father of us all (Eph. 4:6).

B. Our unity with the church of all generations and throughout the world

The Bible speaks of the church as extending through time and place. The description "people of God" emphasizes the historical continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. It pictures the church of all ages, from God's choosing Israel as his special people to Jesus' calling

the disciples and, by the power of his Spirit, creating the new people of God from all nations, a great multitude that no one can count (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; see also Phil. 2:10-11). This saintly multitude from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation portrays the one church throughout the world (see Belgic Confession, Art. 27).

C. *Unity as gift and goal*

1. The unity of the church is a precious gift. The biblical challenge is to treasure, preserve, deepen, and demonstrate this given unity. The unity of Christ-followers is flesh-and-blood testimony to God's reconciling work in Christ.
2. For the church in New Testament times, the summons to unity had a different ring than it has today. In the New Testament context, it was a call to be more fully what we are—one in Christ. However, once the divisions, which Paul could not so much as contemplate ("Is Christ divided?"), fractured the body, the call to unity has taken on new and painful urgency. In the midst of today's disunity, the call to be one requires that we pray and work to overcome the scandal of division. Divisions among Christians and churches are a stumbling block to our witness to the unity of the being of God. Division contradicts the good news of reconciliation in Christ. The call to unity is a summons to manifest the unity of God himself and the reconciling power of God's love in Christ.
3. The ecumenical task is the responsibility of the church at all its organizational levels. This task is especially important at the level of the local congregation, for it is there that the witnessing power of visible unity—and the counter-witness of division—is most vivid. Local congregations should seek to worship, witness, and work with neighboring churches that are part of the Christian community and unequivocally witness to Jesus Christ (see Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

D. *Diversity in unity*

Unity does not mean uniformity. Indeed, the manifold wisdom of God is to be made transparent through the church (Eph. 3:10). It is displayed not in the obliteration but in the reconciliation of diversity. The uniqueness of tribes, tongues, customs, and culture is reflected in a rich diversity of worship, confessional forms and formulations, and church structure. It is this unity in diversity and diversity in unity that we attest when we confess "the holy catholic church" (Apostles' Creed; see Belgic Confession, Art. 27).

1. Diversity in worship

Though all Christians confess one God, administer one baptism, and celebrate one Lord's Supper, they worship through various languages, liturgies, prayers, and hymns.

2. Diversity in confessional forms and formulations

Though all Christians confess one God, one faith, and one hope, they express this confession in different ways, in accordance with different cultural contexts, traditions, and modes of theological reflection.

3. Diversity in forms of governance

Though all Christians confess one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and one body, they order their church affairs in different ways, depending on their understanding and application of New Testament models of ministry and in accordance with different cultural forms of social interaction and decision-making processes.

E. *Unity and truth*

Unity is intrinsic to the truth of the gospel and to our confession. Unity and truth are not alternatives. The unity of the church is a unity in truth, the truth that is Jesus Christ, as revealed in Holy Scripture.

To confess Christ, therefore, is to confess the unity of his church and to be impelled to pray and to work for its visible unity.

The process of comprehending this truth needs to be done “together with all the saints” (Eph. 3:17-19). God has blessed the church throughout the ages to grow in understanding and confessing the truth as it is in Jesus, “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). Yet even in the company of all God’s children throughout the ages and throughout the world, we stand in wonder of the truth that is beyond our comprehension.

Understanding the truth is limited by history, culture, situation, and experience. Moreover, it is distorted by sin. We know only in part and see but a poor reflection (1 Cor. 13:12). Divisions in the body of Christ also impoverish our understanding of the truth. We are called, therefore, to engage in a dialogue that involves mutual learning and correction in order that, in the words of the apostle, “together with all the saints, [we] grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ . . .” (Eph. 3:18). As we come to a deeper understanding of God’s revelation, we walk more consistently, more humbly, and more joyfully in its light.

In brief, the biblical witness leads us to draw two complementary conclusions:

- Passion for the truth of Christ impels us to reach out to the people of God everywhere, striving for the visible oneness of the church.
- Passion for the truth of Christ calls us to reject all forms of unity that compromise unequivocal witness to Jesus Christ (see Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

II. Values that shape ecumenical relations

A. *The unity we seek*

1. In striving for the unity of the church, we celebrate the extent to which unity is already visible in

- a. the one, holy, written Word of God, given for us and our salvation;
- b. one baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
- c. common ecumenical creeds: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed;
- d. common hymns, prayers, and liturgical practices;
- e. united witness to the name of Christ in evangelism;

- f. common witness in the name of Christ in public testimony and action on ethical-social issues; and
 - g. common confessions of faith, especially with churches who share a Reformed heritage.
2. In striving for unity, we seek to make the spiritual and visible communion we already have in Christ more fully visible.
3. Because the unity of the church is a unity in Christ, it demands an ever deeper conversion to Christ (see Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33). As we draw closer to Christ, we draw closer to each other. Such conversion entails repentance, the reconciliation of churches now separated, and the healing of wounds and memories of the past. Questions of institutional relations and negotiations aiming at organizational merger are important only as they serve this deeper unity.

B. *The path we take*

1. As we draw closer through conversion and renewal, the search for greater visible unity may be pursued along various avenues and take a variety of forms, such as the following:
 - a. mutual understanding
 - b. cooperation in ministry through partnership agreements
 - c. common witness—mission and evangelism
 - d. collaboration in ethical-social testimony
 - e. fellowship
 - f. combined worship
 - g. pulpit and table fellowship (as decided by a church council)
 - h. regular combined prayer for unity
 - i. organic union
2. The pursuit of visible unity shall be guided by biblical principles on the unity of the church as articulated in section I above and by consideration of the historical, confessional, practical, and missional aspects of the envisioned relationship.
3. The pursuit of visible unity needs to be diverse and flexible, open to surprising manifestations of the working of the Spirit in various communions.

III. The ecumenical responsibility of the Christian Reformed Church

A. *General principles for the ecumenical task of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)*

1. The CRC recognizes its ecumenical responsibility to cooperate and seek unity with all churches of Christ in obedience to the gospel.
2. For the purpose of pursuing the CRC's ecumenical calling, ecumenical relationships are categorized into three (3) classifications.
 - a. churches in communion
 - b. churches in cooperation
 - c. ecumenical organizations in which the CRC chooses to participate

3. The CRC may enter into relationships that are church-to-church (bilateral) or into a relationship with an ecumenical organization (multilateral). A church-to-church (bilateral) relationship is established with a particular denomination or church. A relationship with an ecumenical organization (multilateral) is established when the CRC joins with other denominations or churches for the purpose of fellowship, common witness, or action.
4. 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) through the work of the church and its agencies and ministries.
5. Ecumenical relationships on the synodical level are initiated, promoted, and maintained by a standing committee on ecumenical relations, as articulated in Church Order Article 49:
 - a. Synod shall appoint a committee to encourage ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches, especially those that are part of the Reformed family, as articulated in the synodically approved Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church so that the Christian Reformed Church may exercise Christian fellowship with other denominations and may promote the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Synod shall designate the churches with whom the Christian Reformed Church is in communion and the ecumenical organizations in which the Christian Reformed Church holds membership or significantly participates.

6. Ecumenical relationships at the local level can be expressed by joint involvement in areas such as worship, witness, service projects, prayer, and address to social / ethical issues.

B. The specifics of ecumenical relationships

1. Churches in communion

The CRC, in accordance with Church Order Article 49, values ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches, particularly those that are confessionally Reformed. With some such churches, synod may establish a close relationship; and if such is decided with reference to a particular group of churches, then the category is designated as *churches in communion*. The purpose of such a close relationship is to

- a. encourage joint action in Christian endeavors, where possible, and a common Christian witness to the world (ecclesiastically and via the work of denominational agencies and ministries).
- b. explore whether the unity we share with such churches may include various forms of organizational expression—the shape of such organizational unity shall be determined in keeping with prudence and such circumstances as language, distance, and nonessential differences in formal standards and practices.
- c. provide the opportunity to exchange fraternal delegates at major assemblies.
- d. make possible the engagement in pulpit and table fellowship.

- e. exercise mutual concern and encouragement with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity (*Acts of Synod* 1974, p. 57).
 - f. communicate on major issues of common concern.
 - g. remain abreast of current developments to assure that such fellowship continues to grow in vibrancy.
2. Churches in cooperation
- This classification recognizes all the other varied bilateral relationships the CRC has with Christian churches. Some of these relationships have originated through correspondence around mutual interests, others from historic ties, and still others through mutual ministry, whether by way of ecclesiastical connection, the work of CRC agencies, or a specific MOU. The following general provisions shall apply to relationships designated as *churches in cooperation*:

- a. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will normally accompany each new relationship begun via the work of the EIRC.
- b. Invitations may, at the discretion of the EIRC in consultation, where appropriate, with CRC agency or ministry leaders, periodically be extended to send delegates to each other's broadest assemblies where delegates may be recognized by the assembly.
- c. When ecumenical delegates are not exchanged, the primary contact for the relationship, whether the EIRC or an agency or ministry, will be expected to communicate periodically with these churches and, when appropriate, to inform synod of such correspondence.
- d. The EIRC shall regularly offer the *Agenda for Synod* and *Acts of Synod* (and any other relevant information) to each of these churches to keep them informed about the CRC and thereby demonstrate our continuing interest in them. In turn, the EIRC shall encourage each of these churches to inform us by correspondence about themselves and their activities.
- e. The EIRC shall continue to explore specific ways in which we may be of service to these churches through our denominational agencies; for example, through opportunities for higher education of pastors and teachers in our educational institutions, availability of teaching and training materials from agencies and ministries, and services of our various boards and committees. Such services will require the cooperation of these agencies and ministries with the EIRC. The EIRC shall likewise be alert to services and help that these churches may be able to contribute to the CRC (*Acts of Synod* 1993, pp. 408-10).
- f. Denominational agencies and ministries shall continue to inform the EIRC of opportunities to recognize or deepen the relationships formed with other churches that arise through an agency or ministry's work.

It is synod's prerogative to decide with which denominations the CRC will be in communion. The EIRC shall keep synod informed about the status of all ecclesiastical relationships. Such reporting provides synod the opportunity to monitor the EIRC's involvement in the broader Christian family.

3. Ecumenical organizations

- a. The CRC seeks to pursue its ecumenical task by also participating in ecumenical organizations. The purpose of such participation is to better carry out the CRC's ecumenical responsibilities broadly, effectively, and efficiently.
- b. The propriety of relationships with such ecumenical organizations is circumscribed by the biblical principles on ecumenicity and the principles for ecumenical practice of this Ecumenical Charter. The EIRC shall evaluate the nature of the ecumenical organizations as described in the constitutions, bases, and statements and as demonstrated in the activities of each. It is synod's prerogative, upon recommendation of the EIRC, to decide with which ecumenical organizations the CRC is affiliated.

IV. Specific responsibilities of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

- A. Synod, through the maintenance of an Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC), in conformity with the provisions of this charter and in accordance with synodical decisions, shall maintain and promote interest in the worldwide church. The EIRC is synod's committee of contact in ecumenical relations and will advise the executive director of the CRC in fulfilling the responsibilities of representing the CRC as the ecumenical officer.
- B. The EIRC shall annually present to synod in the printed *Agenda for Synod* a report of its activities, including a summary of all the ecumenical relations included in its mandate.

Appendix E Pertinent Revised Church Order Sections—with Proposed Changes Shown

Supplement, Article 8, G

G. Joint Ministry of Ministers from Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship Communion

Ministers of denominations in ecclesiastical fellowship communion with the Christian Reformed Church may be called by way of exception to serve in the Christian Reformed Church while jointly serving ministries within their own denominations. This arrangement requires the approval of classis and the concurrence of the synodical deputies. The specific need for their services must be demonstrated and the pension fund arrangements must be satisfactorily met in the denomination holding the minister's credentials.

Ministers of denominations in ecclesiastical fellowship communion who so serve churches in the Christian Reformed Church will be accorded the right of delegation to classis and participation in classical committee work for the duration of their time of service in the

Christian Reformed Church. This right of delegation and participation shall not extend beyond the boundaries of the classis.

The Christian Reformed Church will by way of exception allow its ministers to be called by a congregation of a denomination in ~~ecclesiastical fellowship~~communion if such a minister jointly serves in a congregation of the denomination in ~~ecclesiastical fellowship~~communion and in a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church.

(*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 663)

(*Acts of Synod 2020*, p. ____)

Articles 38-g and -h

g. Particular churches of the Christian Reformed Church in North America may unite to form union congregations with one or more particular congregations of churches in ~~ecclesiastical fellowship~~communion, with the approval of classis.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 38-g

h. Particular churches of the Christian Reformed Church in North America may affiliate with one or more additional denominations in ~~ecclesiastical fellowship~~communion, with the approval of classis and with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 38-h

Supplement, Article 38-h

The following plan for affiliation shall be adopted by a particular church to affiliate with one or more denominations in ~~ecclesiastical fellowship~~communion:

Article 49

a. Synod shall appoint a committee to encourage ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches, especially those that are part of the Reformed family, as articulated in the synodically approved Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church so that the Christian Reformed Church may exercise Christian fellowship with other denominations and may promote the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

b. Synod shall designate the churches with whom the Christian Reformed Church is in ~~ecclesiastical fellowship, the churches with whom the Christian Reformed Church is in dialogue,~~communion and the ecumenical organizations in which the Christian Reformed Church holds membership or significantly participates.

Article 59-e

e. Confessing members coming from churches in ~~ecclesiastical fellowship~~communion shall be admitted as confessing members of the congregation upon the presentation of certificates or statements of membership after the consistory has satisfied itself concerning the doctrine and conduct of the members.

Articles 66-a and -b

- a. Confessing members who move to another Christian Reformed church or to a church in ecclesiastical fellowshipcommunion are entitled to a certificate, issued by the council, concerning their doctrine and life. When such certificates of membership are requested, they shall ordinarily be mailed to the church of their new residence.
- b. Baptized members who move to another Christian Reformed church or to a church in ecclesiastical fellowshipcommunion shall upon proper request be granted a certificate of baptism, to which such notations as are necessary shall be attached. Such certificates shall ordinarily be mailed to the church of their new residence.

Article 67

Members who move to localities where there is no Christian Reformed church and no church in ecclesiastical fellowshipcommunion may, upon their request, either retain their membership in the church of their former residence, or have their certificates sent to the nearest Christian Reformed church.

Appendix F Proposed Condensed Ecumenical Charter for Congregational Use

The Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church

Selections to Guide Local Church Engagement³

Preface

The state of ecumenical relations is in constant transition. The days of merging likeminded denominations, at least for now, are over. Current discussions are about covenants, agreements, and partnerships—all of which presuppose the existence of churches that are independent of each other, equal to each other, and open to an ecumenical relationship.

There are also substantial changes in the way churches relate. There was a time when ecumenical relations were initiated and maintained primarily with those who shared the same faith, viewpoints, confessions, and theological heritage. For the Christian Reformed Church, that meant that our church-to-church relations were initiated and developed with churches that were, in significant respects, most like the CRC.

The CRC is less insistent than it once was that our ecumenical partners understand issues in the same way as those issues are understood in the CRC. The CRC does not endorse every position taken by ecumenical partners, nor do we need to. Rather, the present understanding in ecumenical circles is that churches learn from each other and discuss differing perspectives. Ecumenical relationship can be built on common interests and commitments to the ministry of the gospel and the mission to which that gospel

³ For the full Ecumenical Charter and information on ecumenical organizations and churches in relationship with the CRCNA, please see the website of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee at crcna.org/eirc.

calls the whole Christian church. When the CRC believes that a particular denomination is part of the universal church of Christ, then the CRC can be in an ecumenical relationship with that church and consider such a church an ecumenical partner, especially in areas where we share values and a common mission. The Ecumenical Charter of the CRC that follows this introduction reflects the CRC's desire for such ecumenical relationships.

The CRC does not relinquish any of its principles or convictions by engaging in a variety of ecumenical relationships. Rather, by broadening its ecumenical engagement, there is increased opportunity to be involved in the discussion with Christians who together seek to be faithful to the mission of God in the world.

Biblical principles on the unity of the church

Made one in Christ

From a fallen and broken humanity, God gathers a new humanity—the church. For this purpose God called Abraham and Israel and then acted in a unique and definitive way in Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection are the foundation of the church. Unity is therefore central to the being and mission of the church. As there can be but one Lord, there can be but one church; one Head, one body; one Husband, one bride; one Shepherd, one flock (Eph. 4:5, 15; 5:25-33; John 10:16). The church is as indivisible as Christ is indivisible (1 Cor. 1:13; see Belgic Confession, Art. 27; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).

Focusing on the continuation of his ministry and mission in the world, Christ prays for the unity of the church, a unity as deep and wondrous as that between him and the Father: "that all of them may be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). At stake in the unity of the church is the witness in and for the world to the unity of God, the one Father of us all (Eph. 4:6).

Our unity with the church of all generations and throughout the world

The Bible speaks of the church as extending through time and place. The description "people of God" emphasizes the historical continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. It pictures the church of all ages, from God's choosing Israel as his special people to Jesus' calling the disciples and, by the power of his Spirit, creating the new people of God from all nations, a great multitude that no one can count (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; see also Phil. 2:10-11). This saintly multitude from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation portrays the one church throughout the world (see Belgic Confession, Art. 27).

Unity as gift and goal

The unity of the church is a precious gift. The biblical challenge is to treasure, preserve, deepen, and demonstrate this given unity. The unity of Christ-followers is flesh-and-blood testimony to God's reconciling work in Christ.

For the church in New Testament times, the summons to unity had a different ring than it has today. In the New Testament context, it was a call to be more fully what we are—one in Christ. However, once the divisions, which Paul could not so much as contemplate ("Is Christ divided?"), fractured the body, the call to unity has taken on new and painful urgency. In the midst

of today's disunity, the call to be one requires that we pray and work to overcome the scandal of division. Divisions among Christians and churches are a stumbling block to our witness to the unity of the being of God. Division contradicts the good news of reconciliation in Christ. The call to unity is a summons to manifest the unity of God himself and the reconciling power of God's love in Christ.

The ecumenical task is the responsibility of the church at all its organizational levels. This task is especially important at the level of the local congregation, for it is there that the witnessing power of visible unity—and the counter-witness of division—is most vivid. Local congregations should seek to worship, witness, and work with neighboring churches that are part of the Christian community and unequivocally witness to Jesus Christ (see Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

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There is diversity in worship. Though all Christians confess one God, administer one baptism, and celebrate one Lord's Supper, they worship through various languages, liturgies, prayers, and hymns.

There is diversity in confessional forms and formulations. Though all Christians confess one God, one faith, and one hope, they express this confession in different ways, in accordance with different cultural contexts, traditions, and modes of theological reflection.

There is diversity in forms of governance. Though all Christians confess one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and one body, they order their church affairs in different ways, depending on their understanding and application of New Testament models of ministry and in accordance with different cultural forms of social interaction and decision-making processes.

Unity and truth

Unity is intrinsic to the truth of the gospel and to our confession. Unity and truth are not alternatives. The unity of the church is a unity in truth, the truth that is Jesus Christ, as revealed in Holy Scripture.

To confess Christ, therefore, is to confess the unity of his church and to be impelled to pray and to work for its visible unity.

The process of comprehending this truth needs to be done "together with all the saints" (Eph. 3:17-19). God has blessed the church throughout the ages to grow in understanding and confessing the truth as it is in Jesus, "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). Yet even in the company of all God's children throughout the ages and throughout the world, we stand in wonder of the truth that is beyond our comprehension.

Understanding the truth is limited by history, culture, situation, and experience. Moreover, it is distorted by sin. We know only in part and see but a poor reflection (1 Cor. 13:12). Divisions in the body of Christ also impoverish our understanding of the truth. We are called, therefore, to engage in a

dialogue that involves mutual learning and correction in order that, in the words of the apostle, “together with all the saints, [we] grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ . . .” (Eph. 3:18). As we come to a deeper understanding of God’s revelation, we walk more consistently, more humbly, and more joyfully in its light.

In brief, the biblical witness leads us to draw two complementary conclusions:

- Passion for the truth of Christ impels us to reach out to the people of God everywhere, striving for the visible oneness of the church.
- Passion for the truth of Christ calls us to reject all forms of unity that compromise unequivocal witness to Jesus Christ (see Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

Values that shape ecumenical relations

The unity we seek

In striving for the unity of the church, we celebrate the extent to which unity is already visible in the one, holy, written Word of God, given for us and our salvation; in one baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; in common ecumenical creeds: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed; in common hymns, prayers, and liturgical practices; in united witness to the name of Christ in evangelism; in common witness in the name of Christ in public testimony and action on ethical-social issues; and in common confessions of faith, especially with churches who share a Reformed heritage.

In striving for unity, we seek to make the spiritual and visible communion we already have in Christ more fully visible.

Because the unity of the church is a unity in Christ, it demands an ever deeper conversion to Christ (see Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 33). As we draw closer to Christ, we draw closer to each other. Such conversion entails repentance, the reconciliation of churches now separated, and the healing of wounds and memories of the past. Questions of institutional relations and negotiations aiming at organizational merger are important only as they serve this deeper unity.

The path we take

As we draw closer through conversion and renewal, the search for greater visible unity may be pursued along various avenues and take a variety of forms, such as the following:

- a. mutual understanding
- b. cooperation in ministry through partnership agreements
- c. common witness—mission and evangelism
- d. collaboration in ethical-social testimony
- e. fellowship
- f. combined worship
- g. pulpit and table fellowship (as decided by a church council)
- h. regular combined prayer for unity
- i. organic union

The pursuit of visible unity should be guided by biblical principles on the unity of the church as articulated above and by consideration of the historical, confessional, practical, and missional aspects of the envisioned relationship.

The pursuit of visible unity needs to be diverse and flexible, open to surprising manifestations of the working of the Spirit in various communions.

The ecumenical responsibility of the Christian Reformed Church

General principles for the ecumenical task of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)

The CRC recognizes its ecumenical responsibility to cooperate and seek unity with all churches of Christ in obedience to the gospel.

For the purpose of pursuing the CRC's ecumenical calling, bilateral ecumenical relationships at the denominational level are categorized into two classifications. *Local churches and classes are also invited to consider how these categories of relationship can serve as a framework for relationships with other Christian churches:*

- a. *Churches in communion* refers to the strength of fellowship and the possibility of pulpit and table fellowship shared with these churches.
- b. *Churches in cooperation* recognizes all the other formalized relationship connections the CRC has with churches via correspondence and/or mutual ministry.

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) through the work of the church and its agencies and ministries.

Ecumenical relationships at the local level can be expressed by joint involvement in areas such as worship, witness, service projects, prayer, and address to social/ethical issues.

How will you engage with your neighboring churches?

I. Introduction

The Historical Committee is the 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, listed according to their concluding year and present term of service, are Dr. John Bolt, chair (2020/1); Dr. Paul Bremer (2019/2); Dr. James A. De Jong, secretary (2021/1); and Dr. Kristin Kobes Du Mez (2019/2).

Both Dr. Bremer and Dr. Kobes Du Mez are completing their second terms on the committee and are not eligible for reappointment. Accordingly, the committee presents two slates of nominees with their *vitas* in the Recommendations section at the end of this report.

The two retiring committee members have served synod and the committee ably, demonstrating both wisdom and sensitivity in a time of significant staff transition and review of the committee's mandate and purpose. It is recommended that synod commend them for their service.

II. Archives staff

In early August last year the committee was surprised to learn of the unanticipated departure of Dr. Denice Fett as director of Heritage Hall on the Calvin College campus and as curator of the archives housed there. The position includes service as archivist for the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin College. Then in September the committee was notified of the resignation of Ms. Holly Waldenmeyer, one of two departmental assistants at Heritage Hall, to accept full-time employment elsewhere.

The committee had enjoyed positive relationships with both of these professional staff members. Dr. Fett had served only one year, and Ms. Waldenmeyer had been on the Heritage Hall staff for over two years. The committee is grateful for both of these former staff members and recommends that synod express thanks to them for their archival service on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The work of the archives continued through the dedicated efforts of Ms. Hendrina Van Spronzen, office manager; Ms. Laurie Haan, department assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt, field agent and assistant archivist; Ms. Janet Sheeres, editor of *Origins*; and Ms. Jessica Vos, student assistant. Staff members were assisted by volunteers Mr. Phil Erffmeyer, Mr. Ed Gerritsen, Ms. Helen Meulink, Ms. Clarice Newhof, and Ms. Jeannette Smith. Special thanks are due to these dedicated people for their service in the past year as well.

In February, the committee met with and interviewed Dr. Will Katerberg of the Calvin College history department and endorsed his appointment by the college as interim curator of the archives. He brings to the position administrative competence along with significant training and credentials as a professional historian. He has served as editor of a professional journal and as chair the history department, and the committee looks forward to working with him until a new curator of the archives and director of Heritage Hall can be appointed.

III. Organizational review

As it began a new year of work last summer, the committee found it necessary to clarify its synodical mandate and organizational matters affecting its responsibilities. This involved examining the relationship between the curator and the committee; between the Hekman Library and Heritage Hall at Calvin College; between the college administration and the committee; and between all of the foregoing and the three funding entities (college, seminary, and denomination). Accordingly, the committee engaged in an extensive review of more than fifty years of the committee's minutes and reports to synod, synodical actions regarding the committee and its work with the archives staff, the Hekman Library governing document, select library staff minutes, position descriptions, handbooks, and other pertinent materials. This review was essential due to recent changes in staffing, in managerial oversight, and in college finances.

As of the drafting and submission of this report, the committee anticipates that it will be able to state in a supplemental report to synod that a clarified, shared understanding of organizational matters has been achieved.

In summary, the Historical Committee assures synod that it is deeply committed to enhancing the service of Heritage Hall and to promoting creative use of the archives. These are incomparably rich resources not only for a wide variety of appreciative researchers but also for the entire denomination.

IV. Promotion of historical studies

In the past year, the committee has continued to attend to promoting denominational historical material as stipulated in its mandate.

The committee recognizes with appreciation the crucial role that the publication *Origins* and its growing endowment play in promoting denominational historical studies. The endowment has been used to subsidize publication of historical studies as well as the magazine itself. Some years ago it also made a substantial contribution with committee approval to some needed enhancement of the Heritage Hall facilities. In recognition of her fine work as interim editor of *Origins* and to both guarantee and enhance her continuing service, the committee has named Janet Sheeres as editor with continuing tenure and has designated itself, with her appreciated assent, as the magazine's editorial committee. Few, if any, people are as qualified as Ms. Sheeres to serve in this editorial capacity. She is an effective writer who has published several noteworthy books on denominational history. She has authored the extensive, carefully researched commentary in the recent publication of a translation of our official synodical and classical records from Dutch into English. She leads helpful seminars in genealogical research. She is fluent in both her native Dutch language and in English and is an accomplished translator.

The committee has begun soliciting from key people working in fields related to denominational history information on projects that they or others may be contemplating or working on. We will assess responses and aim to provide more specific information on this initiative later. We have already been made aware of a number of interesting projects in this regard.

The committee has also written its classical representatives requesting them to urge their churches and membership to inform the Historical Committee of any research they know of that is related to denominational

history. This initiative includes the committee's resolve to stimulate and involve studies on ethnic-minority groups in our denominational membership.

The committee recommends that synod assist in this initiative by endorsing the committee's effort to gather information on existing or planned research, publication, and other initiatives related to denominational history.

The committee has reviewed a manuscript on our denomination's mission work in Japan and is considering possible endorsement of it for publication and subsidy. Minimally this manuscript merits a place in the archives because of the valuable information it makes readily accessible.

Synod 2018 instructed the executive director "to work with the Historical Committee to institute a new practice by which we honor each congregation celebrating 150 years of ministry with a commemorative plaque" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 479). Last year twelve such churches were honored at synod, and another was recognized subsequently. The committee is in the process of reviewing additional cases that may qualify for recognition and determining policy regarding them. As this report indicates in the following section, East Saugatuck CRC in Holland, Michigan (organized Mar. 19, 1869), and Munster (Ind.) CRC (organized Aug. 25, 1870) face imminent 150th anniversaries and will be recognized with a plaque and a timely presentation in 2019 and 2020.

The committee notes with keen anticipation the biennial conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies that will be meeting on Calvin's campus June 14-15, 2019, at the Prince Conference Center. Its focus will be on Dutch Americans and Canadians and education, both public and Christian. A preconference workshop on genealogical research is scheduled for June 12; this is a subject increasingly explored by archival researchers at Heritage Hall and often featured in *Origins*. Details on the conference are available on the association's website.

The committee anticipates promoting the archives and Heritage Hall prominently at this event.

V. Significant archival work during 2018 by classical representatives

The Historical Committee encourages each classis to appoint a classical representative who acts as a liaison between the Historical Committee and the churches within a particular classis. In a classis that has no classical representative, the stated clerk has agreed to act as our representative until a classical representative is appointed. The Historical Committee currently has classical representatives in some but not all of the classes.

Our classical representatives for 2019 include the following:

Alberta North – Stated clerk Gary Duthler

Alberta South/Saskatchewan – Stated clerk J. Cameron Fraser

Arizona – Rodney Hugen

Atlantic Northeast – Richard Vanden Berg

British Columbia North-West – Anne Kwanten

British Columbia South-East – Stated clerk Leonard Batterink

California South – Stated clerk Cornelius Pool

Central California – Stated clerk Larry Fryling

Central Plains – Stated clerk Jonathan Spronk

Chatham – John Koole

Chicago South – Stated clerk Jeremy Oosterhouse

Columbia – Stated clerk Roger Kramer
Eastern Canada – Jean Lauziere
Georgetown – Stated clerk Glenda Tebben
Grand Rapids East – Stated clerk Alfred Mulder
Grand Rapids North – Stated clerk Sean Baker
Grand Rapids South – Stated clerk George Vink
Grandville – Stated clerk Daniel Mouw
Greater Los Angeles – Cindi Fairchild
Hackensack – Stated clerk Sheila Holmes
Hamilton – Stated clerk Dick Kranendonk
Hammi – Charles Kim
Heartland – Stated clerk Robert Drenten
Holland – Stated clerk Calvin Hoogstra
Hudson – Stated clerk Mary Stegink
Huron – Stated clerk Sharon Van Kampen
Iakota – Garry Zonnefeld
Illiana – Jeffrey White
Kalamazoo – Stated clerk Jacob Weeda
Ko-Am – Charles Kim
Lake Erie – Stated clerk Benjamin Van Arragon
Lake Superior – Stated clerk Henry Gunnink
Minnkota – Stated clerk LeRoy Christoffels
Muskegon – Stated clerk Drew Sweetman
Niagara – Stated clerk Wendy de Jong
Northcentral Iowa – Stated clerk Steven Schulz
Northern Illinois – Greg Schuringa
Northern Michigan – Stated clerk Roger Hoeksema
Pacific Northwest – Matthew Borst
Quinte – Stated clerk Joan Crawford
Red Mesa – Stated clerk John Greydanus
Rocky Mountain – Walt Ackerman
Southeast U.S. – Stated clerk Vivian Cassis
Thornapple Valley – Stated clerk Paul De Vries
Toronto – Hendrik Bruinsma
Wisconsin – Stated clerk Rodolfo Galindo
Yellowstone – Stated clerk Del VanDenBerg
Zeeland – Stated clerk Ronald Meyer

An email or letter has been sent to each of our representatives thanking them for their services rendered throughout the past year. Some representatives have retired. New representatives have been welcomed, apprised of their responsibilities, and thanked for their willingness to serve.

VI. Update

The Historical Committee sends letters to each classical representative indicating the historical material each church in a particular classis has sent to the archives for preservation during the course of each church's history. The classical representatives are encouraged to remind churches to send their official records, anniversary booklets, membership directories, and newsletters to the archives.

In the past year the official minutes of seventy Christian Reformed churches and three Christian school organizations were received and microfilmed for storage in our vault. Original materials have been returned, usually by UPS, and copies of minutes, with the consent of the churches sending them, were shredded after being microfilmed. Each of the forty-eight classes sent at least one set of classical minutes, and we expect to receive minutes yet from some classical meetings that occurred late in the year. If minutes are not sent in a timely fashion, the committee sends out reminders.

VII. Anniversaries in the denomination

The committee recognizes ordained ministers who will celebrate anniversaries of their ordination in the year 2020. Anniversaries are recognized at five-year intervals, beginning after fifty years of ordination.

70 years, 1950-2020	55 years, 1965-2020 (con't.)
Lugene A. Bazuin	John Van Hemert
Martin D. Geleynse	Anthony Van Zanten
Dick C. Los	Henry Wildeboer
Lammert Slofstra	David G. Zandstra
65 years, 1955-2020	50 years, 1970-2020
Rodger J. Buining	Carl J. Afman
John Bylsma	John J. Berends
Michael M. De Berdt	Robert D. Boertje
Bert E. Den Herder	Jason Y. Chen
John Hofman, Jr.	LeRoy G. Christoffels
Earl C. Marlink	James A. De Jong
Jack J. Matheis	Sidney Greidanus
John C. Rickers	Harrison F. Harnden
Gerard Ringnalda	Gerry G. Heyboer
William K. Stob	John C. Hutt
Jacob W. Uitvugt	Thomas G. Kastrup
Wilbert M. Van Dyk	Carl J. Klompien
60 years, 1960-2020	
Henry G. Entingh	John M.V. Koole
Alfred E. Mulder	Ronald J. Lammers
Joel H. Nederhood	Allen E. Likkel
John H. Primus	Markus J. Lise
Raymond C. Swierenga	George M. McGuire
Frederick J. Van Dyk	Allen Petroelje
55 years, 1965-2020	
Josué Abreu	Gordon H. Pols
David R. Armstrong	Henry R. Post
Harold T. De Jong	Herman D. Praamsma
Henry Dykema	Curtis G. Roelofs
Harvey A. Kiekover	Herman J. Schutt
Harry A. Van Dam	Anthony Schweitzer
Mike Vander Pol	Leonard J. Vander Zee
John C. Vander Stelt	John Veenstra
Peter Van Drunen	Harry Vriend
	Robert Walter
	Seung Won Yoon

The following Christian Reformed congregations will celebrate anniversaries in 2019 and 2020:

25th Anniversary

1994 – 2019

Cutlerville, MI – Discovery
Fife, WA – Hebron
Las Vegas, NV – Yung Kwang
Redlands, CA – The River
Saugatuck, MI – Saugatuck

1995 – 2020

Fresno, CA – Love Song Community
Highlands Ranch, CO –
Horizon Community
Lafayette, IN – Sunrise
Port St. Lucie, FL – Sunlight
Community

50th Anniversary

1969 – 2019

Abbotsford, BC – Living Hope
Chino, CA – CrossPoint
Maryland Heights, MO – Trinity
Silver Spring, MD – Silver Spring
Waterdown, ON – Bethel
Yakima, WA – Faith Alive

1970 – 2020

Byron Center, MI – Heritage
Grand Rapids, MI – Madison Square
Greeley, CO – Fellowship
Jenison, MI – Cottonwood
Rock Valley, IA – Trinity
Sarnia, ON – Redeemer

75th Anniversary

1944 – 2019

Luverne, MN – Luverne

100th Anniversary

1919 – 2019

Lansing, IL – New Hope
Orland Park, IL – Orland Park
Wyoming, MI – Faith Community

1920 – 2020

Coopersville, MI – Coopersville
Lynden, WA – Second

125th Anniversary

1894 – 2019

Falmouth, MI – Prosper
Hospers, IA – First
Jamestown, MI – Jamestown
Peoria, IA – Peoria

1895 – 2020

Leota, MN – Ebenezer
Pease, MN – Pease

150th Anniversary

1869 – 2019

Holland, MI – East Saugatuck

1870 – 2020

Munster, IN – Munster

VIII. Archival holdings of church minutes

Total number of organized churches	854
Number whose minutes have been microfilmed	657
Number whose minutes have not been microfilmed	197

If a church has not sent minutes to the archives for at least a decade, the archives encourages them to do so. Although a few churches have made a conscious decision not to cooperate in this venture, most are amenable; some

understand well the need for microfilming records and express appreciation for reminders. In the following classes every church has sent official records to the archives to be microfilmed: Arizona, Eastern Canada, Niagara, and Zeeland.

A. *Churches organized prior to 2000 whose records have not been microfilmed*

The following churches are listed according to the year in which they were organized.

Beaverton, OR – Oak Hills (1965)
Farmington, NM – Maranatha Fellowship (1962)
Fountain Valley, CA – Fountain of Life Fellowship (1967)
Burbank, IL – Immanuel (1973)
Chatham, ON – Calvary (1975)
Fullerton, CA – Orange Korean (1978)
Oakdale, CA – Community (1979)
San Francisco, CA – Golden Gate (1973)
Sparta, MI – Trinity (1974)
Wheeling, IL – Korean (1971)
Abbotsford, BC – New Life (1986)
Abbotsford, BC – Zion Chinese (1986)
Ames, IA – Korean (1988)
Anaheim, CA – Latin American (1983)
Anaheim, CA – The Good Shepherd (1987)
Chicago, IL – Roseland (1985)
Church Rock, NM – Church Rock (1983)
Crystal Lake, IL – Fox Valley (1982)
Fort Wingate, NM – Fort Wingate (1982)
Guelph, ON – New Life (1988)
Houston, TX – Hope (1988)
Las Vegas, NV – Pilgrim Church (1989)
Los Angeles, CA – Community (1988)
Naschitti, NM – Naschitti (1982)
Orange, CA – Korean American of Orange County (1986)
Plainfield, IL – Christ Community (1986)
Red Deer, AB – New Life Fellowship (1989)
Rimbey, AB – Rimbey (1985)
Silverdale, WA – Anchor of Hope (1986)
Spokane, WA – Hope (1988)
Tee Nos Pos, AZ – Four Corners (1982)
Tohatchi, NM – First Navajo (1983)
Vicksburg, MI – Korean (1987)
Winnipeg, MB – Good News Fellowship Ministries (1989)
Wyoming, MI – Emanuel Hispanic (1981)
Wyoming, MI – Hahn-In (1985)
Zuni, NM – Zuni (1987)
Albuquerque, NM – Korean Presbyterian Galilee (1997)
Anchorage, AK – Alaska Korean (1997)
Artesia, CA – Life Stream Church (1993)
Camarillo, CA – Iglesia Cristiana Ref. de Camarillo (1993)
Chicago, IL – Back to God All Nations Church (1993)

Cutlerville, MI – Discovery (1994)
 Darien, IL – Suburban Life Community (1998)
 El Cerrito, CA – East Bay Korean (1991)
 Fife, WA – Hebron (1994)
 Fresno, CA – Love Song Community Outreach (1995)
 Holland, MI – VictoryPoint Ministries (1993)
 Irvine, CA – Urim (1998)
 Jenison, MI – Friendship Chapel (1998)
 Jersey City, NJ – Jersey City Mission (1997)
 Kent, WA – Kent First Korean (1993)
 Las Vegas, NV – Yung Kwang (1994)
 Miami, FL – Iglesia Buenas Nuevas (1992)
 Mission Hills, CA – Korean Peace of Los Angeles (1998)
 Monterey Park, CA – Chinese (1991)
 Moreno Valley, CA – Oasis Community (1999)
 North Liberty, IA – Chinese Church of Iowa City (1993)
 Northridge, CA – Dong San of Love (1992)
 Philadelphia, PA – Spirit and Truth Fellowship (1999)
 Red Valley, AZ – Red Valley (1992)
 Rochester Hills, MI – Han-Bit Korean (1991)
 San Diego, CA – Trinity Fellowship (1994)
 Santa Ana, CA – Hmong (1996)
 Savage, MN – Bridgewood Church (1999)
 Schererville, IN – Crossroads Community (1998)
 Surrey, BC – Hope Community (1991)
 Tacoma, WA – Tacoma (1990)
 Tacoma, WA – True Light of Tacoma (1991)
 Three Rivers, MI – Three Rivers (1996)
 West Valley City, UT – The Community CRC (1992)

The mailing address and contact information for the archives is

Archives of the CRCNA
 Calvin College – Heritage Hall
 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE
 Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402
 crcarchives@calvin.edu
 616-526-6313

B. Summary of archival holdings of organized churches in each classis

	Organized	Microfilmed	Not Microfilmed
Alberta North	30	22	8
Alberta South/Saskatchewan	17	15	2
Arizona	4	4	0
Atlantic Northeast	17	12	5
B.C. North-West	17	16	1
B.C. South-East	21	11	10
California South	19	5	14
Central California	24	19	5
Central Plains	18	17	1
Chatham	26	24	2
Chicago South	16	9	7

Columbia	13	10	3
Eastern Canada	19	19	0
Georgetown	17	16	1
Grand Rapids East	16	15	1
Grand Rapids North	18	15	3
Grand Rapids South	16	14	2
Grandville	16	14	2
Greater Los Angeles	26	9	17
Hackensack	21	10	11
Hamilton	15	15	0
Hanmi	12	0	12
Heartland	18	15	3
Holland	30	23	7
Hudson	14	7	7
Huron	20	18	2
Iakota	20	18	2
Illiana	22	19	3
Kalamazoo	17	14	3
Ko-Am	13	0	13
Lake Erie	14	12	2
Lake Superior	22	21	1
Minnkota	17	15	2
Muskegon	19	18	1
Niagara	12	12	0
Northcentral Iowa	11	10	1
Northern Illinois	18	11	7
Northern Michigan	13	13	0
Pacific Northwest	32	23	9
Quinte	19	17	2
Red Mesa	17	6	11
Rocky Mountain	20	17	3
Southeast U.S.	10	5	5
Thornapple Valley	12	10	2
Toronto	21	20	1
Wisconsin	20	18	2
Yellowstone	7	6	1
Zeeland	17	17	0

IX. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Dr. John Bolt, chair, and to Dr. James A. De Jong, secretary, when matters pertaining to the mandate and work of the committee come before synod.
- B. That synod recognize Dr. Paul Bremer and Dr. Kristin Kobes Du Mez for their contributions and service on the committee on behalf of synod and our denomination.
- C. That synod thank Dr. Denise Fett and Ms. Holly Waldenmeyer for their archival services at Heritage Hall on behalf of synod and our denomination.
- D. That synod appoint a new member to a first term of three years from each of the following two slates of nominees:

Position 1

Dr. Henk (Henry) Aay has been a Senior Research Fellow at the Van Raalte Institute in Holland, Michigan, since 2013. From 1982-2012 he taught geography and environmental studies on the Calvin College faculty and from 2006-2012 he simultaneously held the Frederik Meijer Chair in Dutch Language

and Culture there. His training and scholarship are focused on Dutch North America and the Netherlands. His projects include Dutch documentary films shown in America; an atlas of Dutch North America; environmental observations in immigrant letters; and the conduction of tours and CALL courses on Dutch immigration and Dutch landscapes. He is a member of Eastern Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he serves as church historian and archivist and has served as an elder.

Professor Herman DeVries, Jr., currently holds the Frederik Meijer Chair in Dutch Language and Culture at Calvin College. He has been teaching Dutch and German as a faculty member there since 1997. Currently he is serving as a board member and as president of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies, the biennial conference for which is being held at Calvin College this summer. Dr. DeVries was baptized in the West Evergreen CRC (Chicago, Ill.), raised in Bethel CRC (Lansing, Ill.), and has been a member of First CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.) for the past twenty-one years.

Position 2

Rev. Shawn Brix is the pastor of Living Hope Church in Peterborough, Ontario. He has also served CRC congregations in Acton and Burlington, Ontario, since receiving his M.Div. from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1995. He is the author of *In the Master's Service*, a study of the life and work of Ms. Tena Huizenga, one of the early women missionaries of the CRC in Nigeria; it was published by Calvin Theological Seminary in 1994. He has a lively interest from a pastor's perspective in the history of the CRC in Canada.

Dr. Tony Maan is the pastor of the Christian Reformed Church of St. Albert, Alberta. He has also served three other CRC congregations since receiving his M.Div. from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1986. He earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Alberta in 2009, writing a dissertation titled "Life in the Body: Protestant Perceptions of Materiality and Corporeality in Early Modern Dutch Culture." He has taught in the history departments of the University of Alberta and The King's University College (Edmonton). In addition to published academic papers, he is the author of *Rembrandt's Jesus: Meditations on the Life of Christ* (CRC Publications, 1999).

E. That synod endorse the Historical Committee's efforts to gather fuller information on existing or planned research, publication, and other initiatives related to denominational history.

Historical Committee

John Bolt, chair

Paul Bremer

James A. De Jong, secretary

Kristin Kobes Du Mez

DENOMINATIONALLY RELATED AGENCIES

Dordt College

Greetings to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church. We are grateful to God for the “partnership in the gospel” that we experience with you.

This is an exciting year for Dordt: on May 13, we will officially become known as Dordt *University*. This transition fits Dordt’s mission to “equip students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.” Dordt currently looks and acts more like a university than a college; we prioritize excellence in teaching, robust scholarship, and a greater variety of opportunities for students and faculty to collaborate. Academic excellence is important on Dordt’s campus, which is seen through expanded academic offerings such as online studies and graduate programs. *University* also speaks to Dordt’s expanding global footprint; Dordt alumni live out our mission all over the world, and our students come from more than 26 countries, nearly 40 states, and eight Canadian provinces. In most places around the globe, the word *college* refers to *high school*. By becoming Dordt University, we will remove this barrier for prospective international students as well as for Dordt graduates who seek to serve Christ around the world.

We revealed the Dordt University logo in October at our largest Defender Days weekend ever, celebrating with more than 1,000 students, staff, alumni, and family. To mark the change to Dordt University with alumni, parents, and friends, we are hosting celebratory events at locations across North America—and we welcome synodical delegates to attend any of these events in their classis or regional area.

By God’s provision Dordt continues to grow, having served more than 1,600 students in the past year. Over the past five years, Dordt has received more grant funding from the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Health than any other Iowa private college. Our high graduation and retention rates, our modest loan levels, our low default rate on student loans, and our high placement rates all speak to the educational quality of our programs. Further, our graduates consistently self-report a 95-percent church attendance rate on our alumni surveys—which we hope encourages you that Dordt serves the institutional church well.

As Dordt continues to fulfill its mission to equip students in all areas of life, our new Pro-Tech program is now in its second year. This program currently offers hands-on, two-year associate’s degrees in either manufacturing technology or farm operations and management, and additional degree options will be added soon. Pro-Tech plays to our region’s strengths as a manufacturing and agriculture hub, and it emphasizes the nobility of work and a Reformed view of calling and vocation. Inside our new Agriculture Stewardship Center, Dordt engineering, agriculture, and Pro-Tech students can engage in more hands-on learning experiences by utilizing twelve welding stations, four CNC mills, and industrial electrical booths.

This year also marks the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort, our college’s namesake. Last fall Dordt participated in the opening ceremony of the celebration in Dordrecht, the Netherlands. We have been invited to participate in May 2019 with our choir at the closing ceremonies as well.

On campus, our Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service will host a 400th anniversary conference titled “The Prodigal Love of God: Reenountering Dort at 400 and Beyond.” The conference will be highlighted by various Reformed voices—including Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Marilynne Robinson, theologian Richard Mouw, philosopher James K.A. Smith, and cultural thinker Jemar Tisby.

We ask that you continue to pray for us as we seek to be faithful to our task of developing effective kingdom citizens for service to Christ. Dordt University remains committed to lifelong Christian education, and we seek to permeate all of our educational work with the spirit and teaching of Christianity, God helping us.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Dordt College
Erik Hoekstra, president

Institute for Christian Studies

The 2018-19 academic year has been historic in the life of the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS). This year, after 46 years at our 229 College Street location, ICS relocated to new premises. We are now situated in Knox College at 59 St. George Street in the heart of the University of Toronto's downtown St. George campus. The move followed the sale of ICS's remaining 27 percent ownership share in the 229 College building in May 2017. This change allows ICS to realize significant cost savings to its annual budget. It also liberates our small and dedicated administrative staff to focus more intentionally on the work of running a Christian graduate school. The move included a significant renovation, which took place over the summer months in preparation for the start of classes in September. On December 1, 2018, we welcomed over 200 friends and supporters to view our new facility at an open house and enjoyed a wonderful Advent concert in the Knox College chapel. The ICS community is experiencing the new setting as a great blessing to our collective educational work. We look forward to the new opportunities our more visible presence on the University of Toronto campus will bring, especially with the member schools of the Toronto School of Theology, with which ICS is affiliated, including Knox College itself.

We are grateful that God continues to bless the work of ICS, and we are firmly focusing our attention on the task of continuing to serve God in the arena of higher education for years to come. The continued and generous commitment of our CRC churches and support community has encouraged us in our mission to provide Christian graduate education that raises Christian academic and cultural leaders in a context that expects and encourages the integration of faith and learning, and nurtures the ability to bear witness to God's healing and transforming work in all areas of life.

Some highlights of the ongoing work of ICS in 2018-19 follow:

Our M.A. and Ph.D. degrees continue to be a focus of our commitment to Christian scholarship at the highest levels. At the same time, ICS also provides significant educational opportunities to lifelong learners through our Master of Worldview Studies and Continuing Education programs. In May 2018 we celebrated the graduation of four junior members (students): one Ph.D., and three M.A. This year we anticipate the graduation of five junior members: three Ph.D. and two M.A. One of the Ph.D. graduands, Joshua Harris, has been hired full-time as assistant professor in philosophy at The King's University in Edmonton, Alberta.

At the time of writing this report, total course enrollments for this academic year are 170, a significant increase (more than 100%) over the previous academic year—and our highest course enrollment total in the past six years. In terms of full-time equivalency (FTE), this number translates to 28 full-time students. After adding full-time students who are in post-coursework stages of their programs, the final FTE number is 35. This number does not yet include enrollment figures for one course scheduled to be offered in May 2019. The number of unique persons taking at least one course at ICS this year is 120.

These increased numbers are a testament to several new developments we have made to our existing programs: In partnership with the Christian Teachers Academy of Edvance (the new association of Ontario Christian

schools), we launched a new “Educational Leadership” stream in our M.A. program, which equips current and future principals and curricular innovators with the leadership skills they need to build out from the existing strengths of the Christian school movement in Ontario. In addition, we successfully experimented with offering radically affordable distance education versions of our M.W.S. courses, which could be taken for credit in that program or simply as continuing education opportunities. Finally, we are planning for a fourth “ART in Orvieto” (Italy) program to take place from July 16 to August 6, 2019.

This year also sees ICS taking the historic step of offering a summer intensive seminar that can be taken for credit by both graduate students of ICS and undergraduate students of The King’s University. The course, titled “To the Unknown God: Paul and Some Philosophers,” takes place May 23-31 in Toronto and is taught by Dr. Ronald Kuipers of ICS and Dr. Jeffrey Dudiak of King’s. Currently five King’s students, two King’s graduates (who are also considering ICS’s M.A. program), and three ICS students have registered. The course is attached to ICS’s third annual undergraduate workshop on the theme of political theology titled “God and Politics: Religion and Public Life in the 21st Century.” This course is one of the firstfruits of the intentional partnership dialogue that ICS and King’s initiated in fall 2017.

The ICS undergraduate workshop is an annual event organized by ICS junior members, and it creates an opportunity for undergraduate students to share their research in a supportive setting and to receive constructive feedback from ICS faculty and Ph.D. students. Undergraduate students whose papers are accepted into the workshop receive free accommodation and an additional travel stipend. In May 2018, ICS junior members participated in the second annual undergraduate workshop on the theme of “Philosophy and / as Storytelling.” In total, eight undergrads shared papers at the workshop, hailing from Concordia University (Montreal, Que.), Cornerstone University (Grand Rapids, Mich.), Greenville University (Greenville, Ill.), and The King’s University. The upcoming third annual 2019 undergraduate workshop hopes to attract students from a similar range of undergraduate programs.

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, ICS’s six faculty members made seven presentations at academic conferences, 33 presentations at popular events, published five articles in academic journals, and published nine articles in popular publications. ICS’s junior members have been productive as well, making seven presentations at academic conferences and 13 popular presentations, and publishing two articles in academic journals and 25 articles in popular publications.

ICS’s Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics (CPRSE) continues to collaborate with other academic and community organizations to pursue quality research and to curate public dialogue around leading questions about life and society. This year’s CPRSE highlights include the following:

- Faith and Settlement Partnerships community-based research project—This year we concluded the final “knowledge mobilization” phase of this research project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research

Council of Canada and led by the Centre for Community-Based Research in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. In concert with the CRCNA's World Renew, Tyndale University College, the Interfaith Council of Peel, and the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group, the CPRSE conducted four capacity-building workshops geared to enhancing further partnerships between faith-based and government-funded organizations working toward the successful settlement of newcomers across southern Ontario.

- Interfaith Dialogue—One of CPRSE's key community partners is the Canadian Interfaith Conversation (CIC), Canada's largest interfaith dialogue and cooperation network. This year, CPRSE is participating in the planning of CIC's "Our Whole Society Conference: Identity and Common Ground in an Age of Transition," which will take place April 28-30, 2019, at the University of Toronto's Multi-Faith Centre. In addition, CPRSE is involved in the steering committee of the Canadian Interfaith Research Centre for Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), an initiative undertaken by CIC to promote and lead community-based research in the field of interreligious dialogue.
- *Critical Faith* podcast—Featuring the work of ICS faculty, students, and special guests, this podcast aims to expand our institution's rich dialogue around leading questions about life and society. Offered in a weekly format, *Critical Faith* is steadily increasing ICS's global reach through creative segments and diverse guests. The podcast is available on iTunes, Google Play, and other digital media delivery services.
- Third annual undergraduate workshop (May 23-25, 2019)—As mentioned above, this year's ICS undergraduate workshop is titled "God and Politics: Religion and Public Life in the 21st Century." This event provides an annual opportunity for undergraduate students to showcase their academic work in a collaborative and constructive environment.
- Scripture, Faith, and Scholarship seminar series—CPRSE hosted two public seminars featuring Dr. Esther Acolatse, associate professor of pastoral theology and intercultural studies at Knox College, and Dr. Heath Carter, associate professor of history at Valparaiso University. The CPRSE curates this public seminar series to foster dialogue on the influence of scriptural narratives on Christian scholarship.

It has been a busy and productive year. We look forward to our continued partnership with the CRCNA in the years ahead. We want to thank you especially for the continued generosity you have shown us this year. Your commitment to our students and to 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 2019.

Institute for Christian Studies
Ronald A. Kuipers, president

The King's University

In September 2018, enrollment at The King's University continued to climb with another record high of 837 students. We thank God for this continued blessing, and we continue to put significant planning and energy into further increasing our student enrollment. Our immediate goal is to have 1,000 students by the end of 2019, which we plan to accomplish through targeted recruitment, continued program development and expansion, and strengthening student support services. As student enrollment is directly linked to the vibrancy and viability of our institution, we covet your prayers and continued support in encouraging prospective students in your community to pursue their Christian university education at King's.

King's recently embarked on the process of refreshing the articulation of our liberal arts interdisciplinary curricular framework. King's has now developed *The King's Common Curriculum*. It reflects a commitment to an institutional academic culture that is more intentional about delivering an integrated Christian liberal arts curriculum with roots in the Reformed tradition, as expressed in our mission statement. Students should emerge from King's with a deep appreciation for the integrity of all of creation in its multiple aspects as a gift from God for which we are called to responsible stewardship. King's is deeply committed to providing courses and other resources that will ground students in a culturally literate and critical Christian worldview. We believe that a degree from King's provides the very best preparation for a lifetime of faith, vocation, and service.

The Micah Centre at King's is excited to be launching the Justice Fellowship, a year-long interdisciplinary program of learning, exposure, and experience with a strong focus on out-of-the-classroom learning. The program consists of five courses (for 15 credits) that focus on the principles and practice of justice, development, and reconciliation from a faith perspective. The semester is facilitated by the Micah Centre's program director and led by a variety of King's faculty and local justice leaders, and the goal of the program is that students will have a better understanding of biblical justice and be empowered to heed the prophet Micah's call to 'do justice and love mercy' in their lives and the lives of their communities.

Our business program received an endorsement from CPA (Chartered Professional Accountants) in 2018. The organization, which represents more than 200,000 professional accountants across Canada, approved The King's University's business courses for transfer into the CPA Western School of Business. This means graduates from our Leder School of Business can enter the CPA Professional Education Program (PEP) directly upon graduation. This is a tremendous win for our students. Our graduates now have the advantage that both industry and academia value their training. As one of Canada's most recognized designations, CPA accreditation opens new doors for current and future business students. King's is only the third Christian institution in Canada to receive full accreditation.

The Government of Canada announced in March 2018 that it is allocating a federally funded Tier 1 Research Chair to King's. The investment brings an additional \$1.4 million from the federal government for research. This is King's second Canada Research Chair allocation. The goal behind establishing the chairs is to elevate Canadian universities and showcase Canada as

a leading country for research and development investment. The fact that King's has been awarded a Canada Research Chair twice is an incredible accomplishment that speaks to our professors' dedication to their fields and the quality of education and research at our university.

Thank you for the faithful, generous support that you provide for The King's University and the more than 800 students we serve each year. Our relationship with the CRC is foundational to our existence, and our continued partnership in training students to glorify God and to bring renewal and reconciliation in Christ's name to all vocations is a key to our continued thriving. The churches in western Canada have been generous in providing critical support through ministry shares and other offerings. We continue to use the resources with which we have been blessed in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Your commitment to our students and to our 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

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of Kuyper College (formerly Reformed Bible Institute and Reformed Bible College). In 1939 the Reformed Bible Institute board, composed of women and men from the CRCNA, appointed Johanna Timmer as the first faculty member and head of the institute and commended her to do “pioneer work in the launching of a new venture” that would provide “systematic Christian training as is not provided elsewhere in our Reformed circles.” The first leaders gave testimony that God was at work in guiding the foundation of this institution, and we continue to see his favor and guidance today as demonstrated through our continued partnership with the CRCNA.

As they did 80 years ago, students today come to Kuyper College to be rooted in a robust knowledge and life application of God’s Word so that they can serve within every square inch of his church and his world. In order to effectively prepare a growing and diverse demographic of students, we are planning and implementing innovative and relevant programs and partnerships that fit our mission and help us realize our strategic goals.

Here is a brief summary of our initiatives based on our strategic goals:

1. Prepare globally competent Christian leaders—Our core curriculum now includes Human Diversity and Intercultural Communication as required courses in order to provide students with a solid foundation of understanding that every human being is a valuable imagebearer of God, and with a practice of engaging people and cultures with respect and discernment. In addition to these courses, our students are required to complete practicums and internships aligned to their programs of study. This year one of our students had the opportunity to serve as an intern at the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, and others served at placements in Chicago, Ecuador, and Uganda.
2. Increase enrollment of students who will thrive in our distinctive student community—In January we launched our Master of Ministry program, which engages students in hybrid and online courses while using their present ministry contexts as their primary learning communities. We also implemented our 2+2 program as an opportunity for graduates of community colleges to complete a bachelor’s degree in two additional years. As we help our students thrive, we are thankful for the generous financial support we can provide through scholarships and our new loan repayment and assistance program. These resources have helped our student loan default rate to stay very low and our student retention rate to increase significantly.
3. Articulate, communicate and celebrate our distinctive identity—This year we are living out our motto, *ora et labora* (“pray and work”), by hosting weekly speakers who share their stories of integrating faith and work in areas such as self-care, refugee resettlement, climate change, and church planting. We also expanded our Global Awareness and Advocacy Day by featuring poster presentations by more than 50 students on topics such as racism in Islam, influential women in the Middle East, and digital natives. As we pursue our vision of providing a “unique, vital, and engaging

learning community,” we are celebrating the recognition of being ranked second nationally in student satisfaction among Christian colleges and universities, and ranked within the top 10 colleges and universities in Michigan based on high performance and low cost.

4. Develop as an innovative and engaging learning community—We are continuing the “pioneer work in the launching of new ventures” through our new, innovative KuyperWorks program that connects work and academics to provide our students with professional, workplace ready skills in ministry, education, social work, and business while offering a more affordable college experience. We also extended our urban-based course offerings in the Madison Square area of Grand Rapids, Michigan, to join our students with community members and to enhance our course content with real-life application. As well, we implemented new specializations that allow our students to choose areas of focus that fit with their vocational plans, such as our new Social Media and Marketing specialization with our Ministry Leadership and Business Leadership programs.
5. Ensure long-term financial viability of the college—Kuyper College continues to operate on a cash-balanced budget without the support of external loans. We maintain that we will steward our resources well in pursuit of our mission. This is evidenced most clearly this year through our improvements in financial management outcomes and our implementation of new processes and software for finances, marketing, and admissions systems. We are grateful to God for the generosity of donors who believe in our mission and have helped us surpass our fundraising goals.

By God’s grace, we have achieved these initiatives through the dedication and skill of our faculty and staff and with the support of women and men within the CRCNA who generously pray, work, and give to help us fulfill 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 exciting ways that God has been at work at Redeemer in 2018 and 2019.

It has been a remarkable year in Redeemer's institutional life. In early 2018 the presidential search process was in full swing, embedded in prayer that God would bring forward a Christ-centered leader committed to Redeemer's founding mission and vision rooted in the Reformed Christian worldview.

Last summer the board announced the appointment of Dr. Robert J. Graham, and on March 1, 2019, Redeemer celebrated Dr. Graham's inauguration as the university's fourth president. Graham, who holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Cincinnati and a master of gerontological studies degree from Miami University, brings to Redeemer ten years of experience in senior leadership at two Christian universities.

Redeemer also named a gifted leader as its dean of humanities in the 2018-19 academic year. Dr. Karen Dieleman began her work at Redeemer in January 2019, bringing a great deal of experience in Christian higher education. Along with her work as a professor of English, she held three academic leadership roles at Trinity Christian College in Chicago.

Redeemer is also in the final year of its 2020 Strategic Plan. Through this plan, Redeemer has achieved significant accomplishments, including new programs in media and communication studies and in urban and intercultural ministry, a new Centre for Experiential Learning and Careers, a new Centre for Christian Scholarship, a new undergraduate core curriculum, a digital-first integrated marketing approach, and the reduction of Redeemer's long-term debt.

These accomplishments have been made possible through generous donors. Their support has helped the Re Campaign funding the 2020 Strategic Plan to surpass \$18.5 million in January 2019, which is significant progress toward its \$20 million goal.

The Redeemer community took the opportunity to thank donors for their support of the school through a Gratitude Week celebration in February. Donors make every year of education at Redeemer possible, so during Gratitude Week, students, staff, and faculty had the opportunity to thank the university's donors, including those in the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church who support Redeemer. We are 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.

Redeemer will be putting Christian higher education within reach for many more students, thanks to one of the year's most exciting announcements: a 42 percent tuition reduction for Canadian undergraduate students. Supported by an \$11 million gift over five years, the new tuition and fee structure will make it possible for more students to participate in a Christ-centered university education on a spiritually vibrant campus. More information about the new structure, which offers Canadian undergraduates significant savings, is available at redeemer.ca/tuition-reduction.

Redeemer continues to extend the impact of Christian education at all levels. Redeemer and five Christian high schools are together launching Act Five, an eight-month Christian gap-year program, in September 2019. The program, which you can learn more about at redeemer.ca/act-five, will guide newly graduated high school students as they explore who they are, where they're going, and how their faith fits into a rapidly changing world.

Finally, it has also been exciting to engage the campus in creating Redeemer's next strategic plan. The planning process began with a series of leadership team retreats in the summer and fall of 2018, followed by a campus-wide survey in October and faculty and staff strategic planning forums in January. We are looking forward to rolling out the next strategic plan closer to 2020 as we continue to ensure that Redeemer's Reformed Christian mission and vision remain vibrant, strong, and relevant for the next generation of students.

Redeemer University College
David Zietsma, vice president for external
relations and enrollment

Trinity Christian College

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on behalf of Trinity Christian College. Throughout our history we have valued 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. It is no secret that higher education is a tumultuous “industry,” and Christian higher education is even more turbulent. The concerns range from cost to value, from changing demographics to cultural pluralism and secularization. Today, for example, there are 3 million *fewer* high school graduates than in 2011, and the midwestern United States is one of the regions seeing the most significant decline.

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 programs and people. We have gratefully seen good results from being “light and salt” in our Chicago-area location—seeing increased numbers of Illinois students and sizable increases in our students of color (over 40% in the fall 2018 incoming class, for example). While many of these students do not come to us from the traditional CRC or even Reformed backgrounds, we joyfully educate them, learn from them, and instill in them our belief that God’s plan of redemption and restoration is for all people, for all of creation, and for all disciplines. This is a wonderfully expansive understanding of what it means to be a Christian college—one that finds receptive minds and hearts in our students regardless of their historic denominational backgrounds.

Technology changes and strategy adjusts, but the core of this good work remains firm: to educate women and men for Godly lives, 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, Washington University in St. Louis, Duke University, University of Iowa, and Northwestern University).
- We finalized the purchase of the former Back to God Ministries International building at the front entrance of our campus and are in the process of finalizing the remodeling plans for its incorporation into campus.

- We established new partnerships with the Ozinga Brothers company and Many Hands for Haiti (MHFH) to have Trinity Honors Program students engage in long-term, sustained development work with MHFH and supported by Ozinga.
- We also expanded on our partnership with the country's largest (and world's top-rated) technology incubator, 1871, in downtown Chicago, along with partner institutions such as the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois, and Loyola University-Chicago.
- We finalized a new comprehensive campus master plan, which received recognition as the campus master plan "Outstanding Design" in *American School & University* magazine.
- We received the results of an alumni survey conducted by the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities confirming that Trinity graduates have above-average experiences at Trinity (compared with other CCCU institutions) that include affinity for their alma mater, success in their professional lives, relationships with professors, participation in a local church, and contributions to charitable causes.
- We received, again, external affirmation that our programs are of excellent quality. For the third year in four, 100 percent of our nursing students passed the NCLEX exam on their first attempt (and in that fourth year, all but one student passed on the first attempt), and our program recently was named the top-rated B.S.N. program in Illinois; we also continue to enjoy high CPA passage rates among all colleges and universities in Illinois; and we have been pleased to be named a "College of Distinction" in Education.

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.

In line with the mission of all CRC-affiliated institutions, we wish to say that *your support is more vital than ever*. At a time when institutions generally are seeing diminished loyalty and support, our colleges are more necessary than ever for the world in which we live. The *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, speaking to CCCU presidents two years ago, had this to say about colleges like Trinity (and our other CRC-affiliated institutions):

You have what everybody else is desperate to have: a way of talking about and educating the human person in a way that integrates faith, emotion, and intellect. You have a recipe to nurture human beings who have a devoted heart, a courageous mind, and a purposeful soul. *Almost no other set of institutions in American society has that, and everyone wants it. From my point of view, you're ahead of everybody else and have the potential to influence American culture in a way that could be magnificent.* (emphasis added)

Without your multifaceted support—prayer, student, financial, for example—there can be no assurance that our institutions will weather the storms in which we find ourselves. Make no mistake: if we *lose* our institutions, we *will not* get them back. If we lose our institutions, what sort of a world will we be leaving for our grandchildren and their grandchildren?

This technically is an annual report to the denomination; but in reality it is a *generational* report to the church and to Christian people everywhere.

Now is the time, like never before, to invest in us and to pray for us. And, in return, we endeavor to be faithful witnesses to the broader world and incubators for future leadership in our congregations and denomination.

I 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). I would be delighted to field your questions or to discuss these matters with you personally: write president@trnty.edu.

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 partnerships with the church.

Trinity Christian College
Kurt D. Dykstra, president

Communities First Association

Communities First Association (CFA) is a national, faith-based organization of highly relational, expert practitioners committed to community transformation through the multiplication of skillful leaders in asset-based community development, economic development, and equity (ABCDE²). With particular interests in helping individuals and organizations to assess their posture for community transformation, CFA works to ensure that people understand the tenets of ABCDE² and the relevance of implementation toward viability and sustainability in their communities, whether they are neighborhoods, schools, churches, denominations, school districts, or other for-profit and/or nonprofit entities.

CFA is composed of a diverse group of partners working intersectionally across city and organizational landscapes and committed to a coach-trainer/consulting model that infuses high standards of coaching, training, and facilitation of relevant, rigorous, and diverse curricular experiences to equip the next generation of leaders to help transform communities in the spirit of *shalom* in God's kingdom.

We have worked hard this past year in the creation of professional learning tools, resources, and experiences that support CFA coaches and CFA affiliates in their growth in key core competency areas: race equity, gender equity, conflict resolution, polarity management, prayer, ABCD direct training, coaching and consulting, cultural competency, restorative justice, soul care, strategic planning, and systems thinking.

This past year we also constructed the Culturally Agile Coaching Framework (CAC), which allows participants to mine the gaps between their ideal and the actual in terms of how they respond to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We have implemented this initiative with individuals, in small groups, and organizationally across denominations such as the CRC, Reformed Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and United Methodist Church in continuing to examine what it looks like to ensure shalom interdenominationally.

CFA also participated in the Communities of Practice initiative, by which we worked together with other CRC ministries to examine challenges currently facing the church. Joel Van Dyke led this work, and it afforded us the opportunity to take a high-level look at how CFA and its practices are instrumental in missions.

We continue to play an integral role in the pipeline to Calvin Theological Seminary through our partnership with the admissions office, as we continue to implement the Dig program with the seminary to ensure that high school students from CRC churches across North America experience teaching and learning related to asset-based community development, economic development, and equity, and see the relevance of these topics as they consider future possibilities in ministry and missions.

As a more relational approach to what we have to offer, CFA has designed a cohort model that is now on its second iteration. Intended for individuals who work/lead in Christian community development with a focus on one area/community, the cohort allows persons who apply and are accepted to

journey together for one year with colleagues who do similar work through a series of CFA-facilitated coursework related to their context and our core competencies—all while receiving monthly one-on-one coaching from a seasoned CFA coach along the way. We are planning to increase the number of cohorts to four, adding Houston, Texas; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Tampa, Florida, to our Chicago cohort in 2019.

As CFA reflects on the significance of ABCDE² influences in education, as indicated by the work we continue to forge with Northwestern College and Calvin Theological Seminary, we are also exploring how the work we do supports urban transformation and economic development. As such, CFA has partnered with several school districts to implement training and strategic consulting around asset-based community development, economic development, and equity.

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

It is an exciting time here at Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC). As part of our 2020 strategic plan, we have several new initiatives and projects on the go. This plan involved a detailed review of DMC's vision, mission, policies, and processes, helping to provide focus and direction for our organization to move forward. DMC is and continues to be an organization created "by Canadian deacons *for* deacons," as we help deacons fulfill their calling/mandate as spelled out in the Church Order (2016) and in the Charge to Deacons as articulated in the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons (2016).

Here's a look at what we've been working on since our last report:

A comprehensive evaluation of our annual Ancaster Day of Encouragement (DOE) was completed in July 2018. With input from DMC partners, stakeholders, staff, and beyond, the decision was made to no longer offer the gathering and to pursue other meaningful and intentional ways to encourage and equip deacons in the work they do. (It is important to note that regional DOEs still continue in various communities across Canada with the support and involvement of DMC.) You can read the official press release on our website at <https://bit.ly/2RPxnc1>.

We continue to strengthen our agency's communication strategies and to improve brand recognition. We are currently working on building a brand-new website that will provide encouragement and relevant resources to deacons in the work they do. (It should be noted that nearly half of the visits made to our website now originate from the United States. While we do not officially work in the U.S., we are excited to be able to share our resources in this way and are encouraged by the attention our material is getting from across the border in our binational denomination.)

Much work has been done in the area of stewardship and benevolence to better equip deacons and congregations to live stewaridly:

- Collaboration with agencies like Christian Stewardship Services will ensure deacons receive helpful resources and training, and a new pilot project in partnership with the CRCNA Canada will begin soon.
- A National Benevolence Training Program was developed and piloted to help deacons move from "handing out money" to partnering with people in improving their situation in more holistic ways.
- We are partnering with World Renew to lead a workshop titled "Helping Without Harming," in which participants learn how to alleviate poverty and injustice without hurting the ones they are serving. These half- or full-day workshops teach the differences between *Relief* (offering temporary relief during a crisis), *Rehabilitation* (helping communities recover from a crisis), and *Community Development* (helping those in chronic poverty to support themselves and to challenge systems that work against people fulfilling these callings). This workshop has gone over very well, and more dates are being booked across Canada.

We also have some exciting news about our Operation Manna program. This program, which has been helping churches to start or grow community ministries for over 35 years, has been rebranded and repurposed. As of March 1, 2019, our Operation Manna Program will be called NewGround.

Though the name is changing and the program is expanding, the overall focus will remain the same: NewGround will continue to partner with churches across Canada to help them roll up their sleeves and break new missional ground, nurturing Spirit-led ideas into healthy ministries that bear everlasting fruit. Check our website (diaconalministries.com) for more information on this revitalized initiative and many other helpful resources.

Finally, we want to say thank you for partnering with us in fulfilling the vision God has given us, to “inspire, empower, and equip deacons, as they animate congregations to (1) engage communities, (2) live stewardly, and (3) promote mercy and justice.” Thank you for your time, your prayers, and your financial support—we could not do this without you. May God continue to bless and guide us all as we carry out the ministries he calls us to.

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 that are uniquely designed to help boys grow spiritually in all areas of life—devotional, mental, physical, and social. While some churches have closed and others are discontinuing with the Cadet ministry, other churches are starting clubs or reactivating clubs that have been dormant for years. Our overall numbers continue to hold steady, as does the percentage of our clubs supported by CRC churches. The percentage of boys attending Cadets who are listed as “unchurched” continues to increase, now over 15 percent. We are grateful to God for providing us with opportunities to minister to boys.

II. Looking back

“Be a Blessing” has been our theme for the 2018-19 Cadet season. The boys have learned what it means to be a blessing to others. Stories and photos from across North America have come in to the office, showing examples of boys and their leaders finding ways to serve others, and often being blessed themselves.

It has been several years since the last International Counselors Convention brought men and their families from across Canada and the United States to participate in several days of worship, fellowship, and education. These conventions were suffering from declining attendance. Our regional, one-day conferences are becoming more popular, and we are now reaching more men each year, equipping them with the tools they need in their Cadet ministry.

Cadet events may not look the same as they did in 1952, when the Calvinist Cadet Corps began, but we continue to live out our landmarks, including our motto of “Living for Jesus.” We are grateful for all of the men who have preceded us, and we continue to build on the foundation they have laid.

III. Looking ahead

Our theme for the 2019-20 season is “Hi God, It’s Me,” by which we plan on showing the boys that we are able to come to God, just as we are, and have a conversation with him. The theme is based on Jeremiah 29:12: “Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.” Through the year we will show the boys that God is approachable and is always eager to hear from us.

Our boys are growing up in a confusing world. It is difficult for them to know their place, to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. The Cadet program remains dedicated to the goal of connecting Christian men with boys and leading by example in what it means to live a Christlike life.

We are grateful for all of the prayer and support we receive from Christian Reformed churches. We appreciate the opportunity to work alongside the CRC, as together we train the younger generation and help them grow, in Christ, into future leaders of families and congregations.

Calvinist Cadet Corps

Steve Bootsma, executive director

GEMS Girls' Clubs

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 welcoming, safe, exciting environment, girls learn the truth about God, his Word, and his world—ultimately discovering who they are created to be.

II. Highlights from 2018

- In 2018, GEMS reached over 25,000 girls through their clubs and two truth-filled magazines, *Sparkle* (grades 1-3), and *Shine Brightly* (grades 4-6). Half of the subscriptions to these award-winning magazines are received by girls who do not attend a local club. We are humbled that God is using the ministry to reach girls within and outside of clubs!
- There are GEMS Clubs in 17 countries, and nearly 700 clubs are located in 42 U.S. states and 8 Canadian provinces.
- Over 4,000 GEMS leaders in North American clubs show up week after week to disciple God's girls. What a blessing!
- A ministry-wide study has focused on being a blessing—looking up and blessing God, and reaching out and blessing others. The study is based on 2 Corinthians 9:8.
- Leadership training took place at our GEMS Conference and through GEMS ReFresh.
 - July 13-15, the 49th annual GEMS Conference took place at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, with 527 women in attendance.
 - In July, GEMS ReFresh launched as a new online membership site for GEMS leaders and church ministry staff. Over 1,600 leaders have been trained and equipped remotely through this online library to better understand how to reach today's girls.
- One of our 2018 goals was to 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 three years. Munyiva has been busy training counselors and forming new GEMS groups. In addition, she has recently hosted the second GEMS conference in Kenya!
- GEMS has celebrated 60 years of ministry! We praise God for his faithfulness. We also give sincere thanks to the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church for faithfully supporting the mission to help bring girls into a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

III. Goals and news for 2019

We are being prayerful, careful, and strategic. Here is a sampling of what we hope to accomplish in 2019:

- Grow the consistency of the GEMS experience across North American clubs and evaluate needs and challenges so that we can strengthen and serve clubs as they reach today's generation of girls.

- Expand our ministry reach by completing the GEMS Mobile App development and prepare for launch by summer 2020. This GEMS App will expand the GEMS ministry reach to all girls all around the world who have access to a mobile phone or device! Even girls who do not have a club in their state, province, or country will have access to a girl-friendly app that will speak the truth of who God is and all he says about them. Every girl, in every language, will hear the good news of Jesus!
- Mentor well. Our desire is to continue to invest in our leaders in creative and relevant ways as they pour into this generation of girls. The GEMS Leadership Conference will take place in July 2019 at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. New messages that equip, encourage, and engage are being added to ReFresh each week.
- Serve our girls with excellence. There will be a ministry-wide focus that tells girls the capital "T" Truth about who God says they are. On the basis of 1 John 3:1, girls will learn they are LOVED. Period. That is what they are!

Grow. Expand. Mentor. Serve. Changing our world, one girl at a time. For over 60 years, GEMS has counted it a privilege to faithfully serve Christian Reformed congregations in 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. Now imagine a church where young people and emerging adults' talents, gifts, and passions are fully integrated into their faith community. Youth Unlimited strongly believes that the local church is one of the primary ways through which God works in this world. We exist to encourage, support, equip, and partner with Christian Reformed congregations in the discipleship of students. We strive to accomplish this mission by providing short-term SERVE mission trips for church youth groups. Each of these SERVE experiences is hosted by a local church that desires to live missional, empowering students to assist in building bridges between their church and their neighboring community.

A student's experience on SERVE will challenge them to step out of the daily routine 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 to daily life. As the students serve on behalf of Jesus Christ through the local church, they experience 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 2019 Youth Unlimited is excited to have 22 Christian Reformed congregations hosting a SERVE experience. They will be welcoming over a hundred youth groups and inviting them to participate in local missions within their unique church context. This year's theme, "Go Do Good," from Titus 2:11-14, will challenge students to approach their work as a response to the grace God has shown each one of us.

In 2018, Youth Unlimited welcomed a new staff member, Sandra Bork, in the role of SERVE director. She joins the four existing members of our team located in Michigan and Alberta. In addition, Youth Unlimited has begun to explore how God might be calling us to further our collaboration with churches. Over the past year we have visited classic meetings with the goal of discerning ministry needs; we have offered presentations to churches seeking to connect with young adults; and we have hosted training events. We are excited to see what God might be calling us to in the future.

Youth Unlimited appreciates partnering with Christian Reformed congregations in their efforts to disciple youth and emerging adults. 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 three mini-units in our exciting online *Together* curriculum. In addition to providing existing Friendship groups with the quality Bible studies they are accustomed to, *Together* includes a track of studies that are appropriate for 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

Every human being is an imagebearer of God. This truth inspires our work at Partners Worldwide to create a world where all people can live the abundant, flourishing life God desires for them. But, far too often, poverty inhibits that ability and holds people, families, and communities back from reaching their God-given potential.

According to the United Nations, an estimated 783 million people still face extreme poverty. While that number is daunting, the world is in fact closer than ever before to ending poverty. Today, around just 10 percent of the world's population remains in extreme poverty. At Partners Worldwide, we aim to help close that gap and end poverty for good through business. With a business approach, we can create jobs and economic opportunities that equip people to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

For over 20 years, we have partnered with local community institutions and volunteer business affiliates to end poverty through business. In over 30 countries around the world, we provide entrepreneurs, farmers, and businesspeople with business and agricultural training, mentoring, access to capital, and advocacy tools. These four strategic activities help catalyze job creation and local economic development in communities facing high unemployment and poverty.

In the 2017-18 fiscal year, our global network of partners created and sustained 217,279 jobs, served 147,839 businesses and farms, graduated 15,121 people from business or agricultural training, and disbursed over \$16 million in loans. Additionally, over 900 volunteers generously served a total of 21,835 hours.

Another highlight from 2018 was the Partners Worldwide International Summit we hosted in October in Grand Rapids, Michigan. From 34 countries 425 attendees gathered for two days of networking, fellowship, learning, and exploring the intersection of faith, business, and ending poverty. Last year we also developed a new faith-based Microenterprise Curriculum to complement our existing Small and Medium Enterprise Curriculum. The development of this curriculum was a collaborative effort between our team, our partners around the world, and our counterparts at HOPE International. The curriculum is already being translated and implemented across the globe and is equipping first-time entrepreneurs to start and grow small businesses. A final highlight from 2018 centers on our agriculture initiative. Since 70 percent of people facing poverty live in rural areas, we are heavily investing in agribusinesses and working to link small-scale farmers to viable markets. Since we launched this initiative three years ago, farmer participation in our training programs has increased by over 76 percent!

In 2019 we remain committed to fighting poverty so that all may have the opportunity to flourish as God intended. We are so grateful for the partnership and support of the CRCNA as we pursue this goal, and we ask for your continued prayers. With God's guidance and a global network of partners like you, we know that ending poverty is possible. We eagerly anticipate how God will continue to use all of us in 2019 to make this dream a reality!

Partners Worldwide
Doug Seebeck, president

STUDY COMMITTEE AND TASK FORCE

I. Introduction

Synod 2016, in response to multiple overtures, adopted the following:

That synod appoint a new study committee to articulate a foundation-laying biblical theology of human sexuality that pays particular attention to biblical conceptions of gender and sexuality. The central aim of this theological task will be to provide concise yet clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life, and in light of this to serve the church with pastoral, ecclesial, and missional guidance that explains how the gospel provides redemptive affirmation and hope for those experiencing sexual questioning, temptation, and sin.

- a. In addition to these broad outlines, the study will include the following three components:
 - 1) Discussion outlining how a Reformed hermeneutic does or does not comport with readings of Scripture being employed to endorse what are, for the historic church, ground-breaking conclusions regarding human sexual behavior and identification.
 - 2) Dialogue with, and potential critique of, untraditional conclusions arising from arguments about a new movement of the Spirit (e.g., Acts 15), as well as conclusions arising from scientific and social scientific studies.
 - 3) Reflection and evaluation of whether or not, with respect to same-sex behavior and other issues identified in the study, it will be advisable for future synods to consider
 - changing the main text of Church Order Article 69 (see Overtures 18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 38).
 - declaring a *status confessionis* (see Overture 16).
 - appointing a team of individuals to draft a statement of faith, perhaps in the style of the Contemporary Testimony, on human embodiment and sexuality that reflects and secures the teachings and conclusions of the report (see Overture 28).

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 919-20)

- b. The committee will be constituted of up to twelve individuals, CRC members who represent diversity in gender, ethnicity, binationality, and ministry location, and who adhere to the CRC's biblical view on marriage and same-sex relationships. These individuals will be gifted and suited for this task. . . .
- c. That synod provide the study committee with a five-year window to complete their task, such that the committee will present their final report to Synod 2021. In consideration of this extended time frame, a written summary of the committee's work will be provided by February 1, 2019, for inclusion in the *Agenda for Synod 2019* in order for Synod 2019 to dialogue with and provide feedback to the committee.

Grounds:

- 1) The scope of the task assigned to the committee needs more time to be completed than the typical three-year window allows.
- 2) The consideration of *status confessionis* is a weighty matter that requires extended and careful deliberation.

(Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 926-27)

Synod appointed the following people to the committee: Rev. Mary-Lee Bouma, Rev. Charles Kim, Rev. Jose Rayas, Rev. Paula Seales, Dr. Matthew Tuininga, Dr. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (as *promotor fidei*), Dr. Mary

Vanden Berg, Dr. Jim Vanderwoerd, Mr. Rick Van Manen, Dr. Jeff Weima, and Dr. Al Wolters. In an effort to represent the types of diversity noted in section b of the mandate, these eleven members include persons from the following groups: an African American pastor, a Hispanic pastor, a Korean pastor, three faculty members from Calvin Theological Seminary, a same-sex attracted person, a chaplain, a philosopher, and a social scientist.

At its first meeting in October 2016, the committee chose Drs. Weima and Wolters as cochairs, Dr. Tuininga as reporter, and Dr. Vanderwoerd as recording secretary. Mr. Van Manen resigned from the committee in February 2018, after accepting an academic position in South Korea. After consultation with the denominational executive director, the committee decided not to replace him.

In carrying out its mandate, the committee as a whole has met on the following dates: Oct. 21-22, 2016; Feb. 3-4, June 2-3, Oct. 20-21, 2017; Feb. 16-17, June 15-16, Oct. 19-20, 2018; and Feb. 1-2, 2019. In addition, a subcommittee met via Skype on July 19, 2018, to discuss planning. These meetings typically took place at Calvin Theological Seminary, with most of the members physically present, but two of the meetings were conducted by videoconferencing.

At three of our meetings we set aside time to interact with people in specialized ministries or life situations whose input we sought. On Oct. 21, 2017, we spoke with three CRC-related members of sexual minorities, as well as with Dr. Wendy VanderWal-Gritter, executive director of Generous Space Ministries. On June 18, 2018, we spoke with two representatives of the CRC's Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, and on Oct. 20, 2018, with two CRC university chaplains.

For the present interim report (or summary) we have interpreted our mandate to mean that we should present not only an account of the committee's activities but also enough of our initial conclusions to make it possible for Synod 2019 "to dialogue with and provide feedback to the committee." Accordingly, in the following pages we have included (1) a tentative preamble to the report, (2) a tentative summary of a biblical theology of human sexuality, (3) a description of our tentative plans for the final report, and (4) a copy of the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality.

Delegates to Synod 2019 are urged to read this interim report carefully and to be prepared to participate in a table discussion at synod on it. Summarizing notes from these table discussions will be forwarded to the study committee for consideration as they write their final report for Synod 2021.

II. Preamble

The following are specific stories of actual people in our churches, whose names have been changed to protect identity.

During Sunday worship, Lisa,^{1*} 45, wonders how church members would react if they knew she and her husband each have deep personal relationships with other people which include sexual intimacy, now that they practice polyamory. She and Andrew^{*} know that many biblical figures were polygamous, and the couple believe Jesus preached an ethic of love. They realize they cannot meet all of each other's needs and are happy to have discovered deeper love with more people.

^{1*} Name changed to protect identity.

In another CRC congregation Rebecca,* 36, thanks God that her pastor is preaching a sermon series on sex. She had heard only silence from the church about how to follow Jesus as a sexually healthy woman who is not married. Through seeing a counselor, Rebecca has finally experienced some healing from the shame she's felt about a strange childhood experience and her subsequent porn use. Many of her single Christian friends of all ages are sexually active, whether never married, divorced, or in serially monogamous relationships. She wishes these things had been talked about in her CRC congregations.

From childhood Joshua,* 13 (or Jessica, as Joshua identifies internally), liked dancing, singing, and pretty colors; found the games, clothes, and aggressiveness of most other boys unappealing; and was hurt by their mockery. People in church often separate boys from girls in activities and groups and seem nervous about Joshua's differences. Joshua / Jessica thinks God might have created the wrong body.

Olivia,* 19, believes that most people in her church assume she is gay and knows that some are supportive of gay marriage. She would like to have a sexual relationship with a woman, but so far she has not because she has read Bible passages that seem to condemn it. She is confused about what the church and the Bible teach. She loves Jesus and wants to do the right thing. She has never met another gay Christian who is celibate.

Tomas,* 48, is one of the few Christian men he knows who never use porn. Deeply respectful of his wife and daughter as fellow imagebearers of God, Tomas longs for the church to help his brothers in Christ reject the cultural expectation to treat women as objects for sexual pleasure.

Noah,* 26, has always been sexually attracted to men. Most of his Christian university friends were not gay, but they supported each other to live faithfully with their sexuality. Noah discovered that these believers were also ashamed of many of their desires, and he had felt joy in encouraging them and praying for each other. Together they had learned about suffering for obedience. But it doesn't feel comfortable to talk about his sexuality in his new church, even though Noah chooses to be celibate. He thinks he could be helpful to other younger believers as they struggle with their sexual identity and hopes that will soon be possible.

Madison,* 16, wants to have a boyfriend. But all the girls she knows who have boyfriends get pressured to send naked selfies and to have sex with them. One classmate has started threatening her that he will spread rumors about her if she does not give him a blow job. He is the one the parents like best because he is a leader in the church youth group. She knows her teachers suspect some of these things but her parents have no idea.

A. *Good sex*

God made sex, and, like everything God made, sexual intimacy was designed as a very good thing. The two accounts in the Genesis creation narrative, along with the passionate Song of Songs, reveal God's intention for women and men to come together sexually to populate the earth and to enjoy each other deeply in exclusive physical intimacy.

We are physical creatures, and good sex is full of pleasure and play. Our desire for sexual satisfaction draws us to another, and God fashioned our bodies to respond to a lover's touch with delight, enjoyment, and amusement. Our senses of sight, sound, hearing, taste, smell, and touch are all engaged in sex, and the intensity of arousal and release is unique to sex. The strongly positive response of our bodies to desired sexual stimulus is clear evidence that God meant for sex to feel good. In distinction from some other religious traditions, the Bible highlights the goodness of the body. After creating the earth and the first humans, God proclaimed his creation very good. Jesus was born human and in his glorified body sits at the right hand of the Father as the incarnate God. The Bible teaches the resurrection of the body, and the church has confessed it ever since. God intended the physical sexual act to bring pleasure, and we can assume that God takes joy in our enjoyment of it.

Because God constructed human beings as body and spirit, the sexual act also has spiritual significance and emotional weight. Sex always creates a bond between those participating in it, whether they intend it to or not. This is why good sex is exclusive sex. Couples can open themselves fully to each other when there is no need for self-protection and no fear of abandonment or rejection. The vulnerability of exposing the naked body during sex creates trust and draws a couple into intimacy. An appreciative gaze and gentle caress heals the shame individuals might feel about their bodies or past sexual experiences. The response of a thrilled or welcoming lover encourages the exposure of the naked self. Mutually enjoyable sex helps in the rebuilding of broken relationships. Sexual release even brings relaxation and can result in renewed energy for work.

The exclusive bond that sexual activity engenders explains why God analogizes his relationship with Israel to that of a lover with the beloved and compares the marriage of a man and a woman to the union of Christ the Bridegroom with the church his Bride. Just as we are God's beloved and God is ours, so a woman and man in marriage are meant to belong to each other and only to each other.

B. Current context

But in a sinful world God's good gift of sexuality is tainted. Although God created women and men to be physically attracted to each other, throughout history humans have sinned and been sinned against sexually. Our selfish treatment of others or their treatment of us leaves us with shame, anger, hurt, or fear of intimacy, or it causes us to withdraw.

As powerful as sex is, its misuses can be brutally destructive. The past few years include ongoing international scandals of the Roman Catholic Church covering up for sexually abusive priests; the emergence of the #MeToo movement as women began to speak openly about violent assault and constant low-key sexual harassment in every arena; a #ChurchToo response in which prominent pastors are accused of sexual misconduct and systemic abuse of power; and a multibillion dollar sex industry built on global sex trafficking that is steadily increasing, largely due to the ubiquitous use of online porn.

Perhaps nothing in North American culture has changed more rapidly and dramatically than sexual mores. The now common language of "hooking

up" and "friends with benefits" testifies to the common occurrence of casual sex between friends or acquaintances. The use of pornography by younger people is assumed, couples who marry without having had sex beforehand are deemed unusual, and most couples live together before marriage, if they marry at all. Gay relationships are accepted, and nearly everyone has friends or family members who are gay. Gay, lesbian, and transgender characters in TV and film are standard. Adults and children identify as transgender. Even the vocabulary regarding sexuality and gender has changed from *biological sex*, to *sex and gender*, to *gender* only, with biological sex negotiable. New federal laws permit same-sex marriage (Canada, 2005; United States, 2015) and prohibit discrimination based on gender expression or identity (Canada 2017). News constantly breaks regarding school policies, local laws, and personal stories from and about transgender children and adults.

At the same time, we swim in an ocean of sexual images. Sexual imagery, sexual language, and sexual comedy surround us. Wave after wave of sexual expectation and promise washes over us. The movies we watch, the books we read, and the media we consume feed expectations and assumptions about the enviable sex lives of others. They tell us that single people are having lots of sex and that married people constantly struggle to improve their sex lives. Yet some research shows that young people are having less sex than previous generations did, while numerous studies indicate that fully-wired 21st-century humans feel increasingly lonely.²

In consequence, many of us have questions about sexuality or about the church's response to changing realities:

Why is the church so uptight about sex?

If my boy/girlfriend and I are committed to each other, why do we need the church's blessing on our relationship before we live together?

Why doesn't the church talk about sexual violence against women, since the news is full of it?

How do I help my daughter, who says she is really a boy? Does the Bible say anything about being transgender?

Can we trust church leaders about sex when the church has just as much sexual abuse as everyone else?

The gay couples I know seem happier than most of the straight couples I know, so how can their love not be from God?

Why can't the church just be loving and accepting, the way God is?

C. The church's response

Instead of being salt and light to the world, embodying for our neighbors joyful sexual wholeness in communities of loving marriages and friendships, we in the Christian Reformed Church have been as susceptible to the lures of the evil one as has the rest of the Western church. The more that culture disconnects sexual activity from procreation and marriage, the more quaint or even bizarre Jesus' teaching on celibate singleness or lifelong monogamous

² J. M. Twenge, R. A. Sherman,, and B. E. Wells, "Declines in Sexual Frequency among American Adults, 1989-2014," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 46.8 (Nov., 2017): 433-40.

marriage seems to us. The historic teaching of the church feels unnecessarily restrictive or difficult. Sexual relationships outside of marriage have become common in the church, whether before marriage or after divorce or widowhood. Divorce, sexual abuse, and pornography use are as common in the church as they are outside.

Tragically, the church's response to the confusion, questions, and sexual turbulence of a desperate world, and even of its hurting members, has often been silence. Whether because we are caught in our own hidden sexual sins, unsure whether God's grace actually has power, or are afraid to speak unpopular or unaffirming words, we have not offered the healing words of the gospel of grace to fellow sinners.

Although John 1:14 tells us that "grace *and* truth" came with Jesus Christ, when the church *does* speak about sex, it often abandons one or the other. Jesus told the judgmental and hypocritical Pharisees to go and learn mercy, saying, "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Mark 2:17, NRSV). With words and by consistent example, Jesus taught his followers to seek out sinners and to welcome all who came to him to be his followers. Tragically, many in the church loudly denounce certain less-common sexual sins while overlooking those sexual sins commonly committed by the majority. Others of us show kindness and welcome to all, humbly acknowledging that all alike need God's forgiving grace, yet without calling confused and needy sinners to repent and follow Jesus in sexual holiness. Sometimes we then condemn one another for failing to demonstrate love or speak truth as we understand it. Our sin leads to division.

1. Yes, we have failed each other.

- a. We have not helped each other to "lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and . . . run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus . . . who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:1-2). We have neglected to confess our sins "to one another and pray for one another," that we might be healed (James 5:16). We have forgotten to "let the Word of Christ dwell in [us] richly" and to "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). The old have not modeled glorifying God with their bodies or taught the young how and why to resist temptation in their bodies. We have privileged sex and marriage, failing to encourage, support, or offer models of kingdom service to those of us who are single or called to celibacy.
- b. Instead, in our sexual practices, the church has frequently been indistinguishable from the world around us. Rather than honoring marriage and keeping "the marriage bed . . . undefiled" (Heb. 13:4), we have taken sexual partners casually or have not married those with whom we live in sexually intimate relationships. We have not helped the young reject the cultural norm of treating sexual intimacy as a skill to be practiced in dating relationships. We have ignored our ubiquitous pornography use, treating it as a personal problem for individuals, failing to see its complicity in systemic commercial endeavors that degrade and exploit women, denigrate the human body, and destroy the possibility of sexual intimacy. Not daring to ask difficult questions of

estranged spouses, nor caring enough to walk with couples experiencing marital struggles, we have made divorce common.

- c. Meanwhile, the wider community has sinned against the few. Out of fear, discomfort or self-righteousness, we have grossly mistreated persons among us who identify as gay, lesbian, or transgender with mockery, derision, or harsh denunciation. These attitudes and actions have driven many brothers and sisters out of the church. Much like the culture around us, the church has alternated between derision and condemnation toward these believers, making it impossible for those of us who are same-sex attracted or who experience gender dysphoria to learn how to follow Jesus while openly sharing our struggles. The time has come to publicly and privately admit the pain and the alienation that have resulted from these sinful actions and attitudes.

The church is facing a crisis of gospel proportions. Our failure to be salt and light through love, sexuality, marriage, gender, friendship, and mutual accountability has deeply compromised our witness to the gospel. We are not facing just one problem, or even two or three. Our whole way of life has fallen out of step with the Spirit and with the teaching of Scripture, and all of us must be called to account. And yet, in this very realization we have the opportunity, together, to repent. We have the opportunity to reexamine our lives and our communities, to confess the sins we have committed against each other, and to call one another back to the costly path of loving discipleship. By following this path, we once again can find hope and offer hope to a desperate, broken world.

Indeed, let us confess our sin together.

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you with our bodies, our hearts, and our minds, by what we have done and what we have left undone. We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.

God, our Righteousness, we devalue the bodies you have created and exploit those made in your image for our own pleasure. We foster the lust that comes from our hearts by using pornography and closing our eyes to its use among others. We defile our bodies which are your temple, Holy Spirit, by uniting sexually with those to whom we are not married. We have not fled sexual immorality, as you have commanded us.

We do not trust in your power, generous God, to reconcile our broken marriages, giving up on our spouses and on one another through divorce and remarriage. We refuse to deny ourselves sexually, unwilling to undergo the cost of discipleship as you transform us by the renewal of our minds. We forget, Jesus, that you sympathize with us because you were tempted in all ways as we are and yet were without sin. We neglect to remind each other to go boldly to your throne of grace to receive mercy in our time of need. We do not hold one another accountable.

Formed by the culture around us, we put our individual selves, our careers, and our families above the kingdom of God. We make marriage a mechanism for our own pursuit of happiness rather than submitting to it as a calling from you for a man and a woman to unite together in reflection of Christ's union with his church. We neglect the good gift of community you have given

us. Instead of being true family, we offer little or no support to single people, whether straight or gay, in living celibate lives. Instead of confessing our sins and praying for each other, we live in unrepentant sin. Good Shepherd, we have let the little ones fall. We have not lived as one body.

Omniscient God, who sees what is done in secret, we recognize that we ridicule and fear the LGBTQ among us. We admit that we drive our sisters and brothers away. We acknowledge that, like the Pharisee with the tax collector, we scorn and criticize the temptations that are not ours. We confess that we overlook the sexual sins of the majority while harshly judging those of the lesbian and gay minority. We do not show the love and hospitality of Jesus to those whom we deem worse sinners.

Light of the world, teach us to walk from darkness into the light of communion with each other and with you. Take away our shame as you show us how to live in honesty and in mutual dependence. Enable us to unite truth and grace together once again.

Resurrected Christ, thank you for advocating for us with the Father. Thank you, Redeemer, that you repair the broken and use repentant sinners to show others your ways. Will you now give us joy, Creator, in the goodness of the bodies you made?

Cornerstone of the church, we ask you to build these living stones into a family who love one another deeply from the heart, who remind each other of your commands and your rich promises, and who reflect your glory to the world. Heal our divisions. Make us one body.

2. Historic opportunity

God assures his people, “See, I am doing a new thing!” (Isa. 43:19, NIV). In today’s historic moment of great change and of questioning old realities, standards, and teachings, God’s Spirit can lead us as a pillar of fire in the darkness. When we are weak, vulnerable, or weary, the Shepherd tenderly picks up the lambs and “carries them close to his heart” while gently leading the mother sheep (Isa. 40:11).

A new-old way. It turns out that the new way is also the way of our spiritual ancestors. “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way lies, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16). What are the next steps as we journey toward sexual wholeness?

- a. If we intend to journey with all of our Christian Reformed brothers and sisters, the church will have to learn from those of us who are not attracted to the opposite sex or do not fit culturally determined gender roles.

These believers can often alert the church to the unbiblical notion that marriages and families are the core of the church. The first-century writers tell us that Christ’s church is not a collection of biological families but a new family of Jesus’ followers. Since more gay and lesbian people spend at least some portion of their adult lives single, they can help us live into this reality.

Helpfully, too, those who do not fit the culturally prescribed male and female roles are more able to point out the falseness of the polarity

our world assumes between men and women. They can help the whole church see where it wrongly follows the world in setting women and men against each other and slotting people into stereotypical sex roles. Implicitly or explicitly, the church often teaches unbiblical models of manhood or womanhood, while God commands all to pattern themselves after Jesus, the one who is tender, strong, humble, bold, sacrificial, and courageous. Those who differ from the norms have had to struggle to discover this on their own. Having learned to concentrate on following Jesus' example, they can now help the church be reminded of this truth.

b. We can then assume our primary identity as brothers and sisters.

One body in Christ, we are united with each other in a bond of family. Our life circumstances vary significantly, and we are indeed poor and wealthy, husbands and mothers, gay and straight, and of many different ethnicities. Yet, by the cross, "in his flesh," Jesus has "broken down the dividing wall between us" (Eph. 2:14, NRSV), and we must live into our fundamental identity as saints, sisters and brothers, fellow citizens in God's kingdom. We must treat this family as family. Every believer must defend, help, assist, endure, and suffer with our spiritual sisters and brothers as we would with our family of origin.

c. Live as forgiven and forgiving sinners.

In his teaching about forgiveness in the prayer he taught us to pray, Jesus made clear that sisters and brothers would continue to be both sinners and sinned against, and that we should offer grace as freely as we receive it. As Reformed believers who confess the depravity of our natures, we know that every believer will not only be tempted but also succumb to temptation and sin. While supporting each other in the "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14), we should also treat each other as fellow sinners in constant need of encouragement, forgiveness, and mercy.

d. Take up the cross.

The narrow way that leads to life is the way of the cross, which means death to self. Peter, John, and Paul remind their hearers that although they once lived like the nations around them in sexual indulgence and abandonment, they have been made new. Repeatedly, the apostles encourage the early church in a radical new way of living that was clearly just as baffling to their contemporaries as it is to ours. Choosing to carry the cross means choosing actions that are counter-cultural and frequently scorned or despised by the world around us. Doing what is right, whether standing up against injustice or being celibate except within the covenant of marriage, is risky and often costly. Yet in this we simply walk in the footsteps of our Lord.

e. Be physically present.

The church has erred, fallen, and failed. Wonderfully, however, it is through the church that God's healing power flows. The community of those being saved, variously pictured as the good shepherd's flock, living stones built on the cornerstone into a spiritual house, and the family of God, is one body. None of us follows Jesus alone but as a

member of the family. And because the corporate body of Christ is also the corporeal family of God, sinners damaged by sexual sin done in or to their bodies can be healed as fellow sinners comfort, feed, house, embrace, or simply play with them on a regular basis. Spiritually exploring sinners can walk with recovering sinners who follow Jesus as they volunteer in the neighborhood, pray before their dinner, or play with their children.

3. Hope

Since the Jesus way is the way of the cross, and it is the narrow way that leads to life, it is only in regular physical community that we can trust each other enough to be honest about our weaknesses and care enough for each other to help. Across the continent, CRC communities of Jesus-followers are supporting each other in following Jesus as celibate singles or monogamous married couples. Here are a few of their stories.

Brittany,³ 29, loves her Christian roommates but feels a bit lonely and baffled as they each begin to have sex with their boyfriends. A serious Christian, Brittany is also generous and spontaneous, and her work colleagues love to hang out with her. Her church encourages its members to spend time with friends and neighbors who are not yet Christians. With some church friends, she hosts dinners and invites friends from different religious traditions, and she encourages conversations about Jesus and life's questions. Her new friends respect her sexual ethics and often ask her to pray for them and give them advice. To stay spiritually strong, she finds herself gratefully relying on times of intimate prayer in pairs during Sunday worship and the close friendships she has built with other believers.

Newly divorced, William, 65, is drawn to escorts whom he sometimes picks up when he drives for Uber to make some extra cash. He cares for them and prays for them but also gradually acknowledges that he really wants to have sex with them. In his church, people honestly share their temptations and struggles with each other during worship, in small groups, and when they are serving in their neighborhood. It is not easy for William to be honest about this, but when he is, other sisters and brothers pray for him and begin to call and text to support him. His church also raises money to stop human trafficking, and he learns to see how the women he has met on the street were groomed for the sex industry.*

Various lesbian and gay individuals and couples participate in New Life CRC. A few of them introduce the pastor and other church members to their friends. Others invite their LGB friends to worship. Raised in an evangelical church and a faithful member of a popular campus ministry in university, sociology professor Carol,* 44, has not been in church for years. Her partner of a decade, Kris,* is not a Christian, but Carol believes she is God's answer to Carol's prayer for love and intimacy at a very lonely period of her life. The church invites Carol to speak on an area of her expertise to their adult education class. Because the church people she meets are loving, reflective, and fun, Carol gets involved in the church even though the pastor carefully explains that the church believes the Bible teaches marriage and sex are only for women with men. Kris starts going to a Bible study on Jesus' parables. Although the group talks about Jesus and not about sex, Kris tells Carol she wants to follow Jesus and thinks maybe they should stop having*

³ * Name changed to protect identity.

sex together. Slowly, with the support of people in the church, they start talking about what direction to take their relationship as Kris prepares to get baptized.

When Walter, 61, was in his thirties and one of the most faithful members of the church choir and the church adult education program, he told only a few people in church that he deeply longed for sexual intimacy with a man. Over the years, these few sisters and brothers listened as he expressed his rage, grief, and hopelessness. A few times, discouragement and hopelessness overtook him. These friends from his Christian community brought him food and helped him shower when he was isolated in his house, too depressed to cope. Finally, Walter decided to move to a big city, to find a Christian man to marry. In that new city, he joined another CRC and instead found a woman who delighted in him and who chose to share his life. After good counseling, they married, and surrounded themselves with other Jesus-followers with whom they share honestly but also reach out as others have reached out to them.*

Desperate for someone to understand, and scared to death, new believer Emily, 22, tells her pastor she wants to transition to being a man but doesn't know how she could fit in to the church. Knowing that Emily has very little money and is looking for work, her pastor Amanda,* takes her to the thrift store to buy some pants and jackets she'd feel more comfortable wearing. Some months later, Emily announces that she wants to go back to living as a woman. Amanda is puzzled and is not sure what Emily's future holds, but is glad that the church's acceptance of Emily communicated to her God's unconditional love and respect.*

Joshua and Chloe* were not raised in Christian families, but now that they are planning to marry, they want to live the Jesus Way together. It has not been easy remaining celibate before marriage, nor dealing with Joshua's ongoing commitment to resist the pornography that formerly dominated his life. But every year their church spends time in Sunday sermons and in more intimate settings discussing what it means to follow Jesus with regard to money, sex, and power. These discussions are lively because their church gatherings, large or small, are usually an interesting mix of believers, serious spiritual seekers, and people who just love the food and community. Unbelievers are initially surprised and baffled that Chloe and Joshua are not living together and in fact are not sexually involved with each other. But people are drawn to them, and Joshua and Chloe find that unbelievers are eager to talk with them about Jesus. Impressed by their openness for others, the trust between them, and their honesty about their own weaknesses, a few of their friends accept Jesus' invitation and join the Christian community.*

4. Mutual need

As individuals, as congregations, and as a denomination, the entire Christian Reformed Church has something in common. Despite the hurt, anger, division, and failure of the church, despite differences in perspectives and difficulties understanding and trusting each other, we have a mutual need for deep healing. The sexuality the Creator gave us, beautiful and intended for good, has brought sinful humans great pain. In great compassion, Almighty God, our Wonderful Counselor, offers us not only forgiveness but also freedom from shame and restoration in holiness.

God provides that healing primarily through communities of people. By the God who lives in eternal loving community, we were created for the deep joy of physical human community. The whole Bible is a story of

a community of people, whose God calls them to show the world God's nature by living in just and loving relationships with God and each other. The Bible's writers reveal first to the nation of Israel and then later to their spiritual descendants how to live well in human community so as to reflect God to each other and the world.

For our own healing and for the sake of the world, God designed the church as a group of people who meet regularly to eat, play, and pray; who are honest about their failures and sins; and who therefore can sharpen each other "as iron sharpens iron" (Prov. 27:17). As the church, we need to be people who meet not in homogeneous, segregated little groups but as single and married people together, young and old, rich and poor.

Mutually we need forgiveness and grace. Every one of us has been sinned against and has sinned sexually. All of us have exploited others and have been exploited sexually in some ways, whether through word, thought, or deed. Mutually we need sister-brother love to heal us of our distance and mistrust of each other. Mutually we need physical touch. Alienated from our bodies by living in the virtual reality of attention to our technological devices, we need the ordinary physical connections of eating, playing with, and being affectionately touched by human sisters and brothers.

5. Mission together

Just as we have mutual need, the members of the CRC also have a mutual mission. Our physical communities are meant not only to heal the sin, shame, grief, and loneliness of believers but also to offer hope to skeptical and curious unbelievers. In a world where reconciliation is all too rare, the church should be filled with people in messy relationships with stories of hurt and forgiveness. In a culture of individualism, our churches can offer the hope of a different way, a way in which the older mentor the younger, single people and families enjoy one another, the poor and rich serve and learn together, and different ethnic groups seek to understand and appreciate one another. These relationships are unusual in our deeply divided world, and they model God's love to a world that yearns to believe true human community is possible.

The Christian Reformed Church has much to offer the millions who do not yet know Jesus. We are rooted in a tradition that gladly acknowledges the need to learn from the historic and global church as we seek to obey God in our sexuality. In each of our congregations, in various ethnic and economic contexts, the Christian Reformed Church has a living tradition of deep love for the Scriptures coupled with a willingness to engage courageously with the ideas of our time. Because we know the creator who made all things and the reconciler who brings all things together, we can create nurturing spaces for people wrestling with sexual identity, deep brokenness, long-term patterns of sin, and disconcerting cultural changes. Resting in Jesus, our peace, we can provide safe harbor for restless explorers both within and outside the church.

The Holy Spirit leads. God pours out love and grace. May our desire to love one another and our neighbors increase, grounded in confidence that we "belong—body and soul . . . —to [our] faithful Savior, Jesus Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1). May we learn anew to follow our

Servant-King in the way of the cross, continually receiving and offering hope and healing.

III. A biblical theology of human sexuality

A. *Introduction: Matthew 19*

Reformed theology reminds us that a good biblical theology follows the outline of the great moments of redemptive history: creation, fall, redemption, consummation. Our Lord himself took this approach when the Pharisees asked him about what in their day was one of the divisive questions of sexual ethics. In Matthew 19:3 they asked him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” (NIV).

They were looking, perhaps, for a rule or a set of criteria. But Jesus’ response moved the discussion in an entirely different direction. He turned their attention to the creation account of Genesis 1-2. “Haven’t you read . . . that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt. 19:4-6).

Jesus’ perspective, interestingly, does not begin with humanity in its fallen state. His mindset is not, first and foremost, one of accommodation of human sexual weakness. Rather, he grounds the ethic of marriage in the purposes of God from creation. It is just as significant that Jesus does not immediately point his hearers to the nature of human sexuality in the new creation. He understands sexuality in creational terms.

In fact, the Pharisees seem surprised by Jesus’ response. “‘Why then’ they asked, ‘did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?’” (19:7). Jesus’ rejection of divorce rooted in his theology of creation seemed to call for a sexual ethic much more rigorous than that of the law. And he affirmed that this is, in fact, the case: “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery” (19:8-9).

Jesus’ approach here is striking. He concedes that the law tolerated sinful behavior because of the *fall*. But he calls his disciples to a higher standard rooted in creation and redemption. The appeal to *creation* is found in his reference to the way it was “at the beginning.” The appeal to *redemption* comes in the form of Jesus’ assertion of his own messianic authority: “I tell you . . . ‘The Lord of redemption and the Lord of creation are one and the same Lord.’

The disciples, of course, quickly grasp that Jesus is calling them to a practice a very difficult ethic. “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry,” they reason (19:10). And Jesus does not dispute the point. The cost of discipleship is high. The way of the cross is difficult. It requires *grace*. He replies, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given” (19:11).

Jesus’ teaching here, it must immediately be observed, is difficult for conservatives and progressives alike. There is no deference to traditional ways of life. Jesus is not lifting up culturally accepted practices of marriage and family as the ideal for his disciples. On the contrary, he is calling his disciples to a kingdom ethic that is no less radical in the area of sexuality than it is in

the area of wealth and poverty (see the story of the rich man in 19:16-27). But the reward—and here Jesus points to that ultimate moment of redemptive history, the *consummation*—is great. As he goes on to say later, “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (19:29-30).

Who is willing to walk this path? All who would be Jesus’ disciples must count the cost. But we will not always have the luxury of choice. “For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it” (19:12). The life of singleness—whether freely chosen or not—like that of marriage, requires one to depend on the grace of Christ.

Matthew 19 provides us with the outline of a biblical theology of human sexuality that comes from the lips of Jesus himself. It reveals the mind of Christ on a host of powerfully relevant questions ranging from the place of eunuchs (traditionally deemed sexually unclean) in the kingdom of God to the relationship between Genesis 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25 (which Jesus explicitly treats as one interdependent unit). It offers us a pattern for the renewing of our own minds, that we may “not conform to the pattern of this world,” but “be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2).

B. *Creation: Genesis 1-2*

The New Testament consistently points to Genesis 1-2 as the paradigm for human sexuality (see Matt. 19; 1 Cor. 6; Rom. 1, Eph. 5). Contemporary debates about evolution, the age of the earth, and the length of the days of creation often distract us from the central focus of the text, which is on God’s creative work of establishing order in the world. By his word God divides those things that do not belong together: light from darkness, the waters above from the waters below, water and dry land. The result is a creation that is good because it is orderly.

By his word God goes on to fill the heavens, the seas, and the dry land with governing lights, birds and fish, plants and animals. Ultimately he subjects all of this order to human beings, whom he calls to govern it on his behalf.

It is of the utmost significance that from the very beginning human beings are described in sexual terms as “male and female.” None of the animals are described in such terms. Within one sentence of God’s decision to create human beings in his image, that they might govern over his creation, we are told, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27).

The poetic structure of Genesis 1:27 indicates that humanity’s creation as male and female is inextricably linked with humanity’s creation in God’s image. We image God not simply as generic human beings, who happen to be male and female, but as male and female human beings.

Indeed, in the following verses it becomes clear that our sexuality as male and female is *essential* to the way in which we bear God’s image by governing on his behalf. Human beings can only obey God’s command to exercise dominion by practicing their sexuality through procreation. “God blessed them

and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (Gen. 1:28). Only as they are fruitful and increase in number, as male and female, can human beings fill the earth and subdue it. And only when creation is governed in this way does God declare that it is “very good” (1:31). Only at that point does God rest (2:2-3).

It should be noted that the terms *male* and *female* clearly refer to biological sexuality, not merely to gender, although it is safe to say that the very distinction between sex and gender would be alien to the text in its ancient Near Eastern context. The point is that to be male is to possess male sexuality and to be female is to possess female sexuality, and that to exercise one or the other through procreation is absolutely essential to fulfilling God’s creation mandate. In other words, it is quite clear, contrary to what some have more recently asserted, that God created human beings with binary, procreative sexuality. The suggestion that God created sexuality as a spectrum, with some human beings falling somewhere *in between* male and female, is not only foreign to the text but also contradicts the obvious meaning and significance of sexuality in the text. To read the notion of sexuality as a spectrum into Genesis 1:27 is to isolate that verse and rip it from its context.

While many biblical scholars point out that Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-33 are separate creation accounts, their placement together at the beginning of Genesis requires us to interpret them in interaction with one another. Indeed, were we in doubt about this, Jesus’ appeal to the two passages as one unit should lay our doubts to rest. It is not simply that Jesus quotes from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 in the same sentence. It is that he explains the meaning of Genesis 2:24 by virtue of its relationship to Genesis 1:27. In Jesus’ words, “at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ [1:27] and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’ [2:24]” (Matt. 19:4-5). Scripture interprets Scripture, and this is all the more the case when dealing with the same book of Scripture.

Human sexuality is even more central to the purpose of Genesis 2 than it is to Genesis 1. God creates an isolated human being, *Adam*, but he cannot fulfill his mandate to fill the earth and subdue it because he is alone. As the text puts it, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (2:18). Interestingly, this first indication that something is not good in creation stems from the lack of sexuality. The word *helper* does not denote any sort of inferiority. God is quite often described as his people’s helper with just this word. The word *suitable*, for its part, is a translation of the Hebrew word *kenegdo*, which is a compound of words meaning “like” and “opposite.” In other words, the man needs a partner who is “like-opposite”—or, *equal, yet complementary*—to him.

While some prefer to emphasize the similarity of the partner, and others the difference, the text emphasizes both, and neither can be abandoned without doing damage to its basic purpose. Some scholars argue that all that the man really lacked was essentially a friend. He needed companionship.⁴ But in the context of Genesis 2, as well as of Genesis 1, the man is clearly lacking

⁴ See, for example, James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 29-31.

more than simply friendship. He cannot fulfill the creation mandate. Unlike the animals, he cannot procreate. He needs someone who is sexually “like-opposite” to him. Hence God creates the woman.

It is also highly significant that it is here that the Hebrew text first uses the gendered terms for “man” and “woman.” Until now, the man was always *adam*. But here the man is *ish*, and the woman is *ishah*. The very words communicate similarity and difference, and the man exults when he sees the woman: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’ [*ishah*], for she was taken out of man [*ish*]” (2:23). This exultation appears in the context of the man and woman’s unabashed sexuality. The text goes out of its way to point out that they “were both naked, and they felt no shame” (2:25). Sexuality is good and rightly leads to exultation. It is only the fall that has rendered it a matter of shame, abuse, and suffering.

The text comments on Adam’s joyful exclamation with an explanatory verse that is quoted no less than three times in the New Testament (Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31): “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Sexuality is inseparable from marriage. Just as a man is born from the marital union of his father and mother, so the man must now leave his parents in order to establish a new marital union of man and woman. This will be the ordinary and essential means of propagating human life.

A few scholars have argued that the “one-flesh” union referred to in the text need not require sexual complementarity. At least one scholar claims that two partners might experience a one-flesh union in the sense of kinship rather than sexual complementarity. In other words, it is claimed that the text is merely saying that two persons might unite as one family.⁵ However, this novel interpretation seems to be based on a misreading of the lexicographical and exegetical evidence.

Significantly, the text does not say that the woman will leave her father and mother and be joined to her husband as part of his clan. That would reflect common ancient Near Eastern practice. Rather, Genesis 2:24 highlights the man as the one who leaves his family behind, and it emphasizes that the man and his wife will now constitute a new one-flesh union. In marriage, it would appear that the man and woman find a new identity and a new purpose.

The theological significance of Genesis 2:24 runs far beyond its reference to the nature of marriage, however. As we shall see from the apostle Paul’s discussion of marriage in Ephesians 5, “in Genesis 2:24 lies an unknown or not fully known intention of God which is now revealed in the relationship of Christ and his church.”⁶ Just as the significance of human sexuality is rooted in God’s creation of human beings in his image, so human sexuality finds ultimate meaning in God’s plan for human beings to be united in communion with him.

⁵ See Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, pp. 85-109.

⁶ “Marriage Guidelines,” *Acts of Synod 1980* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church, 1980), p. 470.

C. Fall: Genesis 3

Genesis 3 describes the fall of the first man and woman into sin in terms of temptation, disobedience against the direct command of God, and the violation of boundaries established by God. The serpent, we are told, challenged the woman about her understanding of God's word. The initial challenge, "Did God really say . . . ?" (3:1) was followed by a stronger challenge, "You will not certainly die . . ." (3:4). The temptation held out to Eve was that of becoming "like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5). The way to get there, however, was by disobeying God's direct command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17), thereby violating the boundary established by God at creation.

Given this rebellion against the created order and against God's commands received at creation, it is no surprise that the very first sign that creation has fallen from its first purpose is the corruption of sexuality. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (3:7). Sin immediately turns what was a source of joy and exultation into a source of shame and fear. Alienation from God immediately turns into the alienation of the man and woman from one another. The vulnerability of nakedness ceases to be a gift. Instead it becomes a threat. "I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (3:10).

Fascinatingly, as it appears in the narrative, God draws the conclusion that the man has disobeyed his command from the fact that the man knows he is naked. "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The connection between disordered sexuality and the curse of disobedience runs like a thread throughout the passage.

The significance of sexuality also permeates the promises and curses that God begins to declare in verse 14. The enmity that stems from the curse will extend to the "offspring" of both the serpent and the woman, but the offspring of the woman would one day crush the serpent's head (3:14). From this time forward the men and women of Israel would be self-conscious of the way in which their participation in the bringing forth of children would be central to God's purposes for redemption.

On the other hand, childbearing would take place in the context of severe and painful labor. The intimate relationships between husbands and wives would give way to conflict and domineering. Sexuality after the fall will always be plagued with suffering and conflict, unfulfilled desires and exploitation. Oppressive patriarchy would take the place of purposeful marital communion. "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (3:16).

This is precisely the picture that we get in the rest of the book of Genesis and, indeed, in the rest of the Old Testament. In the lives of the patriarchs we see polygamy (including the favoring of one wife over another), the sexual exploitation of slaves (including servants made to serve as concubines), incest, rape, spousal abuse, adultery, divorce, prostitution, sexual harassment, and all manner of conflict, jealousy, and violence stemming from such sexual immorality. Neither the lives of the patriarchs nor the kings of Israel offer Christians a model of God's purpose for sexuality as it was "from the beginning." Indeed, as we have seen, the law of Moses itself permitted such

abuse due to the hardness of human hearts, “but it was not this way from the beginning,” Jesus said (Matt. 19:8).

Just as it was immoral for the patriarchs to treat women in accord with the conventions of their culture, so it is immoral when Christians abandon God’s will from creation by acting in accord with the sexual conventions of our own culture. Premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce, sexual assault, polyamory, and a host of other sexual practices increasingly tolerated by our culture are symptoms of a fallen world that is under the curse of sin. Christians are called to flee all such sexual immorality as we walk not according to the mind of this world, but according to the mind of Christ.

D. Redemption: the Old Testament

1. The Law

For all of the corruption and misery that mars human sexuality throughout the Old Testament, from Genesis 3:16 forward sexuality is also the focal point of the hope of salvation. Every man and every woman is expected to marry, to be fruitful and to multiply. Men and women seek to propagate godly children, that their descendants might share in the future hope of God’s people. Fruiteness and salvation go hand in hand. Women who struggle to conceive children (such as Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah) virtually equate the blessing of children with salvation itself. It is no overstatement to say that in the Old Testament the failure to produce descendants is the greatest possible curse upon a man or woman. Indeed, a central part of the crisis facing the oppressed Israelites in Egypt was the Pharaoh’s policy of forced infanticide.

After God delivered his people from the oppression of Egypt, he gave them the law of Moses, which included an extensive sexual code and an array of regulations governing marriage and sexuality. It is important to distinguish between regulations that permitted various immoral practices due to the hardness of human hearts (such as divorce [Deut. 24:1-4], polygamy [Deut. 21:15-17], forced marriage of captive women [Deut. 21:10-14], and other practices of ancient Near Eastern patriarchy [i.e., Lev. 19:20-22]), which are not normative for Christians called to follow God’s purpose “from the beginning” (Matt. 19:8), and the sexual code that prohibited practices that the law declares to be “detestable” (Lev. 18:29) and therefore alien to God’s purpose from creation.

Scholars have debated the purpose and significance of the Mosaic sexual code. The key, most agree, is to view God’s purposes for Israel as being a sort of microcosm of his purposes for creation. If Genesis 1-2 teaches that human beings are called to be kings and priests within the temple of creation, Exodus and Leviticus were given to teach the people of Israel how to be kings and priests within the land of Canaan. Thus the people of Israel were commanded to observe proper creational boundaries and so to be holy in reflection of their creator. Much like God’s work of dividing and ordering during the six days of creation, the Levitical sexual codes reminded the people to observe the separations established by God that are essential to goodness of the creation order.

Further, just as Genesis 1-2 called men and women to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, so the Levitical sexual code called men and women to engage only in forms of sexual activity that resulted in

the procreation of godly children. This helps to explain why the prohibition of child sacrifice is mixed in with prohibitions of homosexuality, bestiality, and having sex with a woman during her period, as well as prohibitions of incest (which produces illicit offspring).

The law warns the people that it was for these sorts of “detestable” practices that the Canaanites were purged from the land of Canaan. The Israelites were to be different from other nations. They were to be holy because their God was holy. “Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Lev. 18:24-25). The laws were to apply to both native-born and foreigners. “Everyone who does any of these detestable things—such persons must be cut off from their people” (18:29). Hence it is already in Leviticus that we have the clear association of sexual immorality with the idolatry of the nations who do not know God.

The integral connection between sexuality, fruitfulness, and holiness is also reflected in the law’s declaration that bodily discharges associated with the reproductive system rendered a person unclean. Men or women experiencing such discharges had to undergo rites of purification (Lev. 12 and 15). Furthermore, eunuchs and males with defective genitals were prohibited from entering the temple (Lev. 21:20; 22:24; Deut. 23:1). Because Israel was to be a microcosm of creation, Israelites were called to be orderly and fruitful in their sexual activity in reflection of the orderliness and fruitfulness of creation.

2. The prophets

While the law called the people to engage only in sexual relationships that were orderly and fruitful, the prophets highlighted the significance of human sexuality in an altogether different way. They used marriage as a metaphor for the covenant relationship between God and his people. For example, Isaiah 54:5-6 declares, “For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected,’ says your God” (see also Isa. 62).

The prophets used this metaphor in both positive and negative ways. Often they described Israel as the bride of the Lord, only to go on to point out that Israel had become unfaithful. Often they went so far as to describe Israel in graphic terms as a prostitute who had committed adultery with all of the nations around Israel (Ezek. 16 and 23). The prophet Hosea, in fact, was even called by God to take an adulterous wife as a means of illustrating God’s grace to adulterous Israel. Ultimately, as Hosea makes clear, God will forgive and cleanse his bride, redeeming her from all her adultery (Hos. 1-3).

The use of marriage as a metaphor for the covenant between God and his people gave rise to the additional use of prostitution, adultery, and sexual immorality as metaphors for the sin of idolatry. Just as a prostitute sells herself for money or protection, they argued, so Israel sold herself in idolatry to foreign gods (and foreign nations). Ezekiel 16 addresses

Jerusalem as an adulterous wife, describing the people's idolatry with the gods of other nations as prostitution in shockingly graphic terms:

"The splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect. . . . But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. . . . You also took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them. . . . And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? . . . In all your detestable practices and your prostitution you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, kicking about in your blood."

(Ezek. 16:14-22)

Ezekiel's description, which becomes all the more graphic in its use of prostitution as an allegory for idolatry, follows Leviticus in identifying Jerusalem's "detestable practices" with the typical practices of the nations around her, including the Canaanites and Sodom. For the prophets, as in the law and (as we shall see) the New Testament, sexual immorality and idolatry were the chief characteristics of the nations that did not know God. Yet when God redeemed his people according to his covenant, he would purify them from all of their sexual immorality and idolatry.

"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. . . .

"In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. . . . I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD."

(Hos. 2:14-20)

3. Wisdom literature

Israel's wisdom literature vividly described the evils of both adultery and prostitution (Proverbs) and the beauty and joyfulness of a healthy sexual relationship (Song of Songs; Psalm 45). In Proverbs 8-9, Wisdom is personified as a woman who is to be sought at all costs, in contrast to the adulterous woman, Folly (Prov. 7 and 9), who is to be avoided at all costs. Proverbs 7 graphically describes how an adulterous woman skillfully seduces an unsuspecting young man: dressing as a prostitute, she takes hold of him and kisses him, using "persuasive words" and "smooth talk" (7:21) as she describes the allures of her bed. "Come let's drink deeply of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love!" (7:18).

The text describes the young man's destruction so as to elicit horror: "All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life. . . . Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death" (7:22-23, 26-27).

In Proverbs it is the young in particular who need to be warned to flee from the dangers of lust and adultery. The antidote is wisdom, especially the wisdom that comes from one's parents and is rooted in the fear of the Lord.

In contrast, Song of Songs is particularly unabashed in the sensuality of its poetic imagery. The two lovers delight in one another's kisses and physical embrace. The man exults in the beauty of his bride's eyes, hair, teeth, lips, neck, and breasts. "You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you" (4:7). "How beautiful you are and how pleasing, my love, with your delights!" (7:6). Love is more pleasing than wine, he tells her. "Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue" (4:11).

The woman speaks of how she aches for her husband's intimate presence. "My beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand" (5:10). She relishes the appearance and smell of his head, eyes, cheeks, lips, arms, legs, and mouth. "His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, this is my friend, daughters of Jerusalem" (5:16).

And yet, the song warns its hearers repeatedly that when it comes to love one must tread carefully. "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (8:4). Love is dangerous because it is powerful. When it is the real thing, its value is without parallel: "For love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned" (8:6-7).

It is notable that Song of Songs has traditionally been interpreted by the church not simply as a poem about love between a man and a woman, but as a prophetic allegory of the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church. This is consistent with the biblical theme of marriage as an analogy of the covenant relationship between God and his people.

E. *Redemption: the New Testament*

1. Celibacy

When he pointed out that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of human hearts, Jesus called his disciples to a sexual ethic so demanding that it led them to question whether it might be better for a person not to marry (Matt. 19). It is telling that Christian teaching rarely elicits such a reply in our time. Has the twenty-first-century church simply accommodated cultural expectations regarding sex, marriage, and family to the point that we have lost sight of the radical path of Christian discipleship?

For the disciples to say that it may be better for a person not to marry was to say the unthinkable. As we have seen, to Old Testament Jews, marriage and procreation were deemed to be mandated by God from creation. To be single, to forgo the calling of procreation, was to ensure that one would not have any descendants who shared in the future hope of God's people.

Yet not only does Jesus affirm that his disciples are correct in their judgment that marriage may not be the best path of Christian discipleship. He goes so far as to identify eunuchs, who were prohibited from entering the temple, as paradigmatic Christian disciples!

Jesus appears to have three different kinds of eunuchs in view: (1) persons who are born impotent or who develop without properly functioning sexual organs; (2) men who have been castrated, either deliberately (often for service in a royal court or harem) or accidentally; and (3) people who “choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” Most scholars agree that with the third type Jesus is speaking metaphorically (i.e., he is not suggesting that Christian disciples should castrate themselves).

Jesus’ statement is best interpreted against the backdrop of the messianic promises of Isaiah 56:3-5, in which God promised that foreigners and eunuchs would no longer be excluded from his temple. Isaiah declared, “To the eunuchs . . . who . . . hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters” (56:5). These words anticipate the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.

Thus understood, the words of Isaiah and Jesus and the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch all point to the good news that with the coming of the kingdom of God, broken or defective sexuality is no longer the obstacle to kingdom membership that it once was. Individuals whose sexual development and flourishing was impaired or incomplete, who had been excluded from God’s presence under the law, are now included in the kingdom of God under the gospel. This truth is clearly of profound significance for Christians who experience disorders of sex development or other forms of sexual dysfunction today.

Jesus’ third category, speaking of those who choose to live a life of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom, likewise points to a greater inclusivity in the kingdom of God and a liberation from Old Testament expectations regarding marriage and procreation. It is a way of life that Jesus and Paul, the two most prominent characters of the New Testament, would choose. Though it is not for everyone, it is clearly a way of honor, befitting special service for the kingdom of God.

In fact, Matthew 19:11-12 is only one of many passages in which Jesus speaks of the diminishing significance of marriage, family, and earthly households. We have already noted his promise that “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (19:29). This promise suggests that those who forgo the blessings of marriage and family in this world will receive even greater blessing both in this age and in the age to come. Jesus appears to be thinking of the bonds of communion that such believers will experience with their brothers and sisters in Christ who are fellow children of God.

A similar statement appears in Luke 14:26-27, where Jesus declares, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me

⁷ In biblical culture, the word hate was often used as a way of saying “love less.” To recognize this idiomatic use is in no way to downplay the demand made here. In a Middle Eastern culture where commitment to parents and family was ranked as the highest social obligation, the challenge for Jesus’ disciples was to be devoted more fully to Jesus than to one’s own family. For similar uses of hate as “love less” or “not love,” see Genesis 29:30-31; Deuteronomy 21:15-17; Judges 14:16; Proverbs 13:24; Isaiah 60:15; Malachi 1:2-3; Luke 16:13.

cannot be my disciple" (cf. Matt. 10:37-39). Those who would be disciples must first count the cost, Jesus goes on to say. They must be willing to give up everything for the sake of the kingdom (Luke 14:33).

Jesus clearly applied this truth to his own life. When told that his mother and brothers were seeking him, he declared, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'" (Matt. 12:48-50). This did not mean that Jesus ceased to care for his mother, as we can see from John 19:26-27. But it does indicate that with the coming of the kingdom the familial bonds of discipleship begin to transcend natural familial bonds in significance.

Yet another declaration by Jesus confirms the diminishing significance of marriage in the coming kingdom of God. In Luke 20:27-40 (see parallel passages in Matt. 22:23-33 and Mark 12:18-27) the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, questioned Jesus regarding a woman who, during this life, married seven successive husbands (each dying before she married the next). Seeking to catch Jesus with an absurdity, they asked, "Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" (Luke 20:33).

Jesus' reply undermines the assumption that the future resurrected life will be much like the present life. He said, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage" (20:34-35). In other words, marriage for men and women and the production of offspring may be important parts of the present order, but they will not be part of the life to come. Sexuality is a positive aspect of God's good creation, but the resurrection and power of God will change human existence such that marriage and procreation are not part of the coming kingdom.

As much as Jesus affirms the creational order regarding marriage, therefore, he puts even stronger emphasis on the limited significance of marriage and family. This does not serve to undermine a creational sexual ethic. On the contrary, as we shall see, if anything, Jesus strengthens it. Still, the good news of the kingdom of God creates a new reality for all who, whether by circumstance or by choice, find themselves giving up the earthly blessings of marriage, family, and household. It is not only a way of life of unexcelled honor; it is a way of anticipating the glorious reality of the future kingdom of God.

Clearly the path of Christian discipleship is not an easy path, especially as it applies to the area of sexuality and marriage. The Christian's sexual life is necessarily a cross-bearing life filled with all kinds of suffering. This is true for all Christians. Although we each experience unique struggles and temptations, all of us are called to count the cost. If there is a part of our sexual or gender identity—or a desire, experience, practice, or relationship—that we are not willing to give up for the sake of Christ, we have made that thing an idol. On the other hand, insofar as we are willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel, we are given Christ's own promise: "whoever loses their life for me will find it" (Matt. 16:25).

The apostle Paul embraced Jesus' teaching about celibacy both in his own life (Paul did not marry) and in his exhortation to young Christians: "I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do" (1 Cor. 7:7-8). In a world where the social pressures to marry, have children, and establish a household were not only immense but definitive and all-encompassing for a person's identity, Paul experienced the life of celibacy as freedom.

Paul's intent was not to negate the goodness of marriage. Rather, his purpose was to direct young Christians' attentions to the coming kingdom. Marriage, he says, is part of the world in its present form that is passing away, but the kingdom is eternal. "What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not. . . . For this world in its present form is passing away" (7:29-31). Marriage, for Paul, is not a permanent union because it ceases with the death of either the husband or the wife, such that the surviving partner is free to marry again (Rom. 7:2-3).

Those who are married, Paul points out, are not able to focus on the work of the kingdom in the same way that single people can:

An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

(1 Cor. 7:32-35)

But is Paul thinking only of those who have a special gift that enables them not to "burn with passion" (7:9)? After all, he urges those who "cannot control themselves" to marry, "for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (7:9). If that is the case, how can Christians demand celibacy from those who lack the gift of singleness? This is a question of the utmost urgency for teenagers, persons who are exclusively same-sex attracted, and many others who find themselves unable to get married or unable to enjoy sex in their marriages.

This question has been helpfully explored by the 2002 report on pastoral care for homosexual members. Lewis Smedes, the report observes, defended same-sex marriage as a sort of concession or accommodation to gay men and women who "burn with passion." Others have compared such an accommodation to Moses' allowance of divorce in the Old Testament. The question, then, is what is the gift of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 7:7?

Although many describe the gift Paul is referring to as the gift of celibacy, Paul himself refers to a more specific gift: self-control. The question, therefore, is whether Christians can expect self-control to the point of celibacy from Christians who lack the gift of self-control. Yet as the 2002 report notes, Galatians 5:22-23 describes self-control as a fruit of the Spirit that is given to all Christians, much like love, joy, patience, or kindness. While not all Christians bear such fruit to equal degrees, all are called to bear them.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul commands Christians to “strive for the spiritual gifts.” While some gifts (such as tongues or prophecy) are given to some Christians only, the greater gifts are given to all, and all are commanded to seek them through prayer and effort. Thus Christians are not simply to wait for the gift of self-control, practicing it only when it has been given from above. Rather, as Paul declares in 1 Thessalonians 4:4, “each of you should learn to control your own body.” Similar commands appear in Titus 2:11-15; 1 Peter 1:13-15; and 2 Peter 1:5-6.

All Christians, then, must practice self-control when called to it by God. “Married people as well as singles need self-control, including self-control of their sexuality, for a well-disciplined life.”⁸ Not all people who are called to a life of celibacy choose such a life. But all who are called to a life of celibacy are promised the grace and blessing of the Holy Spirit as they walk the path of obedience to Christ’s commands. Indeed, for those who give up the blessings of marriage and family out of devotion to him, Jesus promises a family of brothers and sisters in abundance, both in this life and in the life to come.

This reminds us that the starting point for Christian reflection on sexual morality should not be our cultural context, let alone our fallen sexual desires and intimate experiences as sinful human beings. Rather, the starting point for Christian reflection on sexual morality is our identity in Christ, in whom all of God’s purposes from creation have been fulfilled. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Our identity in Christ transcends all other identities, whether those that are consequences of the fall (such as slave and free, gay and straight) or those that are gifts of creation and redemption (such as male and female, married and celibate). First and foremost we are children of God, “heirs according to the promise,” and we are called to practice our sexuality in accord with this purpose.

Like Jesus, for Paul the Christian’s identity leads one to conceive of suffering differently. Along with the creation we groan, yearning for our redemption. “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21). We too groan as we experience frustration that does not stem from our own choice, and yet we have hope. We even “glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (5:3-5).

2. Marriage

Jesus’ teaching regarding the kingdom of God proclaimed a new inclusion of people with broken or defective sexuality, legitimized and honored the life of singleness, and diminished the significance of marriage and family. However, it did not in any way weaken the Old Testament sexual ethic. On the contrary, all of the evidence suggests that Jesus called his disciples to greater sexual holiness in fidelity to God’s purposes from creation.

⁸ “Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members,” *Acts of Synod 2002* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2002), p. 323.

The most obvious expression of this has been skillfully explored in the synodical report on divorce and remarriage. As that report noted, Jesus speaks to the issues of divorce and/or remarriage in four places: Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-9; and Luke 16:18. Although there are significant differences among these texts, their collective teaching is “unambiguously clear.” “Jesus stressed emphatically the permanence of marriage. Marriage is intended to be binding for life.”⁹

Of the four texts, Mark 10 and Luke 16:18 are the most comprehensive in their prohibition of divorce and remarriage, seeming to allow no exceptions whatsoever. In Matthew 5 and 19, however, Jesus allows for an exception in the case of *porneia*, or “sexual immorality.” Even here, however, it is not entirely clear whether or not the legitimacy of divorce in cases of sexual immorality necessarily renders remarriage appropriate for either of the divorced spouses. Matthew 5:32, taken by itself, implies that divorced persons may not remarry. Only the hotly disputed Matthew 19 gives some hint that remarriage may be permissible in certain cases. “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery” (19:9).

The 1980 report concludes that the word *porneia* refers to sexual infidelity, including adultery, incest, homosexual intercourse, and similar forms of unchastity. However, it emphasizes that “the accent appears to fall on persistent and unrepentant unchastity rather than on the single act itself.”¹⁰ In other words, while divorce is permissible in some cases of sexual immorality, this is only the case when such immorality is persistent and unrepentant. The report helpfully situates the Christian marital ethic in the context of the gospel of reconciliation, reminding Christians that reconciliation is always the goal when spouses have become estranged through sexual immorality or other causes.

The 1980 report also noted that the exception is best understood not as “a concession to an existing practice which violates the righteousness demanded by the creational norm for marriage.”¹¹ Rather, it reasserts the binding character of the creational norm against such concessions. Indeed, the report rejects the widespread notion that the exception clause is designed to offer “grounds” for divorce at all. Rather, “marriage *should* not be dissolved, for that is contrary to God’s will; but by persistent and unrepentant unchastity people *can* put asunder what God has joined together. Where such has happened, Jesus does not apply his condemnation upon the subsequent remarriage of the one who did not commit adultery.”¹²

Jesus did not simply condemn outward acts of unchastity, however. Like the book of Proverbs, he identified the root of sexual immorality as the lusts that come from the human heart (Matt. 15:19). Such lust, he declared in the Sermon on the Mount, is itself an inward form of adultery: “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).

⁹ “Marriage Guidelines,” p. 473.

¹⁰ “Marriage Guidelines,” p. 474.

¹¹ “Marriage Guidelines,” pp. 474-75.

¹² “Marriage Guidelines,” p. 477.

The point of Jesus' teaching here is not to condemn the recognition of bodily beauty, nor the experience of being attracted to someone's bodily beauty. Such misinterpretations make a problem of bodily beauty itself. Inevitably they lead to all manner of legalistic regulations designed to hide the body and prevent interaction between men and women. The burden of such an interpretation has tended to fall upon women.

Jesus' purpose, in contrast, is to call his disciples to take responsibility for the way in which they gaze on or think about another person. One does not commit adultery in the heart by looking upon a woman, or even by being attracted to a woman. One commits adultery by looking "lustfully," or with lustful intent. The lustful gaze turns the other person into a mere object of desire and pleasure. It is a form of dehumanization that stems directly from the sinfulness and shame of the fall.

The net effect of Jesus' teaching is to call believers to reserve sex for marriage, as God intended from creation. Some believers may never marry, but all are called to avoid every form of sexual immorality and adultery, whether outwardly or in the thoughts of the heart and the gaze of the eyes. Christians are always to treat one another as brothers and sisters called to communion in the body of Christ.

The apostle Paul reinforces Jesus' teaching regarding sex and marriage by interpreting it in the context of Old Testament teaching. In 1 Thessalonians, thought to be Paul's earliest letter, Paul exhorts Christians, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 4:3-8).

Paul's association of sexual immorality with "the pagans, who do not know God," is typical of Jewish assessments of the Gentiles. Paul, like most Jews, believed that the Gentiles were notorious for two kinds of sin in particular: sexual immorality and idolatry. As we have seen, the Old Testament prophets consistently associated sexual immorality with idolatry. Both sins were deemed to be distinctive expressions of rebellion against God. The same thought appears in Romans 1 and in 1 Corinthians, as we shall see.

Paul's antidote is to call the Thessalonian Christians, like the people of Israel of old, to holiness. Indeed, such holiness is essential to what it means to be God's people. To be God's people is to be different from the nations who do not know God. As God puts it to the Israelites in Exodus 19:5-6, "And now if you indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you will be to me a distinctive people out of all the nations. For the whole earth is mine. You will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Septuagint). Similar exhortations appear in Deuteronomy 26:18-19 and in Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 22:32.

If the essence of holiness for the Israelites, therefore, was separation from the nations, Paul is urging Christians that for them too, the essence

of holiness consists in separation from the pagans who do not know God. To be sure, the wall between the nations has been broken down (Eph. 2), but God's will for his people has not changed: to be holy as he is holy (1 Peter 1:16). What has changed is that God has now poured out his Spirit on all nations, such that disciples of every nation can walk in the way of holiness. Thus, as this letter to Gentile Christians in Thessalonica testifies, Paul expects from the Thessalonians the same sort of holiness with respect to sexuality as he expects from Jewish Christians.

Paul's instructions here therefore reflect the judgment of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 that although Gentile Christians are not obligated to keep the whole law of Moses, they are nevertheless called "to abstain . . . from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:20).

Some scholars have argued that just as the early church had a hard time accepting the fact that the Spirit was working among Gentiles as well as Jews, so the contemporary church fails to see that the Spirit is working among LGBT persons as well. If such persons share in the fruit of the Spirit, it is argued, they should be welcomed into the church as well.¹³

What this argument ignores, however, is that the Gentiles were embraced into the church on the condition that they submitted to God's will regarding human sexuality. Indeed, in his letter to the Galatians, the major purpose of which was to clarify that Gentiles are saved by faith and not by obedience to the law of Moses, Paul expressly called the Galatians to give up the obvious works of the flesh, including sexual immorality, and to walk in the fruit of the Spirit, including self-control (Gal. 5:19, 23). "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (5:24-25). The mark of the Spirit's work, in short, includes repentance from sexual immorality.

Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians, then, interpreted quite literally, is not that they should separate themselves from the Gentiles. Most of the Thessalonian Christians were Gentiles! Rather, he says, they should separate themselves from "sexual immorality" (1 Thess. 4:3). Separation from sexual immorality, he is saying, is an essential part of Christian holiness. What does Paul mean by "sexual immorality"? Most scholars agree that the term *porneia* as used here by Paul refers in a general way to all kinds of sexual misconduct, no doubt against the backdrop of the sexual code of the law of Moses. To be holy, then, requires one to learn to control one's own body in obedience to the will of God.

Interestingly, for Paul, sexual immorality is not considered a victimless crime. On the contrary, Paul warns that to commit sexual immorality is to "wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister" (4:6). Sexual immorality is not an expression of love for another human being. It is a corruption of love that wrongs another human being.

It's also worth noting that here, as elsewhere, Paul warns the Thessalonians, "The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before" (4:6). Nor is this simply a word from Paul.

¹³ See especially Deirdre J. Good, Willis J. Jenkins, Cynthia B. Kittredge, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., "A Theology of Marriage Including Same-Sex Couples: A View from the Liberals," *Anglican Theological Review* 93:1 (Winter, 2011): 51-87. Cf. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, pp. 9-10, 190-91.

"Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit" (4:8). Paul seems to leave believers with a choice. They can reject God's call and live like the pagans do, according to the passions of their flesh, or they can embrace the call of God, knowing that he gives the Holy Spirit to those who seek him. This, ultimately, is the hope to which God calls them. God gives his Holy Spirit to all who seek him, as was once prophesied by the prophet Ezekiel, and the Spirit empowers all such disciples to live within the will of God.

Nowhere does Paul address questions of sexual immorality within the church more extensively or clearly than he does in 1 Corinthians, another of his earliest letters. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul commands the Corinthian Christians to expel from among them a man who was guilty of "sexual immorality," specifically a form of incest that was prohibited by the law of Moses. Paul says that the Corinthians "should have put out of [their] fellowship the man who has been doing this" (5:2), that he has "already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this" (5:3), and that when the Corinthians are "assembled . . . and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, [they should] hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord" (5:4-5). Paul supports his argument by warning the Corinthians that "a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough"—and he urges them, "Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are" (5:6-7). The entire body is compromised by the failure of one person to repent of his sexual immorality.

Paul reminds them that he had already written to them in a previous letter (now lost) that they should not "associate with sexually immoral people" (5:9). His point, he says, was not that they should disassociate with nonbelievers who commit sexual immorality (or other sins like idolatry, greed, or swindling). Such would be impossible. "But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone *who claims to be a brother or sister* but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler" (5:11). In other words, the focus here is on those who would seek to be members of the church. Paul quotes from the Old Testament: "Expel the wicked person from among you" (5:13; quoting Deut. 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21,24; 24:7). Here, as in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul insists on repentance from sexual immorality as a definitive mark that distinguishes Christians from the world.

In the process of making the argument that the Corinthian church is to "judge those inside" the church (1 Cor. 5:12), Paul reminds the Corinthians that as saints destined by God to judge the world, believers need to learn to judge and arbitrate disputes for themselves (6:1-8). They are called to develop the wisdom necessary to judge among themselves, anticipating their future reality as those who will reign with Christ.

The point is not that Christians are perfect or do not themselves fall into sin. The point is that Christians, by definition, are those who have repented from their sin. Paul is well aware that believers may be deceived on precisely this point (what Dietrich Bonhoeffer would later call "cheap grace"): "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor

idolaters nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (6:9-10). These sins had characterized the Corinthian Christians: "That is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (6:11). Here, as in 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Acts, and in so many other places, it is the Spirit of God who empowers believers to repent from the passions of the flesh and to walk in the fruit of the Spirit.

It is essential to observe that Paul's argument in this section is not simply to show *that* sexual immorality is wrong. Rather, it is to show just *how* wrong sexual immorality is. Paul could not raise the stakes any higher than he does. Here again he treats sexual immorality much like he treats idolatry. He warns believers to "flee" two things: sexual immorality and idolatry. Like idolatry, unrepentant sexual immorality destroys one's place in the church and kingdom of God.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Paul refutes the claim made by some Corinthians that Christians have sexual freedom because what Christians do with the body does not matter. Paul's response is that the body does matter because it is destined for resurrection and communion with Christ, and sexual immorality is incompatible with this reality.

Paul begins by offering three specific rejoinders to claims being made by some Corinthians. The first two rejoinders Paul offers are to the same slogan: "I have the right to do anything" (see also 1 Cor. 10:23). It could be more literally translated as "All things are permissible." Paul's first response is that not all things are "beneficial" or "helpful" or "edifying." His second rejoinder is that "I will not be mastered by anything" (6:12). By making this argument, Paul brings the question of authority and ownership, as well as self-control, into the discussion. A Christian possesses liberty, but not so that she or he might once again become a slave to sin or to another human being. Rather, a Christian is given liberty so that she or he might be enslaved to God in Christ.

Finally, Paul addresses a slogan that at first glance has nothing to do with sexuality: "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The Corinthians were evidently arguing that the body—or at least its basic functions—is not eternal, so what we do in carrying out our bodily functions—such as eating—is irrelevant for our future in Christ. Paul's response is to offer a statement parallel to the Corinthian slogan, undermining it at every point:

Food for the stomach . . . the stomach for food . . . God will destroy them both.

The body is for the Lord . . . the Lord for the body . . . God will raise them both.

The body is not for sexual immorality in the way that food is for the stomach, Paul says. Rather, the body has a purpose more ultimate than sexuality itself. That purpose is the believers' union with God in Christ. Thus sexuality is not an arena of Christian liberty like eating and drinking. On the contrary, sexuality has ultimate significance because the body is "for the Lord." This significance is enhanced by the astonishing fact that not only is the body for the Lord, but, as most scholars interpret the

second phrase, the Lord Jesus Christ laid down his own life in order to save the human body for communion with God.

Paul continues the argument by reminding the Corinthians that their bodies are members of Christ. Note the plural here. It is not simply that the church is corporately united to Christ. And it is not simply that believers are united to Christ in their souls. Rather, the individual bodies of believers are members of Christ. Each Christian body—including the dimension of its sexuality as male or female—is a part of the body of Christ. What we do with our bodies, therefore, we do with the body of Christ. Paul illustrates his point with the example of prostitution, but the argument itself applies to all forms of sexual immorality.

Like Jesus, Paul draws his argument from an appeal to creation, specifically Genesis 2:24. As appears from the structure of the argument, Paul quotes Genesis 2:24, “The two will become one flesh,” to substantiate his claim that a man who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body. In other words, sex is of profound significance because it establishes a one-flesh union. And that one-flesh union either is or is not consistent with the believer’s bodily union with Christ. Thus sexual immorality is not simply a violation of the will of God. Much more, it is incompatible with union with Christ.

To be sure, all sin is ultimately incompatible with our union with Christ, but Paul’s point here is that sexual immorality is *especially* incompatible with that union. Why? Because, as he has argued from Genesis 2:24, it involves the body in a deeply intimate one-flesh union that is of profound significance for human beings. In other words, sex has meaning—profound meaning. As we have seen, it is wrapped up with our creation in God’s image as male and female, and Paul is now teaching us that it also involves a level of bodily intimacy directly relevant to God’s purposes for us in communion with Christ.

This conclusion is reinforced by what comes next. Scholars do not agree on what Paul means when he says, “Flee from sexual immorality! All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body” (1 Cor. 6:18). But the primary reason for their disagreement is that modern readers struggle with the claim that sexual immorality is a particularly grave sin. Yet in context it is clear that this is precisely what Paul is saying. Sexual union is so significant, constituting two human beings as one body, that sexual immorality involves a particularly grave sin against the body that cannot be tolerated within the body of Christ.

This argument is reinforced by the logic of verses 19-20. The body is not just destined for resurrection and union with Christ. The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, the bond of union with Christ. Paul reverses his typical word order here to emphasize the holiness of the Spirit, and hence the holiness of the body. His argument connects the New Testament rationale for sexual holiness to the Old Testament rationale: the presence of God must be manifest in sexual holiness!

Finally, Paul reminds the Corinthians that, having been united with Christ and inhabited by the Holy Spirit, they are no longer their own masters. This brings us back to the original Corinthian slogan, “I have the right to do anything.” On the contrary, Paul uses the metaphor of slavery

(or is it prostitution?) to remind the Corinthians that they were bought with a price. They are slaves of God and slaves of righteousness, and the price was nothing less than the body and blood of Christ, with whom they have been united. At the heart of Paul's concern, then, is a question of ownership and authority. In the way that they exercise their sexuality, human beings demonstrate whether or not they are servants of God.

This is the context for Paul's discussion of marriage and singleness in 1 Corinthians 7, which we partially considered earlier. Paul advises some Christians not to marry, but he instructs those who struggle with self-control to marry. The main point is that all Christians, whether married or single, are called to honor God with their bodies. Those who are married are called to sexual faithfulness and to mutual submission in their sexual relationship. "The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife" (7:4).

Paul also reminds believers that while it is good not to marry, once they are married a husband and a wife may not separate from one another. As he puts it, "A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife" (7:10-11). The report on divorce and remarriage rightly concludes that "Paul commands that if the wife does separate from / divorce her husband, she should either remain single or be reconciled to her husband."¹⁴ Paul says nothing, at least in the case of two believing Christians, about a potential right to remarry.

However, Paul goes on to consider the case in which a Christian is married to a nonbeliever. It is a testimony to the inviolability of marriage within a creational ethic that unbelief on the part of one of the spouses is not considered grounds for divorce. On the contrary, the unbelieving spouse is considered holy by virtue of his or her union with the believing spouse! The same is true for the children of such a union (1 Cor. 7:12-14). It could not be clearer that God does not want human beings to tear apart those whom he has joined together.

Here, however, Paul does offer an exception, although even in this case there is dispute about what exactly he means to allow. He declares that if the unbelieving spouse abandons the believing spouse, the believing spouse is "not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (7:15). Here too Paul seems to have the goal of reconciliation in view. He reminds the believing wife or husband that God may use his or her faithfulness and peace as a means of saving the unbelieving spouse (7:16).

Paul called Christians to great sexual holiness in another respect as well. Though the New Testament says relatively little about it, Paul's instructions regarding elders and deacons indicates that Christians were expected to avoid polygamy (1 Tim. 3:2).

3. The ultimate meaning of marriage

All of this is evidence enough that Paul, like Jesus, took marriage seriously as an institution established by God at creation. However, in one respect Paul went beyond Jesus, and even beyond the Old Testament, in articulating the supreme significance of marriage. Building, perhaps,

¹⁴ "Marriage Guidelines," p. 477.

on the Old Testament prophets' tendency to use marriage as a metaphor for God's relationship with his people, Paul argues that, as the report on marriage and divorce puts it, "What has happened in Christ unfolds the meaning of the creational institution of marriage."¹⁵

The context of Paul's declaration about the ultimate meaning of marriage is his instructions to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:22-33. In a manner that was at most implied in the Old Testament, Paul appeals to the union between Christ and the church as a means of elevating the purpose and conduct of men and women within marriage. It is striking that he explicitly invokes the relationship between Christ and the church as the model for marriage in virtually every verse of this passage: 22, 23, 24, 25-27, 28, 29-30, 31-32.

Paul writes that wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord, but he says a lot more about the ways in which husbands should love and serve their wives as Christ loved and served the church. Interestingly, Paul describes Christ's love for the church—the model of husbands' love for their wives—in terms of forms of service generally associated with the work of women or servants.

And yet, Paul does not invoke the relationship between Christ and the church as a mere analogy for marriage. In one of the most profound comments on marriage found in Scripture, he points to a meaning of marriage deeper than that found in creation itself, though ultimately foreshadowed from creation. Speaking of Christ's love for the church as a model for a husband's love for his wife, Paul writes, "For we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:30-32).

The report on divorce and remarriage summarized the point this way: "The basic purpose of God for marriage was especially illuminated and enriched by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul declares that the creational institution of marriage, which affirms that husband and wife become one flesh (Eph. 5:31), contains a mystery (Eph. 5:32). This mystery has now been revealed in the union of Christ and his church. . . . Thus marriage is fully understood and achieves its deepest meaning only when it reflects this spiritual union of Christ and his church."¹⁶

The report rightly explains the meaning of the word *mystery* in the context of Paul's other uses of the word in the letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:9-10 Paul writes that God has "made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." By *mystery*, the 1980 report explains, "Paul refers to that which was not previously known or fully known but which has now been revealed in Jesus Christ."¹⁷

¹⁵ "Marriage Guidelines," p. 470.

¹⁶ "Marriage Guidelines," p. 469.

¹⁷ "Marriage Guidelines," p. 469.

The word appears again in Ephesians 3:3-4, 6, 9. Paul refers to "the mystery made known to me by revelation . . . which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets . . . that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (3:3-6). Here again the word *mystery* refers to something that was for a long time not understood, but that was finally revealed through the gospel. And here again the mystery points to God's purpose of bringing unity out of division, in this case unity between Jews and Gentiles in the one body of Christ.

Against this background, it is impossible not to see the same theme in Ephesians 5. Here again we have two different things being brought together in a unity that is identified in a certain sense with the body of Christ. "For we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church" (5:30-32).

The mystery, then, is that in the union of male and female in marriage, described in Genesis 2:24, God intended to reveal something about his purpose of uniting humanity with Christ. People could not have known this before it was revealed through Christ, but now it has been revealed. And now believers are called to practice this meaning in their marriages. As the 1980 report puts it, "By 'mystery' Paul means that in Genesis 2:24 lies an unknown or not fully known intention of God which is now revealed in the relationship of Christ and his church. . . . Thus in the relationship (or marriage) of Christ to his people, *God actually fulfills the basic goal or purpose of the institution of marriage*"¹⁸ (emphasis added).

It is therefore no accident that in its culminating passages the New Testament describes the ultimate union of God with his people as a wedding feast. John describes the new Jerusalem as "a bride beautifully dressed for her husband," Christ (Rev. 21:2). The angel describes the city descended from heaven as "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). Outside that city, John tells us, are "the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (22:15). Indeed, "the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!,' because they know that this is the wedding for which they were created, and for which they have been yearning all along.

This truth is of the profoundest significance for a biblical theology of sexuality and marriage. God's creation of human beings in his image as male and female (Gen. 1:27) was designed to point toward his ultimate purpose for human beings in communion with God in Christ. Thus sexuality was designed all along to reflect this communion. Marriage itself will pass away, but its ultimate meaning will endure in the kingdom and family of God. One need not be married in this life in order to enjoy this ultimate reality.

As the 1980 report puts it, "Scripture indicates that marriage is not necessary as a Christian obligation, nor is it necessary for personal fulfillment. All that is necessary for discipleship and fulfillment is membership in the family of God by which one participates in the marriage between Christ and his church."¹⁹ It might even be said that those who choose the path of celibacy

¹⁸ "Marriage Guidelines," p. 470.

¹⁹ "Marriage Guidelines," p. 471.

for the sake of the kingdom, such as Jesus and Paul, are able to anticipate this ultimate reality in a particularly focused way (1 Cor. 7:32-35).

This does not mean that marriage and family are in any sense less worthy of Christians. It does mean, however, that they find their “highest goal and ultimate purpose” in serving “the establishment and welfare of the family of God.” Thus “marriage and family are not ends in themselves. When marriage and family become ends in themselves or serve only personal goals, they have become idols.”²⁰ This serves as a rebuke to people who are tempted to view marriage as the best life for Christians. It likewise serves as a rebuke to those who are tempted to view marriage as an entitlement that cannot be withheld from those who desire it. It reminds us that marriage cannot be altered at human whim because it is a gift from God grounded in God’s purposes from creation and fulfilled in God’s purposes in Christ.

IV. Tentative plan for the final report

In our final report, to be considered by Synod 2021, we intend to fully satisfy our mandate by adding two additional sections.

The first and larger section will explore numerous issues of human sexuality facing the church today, potentially including, in varying degrees of detail, hookup culture, premarital sex, cohabitation, singleness, celibacy, polyamory, pornography, sexual assault, sexual harassment, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, gender dysphoria, disorders of sex development, and gender transitioning. On some of these topics (pornography, homosexuality, gender dysphoria, disorders of sex development, and gender transitioning) we have already completed a significant portion of our work. Our tentative plan is to explore these issues in three parts: (1) an analysis of the issues in our current cultural context, (2) a presentation of scriptural teaching as it must shape our approach to each issue, and (3) proposals for pastoral care.

The second section will explore the confessional status of church teaching on sexuality in light of our current confessions and the teaching of Scripture. It will also consider the question of whether or not the church should consider adopting a new statement of faith on sexuality. For the purposes of this interim report, we would like the churches to study the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality (see Appendix below), which has recently been commended for consideration by churches and classes in the Reformed Church in America (<http://images.rca.org/docs/synod/GLCatechism.pdf>).

Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying
Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality

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²⁰ “Marriage Guidelines,” p. 471.

Appendix

Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality

1 Q: Is human sexuality a good thing or not?

A: It is good! We see in Scripture that God created us male and female as part of the creation order, that our sexuality is an inherent part of being human, and that our sexuality is part of what God calls “very good” in the beginning.¹

Moreover, God created man and woman as full partners, together bearing God’s image² and together receiving God’s blessing and call to “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth, and subdue it. rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that lives on the ground.”³

2 Q: But isn’t the body or the “flesh” the root cause of our sin and temptation?

A: Certainly not! Our sin problem is not ultimately a body or sex problem; it is a heart problem— we do not desire God as we should and so we desire other things in a way we should not.⁴

3 Q: May we then look to our bodies and sexual desires to learn what is right?

A: No. Our expressions of sexuality are distorted and twisted by sin. Sin warps us in many ways, including our desires, thoughts, and actions pertaining to our sexuality.

Because our sexuality is affected by the fall, we should not act on our desires, inclinations, or thoughts without first testing them by what Scripture teaches is honorable, right, pure, and lovely.⁵

4 Q: So Scripture is the source from which we learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in our sexual lives?

A: Yes. Scripture is the infallible rule for our lives.⁶ This means that we look to it to understand who God is and who we are called to be as God’s people.

In this world, we are called to test all teaching about marriage and sexuality by Scripture, and we must not put human writings,

¹ Gen. 1:31

² Gen. 1:27

³ Gen. 1:28

⁴ Jer. 17:9; James 1:14-15

⁵ Phil. 4:8

⁶ Belgic Confession, art. 7

custom or tradition,
the majority opinion,
the thinking of our own time and place,
or even past decisions of the church,
above the truth of God,
For God's truth is above everything.⁷

5 Q: Who should we consider our family?

A: Though many may consider their biological family their first family,
Jesus teaches us that those who are his disciples,
who are united by one Lord and one baptism into God's
covenant people,
should be considered our primary family.

6 Q: Does this mean our earthly families are unimportant?

A: No. In fact, Scripture teaches us that we are to honor our parents,⁸
and that we should faithfully love our spouses and children.⁹

Nevertheless, we are called to seek first the kingdom of God.¹⁰
God's mission and vocation must shape all my relationships.
Though earthly families are good and a blessing,
they may become an idol if we make them our ultimate priority or
loyalty.
All earthly loyalties and obligations,
including those of family,
must be subject to the lordship of Jesus.

7 Q: Since marriage and family are good, is it necessary to be married?

A: No. During his earthly ministry,
Jesus showed us that true human fulfillment does not need to
include marriage or sex.
Yet, the life of Jesus most certainly included close, intimate
relationships with those he called family.

8 Q: But why do many people in my church expect young adults to get married and raise a family?

A: The goal for all Christians is not marriage,
but, whether married or single,
to live decent and chaste lives.¹¹

In the beginning, God blessed marriage and he calls many Christians
to live out their discipleship in the context of marriage.

⁷ Belgic Confession, art. 7

⁸ Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1

⁹ Eph. 5:21-6:4

¹⁰ Matt. 6:33; Matt. 12:46-50

¹¹ Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 108

Nevertheless, Christians sometimes idolize marriage and family and promote the unbiblical teaching that a person can only find fulfillment and happiness in the context of a marriage and family.

However, this expectation is contrary to Scripture, which teaches that many Christians will be unmarried,¹² whether through choice or circumstance, and that they live a true, fully human life, as our Savior did.

9 Q: How then should we view the single, celibate life?

A: Singleness can serve as a sign and reminder to married people that our most basic calling is to seek first the kingdom of God,¹³ not our earthly families.

In addition, the single person's life points us ahead to the life to come, when we will neither marry nor be given in marriage.¹⁴

10 Q: Why did God institute marriage between man and woman?

A: Though many see marriage simply as a path to personal fulfillment, happiness, or self-realization, or a relationship that may be dissolved if they are dissatisfied, Scripture teaches that God instituted marriage between a man and woman as a sign of Christ and the church,¹⁵ as a state of mutual help for life's journey,¹⁶ as a relationship in which married Christians are sanctified,¹⁷ and in order to provide for the continuation of the human race¹⁸ and the raising of children into a life of faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁹

11 Q: Should we view the duties and obligations of marriage and family as a hindrance to the truly spiritual life?

A: No. When properly understood, we see that faithful devotion to one's spouse and faithful care of one's children are not merely "earthly" or "natural" matters but are in fact key elements of a faithful walk with Christ.²⁰

Furthermore, the married person is a sign and reminder to single people that, just as a husband or wife has obligations to their spouse and family, so we all have obligations to the family of God.

¹² 1 Cor. 7:29-40

¹³ 1 Cor. 7:33-35; Matt. 6:33

¹⁴ Matt. 22:30

¹⁵ Eph. 5:31-32

¹⁶ Gen. 2:18

¹⁷ John 13:34; Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:3; Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5; 1 Cor. 7:4-5; Gal. 6:2; 1 Thess. 5:11

¹⁸ Gen. 1:28; Ps. 127:3

¹⁹ Deut. 6:4-9

²⁰ Eph. 5:21-6:4

12 Q: What is the meaning of sexual union?

A: God created man and woman to be able to unite not only our bodies, but our very lives and selves as husband and wife.

In marriage, husbands and wives give themselves completely to one another,
and the one-flesh sexual union embodies the fact
that these two persons are no longer two, but one flesh.²¹

13 Q: But isn't sexual union just a physical act?

A: No. It is certainly more than that.

In fact, when we reduce sex to a merely physical or biological act, we end up reducing other image-bearers of God to mere objects to be used.

We see this abuse and hatred of our neighbor all around us,²²
in pornography,
prostitution,
rape,
promiscuity,
cohabitation apart from marriage,
and sexual union outside of the covenant of marriage.

14 Q: How, then, should we understand sexual union?

A: Sexual union is a part of the total giving of oneself—
body and soul, indeed one's whole self—
to one's spouse,
just as God in Christ gave himself completely to his bride, the
Church.²³

And just as God is a faithful God who gives himself to us in covenant,²⁴
so sexual union is a covenantal act
that commits one to faithful, lifelong love to one's spouse.²⁵

Sexual union is also meant to be a free act, entered into without coercion,
but freely and graciously,
as God in Christ freely and graciously loves us.²⁶

²¹ Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31

²² Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 5

²³ Phil. 2:5-8

²⁴ Ex. 34:6-7

²⁵ Mal. 2:16.

²⁶ Rom. 8:32

And finally, God created husband and wife so that
they fruitfully participate in the miracle of new life.²⁷
Just as God's life and creativity brought us forth,²⁸
so children are not to be seen as a nuisance or impediment
to the marriage relationship
but as gifts of God,²⁹
disciples to be raised in the training and instruction of the Lord.³⁰

15 Q: Does Scripture limit marriage and sexual union to a husband and wife?

A: Scripture consistently teaches that the difference
between a woman and man in marriage is essential
to properly represent, symbolically, Christ and the church,
to the one-flesh act of sexual union
and one-flesh relationship of covenantal marriage,
and for the bringing of children into the world.

In Scripture, bodies matter.

We are saved by the body of Christ, broken for us,
and his blood, shed for our sins.

Without Christ's body, we cannot be saved.

Furthermore, in the sacraments, we see that the material elements matter.

God does not merely give us grace through invisible means
but gives us visible signs and seals,
which are not empty and hollow signs
but which have their truth in Jesus Christ,
without whom they would be nothing.³¹

In a similar way, bodies matter in marriage,
which is defined in part by the sexual difference
of male and female, who together—body and soul—bear the image
of God
and symbolize Christ and the church.

Thus, marriage is not defined merely by the will or desire of any
individual

but by the recognition that our Creator and Redeemer God has
instituted marriage

to take a certain form, with certain kinds of bodies:

"A man leaves his father and mother
and is united to his wife,
and they become one flesh."³²

²⁷ Gen. 1:28; Ps. 139:13-14

²⁸ Gen. 2:4-7, 18-22; Job 10:8-9.

²⁹ Ps. 127:3-5; Gen. 21:1; Gen. 30:22; 1 Sam. 1:19; Ps. 139:13-14

³⁰ Eph. 6:1-4; Deut. 6:4-9

³¹ Belgic Confession, art. 33

³² Gen. 2:24

16 Q: Does Scripture really condemn all same-sex sexual activity?

A: Yes. Scripture consistently and categorically condemns sexual activity between persons of the same sex as immoral. Genesis 1-2 presents the male-female relationship as God's design for marriage. The Torah given by God to Israel teaches that same-sex sexual activity is wrong.³³ Jesus re-affirms the teaching of Genesis on marriage, that marriage is between a man and woman.³⁴ The early church condemns same-sex sexual activity when they condemn "sexual immorality," a term that points back to Leviticus 18 and encompasses all forms of sexual sin,³⁵ and the New Testament writers re-affirm the sexual ethics of Torah, including specific condemnations of incest, adultery, and same-sex sexual activity.³⁶

17 Q: Does the Bible especially condemn same-sex sexual activity above other sins, sexual or otherwise?

A: No. Scripture never singles out same-sex sexual activity as a worse sin than others.

18 Q: What should characterize our attitudes and actions toward those who are same-sex attracted, whether inside or outside the church?

A. We must first remember that there is a difference between being same-sex attracted, and acting sexually on that attraction. Just as there is a difference between being attracted to people of the opposite sex, And acting sexually on that attraction.

Furthermore, though Scripture condemns sexual sin, it also condemns all forms of mockery, degrading words and thoughts, economic oppression, abuse, threats, and violence against anyone based on their sexual identity or activity.³⁷

Anyone involved in such behavior must repent and walk in obedience to Jesus' command to love.

³³ Lev. 18:22

³⁴ Matt. 19:1-10

³⁵ Acts 15:19-20

³⁶ 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 1 Tim. 1:10

³⁷ Belhar Confession, art. 4. Luke 6:31; Lev. 19:9-18; Prov. 6:16-19

**19 Q: What about those who fail to keep fully Scripture's teaching
on marriage and sexuality? How should we view them?**

A: We must first remember that "they" are us!³⁸

We are all sinners
saved by God's extravagant grace.

We must therefore see all people with the eyes of Jesus,
who looks on us with compassion.

We must also remember that we should not expect people who are not
disciples of Jesus to act as though they are.

Indeed, Scripture teaches us that we should expect to interact and
associate with those who are idolaters and sexually immoral
as part of our daily life in this world.³⁹

But as disciples of Jesus, we are also called
to teach, rebuke, correct, and even discipline one another,⁴⁰
for we know that without discipline,
we dare not call ourselves the church of Jesus Christ.⁴¹

And we do not love one another in this way merely
for the sake of following the rules or keeping human traditions
but because God's life-giving Spirit empowers and equips us
for a life of faith and gratitude,⁴²
for which we were made and to which we are called.

³⁸ Rom. 2:1-4

³⁹ 1 Cor. 5:9-10

⁴⁰ Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-11

⁴¹ Belgic Confession, art. 29

⁴² Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32 & 33

I. Background and mandate

The establishment of the Synod Review Task Force (SRTF) was approved by Synod 2016 (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 826-27). The committee formed according to the parameters for composition and membership delineated by synod, 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. Steven Timmermans (staff), and Mr. Kraig Van Houten.

The mandate of the SRTF, as approved by Synod 2016, has been

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 from the work of the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture (TFRSC) established by Synod 2011. Included in the final TFRSC report in 2015 was a recommendation to form a subsequent task force to conduct a meaningful review of synod. The TFRSC wanted to include an analysis of the structure and process of synod in their work but realized that expanding their mandate to include those considerations would not be feasible within the time allocated for their study. The timing of the work of the Synod Review Task Force served well to correlate with the transition from the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA to the Council of Delegates in 2017.

II. Methodology

The SRTF 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 and beyond the Reformed tradition through ecumenical and interchurch dialogue. For the purpose of comparative analysis, the SRTF studied the procedures of the major assemblies of the following denominations: Reformed Church in America, Evangelical Covenant Church, Presbyterian Church in America, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Mennonite Church Canada, and Dutch Reformed Church. In addition, the task force took note of certain procedures and protocols adhered to in the ecumenical meeting structures of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Canadian Council of Churches.

Consideration was given to conducting a full-scale survey of the opinions of previous synodical delegates, with the assistance of the Calvin College Center for Social Research. However, the estimated cost of such a study was prohibitive, and the SRTF concluded that the required data could be obtained through other means. The task force made a detailed analysis of the evaluations submitted by delegates and advisers to Synods 2012, 2014, and 2016. In addition, comprehensive audits were conducted with regard to time allocations for Synods 2016 and 2017 (see Appendices A and B). To obtain additional information, surveys went out to the clerks of all classes of

the CRCNA. In addition, the task force interviewed several denominational leaders who have had extensive experience with the various levels of synod, with the previous Board of Trustees of the CRCNA (now Council of Delegates), and with the TFRSC.

To conduct its work, the task force met together in person on October 31, 2016; February 24 and October 6, 2017; and June 26, 2018. In the interest of cost savings, the group met by video-conference call on December 9, 2016; April 28 and November 17, 2017; and February 1 and May 15, 2018.

III. Overview of essential considerations

A. Theological principles pertaining to Church Order and synodical structure and authority

The adoption of synodical structures and procedures must be governed by a well-defined set of principles reflecting the essential characteristics of Reformed church order and synodical structure and authority. To that end we offer the following observations of principle.

Reformed church polity has historically emphasized that ecclesiastical structures and protocols ought to reflect a biblically defensible theological foundation. Within the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) that truth is reflected in the Introduction to the Church Order¹:

More than a contractual set of regulations or simply guidelines, the Church Order is really a record of our covenanting together within this denominational fellowship. As leaders and members and congregations in the CRCNA, we promise to use these regulations to order our life together as a particular part of the body of Christ. And that covenant commitment is based on our belief that Christ is the head of the church and we, as Christ's body, must reflect Christ in how we function, choose leaders, assemble, deliberate over issues, carry out the ministries and mission of the church, and hold one another accountable for all these things.

Key to this perspective is the covenantal nature of ecclesiastical authority, through which lines of servanthood and authority in the church reflect the ultimate authority of Jesus Christ as the sovereign ruler.

In a subsequent paragraph, the Church Order Introduction also cites the biblical foundation that motivates the church's goal for the orderly conduct of its business:

All this is in keeping with the Scripture verse quoted in Article 1 of the Church Order, "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." This statement in 1 Corinthians 14:40 rises out of a concern about disorder in worship, but it also highlights a New Testament principle that Christians are to behave in ways that are fitting for followers of Christ. The Church Order applies that principle to the organization of the church and the checks and balances that seek to ensure that fittingness.

1. The headship of Jesus Christ

The quotations included in the preceding paragraphs demonstrate that ecclesiastical authority is understood in the CRCNA as being inherent in Jesus Christ as the head of the church. Delegated authority in church leadership is derived from Christ's original headship. Accordingly, the system of church governance, of which synod is a part, is, strictly

¹ To download the latest available version of Church Order, visit crcna.org/SynodResources.

speaking, neither democratic nor monarchic. It is, rather, a reflection of Christocracy, which may be defined as a governance structure based on the principle that the teachings of Christ as the head and ultimate authority of the church form the basis for the derived authority of the various levels of church government (i.e., council, classis, and synod).

2. Delegation of authority to assemblies

The form of church governance described here should not be viewed as a form of hierarchy “from the top down.” When correctly adhered to, biblical and Reformed principles provide a safeguard against improper forms of ecclesiological hierarchy. For clarity, it is helpful to summarize a number of these principles, including Christian servanthood, recognition of a diversity of leadership gifts, the parity of ecclesiastical offices, the priesthood of all believers, and the application of these principles in various circumstances and cultural contexts.

3. Authority through servanthood

Servanthood is exemplified in the earthly ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ and ought to be reflected in the offices of the church. Jesus differentiated between (1) the practice of rulers who lorded it over the people and (2) the servant-type ministry to which he called his followers. Highlighting his own commitment to humble servitude, Jesus stated that he “did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (see Matt. 20:25-28). Upon that principle, he also instructed his followers that whoever “wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:44). Leadership in the church, therefore, is a matter of servanthood modeled on the sacrificial love of Christ as the head of the church (Col. 1:18; 2:19; Eph. 4:15; 5:23). The principle of servant leadership is illustrated through many powerful biblical images, not the least of which include the examples Jesus gives when he, the divine King, rides humbly on a donkey (Matt. 21:4-5) and when he performs the lowly task of footwashing (John 13:1-17).

4. Recognition of different gifts

The affirmation of a diversity of leadership gifts in the body of Christ constitutes a biblical teaching that is essential for a correct understanding of church governance (see 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Thess. 5:12-13). Taken together, these passages describe the church as an institution in which the leadership offices create opportunity for the meaningful employment of the spiritual gifts of all members.

5. Parity of offices

The Church Order of the CRCNA follows a biblical and confessional principle that affirms the parity of ecclesiastical offices. “The church recognizes the offices of minister of the Word, elder, deacon, and commissioned pastor. These offices differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor” (Church Order Art. 2; see also Belgic Confession, Art. 31).

It is now generally emphasized that there is not only parity between officebearers within a given office of the church but also between the respective offices, with a diversity of mandates specific to the offices.

Recognition of the special offices of the church does not contradict the Reformed doctrine that emphasizes the priesthood of all believers. All who are true followers of Christ share in his anointing (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12). Nevertheless, for the orderly structure and ministry of the church, some are called and ordained to special offices (Belgic Confession, Art. 30-31).

6. Varying circumstances may warrant changes to the Church Order

The Introduction to the Church Order also recognizes that within Reformed church polity there is a long-standing tradition to permit change to occur when it is warranted by new circumstances and the envisioned modifications fall within the bounds of biblical guidelines.

Our commitment to change and adjust our practices comes from one of the theological fathers of our church, John Calvin, who wrote,

But because [our Lord] did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages), here we must take refuge in those general rules which he has given, that whatever the necessity of the church will require for order and decorum should be tested against these. Lastly, because he has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe (*Institutes*, IV.X.30).

7. Cultural contexts and the application of the Church Order

As the CRCNA conducts a formal review of the structure and function of synod, it is important to take into consideration that these theological principles are contextualized differently in various cultural components within the denomination, especially in Asian, Hispanic, Indigenous nation, and African American contexts. Our commitment to respect and unity within the denomination demands awareness of and sensitivity to these dynamics of authority and leadership as we seek to develop and embrace protocols based on biblical principles. Our goal is to strive for synodical procedures that will unify the denomination through common practices.

B. *Synod: What it is and what it does*

1. What is synod?

The CRCNA *synod* is an ecclesiastical assembly of delegates that provides governance and leadership for the members, congregations, classes, agencies, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The term *synod* is derived from the Greek σύνοδος (*sýnodos*), meaning “assembly” or “meeting.”

2. What does synod do?

The CRCNA *synod* fills an essential denomination-wide governance and leadership role alongside the regionally delegated authority of the church *classes* and the locally elected church *councils*.

a. The functions of synod include, but are not necessarily restricted to, the following primary responsibilities:

- 1) Elect officers to lead the synod meeting.
- 2) Provide a context for deliberative assembly, both in the form of advisory groups and in plenary meetings.
- 3) Receive reports from the various denominational agencies, ministries, and institutions and oversee their mandates, bylaws, and articles of incorporation, relying on the Council of Delegates, as specified in the COD Governance Handbook.
- 4) Receive and act upon the reports of study committees and task forces appointed by synod.
- 5) Appoint representatives to denominational boards, committees, and other working groups.
- 6) Appoint or ratify the appointment of certain staff and leadership positions, including seminary faculty, college and seminary presidents, and the executive director of the denomination.
- 7) Provide direction and instruction for denominational administration through the office of the executive director.
- 8) Decide on issues of Church Order, liturgical forms, and confessional matters (cf. Church Order Art. 47).
- 9) Review denominational budgets, provide financial oversight to the agencies and ministries of the denomination through adoption of ministry-share formulas, and approve annual ministry-share amounts.
- 10) Receive, discuss, and process overtures, communications, and appeals from classes, congregations, and individuals.
- 11) Adjudicate judicial code matters and address appeals and recommendations brought before synod by way of the Judicial Code Committee.
- 12) Supervise and advance ecumenical relations by way of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee.
- 13) Oversee the archival work of the denomination by way of the Historical Committee.
- 14) Approve candidates for ministry in the CRCNA and oversee other work of the Candidacy Committee.
- 15) Ratify the appointment of synodical deputies and review and approve their work.

b. Secondary functions of synod include the following:

- 1) Conduct orientation for all delegates and advisers.
- 2) Provide a denomination-wide context for worship, celebration, and fellowship.
- 3) Create opportunities for ministry-related learning via seminars, workshops, and discussion groups.
- 4) Occasionally make known, via letters or other forms of communication, the denomination's position on current issues or affairs.

C. *Observations regarding the efficiency of synod*

A thorough analysis of the evaluation forms completed by previous synodical delegates and advisers provided the SRTF an objective data pool to

assess the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding the function and efficiency of synod. In general, over the years past delegates have expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the way that synod operates. Delegates have generally concluded that being part of synod was inspirational and provided them with an experience that increased their appreciation for the complex dynamics of denominational administration, life, and ministry.

Despite the high level of satisfaction with the performance of synod, there are some discernible areas for possible improvement. Proposed enhancements gleaned from the evaluation forms of past delegates tend to cluster around a few repeated themes. Some, especially first-time delegates and advisers, find that the extensive agenda and fast pace of synod present a challenge for them to be suitably and confidently prepared to contribute meaningfully to discussions in advisory committee and plenary settings. Additional concerns that arise perennially in the synod evaluations include the matter of delegate speeches that seem unnecessarily long in debates on issues, and the fact that certain delegates speak repeatedly.

Numerous past delegates have raised concerns pertaining to possible improvements that could be made in the election of synodical officers, clarity on some rules of synodical procedure, and the desirability of enhanced training for synodical participants. Leadership training is a key concept in effective administration and efficient time management. Synod would be served well through the refinement of rules pertaining to the election of officers, their specific duties, and certain provisions that could be made with regard to advanced training and preparation for the leadership of synod. To this end, the SRTF is proposing a number of recommendations that pertain to the selection of synod's officers, refinement of their roles, and provisions for training.

At times there has been confusion as to whether the denomination's Rules for Synodical Procedure (RSP) are intended to harmonize with Robert's Rules of Order. While the RSP have much in common with Robert's Rules, they do not strictly adhere to them. There are aspects in the RSP that reflect the nature of an ecclesiastical assembly and discussion, and it is not necessary to make our synodical rules conform to other protocols. Nevertheless, based on experience from previous synods, there are some areas in which the current RSP may be considered ambiguous or lacking in specificity. Accordingly, to assist in the orderly conduct of synod, amendments and clarifications to the RSP are being recommended.

In addition to the concerns mentioned above, the SRTF is aware of a growing desire that synod include increased opportunity for vision casting—if not annually, then at least occasionally. While it is not consistent with the governance purpose and goals of synod to structure it as a visioning rally, and while there have been other formats for visioning (e.g., national and binational gatherings such as *Inspire* for CRCNA members²), synod nevertheless should be a place to celebrate, refine, and reflect on the vision of the CRCNA. For example, Synod 2015 approved the implementation of five ministry priorities³ as a strategy for focusing and organizing the work of the

² Inspire 2017 was held August 3-5, 2017, in Detroit, Michigan. A similar Inspire 2019 is scheduled for August 1-3, 2019, in Windsor, Ontario.

³ Faith Formation, Servant Leadership, Global Mission, Mercy and Justice, and Gospel Proclamation and Worship (see crcna.org/ministries).

CRCNA, and it called for annual updates on how these priorities are being developed (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680).

Periodically scheduling a “themed synod” could provide a way to focus on a specific aspect of the vision or calling of the church. At such synods, the business items that are necessarily handled annually could be incorporated, and yet a significant percentage of the agenda could be allocated to and structured around a specific theme. In order to make themed synods feasible, consideration would likely have to be given to scheduling so that a themed synod wouldn’t overlap with the presentation of major study committee reports in a given year. Consequently, a themed synod could focus on the topic and results of a particular study committee.

D. Additional considerations

1. The SRTF explored but did not choose to promote having synod follow a three-year cycle in which it might meet annually for two years and then skip a year till its next meeting, thus allowing room for binational gatherings on the “off” years. While recognizing the potential advantage of cost savings that such a system might provide (taking into account decreasing ministry-share income), the task force also recognized potential disadvantages that could develop—for example, not having annual decisions on matters such as candidacy, creating more distance with congregations by having fewer meetings of synod, increasing the challenge of planning for themed synods, and relegating more decisions to the Council of Delegates in years when synod would not gather.
2. Finding an ideal formula for the location of synod has been an ongoing challenge that calls for the balancing of various pros and cons, including cost containment. The expense of holding synod varies annually, based on a number of factors that include travel costs, the size of synod’s agenda, and the duration of synod (see cost comparisons in Appendix C). Increased travel costs can be anticipated when synod meets outside of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Hosting synod regularly in central locations such as Grand Rapids or near Chicago tends to optimize cost efficiency. Fiscal stewardship is a major consideration as the denomination continues to struggle with implications of cost containment. There is also merit, however, in periodically hosting synod in other locations across the continent, particularly because we are a binational denomination. Synod is refreshed by connecting with various regions of the CRCNA, and various regions of the CRC feel more engaged and a part of the denomination when synod meets in their area.
3. Given the financial constraints that the denomination is experiencing, reflecting an ongoing pattern that is not likely to be reversed in the foreseeable future, synod may soon need to address more aggressive cost-cutting measures. At this time it is relevant already to entertain questions about the advisability of requesting that classes participate in some cost-sharing with respect to delegates’ participation at synod. The relevance of this issue is underscored by the reality that in a number of classes, not due to financial hardship but based on decisions of principle and choice, some congregations are currently paying ministry shares at a level well below the denominational average (or mean). In the opinion of the SRTF,

synod costs should continue to be covered mainly by the denomination's administrative office, but it may also be time to introduce the contribution of a modest offset from classes in the form of a delegate registration fee. A registration fee could help to enhance a sense of ownership of denominational matters by classes and their local congregations. Such a measure could be calibrated by (1) reducing or waiving fees for classes experiencing financial hardship and/or (2) increasing fees for classes whose ministry-share contributions are significantly below the norm.

4. The SRTF notes that a number of classes have adopted measures to provide a degree of remuneration for loss of income incurred by lay members who serve as synodical delegates or advisers. It is not the prerogative of synod to prescribe such provisions by all classes. Nevertheless, synod could encourage all classes to consider making such arrangements reflecting local situations. Classes that do so not only provide valuable assistance to their delegates but also demonstrate the value that they place on the time taken and efforts made by their representatives at synod. Many classes indicate that they have difficulty in finding enough elder and deacon delegates to attend synod, partly due to the prospect of income loss and to a lack of time these officebearers have available for being away from their jobs.
5. The SRTF agrees with feedback from synodical delegates that it is desirable to replace the term *fraternal delegate* with *ecumenical delegate* or *ecumenical representative*. *Ecumenical*, as a neutral term, is a fitting replacement for the male-oriented language of *fraternal*. These thoughts were communicated to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC), which at its meeting of January 29, 2018, concurred and has decided to replace the term *fraternal delegate* with *ecumenical delegate*. Synod 2018 was made aware of this development via the EIRC report, and it was duly noted (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 480).
6. Over the years many groups, including young adult representatives and ethnic minority persons, have made valuable contributions to the spirit and discussions of synod, despite barriers such as inexperience or language challenges that inhibit full engagement in synodical deliberations. It may be desirable to facilitate deeper involvement by such representatives in the future. We note that in the Reformed Church in America seminarians often serve as young adult representatives. Perhaps the Candidacy Committee could give consideration to development of an educational component for seminarians at synod, to assist them in learning what synod is and what it does, and in thinking of themselves as future synodical delegates. Candidates are already presented at synod, and that involvement could be expanded to include educational sessions while present at synod. Spending more time at synod in a learning context would help new ministers to become effective synodical delegates in the future.

Adequate training of delegates includes more than providing a basic orientation to the way synod functions. It is also important that all delegates feel empowered to participate in the deliberations of synod, whether in advisory committees or in plenary sessions. All delegates should be encouraged to be aware of power dynamics that at times come to bear on

synodical discussions. For that reason, sensitivity training prior to synod could contribute to fostering inclusive and gracious conversations.⁴ For a congenial, constructive, and broadly participatory engagement, various formats for dialogue could be considered, especially in discussing topics that are expected to be controversial. More intentional investment in training may also assist ethnic and women advisers and young adult representatives in gaining greater confidence to participate in synodical procedures and discussions. Assignment of on-site guides or mentors could be considered as a positive step in this direction.

7. Developments in social media have presented a challenge in maintaining the integrity of the deliberative nature of synod. Live streaming provides the opportunity for social media contact, influence, and strategizing to be communicated by nondelegate observers to delegates at synod during the course of deliberations. This can cause interference with the deliberative nature of the delegated assembly. One way to address this issue is through a time delay in live streaming. The SRTF accordingly considered recommending a time delay of thirty minutes. However, a cost analysis demonstrates that this would entail significant expense, such as technological equipment rental (since purchase price is estimated at \$20,000) and the requisite personnel from a production company (for an annual cost of \$6,000), necessitating an increase in the synod budget (borne by ministry-share funding). Given the significant costs that a time-delay system would incur, we are instead proposing that the orientation for all delegates and advisers should address the matter of appropriate boundaries regarding social media interaction between delegates and nondelegates during advisory committee discussions and plenary sessions of synod. The goal is to protect the integrity of the deliberative process while synod meets. Though such guidelines may be impossible to enforce, they should at least be emphasized annually as a matter of conscience for all delegates and advisers.
8. Synod 2016 assigned the SRTF to provide advice regarding an overture from Classis Hamilton to move the distribution date of synodical study committee reports to churches from November 1 to September 15 (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 547; *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 831). The SRTF took into consideration the fall and winter meeting dates of all the classes of the CRCNA and noted that a majority of the classes meet in September. For these classes, a September 15 distribution would not help the congregations deal with study committee reports prior to fall classis meetings. Further, adjusting the date for distribution to the churches from November 1 to September 15 would require that the reports from study committees be received in the denominational office by midsummer to facilitate preparation for distribution by September 15. In short, any benefit that might be attained for the churches by moving the distribution date to mid-September to create a longer study time in the fall would be offset by a disadvantage of restricted working time for the study committees and the denominational office.

⁴ One option could be a training exercise similar to “The Power Flower”—a tool to increase understanding of personal power and privilege.

IV. Recommendations⁵

Based on its learnings from evaluations and discussions, the Synod Review Task Force presents the following recommendations for consideration by Synod 2019:

1. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Thea N. Leunk, chair; Dr. William T. Koopmans, reporter; and Rev. Kathleen S. Smith, recording secretary, when matters pertaining to the Synod Review Task Force are discussed.
2. That synod recognize that in general the current format for conducting synod, along with the typical agenda template, has served the denomination well.

Grounds:

- a. Careful scrutiny and tabulation of results from synodical delegate evaluation forms over a period of years indicates a high degree of general satisfaction with respect to the format and function of synod.
 - b. Proposed changes to the format or function of synod ought to be in the order of fine-tuning rather than radical revamping.
 - c. Most of the components currently included on the agenda for synod properly belong there.
3. That synod follow a cycle of annual meetings taking place in Grand Rapids for three years in succession (one of which could be at another midwestern location nearby, such as Chicago) followed by a fourth-year meeting in a region elsewhere in North America where CRC congregations are clustered, with contributions to the additional costs of the fourth-year meeting to be drawn from classes without financial hardship.

Grounds:

- a. Good stewardship is attained when synod meets in Grand Rapids (or a nearby midwestern city, such as Chicago) due to hosting/travel costs and the role/location of staff who serve synod.
 - b. Synod is refreshed by connecting with various areas of the CRC in both Canada and the United States, and various regions of the CRC feel more engaged and a part of the CRC when synod meets in their area. Additional resources (for delegate travel) from classes would allow for good stewardship when synod meets outside Grand Rapids (or a midwestern location nearby).
4. That synod meetings continue to be supported by ministry shares (as managed by the denomination's administrative office) with the introduction of a modest contribution from classes in the form of a "delegate registration fee" and partial payment of travel costs.

Note: Such contributions would be waived for classes experiencing financial hardship and would be increased for classes without financial hardship who

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all recommendations are, upon approval, assumed to go into effect immediately for implementation at subsequent synods.

provide less than 50 percent of the overall denominational average (mean) percentage of denominational ministry-share.

Grounds:

- a. Such contributions could help to enhance a sense of ownership of denominational matters by classes and their local congregations.
- b. It is important that consideration be made for classes experiencing financial hardship.
5. That synod encourage classes to develop and / or maintain policies through which the classis would provide remuneration to delegates who are financially disadvantaged through service to synod. Each classis can determine a fitting amount of remuneration on the basis of its location.

Grounds:

- a. The Rules for Synodical Procedure include such a policy for advisers to synod.
- b. Some classes already have such policies in place and can provide samples.
- c. More persons are likely to be able to serve as delegates to synod if remuneration is available.
6. That synod arrange for a volunteer on-site mentor / guide and offer that person's service to young adult representatives and ethnic minority persons (advisers or delegates) to familiarize them with synodical procedures, to assist them in preparing to actively participate in synodical sessions, and to help them process their learning at synod. The mentor / guide would not have a voice or vote at synod.

Grounds:

- a. Such a low-cost program would increase the benefit of these representatives' and advisers' involvement at synod.
- b. Such a program would increase the denomination's investment in young people and new leaders who may be encountering language, experience, and / or cultural barriers.
- c. Intentional investment in having people learn how the church works and in diminishing language and cultural differences would be of benefit to the denomination. Ethnic minority and young adult leaders who benefit will become better able to contribute to the church as leaders in the future.
7. That synod create a process, to begin in 2020, of selecting at the end of synod each year a president, a vice-all, and a clerk to serve the following synod, with the following provisions:
 - a. Three new officers would be selected each year for the following synod. A president pro tem would no longer be required at synod.
 - b. In order to encourage diversity of gender, ethnicity, and nationality at each synod and over time, a ranked-choice voting process would not be used.
 - c. The process of surveying synodical delegates regarding availability and willingness to serve as officers would continue to be used.

- d. Officers chosen for the next synod would come to that synod as part of their classis delegation. If an elected officer of synod moved from one classis to another in the intervening year, that person would be part of the delegation of his or her new classis.
- e. If the term of an elder or deacon chosen to be an officer of synod is due to expire before the next synod, that officebearer's term would be extended to ensure service at the next synod. Local duties and responsibilities as an officebearer would be determined by the local council.
- f. In the year leading up to the synod at which the officers would serve, they would
 - function as the program committee of synod, which makes plans and assignments and provides advice for staff for the upcoming synod,
 - attend Council of Delegates meetings for informational purposes and with an advisory voice, but not as voting delegates (see Appendix D for a cost estimate).
 - participate in training related to synodical governance and procedures, provided by the CRC's executive director and parliamentarian.
- g. In the event that the president-elect or clerk-elect is unable to serve at the next synod, the vice-all would take his or her place, and a new vice-all would be elected at the start of the next synod, based on a survey of delegates to that synod. If the vice-all-elect selected by the previous synod is unable to serve at the next synod, a new vice-all would be elected at the start of the next synod.

Grounds:

- a. This plan would result in more experienced officers at synod, enabling them to be prepared to lead well the following year.
 - b. Election of a vice-all allows for an alternate to either the president or the clerk, should the need arise for either to step aside.
 - c. The current problem of advisory committee chairpersons and reporters being removed from committees because of synod-officer elections would be eliminated.
 - d. This plan would allow time for mentoring and training of officers on procedural skills and / or content knowledge.
8. That synod no longer elect a second clerk as an officer of synod but have a staff member take minutes in close proximity to the clerk.
- Grounds:*
- a. Two clerks are no longer necessary with current staff support and use of technology.
 - b. Accessibility to the officers by the staff member taking minutes would be extremely helpful.
9. That synod instruct the COD to periodically recommend a plan for a "themed agenda" or "themed synod" in which, alongside indispensable components of a typical synod agenda, the primary focus would be on a

visioning or leadership theme germane to the health and growth of the entire denomination.

Grounds:

- a. This provision would allow synod to schedule proactive visionary leadership for the denomination.
 - b. Setting regularly scheduled themed synods would provide a framework, in consideration of major study committee reports, to focus intentionally on areas of ministry leadership that are essential to the denomination's overall ministry plan.
10. That synod follow a set meeting schedule that includes the following:
- a. Begins with orientation exclusively for the chairs and reporters of advisory committees the evening before synod convenes in preparation for advisory committee meetings.
 - b. Provides orientation for all (not just first-time) delegates and advisers prior to the convening session of synod.
 - c. Provides adjournment no later than mid-afternoon on the fourth day of plenary sessions, and possible deferment of unfinished items on the agenda to the following synod or to the Council of Delegates—the interim committee of synod—if necessary.

Grounds:

- a. Synod evaluations call for better orientation and a more definitive schedule determined for adjournment.
 - b. These changes would provide for a more effective operation of synod.
11. That synod include time for worship and prayer in its schedule in the following ways:
- a. Synod would begin each morning with a time of worship planned by a committee appointed by the program committee of synod and convened by the denominational Worship Ministries Office, with the exception of the final day when synod concludes with worship. The Synod Worship Planning Committee will be composed of a diverse group of delegates and advisers to synod and make use of the gifts of synod's attendees as much as possible to carry out worship.
 - b. The Synod Worship Planning Committee would also be responsible for planning the Sunday synodical worship service, using local congregations as much as possible in planning and implementing the service.
 - c. Prayer would be central to worship and become a more intentional feature of synod's work sessions.

Grounds:

- a. This recommendation seeks to achieve an appropriate balance of planning for worship before synod convenes and making use of the gifts of delegates and advisers to synod.

- b. Given recommendations that would result in discontinuing the appointment of a convening church/president pro tem of synod (see Recommendation 7 above), this plan would provide an alternative consistent with the overall approach to worship.
 - c. Synod evaluations, appropriately citing Scripture, call for more emphasis on prayer.
12. That synod organize its work each year to reflect the five ministry priorities adopted by Synod 2015.

Ground: Synod 2015 endorsed five “ministry priorities to strategically focus and adaptively organize the work of the Christian Reformed Church in North America . . .” (*Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 680).

13. That synod limit its agenda in any given year to include no more than two major study reports so that fuller and more thoughtful discussion can take place.

Ground: This recommendation serves as a response to concerns raised in the overture from Classis Hamilton to Synod 2016 (and assigned to this task force), requesting that synod “move the distribution date of synodical study committee reports to churches from November 1 to September 15.”

14. That synod adopt and implement the following changes to the Rules for Synodical Procedure (changes indicated by strikeout and underline):

- a. Amend the following introductory paragraph in section VIII as follows:

Our ecclesiastical assemblies “shall transact ecclesiastical matters only, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner,” as Article 28 of our Church Order stipulates. Our synods should therefore ~~not be bound to observe detailed parliamentary rules. These may be proper in other gatherings, but they do not fit into the pattern of ecclesiastical assemblies which demand a large be allowed some measure of freedom in discussion and action. However, a few agreed-upon general rules of order may serve a good purpose and are to be observed, as contained in this document, particularly in the following section regarding Rules of Order.~~

- b. Add the following new point 3 to section VIII, A:

3. Any report and decision addressed in executive or strict executive session should include a recommendation regarding what is to be included in the public record, subject to approval by the body.

- c. Add the following new points 4 and 5 to section VIII, C:

4. A motion to amend must be recognized as acceptable by the chair and seconded by a member of synod. Such a motion is open to debate.

5. If a minor amendment is judged properly before the assembly by the chair, is acceptable to the maker of the main motion, and finds no objections from any delegates, the chair may declare the amendment adopted (sometimes referred to as a "friendly amendment"). If the amendment is not acceptable to all, it shall be subject to debate and vote.
- d. Add the following changes to points 1 and 3 and insert a new point 4 in section VIII, D:
1. When synod deems it advisable, it may decide to table a motion temporarily. Tabling a motion implies that the assembly will resume consideration on the motion at a later hour or date.
A motion to table is not debatable.
 - [Point 2 is unchanged.]
 3. If synod prefers not to take action regarding a matter, it may adopt a motion to withhold action. A motion to withhold action is debatable.
 4. A motion to refer a matter to an advisory committee for further discussion and possible revision may be debated and amended.
- e. Add the following to section VIII, E:
- If any member is not satisfied with the ruling of the chair, the matter is referred to synod for decision. An objection to a ruling of the chair must be seconded in order to be considered and debated. The person presiding at the time of the challenge shall relinquish the chair until the body votes whether to sustain the ruling in question.
- f. Add the following to section VIII, G:
- At the request of one or more members of synod, a motion consisting of more than one part must be divided and voted upon separately, unless synod decides that this is not necessary. A call for division of a question must be seconded to be considered, and is not open to debate.
- Note:* The rules state that upon "the request of one or more members," the motion must be divided unless synod decides that is not necessary. Since there is no debate and the request does not need to be voted on, presumably synod would only decide that division is not necessary if the chair states that it is not necessary. A challenge to the chair on that matter would be put to a vote by the delegates.
- g. Add the following to section VIII, I, 1:
- A motion may be offered to *reconsider* the matter. The purpose of this motion is to propose a new discussion and a new vote. (The motion must be made by one who voted with the prevailing side when the decision was made.) A motion to reconsider must be

seconded to be considered, can be debated, cannot be amended, and requires a simple majority to pass.

Note: The intent of a motion to reconsider is to modify, not negate, a previous decision of the same synod.

h. Add the following to section VIII, I, 2:

A motion may be made to rescind a previous decision. The purpose of this motion is to annul or reverse a previous decision. (Rescinding applies to decisions taken by the synod in session; it does not apply to decisions taken by previous synods. A succeeding synod may alter the stand of a previous synod; it may reach a conclusion which is at variance with a conclusion reached by an earlier synod. In such cases the most recent decision invalidates all previous decisions in conflict with it.) A motion to rescind a previous decision made by the same assembly must be made and seconded by delegates who voted previously with the prevailing side. It can be debated and amended, and it requires a two-thirds majority to pass.

Note: In the case of rescinding, it is wise to require more than a simple majority to pass. Otherwise, if a decision passes by one or two votes, a person not in favor could convince two people who voted in favor of the motion to change their mind and the whole matter could be reversed.

i. Amend the following within section VIII, J:

[Points 1-4 are unchanged.]

5. When it is believed that a motion under consideration has been debated sufficiently, the president may propose cessation of debate. If a majority of synod sustains this proposal, discussion shall cease and the vote shall be taken. No further speakers will be allowed.
6. When any member of synod deems a matter to have been debated sufficiently, that delegate, without speaking for or against the main motion, may move to cease debate (also known as “calling the question”), close the discussion. Those who call the question move to cease debate shall be recognized in the same manner as others who gain the floor of synod; i.e., that is, by taking their turn on the list of those who have requested the privilege of the floor. The vote on the motion to cease debate is not debatable and shall be taken at once. Should a majority be in favor of ceasing debate, the vote on the matter before synod shall be taken only after those who had previously requested the floor have had the opportunity to address the main motion that is being discussed. However, once the motion to cease debate has been adopted by synod, no motion to amend the main motion will be permitted.

- j. Add a new section VIII, K regarding reports:

K. Precedence and Procedures for Addressing Reports

1. When there is a substantial difference between the recommendations in a report from a synodical study committee or task force and those of the advisory committee, the recommendations of the original committee report receive precedence for consideration by the assembly (cf. section VI, E, 2).
2. When there is a majority report and a minority report from the same advisory committee, the recommendations from the majority report are presented first, followed by a for-information reading of the recommendations from the minority report. Precedence for consideration is given to the majority report. A motion to table the majority report, or a defeat of the majority report's recommendations, would be required in order to move to a consideration of the minority report (cf. section VI, B, 2, e).

Note: With the adoption of the proposed new section VIII, K, the current sections VIII, K: Voting and VIII, L regarding changes to the rules, will be renumbered VIII, L and VIII, M respectively.

Ground for recommendations 14, a through 14, j: These changes reinforce the consistent use of the Rules for Synodical Procedure, provide clarifications of current practices that have not been fully described in the RSP, and will serve to ensure smooth procedures at synod.

15. That synod declare that the training of officers and the orientation of delegates and advisers include a basic review of the Rules for Synodical Procedure.
16. That synod add the following definition and descriptions of synod to the Rules for Synodical Procedure to explain why synod exists—what synod is and what it does—and include this statement in training materials as well:

Synod: What it is and what it does

What is synod?

The CRCNA *synod* is an ecclesiastical assembly of delegates that provides governance and leadership for the members, congregations, classes, agencies, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The term *synod* is derived from the Greek σύνοδος (*sýnodos*), meaning “assembly” or “meeting.”

What does synod do?

The CRCNA *synod* fills an essential denomination-wide governance and leadership role alongside of the regionally delegated authority of the church *classes* and the locally elected church *councils*.

- A. The functions of synod include, but are not necessarily restricted to, the following primary responsibilities:

1. Elect officers to lead the synod meeting.
2. Provide a context for deliberative assembly, both in the form of advisory groups and in plenary meetings.
3. Receive reports from the various denominational agencies, ministries, and institutions and oversee their mandates, bylaws, and articles of incorporation, relying on the Council of Delegates, as specified in the COD Governance Handbook.
4. Receive and act upon the reports of study committees and task forces appointed by synod.
5. Appoint representatives to denominational boards, committees, and other working groups.
6. Appoint or ratify the appointment of certain staff and leadership positions, including seminary faculty, college and seminary presidents, and the executive director of the denomination.
7. Provide direction and instruction for denominational administration through the office of the executive director.
8. Decide on issues of Church Order, liturgical forms, and confessional matters (cf. Church Order Art. 47).
9. Review denominational budgets, provide financial oversight to the agencies and ministries of the denomination through adoption of ministry-share formulas, and approve annual ministry share amounts.
10. Receive, discuss, and process overtures, communications, and appeals from classes, congregations, and individuals.
11. Adjudicate judicial code matters and address appeals and recommendations brought before synod by way of the Judicial Code Committee.
12. Supervise and advance ecumenical relations by way of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee.
13. Oversee the archival work of the denomination by way of the Historical Committee.
14. Approve candidates for ministry in the CRCNA and oversee other work of the Candidacy Committee.
15. Ratify the appointment of synodical deputies and review and approve their work.

B. Secondary functions of synod include the following:

1. Conduct orientation for all delegates and advisers.
2. Provide a denomination-wide context for worship, celebration, and fellowship.
3. Create opportunities for ministry-related learning via seminars, workshops, and discussion groups.
4. Occasionally make known, via letters or other forms of communication, the denomination's position on current issues or affairs.

Grounds:

- a. This information will help new delegates understand the purpose of synod and how it functions.
- b. This rationale will guide other proposals and recommendations about synod.
- c. This explanation will give clarity to planning decisions.

17. That synod be intentional about providing opportunity for purposeful dialogue during synod, including the following considerations:
- a. Schedule time in plenary sessions and / or advisory committee meetings, and / or elsewhere in the schedule of synod to encourage space for dialogue.
 - b. Provide time for dialogue in connection with significant and challenging topics and / or recommendations to be voted on, to encourage learning and listening.
 - c. Develop processes for learning from and listening to each other and the Holy Spirit.
 - d. Offer discussion guidelines for being genuinely curious and for learning from each other.
 - e. Use the process of a Native American talking circle (found to be effective by this task force) or other methods so that everyone has an opportunity to be heard in a group discussion.
 - f. In group discussions, account for diversity and different learning and discussion styles.
 - g. Provide tools for committee and group leaders to use.

Grounds:

- a. Difficult issues need deep, well-facilitated discussions that promote a deliberative process to help ensure listening and learning.
 - b. The current model offers space for only a few speakers to voice opinions for or against motions.
 - c. Shepherding committees have had significant success using listening and learning dialogue methods, as have other bodies such as the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
 - d. Workshop/learning times scheduled in recent synods have provided some helpful examples of dialoguing.
 - e. Agenda items related to study committee reports have helped determine when dialogue is needed.
18. That synod improve the connection between synod and classes and churches, using the following methods (see Appendix D for a cost estimate):
- a. In addition to sending a summary of the *Acts of Synod* to classes and churches after synod, also send a summary of the Agenda for Synod prior to synod. These documents would be sent to the delegates to synod and to church council clerks with an encouragement to pass them on to church members.
 - b. Offer an easy-to-read guide to the issues on synod's agenda.
 - c. Make executive summaries of study committee reports available in other languages (Korean, Spanish, others?).
 - d. Strongly encourage classes to invite their synodical delegates to speak to the classis about their experience at synod.
 - e. Offer classes and churches tips on how they can encourage and support delegates to synod.

Grounds:

- a. The disconnect between synod and churches must be bridged.
 - b. Increased communication about and understanding of synod will benefit all churches and hopefully make it easier to recruit delegates.
 - c. Ethnic minorities will especially benefit from this plan.
19. That synod encourage classes to send one or more delegates to synod for two consecutive years, if possible, to build continuity from synod to synod.

Ground: Though difficult to require, multiyear commitments could be encouraged to enhance continuity and local interest in denominational matters, while also respecting classical rules and procedures.

20. That synod encourage diversity in classical delegations to synod, as previously approved by synod, and require each classis to include at least one woman *or* one ethnic minority person in its delegation of one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod.

Grounds:

- a. This requirement would increase the number of ethnic minority and women delegates.
- b. This practice would eventually eliminate the need for nonvoting advisers.

21. That synod replace the term *fraternal delegate* with *ecumenical delegate*.

Grounds:

- a. *Ecumenical* as a neutral term is a fitting replacement for the male-oriented language of *fraternal*.
- b. The EIRC has already begun using *ecumenical delegate* in place of *fraternal delegate*.

22. That synod instruct the EIRC to continue to include presentations and participation by ecumenical delegates and guests in a way that would maximize the benefit of their presence at synod.

Grounds:

- a. Previous synodical delegates have indicated that improvement is possible in the manner in which ecumenical guests address synod and are incorporated into the program of synod.
- b. Synod provides a valuable context in which to further the denomination's ecumenical relations.

23. That synod be served by a parliamentarian appointed each year by the program committee of synod in advance of synod, with no limit on the number of one-year appointments he/she may serve. The duties of the parliamentarian would include advising the president with regard to appropriate procedure related to Church Order and the Rules for Synodical Procedure, responding to procedural challenges from the floor, and serving with the officers of synod when complicated procedural processes arise. The person appointed as parliamentarian should have demonstrated expertise in Church Order and meeting

management, should be stationed in close proximity to the officers and other staff on the floor of synod, would have the right to challenge the chair related to the Rules for Synodical Procedure, and would provide training to the officers prior to synod as well as in-the-moment advice. This position could be filled by the faculty adviser for church polity.

Grounds:

- a. When procedural questions arise, help would be available from the parliamentarian to assist synod in doing its work efficiently.
 - b. The need for a parliamentarian position is well supported in synod evaluations.
 - c. Appointment, instead of election, provides a greater opportunity for impartiality and preparedness.
 - d. Other denominations such as the RCA have found it helpful to adopt this type of practice.
24. That synod offer more extensive training for all delegates prior to synod with online and printed materials that cover rules and best practices, and ensure on-site engagement with training materials led by trained educators before synod begins. Doing so will help all delegates to engage with the material on synod's agenda and to facilitate comments and questions, possibly in discussion groups. This position could be filled by the faculty adviser for Church Order and synodical matters (see Appendix D for a cost estimate).

Grounds:

- a. More training is needed for effective participation of all delegates and especially those serving for the first time.
 - b. On-site discussion groups will facilitate learning and the opportunity to process questions.
 - c. Experienced educators will help with content and process learning.
 - d. Classes could use training materials and encourage former delegates to mentor those selected to be delegates to synod.
25. That synod incorporate power and privilege training into its scheduled training and orientation for delegates to help synod participants better understand the power with which they are privileged, especially with regard to gender, ethnicity, position, and age (see Appendix D for a cost estimate).

Grounds:

- a. Understanding power dynamics is important in order for synod to function in healthy ways and accomplish its tasks well.
 - b. Ethnic, gender, and age-related minorities will be more affirmed and encouraged in their participation at synod.
26. That synod require training of advisory committee chairs and reporters regarding synodical rules, best practices for leading committees, facilitating discussion and participatory decision making, following rules for advisory committees, handling differences, developing reports, and functioning in plenary sessions. Training could include the use of online modules, webinars, on-site instruction and discussions, and a video

introduction to advisory committee meetings (see Appendix D for a cost estimate).

Grounds:

- a. Chairs and reporters are often unprepared for group facilitation and the unique rules for synodical procedure.
 - b. Training would help to ensure that all voices are invited, respected, and heard.
 - c. A short video introduction with some dialogue would ensure that all advisory committee members are on the same page with regard to the functioning of the committee.
 - d. Some delegates are reluctant to serve as chairs and reporters due to lack of training.
 - e. Other denominations, such as the RCA, have found it helpful to provide such training for chairs and reporters.
27. That synod implement guidelines restricting the length of speeches during plenary sessions to a maximum of *three minutes* per person. For delegates and advisers to synod for whom English is a second language or who may require interpretation services, the chair may extend the three-minute time limit (see Appendix D for a cost estimate).

Ground: One area of recurring frustration for delegates, as expressed repeatedly in post-synod evaluation forms, is that some delegates tend to speak at excessive length to the detriment of a fair discussion involving the voices of as many delegates as possible.

28. That synod adopt the following provision pertaining to use of social media:
- That the training and orientation session for all delegates and advisers include guidelines to avoid inappropriate use of social media contact with nondelegates during advisory committee meetings and plenary sessions of synod, because such use might compromise the transparency and integrity of the deliberative process.
- Ground:* Since synod is a deliberative body, it is important for delegates to be engaged in the deliberative process of the assembly unencumbered by social media influences by nondelegates.

29. That synod not accede to the overture by Classis Hamilton (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 547) seeking to move the distribution date of synodical study committee reports to churches from November 1 to September 15.

Grounds:

- a. Adjusting these dates would require that the reports from study committees be received in the denominational office by midsummer to facilitate preparation for distribution by September 15.
- b. Since a majority of the classes meet in September, a September 15 distribution would not help most congregations deal with study committee reports prior to fall classis meetings.

30. That Synod 2019 propose to Synod 2020 the adoption of the following changes to the Church Order (changes indicated by strikethrough and underline):

Current Article 46

- a. Synod shall meet annually, at a time and place determined by the previous synod. Each synod shall designate a church to convene the following synod.
- b. The convening church, with the approval of the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA, may call a special session of synod, but only in very extraordinary circumstances and with the observance of synodical regulations.

Proposed Article 46

- a. Synod shall meet annually, at a time and place determined by the ~~a~~ previous synod. Each synod shall designate a church to convene the following synod.
- b. The ~~convening church, with the approval of the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA,~~ may call a special session of synod, but only in very extraordinary circumstances and with the observance of synodical regulations.

Grounds:

- a. If the proposed process for electing officers of synod is adopted and the officers would be in place by the convening session of synod, a convening church and a president pro tem (the minister of the convening church) will not be needed.
- b. If the recommendations regarding synodical worship services are adopted, a convening church will not be needed, but local churches would be included in the planning and leading of the Sunday synodical worship service.

Current Article 47

The task of synod includes the adoption of the creeds, of the Church Order, and of the principles and elements of worship. Synod shall approve the liturgical forms, the *Psalter Hymnal*, and the Bible versions suitable for use in worship. No substantial alterations shall be effected by synod in these matters unless the churches have had prior opportunity to consider the advisability of the proposed changes.

Proposed Article 47

The task of synod includes the adoption of the creeds, of the Church Order, and of the principles and elements of worship. Synod shall approve the liturgical forms, the hymnals Psalter Hymnal, and the Bible versions suitable for use in worship. No substantial alterations shall be effected by synod in these matters unless the churches have had prior opportunity to consider the advisability of the proposed changes.

Ground: The reference to the *Psalter Hymnal*, a title that was not used for the most recent hymnal approved by synod, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, should be changed to a generic reference to *hymnals*.

31. That synod instruct the executive director, in consultation with the Church Order adviser, to implement changes to the Rules for Synodical Procedure as necessitated by the adoption of preceding recommendations in this report.
32. That synod dismiss the Synod Review Task Force.

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
José Tagle
Steven Timmermans, staff
Kraig Van Houten

Appendix A

Synod 2016 Summary of Timed Proceedings

	MINUTES	TOTAL BREAKS	COFFEE	LUNCH	SUPPER	OPENING	ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS	PRESIDENTIAL REPORTS	COMMITTEE REPORTS TO PLENARY	MISC.
Friday	780	260	80	90	90	40	375	0	0	77
Saturday	765	259	64	105	38	330	105	0	0	16
Monday	795	250	40	90	120	46	0	54	409	36
Tuesday	770	265	45	90	130	45	0	91	340	29
Wednesday	810	240	40	80	105	44	0	64	455	22
Thursday	790	190	36	80	75	46	0	0	513	40
Friday	210	12	11	0	0	10	0	21	107	61
TOTAL	4920	1476	316	520	625	269	705	335	1824	281
PERCENT %	100%	30%				5.5%	14%	7%	5.5%	37%

COMMITTEE REPORTS TO PLENARY

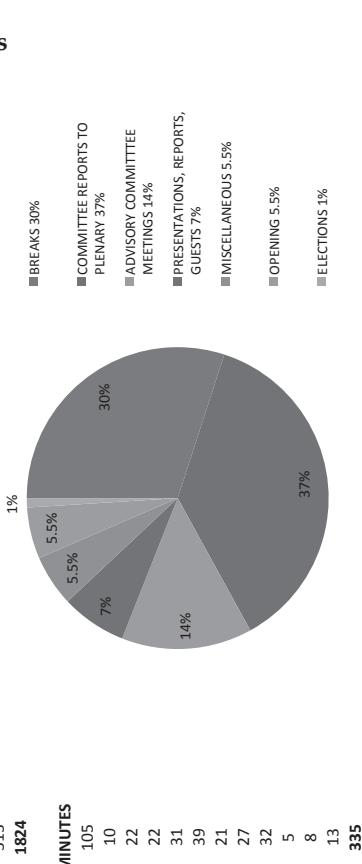
1. Synodical Services
 2. Church Order and Synodical Matters
 3. Education and Candidacy
 4. Congregational Services I
 5. Congregational Services II
 6. Global Mission and Ministry
 7. Financial Matters
 8. Interdenominational Matters
 9. Pastoral Guidance re Same-Sex Marr.
- TOTAL** 1824

MINUTES

- 145
226
243
196
198
49
197
257
313
TOTAL 1824
- OPENING** is the time before roll call (worship, meditation, prayer).
MISCELLANEOUS is roll call, synod orientation, announcements, technical delays, assigned prayers (before meals, beginning/end of sessions), closing worship of synod.
COMMITTEE REPORTS TO PLENARY include deliberation time.
Days were timed from beginning of worship to adjournment.
Timed only the days with roll call (Sunday excluded).

PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS/GUESTS

1. Blanket Exercise
 2. President BOT Address
 3. State of the Church Address
 4. CRCNA and RCA
 5. EIRC
 6. EIRC
 7. Calvin College
 8. Presentation of Candidates
 9. Faith Formation "Our Calling"
 10. Our Journey: Identity
 11. Our Journey: Discipleship
 12. Inspire 2017
- TOTAL** 335



Appendix B

Synod 2017 Summary of Timed Proceedings

	MINUTES	TOTAL BREAKS	COFFEE	LUNCH	SUPPER	OPENING	ADVISORY COMMITTEES	PRESIDENTIAL REPORTS	COMMITTEE REPORTS TO PLENARY	MISC.
Friday	760	225	60	75	90	105	43	315	76	0
Saturday	725	250	55	90	44	120	40	0	146	20
Monday	720	254	44	90	68	70	115	37	0	244
Tuesday	775	253	50	150	110	40	0	203	257	36
Wednesday	680	310	0	0	0	10	0	45	265	25
Thursday	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	65
TOTAL	3735	1292	277	475	540	206	720	470	766	226
PERCENT %	100%	3.4%					5.5%	19%	21%	6%

COMMITTEE REPORTS TO PLENARY

1. Synodical Services
2. Church Order and Synodical Matters
3. Education and Candidacy
4. Congregational Services I
5. Congregational Services II
6. Global Mission and Ministry
7. Financial Matters
8. Interdenominational Matters

MINUTES

- 41
60
97
200
15
124
23
206

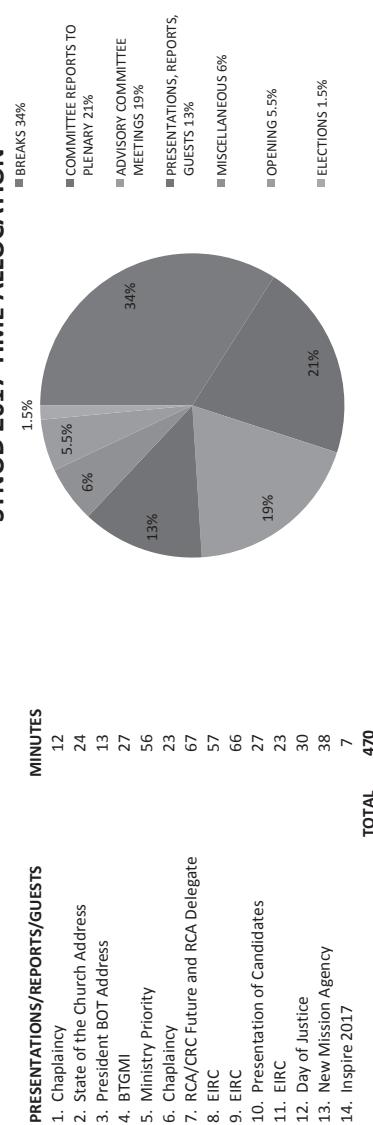
TOTAL

766

OPENING

OPENING is the time before roll call (worship, meditation, prayer).
MISCELLANEOUS is roll call; synod orientation, announcements, technical delays, assigned prayers (before meals, beginning/end of sessions), closing worship of synod.
COMMITTEE REPORTS TO PLENARY include deliberation time.
 Days were timed from beginning of worship to adjournment.
 Timed only the days with roll call (Sunday excluded).

SYNOD 2017 TIME ALLOCATION



PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS/GUESTS

1. Chaplaincy
2. State of the Church Address
3. President BOT Address
4. BTGMI
5. Ministry Priority
6. Chaplaincy
7. RCA/CRC Future and RCA Delegate
8. EIRC
9. EIRC
10. Presentation of Candidates
11. EIRC
12. Day of Justice
13. New Mission Agency
14. Inspire 2017

Appendix C

Cost Assessment of Synods 2015, 2016, 2017

		2015	2016	2017	
		Held in Sioux Center Adjourned Thurs. a.m.	Held in Grand Rapids Adjourned Fri. a.m.	Held in Palos Heights Adjourned Thurs. a.m.	Notes
Direct Costs					
Temporary help	\$	5,237.55	\$	9,463.41	\$ 9,388.63
Contracted services	\$	2,399.00	\$	17,801.10	\$ 22,976.50
Meeting facilities, meals, lodging	\$	114,134.48	\$	99,746.88	\$ 106,720.55
Travel (Ind. synodical deputies)	\$	129,191.50	\$	84,735.21	\$ 103,429.85
Postage/Shipping	\$	18,530.86	\$	26,333.26	\$ 13,888.50
					The Agenda 2016 was 200 pages longer than Agenda 2017; Cost to publish <i>Manual of CRC Government</i> in 2016 included here as well
Publications/printed/AV materials	\$	42,104.66	\$	83,039.88	\$ 65,180.63
Supplies	\$	4,651.75	\$	4,808.00	\$ 4,431.49
					Five active study committees and task forces in 2015; three active in 2016; two active in 2017
Synodical study committees	\$	42,306.53	\$	2,103.93	\$ 15,724.12
Miscellaneous	\$	2,101.30	\$	1,763.93	\$ 2,652.31
TOTAL	\$	360,637.63	\$	329,795.60	\$ 344,382.67

Significant variables that affect synod costs are the location where synod is held (affects travel costs and the number requiring lodging on campus), the duration of synod (affects number of meals and lodging nights), the size/length of the Agenda for Synod (affecting publication and shipping costs), and the number of active synodical study committees that require meeting in person. In addition to the direct costs of holding a synod meeting, not included in the above are indirect costs of staff salaries and office costs of centralized services. The average for such indirect costs to support synod is \$230,000 per year.

Appendix D

Cost Estimate Associated with Report Recommendations

Synod 2016 adopted the following instruction: "That synod require that all new ministry proposals include a ministry-share cost implication and / or alternative funding plan for sustaining the ministry" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 857-58). In light of this requirement, the Synod Review Task Force presents cost implications for its recommendations if applicable.

Recommendation 3 – Location of Synod Meetings

Appendix C provides information about past costs for holding synod in three different midwestern (U.S.) locations; the costs for holding synod at other locations would be extrapolated from these data. The suggested source of additional funding that may be required to hold synod at other locations, beyond amounts that classes might contribute, would be an increase in the budget for synod (depending on the specific location) and be borne by ministry-share funding.

Recommendation 6 – Mentoring for Young Adult Representatives

The additional cost for food and housing (and potentially travel) would be minimal and would minimally affect the budget for synod and be borne by ministry-share funding.

Recommendation 7, f – Synod Officers Attending COD Meetings

The additional cost of travel, lodging, and food (\$600) for three (3) officers to attend three (3) COD meetings a year is estimated to be \$5,400. The suggested source would be an increase in the COD budget to be borne by ministry-share funding.

Recommendation 18 – Creating Agenda Summaries/Easy-to-Read Guides

The additional cost of staff time is estimated to be \$1,400 (40 hours at \$35 per hour). The suggested source would be an increase in the synod budget to be borne by ministry-share funding.

Recommendation 23 – Parliamentarian

If a person needs to be hired (i.e., if this person is someone other than the seminary faculty polity adviser), the additional cost is estimated to be \$2,000 (five 10-hour days for plenary sessions and training). In addition, travel, lodging, and food are required and are estimated to cost approximately \$1,000. The suggested source would be an increase in the synod budget to be borne by ministry-share funding.

Recommendation 24 – Trained Educator

Initial costs are estimated to be staff time (4 weeks at \$40 per hour = \$6,400) and training materials and video production (\$3,000) for a total of \$9,400 for the first year; for subsequent years the costs would decrease for staff time (\$1,600) and materials / production (\$1,500), anticipating that only an update of materials would be needed. Each year the presence of the trained educator

would be minimal (e.g., food = \$200). The suggested source would be an increase in the synod budget to be borne by ministry-share funding.

Recommendation 25 – Power and Privilege Training

Initial costs are estimated to be staff time (4 weeks at \$40 an hour = \$6,400) and training materials and video production (\$3,000) for a total of \$9,400 for the first year; for subsequent years the costs would decrease for staff time (\$1,600) and materials/production (\$1,500) for any necessary updates to materials. Each year the presence of the facilitator would require approximately \$800 for travel, food, and lodging for the first two days of synod. The suggested source would be an increase in the synod budget to be borne by ministry-share funding.

Recommendation 26 – Advisory Committee Training

Initial costs are estimated to be staff time (honorarium of \$1,000), training materials, and video production (\$2,000) for a total of \$3,000 for the first year; for subsequent years the costs would decrease for staff time (\$500) and materials/production (\$1,000) for any necessary updates to materials. The presence of the trainer would be minimal each year (e.g., food = \$200). The suggested source would be an increase in the synod budget to be borne by ministry-share funding.

Recommendation 27 – Length of Speeches

Some form of technology/app would be required at a cost of not more than \$200 annually, borne by the synod budget by way of ministry-share funding.

OVERTURES, COMMUNICATION, AND PERSONAL APPEALS

OVERTURES

Overture 1: Allow Transfer of All Nations Church in Bakersfield, California, from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Ko-Am

With gratitude to God for the time it has spent in ministry with All Nations Church in Bakersfield, California, Classis Greater Los Angeles overtures Synod 2019 to approve the transfer of All Nations Church from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Ko-Am.

Grounds:

1. By the unanimous decision of its council, All Nations Church (Bakersfield) has a clear intention of affiliating with Class Ko-Am.
2. Classis Ko-Am approved the request of All Nations Church to transfer classis membership at its February 25, 2019, meeting.
3. Classis Greater Los Angeles approved the request of All Nations Church to transfer classis membership at its February 26, 2019, meeting.
4. Sharing the same classis with other churches of common cultural background would help promote greater ministerial fellowship, in which challenges and opportunities unique to Korean-American cultural contexts could be more openly and readily discussed.

Classis Greater Los Angeles
Aaron Solomon-Mills, stated clerk

Overture 2: Allow Transfer of All Nations Church, Bakersfield, California, from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Ko-Am

I. Introduction and history

All Nations Church in Bakersfield, California, started as a campus church birthed from the Lakeview Terrace (Calif.) All Nations Church. Rev. Jin Phil Huh was called to serve as lead pastor of the church for several years; unfortunately his health deteriorated. Another pastor, Rev. David Jineung Jun, was called as a new pastor and served several years.

All Nations Church in Bakersfield has been an organized congregation since 2008 in Classis Greater Los Angeles. However, the council of All Nations Church in Bakersfield voted to transfer membership to Classis Ko-Am because they have called Rev. Sung Lee, who was ordained through the Article 8 process at the Classis Ko-Am meeting in September 2018.

II. Overture

Classis Ko-Am overtures Synod 2019 to permit the transfer of All Nations Church in Bakersfield, California, from membership in Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Ko-Am.

Grounds:

1. Currently All Nations Church in Bakersfield does not connect with representation or involvement with the churches of Classis Greater Los Angeles.
2. By the unanimous decision of its council, All Nations Church in Bakersfield has a clear intention of becoming a member congregation of Classis Ko-Am.
3. The church feels much more comfortable communicating and participating with a Korean-speaking classis, since it is composed of almost 100 percent Korean-American nationals.
4. The church's new pastor, Rev. Sung Lee, completed the Article 8 ordination process with Classis Ko-Am in September 2018.
5. Classis Ko-Am demographically has more small-membership congregations that more closely reflect the composition of All Nations Church in Bakersfield.
6. Classis Ko-Am approved the request of All Nations Church in Bakersfield to transfer membership at its February 25, 2019, meeting.

Classis Ko-Am
Theodore Lim, stated clerk

Overture 3: Approve Transfer of Bethany Korean CRC, Burbank, California, from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Hanmi

With gratitude to God for the time it has spent in ministry with Bethany Korean CRC of Burbank, California, Classis Greater Los Angeles overtures Synod 2019 to approve the membership transfer of Bethany Korean CRC from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Hanmi.

Grounds:

1. In September 2018, the Bethany Korean CRC council decided that for the convenience of language and culture, they would like to be a part of Classis Hanmi.
2. Bethany Korean CRC has been welcomed in writing by Classis Hanmi.
3. At its October 30, 2018, meeting Classis Greater Los Angeles voted to approve this transfer.
4. Sharing the same classis with other churches of common cultural background would help promote greater ministerial fellowship, in which challenges and opportunities unique to Korean-American cultural contexts could be more openly and readily discussed.

Classis Greater Los Angeles
Aaron Solomon-Mills, stated clerk

Overture 4: Approve Transfer of Bethany Korean CRC, Burbank, California, to Classis Hanmi from Classis Greater Los Angeles

Classis Hanmi at its winter meeting approved a request by Bethany Korean CRC of Burbank, California, to transfer membership from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Hanmi. Therefore, Classis Hanmi overtures Synod 2019 to approve the transfer of Bethany Korean CRC to Classis Hanmi from Classis Greater Los Angeles.

Grounds:

1. In September 2018 the Bethany Korean CRC (Burbank) council decided that, for the convenience of language and culture, they would like to be a part of Classis Hanmi.
2. Classis Greater Los Angeles approved the transfer of membership request of Bethany Korean CRC (Burbank) to Classis Hanmi.
3. At its March 11, 2019, classis meeting, Classis Hanmi approved the transfer.
4. Sharing the same classis with other churches with common cultural backgrounds and language would help promote greater ministerial fellowship and growth for Bethany Korean CRC.

Classis Hanmi
Paul K. Im, stated clerk

Overture 5: Approve Formation of a New Classis from Congregations and Ministries within Classis Pacific Northwest

I. Background

The Christian Reformed Church arrived in Washington State in 1900. CRC congregations were relatively few and widely scattered. As a result, the western United States classes were large. At one time Classis Pacific, as it was then called, included congregations from Washington, Montana, and Alberta. More recently Classis Pacific Northwest was reduced to the area west of the Cascade Mountains, and from Olympia, Washington, to the Canadian border, including Alaska.

Since the creation of Classis Pacific Northwest, this region has grown dramatically in population and has evolved into two distinct cultures: (1) a sprawling urban metroplex surrounding Seattle, Washington, and (2) the remnants of the earlier agricultural communities of Oak Harbor, Mount Vernon, and Lynden, Washington.

The forty-six ministries in this geographic region are struggling to maintain a single classis. With a distance of 170 miles from Olympia to Sumas, Washington, including a fifty-mile traffic jam in the middle, Classis Pacific Northwest has become too large for effective intercongregational ministry.

After years of working toward classical renewal and considerable research and exploration of options, Classis Pacific Northwest has come to recognize that the churches in the rural north would like to form a new classis for the purpose of carrying out more effective ministry in their specific context.

II. Overture

Therefore, Classis Pacific Northwest overtures Synod 2019 to approve the formation of a new classis, Classis North Cascades, consisting of the congregations and ministries of Classis Pacific Northwest in Whatcom County, Washington.

See the Appendix for a list of the congregations and ministries in the proposed Classis North Cascades. All other churches and ministries would remain in Classis Pacific Northwest.

Grounds:

1. Classis Pacific Northwest is the largest classis in the CRCNA with 46 reporting units, including 33 organized congregations, 12 emerging congregations, and 1 ministry at the University of Washington. This is double the number of congregations compared to the average of all other classes. If all the potential delegates were present for a classis meeting, there would be over 125 delegates, which is over half the size of a synod meeting. The large size of classis Pacific Northwest has had the following effects:
 - a. Volume—Long agendas resulting in meetings that can be administrative challenges in which important business is rushed along or repeatedly remanded back to committee.
 - b. Participation—The work of classis has become more difficult because few churches are able to send a full complement of delegates, resulting in fewer people to do the same amount of work. Furthermore, many delegates remain quiet—intimidated by the large group.
 - c. Failing to supervise—Frequent classis contractas at additional expense are required to handle business that could not be fit into a regular meeting. This often includes classical exams. Since attendance is often poor at classis contractas (see ground 1, b), sometimes barely half the churches are in attendance to hear examinations.
 - d. Fellowship—Classis is supposed to be a time of deliberation and consensual decision making. Due to the hurried schedule and the full agendas, meetings are time and task driven. This results in a dwindling sense of ownership, accountability, and mutual support.
 - e. Proximity—Church Order Article 39 defines a classis as a neighboring group of churches. Articles 41 and 42 call churches within the classis to assist, build up, observe, counsel, rebuke, and pray for each other, helping each other in their ministry. The geographic size of the classis makes it difficult for us to know our classical neighbors as the Church Order envisions.
2. There is historical precedent to change the boundaries of Classis Pacific Northwest. It divided in 1969 based on size and inefficient functioning in conducting ecclesiastical business. At that time Classis Pacific Northwest had 32 congregations and 2,326 CRC members. The new Classis Columbia consisted of fourteen churches with 670 families.
3. There is historical precedent in other locations. This request is consistent with our denominational history. Examples include
 - Division of Classis Grand Rapids East—*Acts of Synod 1980*, p. 51
 - Division of Classis British Columbia—*Acts of Synod 1985*, pp. 679-80
 - Division of Classis Hamilton—*Acts of Synod 1986*, pp. 631-32

- Division of Classis Rocky Mountain—*Acts of Synod 1988*, p. 608
 - Formation of a new classis out of Classes Grandville and Zeeland—*Acts of Synod 1988*, p. 608
4. This division is practical and realistic. The two classes would be similar in active membership (Pacific Northwest: 1,870; North Cascades: 1,685). Both classes would have enough members to adequately fund and support the various ministries in their regions.
 5. This division will help improve the quality of each classis' ministry. This proposal would allow ministry and resources to be focused more locally and to address issues unique to the respective regions and ministry contexts.

Classis Pacific Northwest
Rob W. Jansons, stated clerk

Appendix

Congregations and Ministries Proposed as Members of Classis North Cascades

The new Classis North Cascades will consist of the following congregations and ministries:

1. Envision Mission (agency, ministry, organization) – Bellingham, WA
2. Hope in Christ – Bellingham, WA
3. The Table – Bellingham, WA
4. First – Lynden, WA
5. Second – Lynden, WA
6. Third – Lynden, WA
7. Amor Viviente – Lynden, WA
8. Bethel – Lynden, WA
9. Mountain View – Lynden, WA
10. Sonlight – Lynden, WA
11. Sumas – Sumas, WA

If this overture is adopted by synod, in order to implement the realignment and ensure a smooth transition, the following actions will be taken:

1. A classis realignment task force of five members, two from Classis North Cascades, two from Classis Pacific Northwest, and one neutral moderator/facilitator appointed by synod, will be convened after synod's adoption and should finalize its report (see mandate below) in time for presentation for final approval at a full meeting of Classis Pacific Northwest in October 2019, with the formal implementation effective January 1, 2020.
2. This task force will oversee and coordinate and make recommendations for all accounting issues, bank selection, legal considerations, government registrations, communications with the organizations within the new classis and the CRCNA denominational offices, and all other emerging issues.
3. This task force will also make recommendations for the fair and equitable allocation of all financial assets for final approval by Classis

Pacific Northwest. It is understood that a larger share of resources may be given to the southern classis due to the smaller size of those congregations. As the outstanding loans are primarily located in the south, those assets will be allocated to that region.

Overture 6: Follow Christ in the Way of Peace, Doing Justice, and Bringing Reconciliation to the Peoples of Israel and Palestine

I. Background

The council of East Hill Community CRC in Vernon, British Columbia, overtures Synod 2019 to follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, and bringing reconciliation to the peoples of Israel and Palestine. We believe God calls us to speak truth to power, urging our governments, institutions, and individuals to take peaceful and nonviolent action against injustice where it occurs.

We hear continued pleas from Palestinian Christians (“A Moment of Truth”—Kairos Palestine Document, 2009) that Western Christians take notice of the suffering of all Palestinians under Israel’s 52-year military occupation. Although we recognize the greater level of injustice practiced against the Palestinians, we acknowledge and lament the suffering of both Palestinians and Israelis in this ongoing and worsening conflict.

The role of the church in the face of injustice is not to remain silent but to speak the truth prophetically against oppression, discrimination, and human rights abuses, and to call on governments to uphold international law. Our denomination has previously acted on its obligation to speak to injustice in a similar situation by addressing apartheid in South Africa. It is time again for the church to use its voice in a similar manner about the ongoing injustices in occupied Palestine.

As Christians, we are required to seek justice as shown in the words of Scripture:

- “What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8).
- “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like an never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24).
- “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. . . . Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:5, 9).
- “Remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Heb. 13:3).

The biblical call to do justice is strongly echoed by Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony:

- “We grieve with those who live under oppression, and we seek for them the liberty to live without fear” (para. 52).
- “We urge governments and pledge ourselves . . . to bring justice to the poor and oppressed, and to promote the freedom to speak, work, worship, and associate” (para. 53).

- “Followers of the Prince of Peace are called to be peacemakers, promoting harmony and order and restoring what is broken. We call on our governments to work for peace . . .” (para. 54).

II. Overture

The council of East Hill Community CRC overtures Synod 2019 of the Christian Reformed Church to act on the following:

- A. To increase the awareness of our members that in the ongoing conflict the system of official policies and practices of the Israeli government with respect to the treatment of Palestinians violates biblical principles of justice and righteousness.
- B. To, along with other Christians, continue to call on our respective governments and ultimately the government of Israel to hear God’s call to practice justice with regard to the Palestinian peoples.
- C. To encourage the Palestinian peoples and Israel to continue to choose the way of a nonviolent path to peace in the face of this deteriorating 52-year occupation.
- D. To instruct the Council of Delegates to instruct the Office of Social Justice to continue to lead our churches into taking appropriate action by providing educational resources, consultation, and coordination of our congregations’ efforts in addressing these injustices.

III. Grounds for the overture

A. *The church and other faith groups*

“We, a group of Christian Palestinians, after prayer, reflection and an exchange of opinion, cry out from within the suffering in our country, under the Israeli occupation, with a cry of hope in the absence of all hope, a cry full of prayer and faith in a God ever vigilant, in God’s divine providence for all the inhabitants of this land. . . . We address ourselves to our brothers and sisters, members of our Churches in this land. We call out as Christians and as Palestinians to our religious and political leaders, to our Palestinian society and to the Israeli society, to the international community, and to our Christian brothers and sisters in the Churches around the world” (“A Moment of Truth”—Kairos Palestine Document, 2009; kaiospalestine.ps/index.php/about-us/kairos-palestine-document).

Multiple and credible Christian and Jewish voices have long observed and advocated for the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and all the injustices perpetrated upon Christian, Muslim, and other faith groups that make up the Palestinian population. Shall we too now join our many brothers and sisters in Christ who cry out against this? Shall we now come to the aid of all humankind affected, acknowledging that they too are image-and likeness-bearers of our God and Father, neighbors we are called to love? Shall our voices at last join the multitude of diverse voices from denominations Reformed (RCA), Presbyterian, Mennonite, Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, etc., who cry out for justice? Shall we too speak truth to power, special interests, multinational business players, other international influencers, and Zionist theologies?

B. Injustice among neighbors

"Alas for those who devise wickedness . . . because it is in their power. They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance" (Mic. 2:1-2, NRSV).

Ongoing, systematic occupation and oppression by the Israeli government and its armed forces impact all facets of every inhabitant of Palestine and, in effect, Israel every day. Access to basic human needs, prosperity, and enjoyment of daily life are intentionally impeded. Food, water, housing, land, electrical power, transportation, freedom of movement, medical, and other services are severely disrupted by the annexation and occupation by Israel of the historic Palestinian lands (1967). Walls built throughout the Occupied Territories for the security of the Israeli population effectively separate and control the Palestinian populations, making life very difficult indeed. Daily movement is constrained by military and police check points that are everywhere and target especially young men. Detainment and searches are routine for non-Israelis. Palestinian homes are regularly destroyed to make room for new Israeli settlements. Civil law and property rights are severely restricted for Palestinian people living in or adjacent to Israeli occupied territories. Can we help but imagine that Israeli citizens too must surely be deprived of their own peaceful enjoyment of life by the diversion of economic, social, and emotional capital to maintain such an occupation? Israel is necessarily the target of Palestinian resistance and retaliation by factions who mete out violent attacks against more powerful neighbors. Anxiety, frustration, and security are major preoccupations for all Israeli citizens, especially those in Jerusalem and all areas that comprise or border the disputed territories. Many Jewish voices in Israel, Jewish communities, and Jewish institutions around the world oppose what is happening in Palestine.

C. Endangered children and families

"You shall allot [this land] as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they will be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel" (Ezek. 47:22, NRSV).

A sacred trust is daily compromised by the arrest and detention of children separated from parental care and family security, often being moved far from their homes. Young people meet with daily harassment as they pass through Israeli check points on the way to school, employment, or social activities. These check points are barriers for all to the normal course of family and community life, limiting access to medical services, shopping for food, clothing, and other basic needs. Building, ownership, and occupancy permits are severely restricted for Palestinian households. Illegal settlements for Jewish immigrants are built on land reserved for Palestinian families in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Jewish settlers are given incentives of protection, cash, tax breaks, and access to water and power to move into these areas, continuing the proactive annexation practices of the Israeli government and the IDF (Israeli Army) who protect the settlers. Some decorated soldiers and officers now refuse to serve Israel in its missions of illegal occupation that have nothing to do with the security of their country.

D. Basic human rights

"Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:16-17, NRSV).

Intimidation, degradation, and punishment have been used by the Israeli military since 1967 in a systematic effort to control the Palestinian population. In the case of Gaza, the punishments have been massive assaults on the general population, for which proceedings have started against the Israeli government through the International Court in the Hague, the Netherlands. Recent moves by some countries to establish embassies in Jerusalem have heightened the insecurities of Israeli and Palestinian populations as well as outside observers.

The newly passed Israeli Nation State Law enshrines the privilege that Jewish Israelis already enjoy as their historic and national homeland and gives them exclusive rights to self-determination. It names Jerusalem as a united capital; it states its priorities of “ingathering exiles” and prioritizes the creation of Jewish-only communities. The words *Palestinian*, *equality*, and *democracy* appear nowhere in the document; *Arabic* only appears in the context of downgrading the language from “official” to “special.”

The law, passed by a narrow majority in the Knesset, is a recipe for an apartheid reality.

—excerpted from Gary Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Pilgrim Press, 2003, 2013), p. 282

In 2002, fifty-eight evangelical leaders wrote to President George W. Bush, urging him to pursue a “balanced” policy regarding Israel:

Mr. President,

We write as American Evangelical Christians concerned for the well-being of all the children of Abraham in the Middle East – Christian, Jewish, and Muslim. We urge you to employ an even-handed policy toward Israeli and Palestinian leadership so that this bloody conflict will come to a speedy close and both peoples can live without fear and in a spirit of shalom / salaam. . . . The American evangelical community is not a monolithic bloc in full and firm support of present Israeli policy. Significant numbers of American evangelicals reject the way some have distorted biblical passages as their rationale for uncritical support for every policy and action of the Israeli government instead of judging all actions—of both Israelis and Palestinians—on the basis of biblical standards. The great Hebrew prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah declared to do justice one to another, and to protect the oppressed, the alien, the fatherless, and the widow.

Signed,

[58 U.S. evangelical leaders]

Included among the signatories were
David H. Engelhard, general secretary, Christian Reformed Church in
North America

Andrew Ryskamp, executive director, Christian Reformed World Relief
Committee

Council of East Hill Community CRC,
Vernon, British Columbia
John Vander Leest, clerk of council

Note: The above overture was presented to Classis B.C. South-East at its October 2018 meeting but was not adopted.

References

A. Documents and books

Report on Palestine and Israel — Study visit by the CRC and Calvin College, June 2007

“A Moment of Truth”—Kairos Palestine Document, a prayerful call by Palestinian Christians to end the occupation, Dec. 2009; kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-us/kairos-palestine-document

Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians (Pilgrim Press, 2003, 2013) by Gary Burge, professor of New Testament theology, Calvin Theological Seminary

Steadfast Hope: The Palestinian Quest for Just Peace (second ed., 2017). An excellent study guide by the Israel/Palestine Mission Network published by the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.; www.theIPMN.org

Witness in Palestine: A Jewish Woman in the Occupied Territories (Paradigm, 2007, 2014) by Anna Baltzer, a young Jewish American, reporting on her visit to the West Bank to discover for herself the realities of everyday life for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation

“CRC Engagement in Israel and the Palestinian Territories: A Brief History of CRC Involvement in the Past and Present Actions” by Shannon Jammal-Hollemans, Office of Social Justice, 2018

The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine (Oneworld, second ed., 2007) by Ilan Pappe, Israeli historian

B. Websites and resources

Sabeel (meaning “the Way”) is the Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem. Seeking to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity, and work for justice, peace, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. sabeel.org

Christian Peacemaker Teams working for justice by organizing service and educational delegations to Israel/Palestine, Kurdistan, Columbia, USA borderlands, Canadian First Nations. Ontario, Canada. cpt.org

B’Tselem (meaning “In his likeness” from Gen. 1) is the Israeli Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, which documents human rights abuses and assists victims of the illegal occupation. They advocate for political prisoners, etc. btselem.org

Do Justice blog, published by the Office of Social Justice and the Centre for Public Dialogue (CRC), which promote justice and righteousness causes in North America and around the world. dojustice.crcna.org

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is an organization of which the CRC is a member. Their mottos are “Educate: offering opportunities to learn; Elevate: hear the diverse voices; Advocate: for just government policies by contacting government bodies.” cmepl.org

No Way to Treat a Child campaign seeks to challenge Israel's prolonged military occupation by exposing widespread and systematic mistreatment of children. It is associated with Defense for Children International and the American Friends Service Committee. nwttac.dci.palestine.org

Jewish Voices for Peace works for justice, equality, and dignity for all in Israel/Palestine. jvp.org

If America Knew is an organization to inform Americans and others about what is happening in Israel/Palestine and not being reported in the American press. This organization is a good source for statistics on this 52-year-old occupation and conflict. ifamericanaknew.org

C. *International actions*

United Nations Resolutions

Here are examples of some of the main resolutions over the years:

General Assembly:

#181 (1947): Partition plan for Palestine

#194 (1948): Resolves that refugees (Palestinians) wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours be permitted to do so

2546 (1969): Condemns Israeli "violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms" in the occupied territories. A similar resolution has been passed every year since then, and Israel has ignored each one.

3414 (1975): Calls for economic sanctions and an arms embargo on Israel until it withdraws from all territories occupied in 1967 and grants the Palestinians their "inalienable national rights"

33/183-D (1979): Demands that Israel terminate all forms of collaboration with South Africa. A similar resolution was passed every year until South Africa abandoned apartheid.

37/135 (1981): Permanent sovereignty over national resources in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories. A similar resolution has been passed every year since then, and Israel has ignored each one.

37/222 (1982): Gravely concerned at the difficult living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories. A similar resolution has been passed every year since then, and Israel has ignored each one.

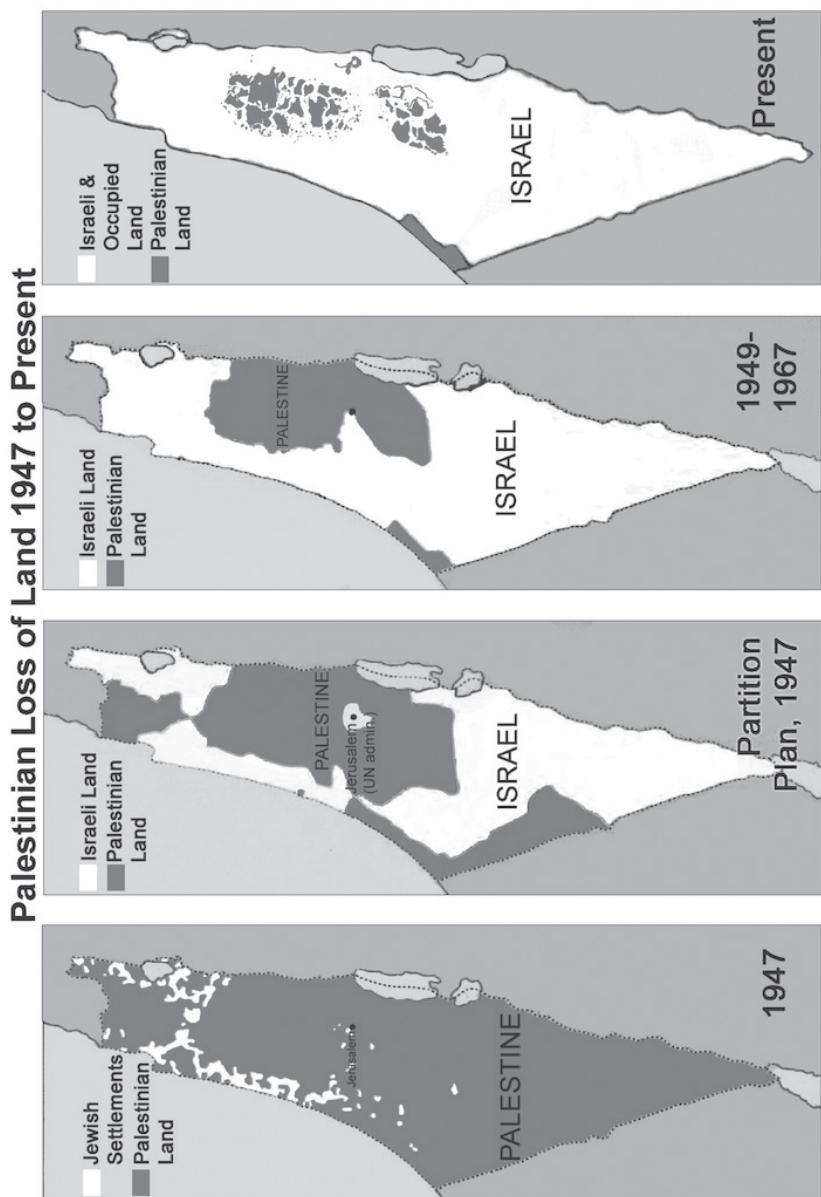
Security Council (UNSC):

#242 (1968): Issued after the 1967 war, it calls for the withdrawal of the Israeli military from the occupied territories and is the basis for most peace plans. There are many more resolutions that could be mentioned, such as #425, 681, 1322, all calling for the same thing.

#2334 (2016): First UNSC resolution on this issue to be passed unanimously. It concerns the Israeli settlements in "Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem." The resolution passed in a 14–0 vote.

Numerous Resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council are passed every year, calling on Israel to deal justly with the Palestinian peoples

of the Occupied Territories as outlined in the examples above. During times of armed conflict, resolutions called on both Israel and Palestine to cease aggression and work for peace. To date, Israel has not implemented the vast majority of UN resolutions. un.org/press/en



Overture 7: Declare Kinism Teaching as Heresy

Note: The following overture was adopted by both Classis California South and Classis Hackensack.

I. Introduction

Kinism is a recent, though historically familiar, grassroots theological movement within some Reformed theological circles and churches. Like other grassroots movements, Kinism claims no single organization or leader. It has no well-known or published works. It lives on the Internet through various blogs and a now-defunct scholarly journal. While no one leader or organization dogmatically defines Kinism, a list of commonly held beliefs can be found at tribaltheocrat.com/2013/08/what-is-kinism/ and in the appendix to this overture.

Kinism blends tenets of orthodox Reformed theology (e.g., *imago Dei* of humankind, total depravity, divine special revelation in Scripture, the centrality of the church as the body of Christ to God's mission and purpose in the world) with an ethnocentric hermeneutic. As a result, Kinism, as defined through Kinist websites and preachers, is antithetical to a lived gospel in God's diverse world. In fact, we believe this teaching is heretical based on the testimony of Scripture as reflected through our confessions, contemporary testimonies, and previous acts of synod.

Various Christians will object to various points in Kinist theology. In this overture, we refrain from debating the existence or absence of a New World Order, the likelihood of one world government, or other items in the Kinist agenda. As the church, we judge all theological claims in light of Scripture and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, while there may be much to object to within Kinism, this overture is concerned with addressing the following claims of Kinist theology:

1. Interracial marriage is contrary to God's plan.
2. God has ordained separation in a religio-ethnostate that necessitates racial separation in all areas of life.

II. Why should synod address Kinism?

Given that Kinism is a minority view within Reformed theology, some may wonder why synod should address the problem. There are at least five reasons synod should address this issue rather than let it pass as a minor disturbance existing elsewhere in the broader Reformed community.

1. A pastor within the Christian Reformed Church has propagated Kinism in his teaching, preaching, and online writings. For years, he was able to teach Kinism as a pastor of the CRCNA. This pastor continued in error in spite of the efforts of his classis to respond. The pastor ultimately left the CRCNA and took his congregation with him.
2. Given the former presence of an officebearer in our denomination who was teaching Kinism, synod should declare loudly for all officebearers to hear that we will not tolerate Kinism in our church!

3. The CRCNA laid a thorough theological foundation in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to refute the heresy of apartheid in South Africa, but many current CRCNA officebearers and members are unfamiliar with that work.
4. Given the current political climate in North America surrounding race, the CRCNA would be wise to unequivocally reiterate our biblically and confessionally informed denunciation of apartheid. The church must proclaim to the world our love of neighbor without regard to race.
5. We hope this overture will give officebearers and classes the appropriate theological knowledge to refute Kinism and confront any officebearer who may propagate Kinist theology.

III. Kinist claims—familial relations

Kinists claim the following:

1. “That the God of the Old Testament, who forbade interracial, interreligious marriages to his covenant nation, is the same as the God of the New Testament. That marriage between parties who are not naturally congenial is unequal yoking. That unequal yoking in marriage or in society at large is destructive of Christian harmony, association, and growth.”
2. “That Christians should work to limit human error by seeking those conditions which are inherently productive of harmony of interests, both in marriage and in society at large. That a harmony of interests naturally exists between people who are similar.”¹

IV. Scriptural problems—familial relations

Paul wrote to the Colossians about division within the body of Christ. He addressed them as those who “have been raised with Christ” (Col. 3:1) and went on to admonish them against sin that would harm their interpersonal relations.

You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you *have taken off your old self with its practices* and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

(Col. 3:7-10)

The church in Colossae was raised with Christ. They had put off the old self with its practices and had put on a new self. Paul then draws the logical conclusion of this real spiritual change in the church.

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

(Col. 3:11-12)

God removed the wall of division between Jew and Gentile. All people within the church constitute *a people*. God’s *chosen people* is no longer merely a rough sketch of ethnic Israel, but all people who have been raised in Christ and who have put off the old self with its practices.

¹ tribaltheocrat.com/2013/08/what-is-kinism/ (accessed 1/12/19).

Peter concurs with Paul:

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

(1 Pet. 2:9-10)

Peter, formerly a zealous Jew, could not be more explicit: God's people are one nation. The church, which constitutes a single people, is then free to operate as one people. There isn't the slightest hint of maintaining old ethnic differences between people in God's one nation. Kinists downplay the real change that God has effected through his saving grace, insisting that while we may constitute one church, we are in fact a separate people.

Marriage is the most intimate of relationships and mirrors the church's relationship with God. Paul told the ethnically diverse church in Ephesus:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

(Eph. 5:25-28)

Paul draws a parallel between the relationship of Christ to his church (relatively unknown and unfamiliar to the early believers) and the familiar relationship of a husband and wife in marriage. Christ is analogous to the husband in the marriage relationship. Christ loved the church to the point of dying for the church, which includes people from every nation. Christ does not marry many wives, each one constituting a separate nation. Rather, he marries one wife, the church, whose defining characteristic is her holy and blameless nature, not her skin color. Kinists claim to want to maintain God-given distinctions, yet they ignore the fact that Christ has done away with ethnic distinctions in the church through his marriage to a single bride.

Kinism claims that God forbade interracial marriages in the Old Testament and the New. We agree that God forbade marriages between the nation of Israel and other nations in the Old Testament. However, God did not prohibit marriage between the nations *upon the basis of race*. Scripture clearly testifies that God's primary concern in forbidding marriages in the Old Testament to the nations was not their ethnic background or skin color. Instead, the LORD wanted to *keep his people free of the detestable practices of the nations*. His concern was that they remain faithful to their covenant partner and not forsake him for the gods of the nations.

Deuteronomy warns that intermarriage among the nations (or those outside God's covenant) would cause God's people to turn away from God to serve other gods.

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, *for they will*

turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.

(Deut. 7:1-4)

Scripture reiterates this warning in Ezra. The prophet's concern is that intermarriage with unbelievers will cause God's people to adopt their detestable practices.

The leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring *peoples with their detestable practices*, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness."

When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.

(Ezra 9:1-4)

Between the Old Testament and New, we find a striking thematic unity. In the Old Testament, God warned his people to avoid intermarriage between the nations based upon *their detestable practices*. In the New Testament, God reminds us that we are no longer a people with detestable practices. Those old people are dead. We, the church, are a new people. Continuing in Ezra we read,

But now, our God, what can we say after this? For we have forsaken the commands you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: "The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By *their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other.*"

(Ezra 9:10-11)

Scripture also provides concrete examples of these principles in the lives of Rahab and Ruth. Rahab, an Amorite and a prostitute, did not follow the *detestable practices* of her kinfolk. Instead she acknowledged the LORD as "God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Josh. 2:11). Driven by her faith in the God of Israel, Rahab aided God's people as they conquered Jericho. As a result of her efforts, "Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day" (Josh. 6:25). Rahab is listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:31 and as one of the righteous in James 2:25. Rahab not only lived among the Israelites but also married an Israelite. Rahab, an Amorite who became a nonethnic Israelite, is listed in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:5.

Ruth, a Moabite, is another example of marriage outside of ethnic Israel. She, like Rahab, did not adopt the *detestable practices* of the Moabites. Instead, she left her people and country out of love for her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, and out of dedication to the God of Israel. She told Naomi, as she was preparing to leave Moab to live as a widow in Israel, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. *Your people will be my people and your God my God*" (Ruth 1:16). Ruth, the Moabite, joined Boaz, an Israelite and son of Rahab, in marriage. Ruth and Boaz also appear in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:5.

Rahab and Ruth became members of the nation of Israel through faith and were not excluded from the covenant community by their ancestry. As members of the covenant nation by virtue of their faith and righteousness, they were free to marry within ethnic Israel.

Scripture is clear—there is nothing intrinsically wrong with any particular race. The line of demarcation between Israel and the nations was not their lineage but their covenant status with God. Israel was a covenant partner with God. The Lord was their God, and they were his people. The Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites had no such relationship with God. Marriage between Israel and the nations caused God's people to abandon their covenant with God. Therefore, Israel should not marry people from the nations. God's plan for his people was that they should marry others who are in covenant with God.

Scripture echoes in the New Testament God's warning from the Old Testament about marrying people who are not in the covenant. Paul, writing to the ethnically diverse church in Corinth, did not mention national distinctions as he warned against unequal yoking. Rather, unequal yoking is a function of righteousness versus wickedness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

(2 Cor. 6:14-18)

Paul calls the church to be separate from people in darkness who worship other gods. Paul does not call the church to be separate from people of a different color or national origin. We, the church, are the temple of the living God, not separate temples, one for each nation, as Kinism would imply.

Kinism portrays God's blessing of marriage between Christians of different races or ethnicities as sin. Given the scriptural evidence provided above, we can unequivocally declare that such marriages are clean, lawful, and good. Officebearers who preach Kinism bind the conscience of believers to an unscriptural standard. In fact, the CRCNA has recognized the biblical evidence that Christians are free to marry, without regard for race, in our confessions, which are detailed below.

V. Confessional problems—familial relations

Our confessions and contemporary testimonies recognize the radical unity we have in Christ. Beginning in Our World Belongs to God (para. 35) we read, "The church is the fellowship of those who confess Jesus as Lord. She is the bride of Christ, his chosen partner, loved by Jesus and loving him: delighting in his presence, seeking him in prayer—silent before the mystery of his love."

The natural result of one church being the bride of Christ is this:

We are the family of God, serving Christ together in Christian community. Single for a time or a life, devoted to the work of God, we offer our love and service to the building of the kingdom. Married, in relationships of lifelong

loyalty, we offer our lives to the same work: building the kingdom, teaching and modeling the ways of the Lord so our children may know Jesus as Lord and learn to use their gifts in lives of joyful service. In friendship and family life, singleness and marriage, as parents and children, we reflect the covenant love of God. . . .

(Our World Belongs to God, para. 46)

The Heidelberg Catechism declares that our baptism incorporates us into God's covenant people just as circumcision incorporated people into God's Old Testament nation.

Q. Should infants also be baptized?

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are included in God's covenant and people, and they, no less than adults, are promised deliverance from sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant, they too should be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

(Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 74)

The Belgic Confession tells us that by our baptism we are set apart from all other nations as God's children.

Having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, Christ established in its place the sacrament of baptism. By it we are received into God's church and set apart from all other people and alien religions, that we may wholly belong to him whose mark and sign we bear. Baptism also witnesses to us that God, being our gracious Father, will be our God forever. . . . Just as water washes away the dirt of the body . . . , so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the Holy Spirit. It washes and cleanses it from its sins and transforms us from being the children of wrath into the children of God.

(Belgic Confession, Art. 34)

Baptism gives us a sign and seal of our new, central, Christian identity. We are no longer united by common citizenship, language, ancestry, or ethnicity, as Kinists would claim. We are united to Christ, in whom we are united with one another, across all other bounds of identity or ethnicity. In this, "we reflect the covenant love of God" (Our World Belongs to God, para. 46).

VI. Synodical problems—familial relations

During the culmination of the civil rights struggle in the United States, synod declared concerning interracial marriage,

Holy Scripture does not give a judgment about racially mixed marriages; contracting a marriage is primarily a personal and family concern. Church and state should refrain from prohibiting racially mixed marriages, because they have no right to limit the free choice of a marriage partner.²

Synod recognized that Christ's redemptive work made the church one, without distinctions that require separation.

For a true understanding of the rights, equality, and dignity of man, we should see all men not only as creatures of God, made in His image, but also as those who have sinned, and need redemption. Therefore in our relation to fellow believers we should recognize the new unity which all Christians, regardless of race, have by virtue of being redeemed by Christ.³

² *Acts of Synod 1969*, p. 51.

³ *Acts of Synod 1969*, pp. 50-51.

VII. Kinist claims—societal segregation

Kinists advocate separation of people from different ethnic backgrounds when it comes to marriage. Unfortunately, they also extend the supposed requirement of racial separation to every sphere of life, including church and state. In doing so, Kinists regularly refer to and quote theologians central to our own Reformed identity, history, and culture, including—but not limited to—John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and Louis Berkhof.⁴

Kinists would use the force of the civil government to establish racial boundaries as was done in the American South during segregation and in South Africa during their policy of apartheid. The following statements from Kinists supporting segregation run contrary to the stated positions of the CRCNA:

That man, as a creature, is necessarily limited. That because he is limited, his responsibility to others is also limited. That human responsibility is biblically regulated by relationship, such that we have a greater responsibility to our own family, race, town, state, region, and country, than we do to “the other.” That Christians should favor the native and the normal over the alien and the novel.⁵

We affirm the multinational multiracial makeup of Christ’s church. We further affirm that the nations and races are themselves individual expressions of Providence, separated and cultivated by God to check the spread of evil and add to His glory, to be preserved kind after kind in this world and eternally in the world to come. We affirm that all attempts to amalgamate humans into one mixed mass are in open rebellion against God’s law and His sovereignly created boundaries.⁶

Our grandfathers called those advocating for diversity and integration “infidels” who had abandoned the Bible for “modernism” and were leading the Christian flock astray.⁷

God is the author of segregation and racial separation. Our grandfathers rightly believed that those who rebelled against racial separation rebelled against God Himself, the Author of those boundaries.⁸

That the ideal Christian social order is an extension of the family concept, considered at a larger scale. That biblically, a nation is a large group of people of common patrilineal descent, living in a common geographical location, and having a shared religion, history, language, and civil government (a religio-ethnorate).⁹

VIII. Scriptural problems—societal segregation

Kinism routinely underestimates the importance of the church. They state, “Responsibility is biblically regulated by relationship, such that we have a greater responsibility to our own family, race, town, state, region, and country, than we do to ‘the other.’”¹⁰ Completely missing from this statement is *the church*. Family, as defined by blood relation, takes priority over the family as defined by the Spirit of God, who makes all Christians brothers and sisters.

⁴ faithandheritage.com/2015/11/what-does-this-have-to-do-with-calvinism-calvinism-is-kinism/ (accessed 1/23/2019).

⁵ faithandheritage.com/2013/08/what-is-kinism/ (accessed 12/5/18).

⁶ faithandheritage.com/about/ (accessed 12/5/18).

⁷ faithandheritage.com/2013/08/is-segregation-scriptural/ (accessed 12/5/18).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ faithandheritage.com/2013/08/what-is-kinism/ (accessed 12/5/18).

¹⁰ Ibid.

The CRCNA rightly views the role of the church in evangelism through the lens of the Great Commission:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
(Matt. 28:18-20)

After his death and resurrection, our Lord told his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus sent his ethnically Jewish disciples into the broad Gentile world with the good news. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church dispersed throughout the world to minister to all nations. While this text does not say that all nations are to become one nation, this text, along with other Holy Spirit inspired texts noted above, makes clear that, in Christ, Christians are one people with a loyalty that transcends nation, race, or ethnicity. As such, Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit to minister to all nations.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

(Acts 2:5-11)

The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples and sent them to fulfill Jesus' prophecy that they would be his witnesses in Judea and Samaria. "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1).

The Lord pushed Philip directly into cross-cultural ministry:

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

(Acts 8:26-31)

Philip, a Jew, taught the Ethiopian how to read the Scriptures. Philip shared the good news with the Ethiopian and then baptized him.

Nowhere in Scripture do we find teaching—explicit or implicit—that people from one ethnic group should be wary of evangelizing people in another ethnic group. Even more importantly, we find nothing in Scripture to support the command—explicit or implicit—that Christians should set up separate ethno-states.

What we do find in Scripture is Jesus' explicit command to engage in missions to the entire world, the Holy Spirit empowering missionaries and changing the hearts of people through the preaching of the gospel, without regard for ethnic heritage. While wisdom dictates that evangelism should be done in culturally appropriate ways that maintain cultural practices that do not conflict with Christ's teaching, the Scripture strongly rejects the idea that missions should only be done intraculturally.

IX. Confessional problems—societal segregation

Kinist statements run contrary to Scripture, our Reformed confessions, and our contemporary testimonies—the Belhar Confession and Our World Belongs to God—which stress the unity of all believers. Paragraph 30 of Our World Belongs to God states:

The Spirit gathers people from every tongue, tribe, and nation into the unity of the body of Christ. Anointed and sent by the Spirit, the church is thrust into the world, ambassadors of God's peace, announcing forgiveness and reconciliation, proclaiming the good news of grace. Going before them and with them, the Spirit convinces the world of sin and pleads the cause of Christ. Men and women, impelled by the Spirit, go next door and far away into science and art, media and marketplace—every area of life, pointing to the reign of God with what they do and say.

Article 36 of the Belgic Confession describes the role of the civil government, saying,

We believe that because of the depravity of the human race, our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings. For that purpose God has placed the sword in the hands of the government, to punish evil people and protect the good. And being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, the civil rulers have the task, subject to God's law, of removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship. They should do this while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them. They should do it in order that the Word of God may have free course; the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress; and every anti-Christian power may be resisted.

Classis California South and Classis Hackensack submit that the role of the church is to support political action that allows the free association of those within the church in accordance with our confessions. The role of the civil government is to protect our freedom to share the gospel with the entire world. Kinism would deny the church this freedom through the establishment of a religio-ethnostate resembling apartheid.

The Belhar Confession reminds us that "Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another."

Reconciliation means the bringing together of different groups into unity. The Belhar continues:

This unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly . . . anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

(Belhar Confession, Art. 2)

A necessary result of unity in the church means a rejection of any doctrine that

... absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

... professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;

... denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin.

(Belhar Confession, Art. 2)

God's work of reconciliation transcends our individual relationships with God. One fruit of reconciliation with God is reconciliation with our fellow human beings, including those of different races. Kinism proposes an ethno-state that would forcibly prohibit Christ's work of reconciliation between people of different races.

X. Synodical problems—societal segregation

The CRCNA has a well-documented history of dealing theologically with segregation. As a church founded by Dutch immigrants and connected to Dutch Reformed churches in South Africa during the state's policy of apartheid, the CRCNA strongly rejected the forced segregation of people based on their ethnic background. We are deeply indebted to the work of the CRCNA as they formulated a response to apartheid, which is what Kinism looks like in politically sanctioned, widespread societal practice.

Kinism and apartheid are, at their core, an effort to divide the church of Jesus Christ. The CRCNA delineated how the church is to be both diverse and unified in "God's Diverse and Unified Family," a report recommended to the churches by Synod 1996, which states:

The church, Christ's gathered body in the world, is the means by which God intends to reveal himself, to proclaim the good news, and to unite all things in Christ.

In John 17, Jesus is more precise as to how the church reveals God. Jesus prays that all the people who believe in him "may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20–21). Why does he want them to be one? "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:21, 23). When the church is one, people see God. The power of the church's witness lies precisely in its new oneness in Christ, an oneness of believers that transcends external differences.

The church will be effective in the mission God has given it only when it understands and lives out of a vision that appreciates both its unity and diversity in Christ. The church is one in Christ (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 12:12-13). Christ is the one foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11) and the one head of the body (Eph. 1:22-23). "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6). The church, however, is also marvelously diverse. Just as the body has feet and hands and eyes and ears and is incomplete without all those parts, so the body of Christ is made up of many parts. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul teaches that each part of the body is necessary to make the body function with complete effectiveness, and all parts have equal dignity, regardless of size or function. The gifts of the Spirit to the church are marvelously diverse (1 Cor. 12:27-31; Eph. 4:11-13; Rom. 12:3-8).

This teaching on the unity and diversity of the church is extremely important as we think about matters of racial and ethnic diversity in the church. On the one hand, Scripture calls us to be one in Christ. This is not just some theoretical oneness. It is a visible, actual unity of people with one another because they share in the common source of life—Jesus Christ. This unity is so real that the world comes to know God through it (John 17:23). This scriptural call to unity judges the church in its lack of unity.

Nevertheless, unity does not obliterate differences. To be whole, the body needs each part. In terms of racial and ethnic differences, the goal in the church is not to rub out those differences and try to make everyone the same. Each of us has a particular race, ethnicity, and culture. We do not cease to be Korean or Kenyan or American when we become part of the body. Rather, each particular person (and community) plays a part in making the body whole. Each person and community brings unique gifts and makes unique contributions. In the Spirit, diversity is no longer threatening; it is enriching. Unity and diversity together confirm that indeed the church is the Lord's work, not our own.¹¹

The report continues to describe what working out unity through diversity looks like. It calls the church

1. To pray and work for the increased enfolding of ethnic-minority persons into the CRCNA in order to reflect more fully the racial and ethnic diversity of Canada and the United States.
2. To ensure the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence at all levels of denominational life.¹²

Working out unity through diversity is antithetical to Kinism, which sees the only possibility for unity in an abstract, spiritual sense. We submit that where there is no physical unity, there can be no meaningful spiritual unity. The two go hand-in-hand. Synod stated in 1983,

Synod is deeply grieved and disturbed over the unbiblical ideology and persistent practice of apartheid/separate development in the society of South Africa and within white Reformed churches and the consequences these have, such as is evidenced by the fact that there are separate churches for believers of different races so that even at the table of the Lord racial separation is maintained.¹³

Synod 1984 laid the groundwork for the “God’s Diverse and Unified Family,” saying,

It is the judgment of the synod that

- where citizenship (with the full rights and privileges of membership) in a territorial state is allowed or disallowed on the basis of race or nationality (ethnic identity);
- where membership (with the full rights and privileges of membership) in a congregation of the church of Jesus Christ is allowed or disallowed on the basis of race or nationality;
- where participation in the Lord’s Supper is allowed or disallowed on the basis of race or nationality;
- where free and untrammeled participation in the economic life of a community is allowed or disallowed on the basis of race or nationality;
- where unrestricted participation in the public educational system of a society (or political entity) is allowed or disallowed on the basis of race or nationality;

¹¹ “God’s Diverse and Unified Family,” pp. 22-23.

¹² “God’s Diverse and Unified Family,” p. 29.

¹³ *Acts of Synod 1983*, p. 712.

—where unrestricted participation in social units (marriage/family, political parties, service or cultural associations, labor organizations, athletic organizations, etc.) or social functions (weddings, funerals, recreational or cultural gatherings, etc.) or public facilities (medical, travel, entertainment, athletic, recreational, service, etc.) is allowed or disallowed on the basis of race or nationality;
—or where [for any human being the granting of official status as] . . . a person with full dignity, rights, and privileges is conditional upon his/her having been assigned by authority a specific racial or national identity:

there race and/or national identity have been made an absolute that fundamentally conditions and qualifies the common humanity of all human persons (as absolute, if not more so, than the created distinction of male and female). As a result, the state, which under God is appointed the guardian of the rights and privileges of every human being and the defender of justice, becomes a power structure enforcing a false ideology and administering systematic injustice. As a result, also, the church, which in Christ has been made and called to be the one, new reconciled humanity, denies its confession of unity in Christ (one, holy, catholic church) and repudiates its calling to live together as the one body of Christ that acknowledges only the distinctions of spiritual gifts.

Where such an ideology is the guiding principle for the systematic policies of the state and where the evil of such an ideology, with all its sinful consequences, has been clearly and persistently exposed from within the church itself and where the church(es) nevertheless continue to support and/or do not oppose such an ideology and its resultant injustices, and where they reflect that same ideology in their own life and structure, a *status confessionis* concerning this matter must surely (though humbly and with anguish) be acknowledged.

Any church that supports or warrants such an ideology in the name of the Word of God is untrue to the Word of God, and the teachings it propounds in support or defense of such ideology must be judged heretical. And any church that does not vigorously oppose such an ideology must be judged guilty of disobedience to God's Word and to Christ its Lord.¹⁴

We, as a denomination, understood that we could not be associated with such an evil practice, given the theological and ethnic similarities between South African supporters of apartheid and the CRCNA. Likewise, we should be equally forceful in our denunciation of Kinism as it is rooted in the Reformed tradition.

The CRCNA has recognized that the church and state's role in race relations is not to facilitate segregation but to allow Christians to freely associate with other Christians in love regardless of race.

Believers should be equipped by the church through teaching and discipline to serve God, in all spheres of society, individually, and where possible, corporately. Believers must also proclaim the commandment of love in race relations and make it applicable to the affairs of civil government and the structures of society.¹⁵

Kinists' desire to establish an ethno-state runs contrary to the CRCNA's stated goal of proclaiming the commandment of love in race relations in civil government.

Synod clearly expressed that interracial worship is a starting point for living lives with people of different ethnic backgrounds when possible.

The unity of the Body of Christ should come to expression in common worship, including Holy Communion, among Christians regardless of race. It may be that linguistic or cultural differences make the formation of separate congregations, often with their own type of preaching and worship, advisable: in these

¹⁴ *Acts of Synod 1984*, pp. 603-604.

¹⁵ *Acts of Synod 1969*, p. 51.

cases it is wise not to force an outward and therefore artificial form of unity but to recognize the differentiation within the circle of God's people. However, the worshipping together of people of different races is a sign of the deepest unity of the church, and can be an example for the life of society as a whole.¹⁶

XI. Overture

Classis California South and Classis Hackensack overture Synod 2019 to do the following:

- A. Declare that this is a grievous deviation from sound doctrine, a heresy: the Kinist teaching that interracial marriage is sinful, and the theological reasoning supporting this teaching.

Grounds:

1. Kinist teaching on interracial marriage is demonstrably false according to Scripture, the confessions, contemporary testimonies, and past synodical statements and decisions of the CRCNA.
2. The CRCNA has declared both apartheid and the theological reasoning that supports apartheid to be heresy.
3. Kinism's teaching on interracial marriage is a grievous deviation from orthodoxy for the following reasons:
 - a. It compromises essential elements of the gospel according to Scripture: the unity of God's people in Christ, reconciliation between God and his one people as a mirror of the bond shared between a husband and a wife, and our reconciliation with God and one another through our salvation in Christ.
 - b. It violates our confessional standards, which emphasize the church's unity in a marriage-like relationship to Christ, signified by baptism, which makes us part of the one covenant community.
 - c. It runs contrary to past synodical decisions that allow for Christian liberty in choosing a spouse from a different race.
- B. Declare that this is a grievous deviation from sound doctrine, a heresy: the Kinist teaching that God has ordained separation in a religio-ethnostate, and the theological reasoning supporting this teaching.

Grounds:

1. Kinist teaching on the establishment of a religio-ethnostate that would forcibly separate Christians according to race is demonstrably false according to Scripture, the confessions, contemporary testimonies, and past synodical statements and decisions of the CRCNA.
2. The CRCNA has declared both apartheid and the theological reasoning that supports apartheid to be heresy.
3. Kinism's teaching on the establishment of a religio-ethnostate is a grievous deviation from orthodoxy for the following reasons:
 - a. It elevates the status of family, race, city, state, and nation above that of the church.
 - b. It inhibits the efforts of Christians to propagate the gospel to all nations in obedience to the Great Commission.
 - c. It contradicts our confessional standard on the role of civil government, which is to protect the church's freedom to share the gospel with

¹⁶ Ibid.

the entire world. Kinism would deny the church this freedom through the establishment of a religio-ethnstate resembling apartheid.

- d. It opposes past synodical decisions and statements that declare apartheid, and the theological arguments for apartheid, a heresy.

C. Declare that any officebearer who teaches or promotes Kinist theology is worthy of special discipline in accordance with Church Order Article 83.

Grounds:

1. Church Order Article 83 states, “Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.”
2. A heresy is a serious deviation from sound doctrine. Therefore, any officebearer who teaches Kinism is seriously deviating from sound doctrine and should be subject to discipline.

D. Instruct the executive director to create, through the appropriate agencies, opportunities for education, instruction, and discussion so that church leaders and lay members can recognize and refute the heresy of Kinism in various social contexts where they may encounter it.

Grounds:

1. Kinism in the CRCNA is contrary to our stated vision to be “a diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries expressing the good news of God’s kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.”
2. We believe God has called the CRCNA to minister to the entire world.
3. Toleration of Kinist theology and its worldview in the policy, clergy, or officebearers of the CRCNA communicates loudly that the CRCNA does not welcome people from ethnically diverse backgrounds in our community.

E. Acknowledge, with lament, the historic and present use of our beloved Reformed theological tradition to perpetuate hateful racial prejudice and the theological error of Kinism.

Grounds:

1. Even as we work to line up our behaviors with Scripture and doctrinal standards, we uphold the importance of naming the harm of past behavior. In worship, a guide to grateful living is insufficient without a prayer of confession. As this overture is offered as an act of worship, it is right that we confess as we also move toward amendment of our lives accordingly.
2. Given the Reformed theological heritage that the CRCNA shares with both apartheid in South Africa and Kinism in North America, it is incumbent upon us to be the harshest critics and the loudest voices calling upon the church to repent of racism in all its forms.

Classis California South
Cornelius Pool, stated clerk

Classis Hackensack
Sheila E. Holmes, stated clerk

Appendix

Commonly Held Beliefs of Kinists

Kinists believe the following:

- That a basic harmony exists between the mind and the body, the spirit and the flesh.
- That conversion often happens, but that the ordinary means by which the Church militant extends itself is through covenantal succession from Christian parents to covenant children.
- That men are not born blank slates, but inherit physical and mental characteristics, predilections, weaknesses, and strengths from their biological parents. That neither nature nor nurture is deterministic of behavior, but that both are highly influential.
- That race is biblically defined as common patrilineal descent. That, in consequence, race is the sum total of all the attributes a man inherits from his ancestors that he holds in common with his relatives, both near and distant.
- That culture is the external expression of religious belief in union with race and place.
- That the ideal Christian social order is an extension of the family concept, considered at a larger scale. That biblically, a nation is a large group of people of common patrilineal descent, living in a common geographical location, and having a shared religion, history, language, and civil government (a religio-ethnstate).
- That sin is a universal deformity in human nature, and that no perfect society is possible this side of heaven. That Christians should work to limit human error by seeking those conditions which are inherently productive of a harmony of interests, both in marriage and in society at large. That a harmony of interests naturally exists between people who are similar.
- That the God of the Old Testament, who forbade interracial, interreligious marriages to his covenant nation, is the same as the God of the New Testament. That marriage between parties who are not naturally congenial is unequal yoking. That unequal yoking in marriage or in society at large is destructive of Christian harmony, association, and growth.
- That those who are not Christian in outlook reject the transcendent unity of creation in God our Creator, and in its place seek to substitute an immanent unity that ultimately destroys all distinctions.
- That those seeking a New World Order find the boundless diversity in God's creation an intolerable hindrance to earthly unity. That they seek a one-world government, a one-world religion, and a one-world man. That multiculturalism, miscegenation, and transracial adoption are all means to their ends.
- That Cultural Marxists seek a revolutionary regeneration of society by destroying all the institutions of Christendom. That multiculturalism and politically correct newspeak, as well as their control of the news media, entertainment, and education, are all a means to that end. That all of Christendom's history is continually subjected to critical assessment designed to undermine it.

- That under the Abrahamic covenant, God's covenant nation consisted principally of a subset of Abraham's physical descendants. That in the New Covenant era, the elect come from all nations. That, nevertheless, God graciously made Europe the historic seat of Christendom. That because of this, the white Christian male is especially under attack by the forces of the New World Order.
- That atomistic individualism and centralized totalitarianism are not in tension, but are necessary corollaries. That the rise of rationalism has led to the simultaneous rise of an impersonal and rootless man and a unitary, technocratic state. That man inherently desires association and a sense of belonging, and that, in the absence of human-scale associations, will substitute the sense of belonging offered by the total state. That the cure for collectivism is not individualism, but rather to increase human-scale associations, principally in the primal community of the family, but also in multitudinous local social institutions, such as the church, civic organizations, and trade associations.
- That multiculturalism is destructive of community and leads to isolation, alienation or loss of identity, and a prevailing sense of loneliness. That a man who no longer identifies with his community will not expend his labor or capital in its maintenance, improvement, or in service of its future existence.
- That the forces of the New World Order have a vested interest in destroying community, as a means of atomizing man so that he willingly embraces the total state.
- That all men are equal only in the sense that we have a common origin and federal head in Adam. That we are equal before God's Law in the sense that it applies to all men; recognizing that in points it applies unequal treatment to the sexes, to believers than to unbelievers, to the native than to the alien. That men are unequal in almost every other way, whether it be in talents, intelligence, character, strength, appearance, etc. That these inequalities are inherent in man, and not the result of differences in their environment or upbringing. That Christians, the native born, and property owners have a greater claim to wielding power, whether that be holding a position of leadership, voting, land ownership, or freedom of movement. That hierarchy is the natural and proper structure of human society.
- That inequality has developed both along individual and racial lines, and that every race has its areas of superiority. That we should not be ashamed of those gifts God saw fit to bestow upon us, but enjoy them.
- That envy is a desire for equality taking the form of hatred of the superior. That the envious man begrudges others of their advantages, and rather than seeking to acquire those advantages for himself, instead seeks to destroy them so that all will be equal in their poverty of advantages. That envy motivates many minorities, and that separation is the only effective way to deal with it.
- That man, as a creature, is necessarily limited. That because he is limited, his responsibility to others is also limited. That human responsibility is biblically regulated by relationship, such that we have a greater responsibility to our own family, race, town, state, region, and country, than we

do to “the other.” That Christians should favor the native and the normal over the alien and the novel.

- That placing burdens on people they cannot bear inevitably induces guilt. That a guilty man is an easily controlled man. That a man with impossible burdens will seek a more powerful entity to bear those burdens for him. That the most powerful earthly entity is the state. That the agents of the New World Order have a vested interest in inducing guilt as a means of control.
- That atonement is an inescapable category for man. That if the true atonement of Christ is rejected, a substitute atonement will be sought elsewhere. That masochistic activity is often a false substitute means of self-atonement. That burden-bearing is one such masochistic activity. That transracial adoption is one common form of burden-bearing in the post-Christian church. That sacrificing one’s family to become a foreign missionary is another common form.
- That adoption should be a rare event, and that orphans should always be cared for by the relationally nearest family member willing to do so. That if no natural family is willing to care for the orphan, only then may a foster family be sought. That a foster family should only care for another’s child as a means of making the best of a bad situation, after the woman is beyond her childbearing years and all natural children have left the home. That transracial or international adoptions should not occur.
- That besides treating all men in accordance to God’s law, our only universal responsibility to others is to share the gospel with them. That this responsibility is not borne by every individual, but collectively by the church. That the social gospel is not the gospel, and that relief efforts, as well as educational and medical missions, are often destructive of the spread of Christianity to foreign cultures. That our responsibility consists only of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. That the most effective missionaries are native missionaries, and that foreign missionaries should only be considered if no natives are available. That a foreign missionary should be single, or married but childless.
- That dispossession, barrenness, population decline, wealth transfer, mental blindness, and widespread self-destructive behavior are clear external signs of God’s judgment. That the proper response to this is not to bare our necks to his chosen instruments of castigation, but to reassert the crown rights of King Jesus, and our lawful claims under his kingship.¹⁷

Overture 8: Withdraw Assertions by Synod 2012 about Climate Change

I. Background

Synod 2010 declared its intention to appoint a task force with the mandate to examine creation stewardship and climate change. A Creation Stewardship Task Force reported to Synod 2012 with a report of about 124 pages (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp. 287-411; available at crcna.org/synodresources).

The task force summarized its views on climate science in an extensive and technical appendix of 27 pages. At its core is Figure 11 (p. 372), which

¹⁷ tribaltheocrat.com/2013/08/what-is-kinism/ (accessed 1/12/19).

compares calculations of global warming from about 1900 to 2000 to the warming observed. These calculations were said to include the effect of atmospheric CO₂. The fit between calculation and observation was described as excellent. The task force concluded from this that these calculations are correct, that the related climate physics is understood, and that the observed warming is largely due to CO₂ generated by humans.

This conclusion follows from a rather technical discussion, and, in challenging it, this overture will perform also be technical. In order to clarify the technical context of the overture, it is recommended that the reader consult a helpful paper, "Climate Models for the Layman," written by Judith Curry, a leading climate scientist, available at www.thegwpf.org/content/uploads/2017/02/Curry-2017.pdf.

The task force also claimed (pp. 324, 340) that the scientific community is strongly supportive of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR4, 2007) position that "most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations."

In response, Synod 2012 agreed that "it is the current near-consensus of the international community that climate change is occurring and very likely due to human activity" and stated that "human-induced climate change . . . poses a significant threat . . ." (p. 803).

More recently, however, results of similar comparisons of calculated and observed global warming have been published that disagree sharply with the above.

J.R. Christy, a climate scientist, reported in March 2017 to the U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on a hundred model calculations of global warming from 1975 to 2020 that also attempted to include the effect of atmospheric CO₂ and compared the calculated warming to that observed. The results are shown in Figure 1 at the end of this overture. This graph reveals, on average, a marked difference between calculated and observed global warming from 2000 to 2015. This disagrees sharply with the "excellent" agreement of the above-mentioned Fig. 11 on which the conclusions of the task force are based.

Judith Curry, a widely published climate scientist, in *Climate Models for the Layman* (GWPF, 2017) carefully describes climate models and their predictions. She too sees large recent discrepancies between calculated and observed warming, and she attributes these mainly to the complexities that climate science must face. She describes these complexities in some detail.

Consider two further points made by Curry: "There are numerous arguments supporting the conclusion that climate models are not fit for the purpose of identifying with high confidence the proportion of the 20th century warming that was human-caused as opposed to natural"; and "There is growing evidence that climate models predict too much warming from atmospheric carbon dioxide."

Both authors write that, at this time, climate science is not well understood and that accurate calculations of the effect of anthropogenic CO₂ cannot now be made.

The task force also asserted there is a clear consensus among climate scientists that global warming is largely due to human-generated CO₂. J.R. Christy, in a 2017 report to the U.S. Senate, writes that "consensus science is

not science,” and that “consensus is a political notion, not a scientific notion.” Many others have expressed similar opinions on this alleged consensus. Furthermore, the fact that the average line of the figure below (that represents more than a hundred model calculations) deviates markedly from observations shows that the notion of the described consensus as claimed has little meaning.

In all this, a key parameter is the sensitivity of global temperatures to CO₂ levels. If this sensitivity is high enough, we should be concerned. Judith Curry writes that this sensitivity is very difficult to calculate accurately—the related climate science is too complex. Ross McKittrick has recently summarized data for this sensitivity (*National Post*, June 20, 2018) and has mentioned that according to the IPCC the sensitivity is such that, if CO₂ levels were to be doubled, the global temperature is likely to increase by a value between 1.5 and 4.5 degrees Celsius. According to McKittrick, for the lower limit we need not be concerned about CO₂ levels, while for the higher limit we should be. This would imply that the IPCC is unable at this time to determine if we should be alarmed by rising CO₂ levels. The IPCC cannot be more precise, McKittrick writes, “which is too bad, because an enormous amount of public policy depends on [this sensitivity].” Thus, the statement of Synod 2012, that “human-induced climate change . . . poses a significant threat,” and on which some denominational policy is presently based, may or may not be true. Again, climate science is too complex to reach this conclusion.

II. Overture

Synod 2012 has, first, accepted the Creation Stewardship Task Force report and, also, recognized a “near-consensus . . . that climate change is occurring and is very likely due to human activity” and that “human-induced climate change . . . poses a significant threat” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 803). We overture Synod 2019 to withdraw the two assertions made by Synod 2012.

Grounds:

1. Climate science is too complex for the denomination to reach such conclusions at this time.
 - a. These assertions are based on an alleged close agreement, dating to 2007, between calculated and observed global warming that is said to show the science is fully understood and that warming is clearly due to anthropogenic CO₂. However, more recent and detailed calculations, cited above, show no such agreement, implying that climate science of today is certainly not well understood. It follows that the effect of CO₂ generated by human activity cannot be calculated accurately, and this uncertainty is also reflected in a wide range of the calculated sensitivity of global temperatures to CO₂ levels. The papers cited above show that climate science is too complex and unsettled to conclude that we should certainly be concerned about anthropogenic CO₂.
 - b. No doubt others can point to papers disagreeing with the publications cited above, but it is not the task of an ecclesiastical assembly to resolve these complexities in climate science.
 - c. All this implies that the consensus described above is also debatable.

- d. Synod 2012 reaffirmed “biblical principles of responsible dominion, care, and stewardship of creation as articulated in Our World Belongs to God” (*Acts of Synod* 2012, p. 803) and as mentioned in the task force report. Such principles would rightly have us consider living in a stewardly fashion, but they should not have Synod 2019 continue to endorse a position on climate science that, as we show above, is contentious. Here we should quote the task force report: “continually emerging science is a valid and necessary means for knowledge about God’s world . . .” (p. 803).
2. Furthermore, the Church Order prevents synod from maintaining its stated position on the effect of human-generated CO₂ or attempting to resolve these differences. Church Order Article 28-a states, “These assemblies [council, classis, synod] shall transact ecclesiastical matters only, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner.” Two authors give information on Article 28 that is relevant to the present case:
- Henry DeMoor, in the *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (2010), states, “The church is concerned with such things as Christian worship, the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the nature of the faith of God’s people, pastoral care, and mission efforts” (p. 157). The position on climate science taken by Synod 2012 does not come under any of these tasks.
 - Peter Borgdorff, in the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (2017), writes regarding Article 28, “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” (p. 111, emphasis ours).
- a. This Church Order article should have prevented Synod 2012 from making clear announcements on climate science and the causes of global warming. Some 2012 overtures (56, 57, 58, 59) pointed out that synod should hesitate to speak on a topic that has clear scientific and political aspects.
- b. Synod 2018 affirmed that the denomination and its churches should be free to take part in political action toward justice and mercy. These qualities are core concepts of the Bible. Decisions related to highly complex calculations in climate science are not, however, simply related to such core concepts.

We realize that this overture questions a position taken by Synod 2012 on the effects of human-generated greenhouse gases that in turn led synod to adopt a detailed Call for Action to reduce our carbon footprint. We do not mean to imply that all suggestions should now be ignored—many of them are laudable. In our seeking a stewardly use of fossil fuels without knowing accurately how this would affect our climate, the following might be kept in mind.

- The precautionary principle (“it is better to be safe than sorry”) would have us reduce our usage of fossil fuels.
- However, as papers by, for instance, the Cornwall Alliance show, the poor in both North America and overseas may be negatively affected by our advocating low usage of fossil fuels.

- We have recently seen that public policies toward reduction of the usage of fossil fuels can be both complex and costly.

Regrettably, in all this there are few obvious and effective measures.

Council of Calvary CRC, Ottawa, Ontario
Marsha Hodges, clerk

Note: The above overture was presented to Classis Eastern Canada at its meeting on March 1, 2019, but was not adopted.

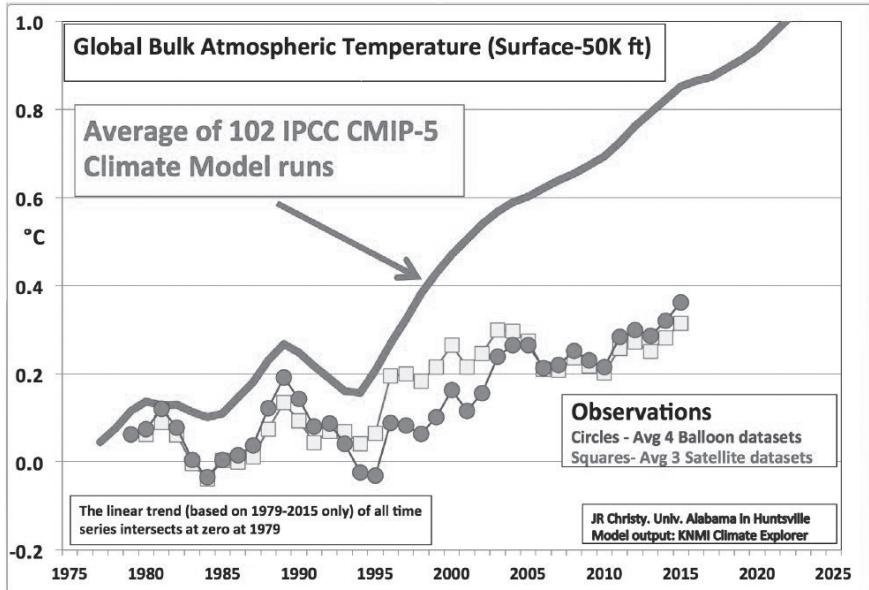


Figure 1: A comparison of averaged global warming calculated in 102 model runs with observed warming (J.R. Christy, 2016, 2017). The increasingly poor fit at recent times shows that the climate science is not understood well enough for the effect of CO₂ to be accurately calculated.

Overture 9: Revise Church Order Articles 51 and 54; Encourage Churches to Review their Worship Practices

I. Background

For much of its history, Christian Reformed congregations have held to a deeply embedded practice of assembling for worship twice each Lord's Day. Reflecting the biblical practice of morning and evening sacrifice (cf. Num. 28:4; Ps. 92:1) and patterns developed in church history, the Reformed churches have traditionally mandated a second preaching service each Sunday that often included a time of catechism instruction. This practice was enshrined in Church Order Article 51, which historically required all congregations to assemble for worship "at least twice on the Lord's Day." Though this requirement was softened so that churches are now merely

instructed to worship “ordinarily” twice on the Lord’s Day (*Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 766-67), morning and evening worship remains an official requirement for CRC congregations.

If, however, one function of Church Order is to reflect the common expectations of the churches (Church Order Article 86), then the requirement of two separate services needs to be examined in light of current practice. A cursory survey of CRC congregations from the *Yearbook* reveals that only about one-third of churches hold two worship services per Sunday (a fact which also has implications for the requirement of catechism preaching found in Church Order Art. 54-b). As synod noted some years ago, this data, at least in part, “reflects God’s blessing on our effort to become a multiethnic denomination,” enriched by those who traditionally worship on another evening of the week or in early morning prayer services (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 753). Others may note that neither God’s Word nor the Reformed confessions mandate a second preaching service; in fact, the goals of rest and worship reflected in the confessions (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 103) may be met in other ways than by attendance at a public worship service.

So if a second worship service on the Lord’s Day no longer reflects a shared commitment as a congregation, and classes no longer expect congregations “exploring alternatives to the second service . . . to ensure that such alternatives are part of a strategic ministry plan” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 51-a, pt. b), then perhaps it is time for the CRC to change Church Order to reflect our present expectations of one another.

At the same time, however, we should not simply dismiss the CRC’s tradition of morning and evening worship as a quaint historic artifact. We need to acknowledge that we live in a world that does not prioritize the worship of the triune God, and that we tend to rest in a selfish way that does not renew us in the finished work of Christ. There is something countercultural in Article 51-a that, while perhaps it should not be stated as a requirement, should prompt us to ask whether we as a denomination are doing enough to call attention to the story of the gospel which is told through public worship each week.

For this reason, even as we propose a change to the Church Order, we would echo the call of Classis Alberta North in its overture to Synod 1995 (see *Agenda for Synod 1995*, pp. 326-29). As that classis noted, the second service has long proven to be a helpful discipline in fostering appropriate observance of the Lord’s Day, raising the level of biblical and doctrinal literacy in the church, and creating opportunity for deeper and richer fellowship. Each of these issues, it could be argued, remains vitally important for Christians to flourish today. Some congregations that have continued the practice of a second worship service can testify to these benefits. For those congregations exploring an alternative to the evening worship service, or for those that have already stopped worshiping on Sunday evenings, perhaps there are ways to reimagine what public gatherings for worship might look like:

- Some churches hold a regularly scheduled time of Bible study, with time for song and prayer, on a Sunday evening.
- Other churches might consider holding a regular time of prayer for specific needs of the community or the world, in the spirit of the current

denominational day of prayer or the weekday morning prayer time of many Korean churches.

- A variety of denominations have drawn on resources from the wider church: Taizé services, evensong, and so on.

Such gatherings may be much less formal than the main worship service, while still providing opportunities for a public invitation to the assembly of God's people. It may be that the denomination's liturgical committee has other suggestions for elements and practices that congregations have found helpful in calling people into a relationship of rest and worship with the risen Lord.

We would also note that it is important for the CRC to be clear about the central purpose of our worship. Article 51-b of the Church Order identifies a number of annual liturgical celebrations, most of which are organized around the central events of our salvation. In the past synod discouraged denominational boards and committees from designating certain Lord's Days by a specific name so as not to detract from worship by directing attention to a cause or institution (*Acts of Synod 1964*, p. 26). This caution is worth remembering at a time when an increasing number of Sundays are given to promotion of the various agencies and causes favored by the CRC, even good causes such as justice or world hunger. Though we recognize that the work of CRC ministries may be celebrated in an appropriate way during public worship, as a denomination we also need to remember the central message of our liturgy, which is to ascribe worth, adoration, and praise to the triune God for the redemption given us in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

II. Overture

In order to bring the Church Order more into alignment with our current practice as a denomination, and to foster conversation among the churches about the expectations that should shape our worship practices, Classis Atlantic Northeast overtures synod to do the following:

A. Propose that a future synod adopt the following changes to Church Order Article 51 (deletions indicated by strikethrough, changes indicated by *italics*):

- a. The congregation shall assemble for worship,~~ordinarily twice~~ on the Lord's Day, to hear God's Word, to receive the sacraments, to engage in praise and prayer, and to present gifts of gratitude.
- b. *Each classis shall affirm the rich tradition of assembling a second time on the Lord's Day for worship, learning, prayer, and fellowship by encouraging churches to include these items as part of a strategic ministry plan for the building up of the body of Christ.*

Note: The current sections b and c would be relettered c and d; Supplement, Article 51-a would be deleted.

Grounds:

- a. These changes would bring the Church Order into harmony with the current practice of the vast majority of congregations, so that its provisions for public worship are “faithfully observed” (Church Order Article 86).
 - b. Though Scripture nowhere indicates the frequency of worship on the Lord’s Day, the proposed Article 51-b highlights the value of a time beyond Sunday-morning worship when the whole congregation may be invited to assemble as Christ’s people and invites the broader assemblies to foster conversations about how this might best be done.
- B. That synod propose the deletion of Church Order Article 54-b.

Grounds:

1. Though it is important for our preaching to reflect the instruction of the Reformed confessions, the current Church Order Article 54-a already requires that preaching be guided by the creeds and confessions, and a specific obligation for catechetical preaching is an unrealistic expectation when a single Sunday worship service is already our denominational norm.
2. This brings Church Order into harmony with denominational practice (Church Order Article 86).

C. That synod affirm the rich tradition of assembling for worship twice on the Lord’s Day and instruct the Council of Delegates to instruct the Faith Formation office to make resources available to the churches that would encourage existing congregations to continue, and new congregations to embrace, some kind of assembly that builds up the body of Christ.

Ground: This would provide congregations with additional resources for carrying on the tradition of, or beginning, a second Sunday service, in keeping with the decisions of earlier synods (see *Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 766-67).

D. That synod remind denominational boards and committees of its decision of 1964 that the recognition of institutions and causes not detract from the worship of God (see *Acts of Synod 1964*, p. 26; see also *Acts of Synod 1972*, p. 24; *Acts of Synod 1980*, pp. 69-70; *Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 593; and *Agenda for Synod 1985*, p. 149) and review the current list of special observances in light of this earlier decision.

Grounds:

1. Though it is important to draw attention to the work which God is doing in and through the church, such consideration can distract the congregation’s attention from the work of God in Christ which saves us from our sin.
2. The number of requests for special observances has grown since 1964, and it is not clear that such a regular review has taken place since that time.

Classis Atlantic Northeast
David D. Poolman, stated clerk

Overture 10: Provide Legal Counsel to Assist Congregations with Immigration

I. Background

Our denomination has immigrant roots. The Christian Reformed Church in North America dates back to November 19, 1846, when Rev. Albertus Van Raalte and his congregation of 53 people left the port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. When these new immigrants arrived in New York City, many earlier Dutch immigrants in Manhattan helped the newcomers arrange travel, find employment, and settle in. On February 9, 1847, the congregation moved to and began settling on a parcel of land that became Holland, Michigan. A large number of Dutch immigrants continued to come. Within a year of the Van Raalte colony arriving, the community had grown to 4,000. This immigrant community began making North America their home. The first English worship service took place in 1871. By 1887, the first English-speaking congregation had organized. Synod 1932 switched all official business from Dutch to English. Immigrants continued to come; many among them were ministers with families. The last big wave of immigrants came after World War II to settle in Canada.

Our denomination is binational and increasingly multinational. CRC ministers with citizenship in Canada and / or the United States can serve in congregations on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border. They do this while navigating ever-changing immigration policies. For a growing number of congregations in the CRCNA today, the primary language in worship is not English. These congregations currently worship in Korean, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotian, Khmer, Burmese, and other languages. These congregations and even those for whom English is the primary language spoken are increasingly extending calls to ministers with citizenship outside North America. The international student enrollment at Calvin Theological Seminary has been on the rise, especially from China. Spouses of Resonate Global Missions missionaries and some staff at Back to God Ministries International hold non-Canadian and non-U.S. citizenships.

Navigating immigration requires professional legal counsel. The policies that affect immigration to North America have grown far more complex since the Van Raalte colony disembarked in New York City. Individual congregations spend substantial sums of money on immigration attorneys and filing fees. These additional costs have created a barrier in the binational commitment of our denomination. The complexity and cost of the immigration process can be daunting for congregations and ministers.

II. Overture

Classis Hackensack overtures Synod 2019 as follows:

- Instruct the executive director to work with the denomination’s Human Resources Office to arrange for an immigration attorney versed in United States and Canadian immigration law to be on retainer for congregations and pastors who need help with immigration matters, whether in the process of calling CRC pastors from across the U.S.-Canada border or in the process of calling pastors from outside the United States and Canada.

- That \$50,000 be included in the denominational budget for immigration legal assistance through a ministry-share increase.

Grounds:

1. Church Order Article 28-b states that "a major assembly shall deal only with those matters which concern its churches in common." The need for sound counsel on immigration issues is needed across the denomination.
2. Having a single firm dedicated to working with congregations and ministers of the denomination would create financial and time efficiency for the congregations and attorney involved.
3. A great burden for ministers and congregations would be alleviated.
4. Our binational and international commitment would be strengthened.

Classis Hackensack
Sheila E. Holmes, stated clerk

Overture 11: Provide Funding, Support, and Care for Resonate Global Mission Missionaries through Individual Classes

Classis Iakota overtures synod to place all Resonate Global Mission missionaries into individual classes for funding, support, and care.

Grounds:

1. Our denominational missionaries are not called by God to fundraise first and provide ministry second.
2. Our missionaries have to raise a large majority of their own support prior to going on the mission field.
3. Allowing missionaries to return to local church and classis support alone would alleviate the missionaries' need for fundraising entirely, as each missionary would be supported fully by the churches of the local classis.
4. This would provide greater transparency and accountability between churches and missionaries and open new possibilities for stronger mutual support.
5. This would drastically reduce the travel time and expenses that are currently required for going across all of North America. In this way the missionary families could experience rest and renewal prior to going back to the mission field.
6. For those classes that struggle to support one missionary, the missionary could be shared with another adjoining classis.
7. Our goal would be to get more funded missionaries in the field.

Classis Iakota
Bernard J. Haan, stated clerk

Overture 12: Identify Pastors Who Left the CRC for the United Reformed Church; Change Their Status

I. Background

The URC [United Reformed Church] 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.

(*Agenda for Synod 2018*, p. 349)

II. Overture

Classis Lake Superior overtures Synod 2019 to direct the executive director to work with the Council of Delegates to identify pastors who left the CRC for the United Reformed Church (URC) due to deep convictions of their faith and change their status where they deem appropriate to "honorably discharged." Pastors who are identified should be sent a letter stating the change, or to their surviving family where necessary.

Grounds:

1. We are called to attempt to reconcile with anyone who has something against us.

"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."

(Matt. 5:23-25)

2. Unresolved church conflict is not good for church growth or advancing God's kingdom globally.
3. We need to forgive where we felt hurt or wronged.

"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."

(Matt. 6:14-15)

Classis Lake Superior
Henry G. Gunnink, stated clerk

Overture 13: Add the New City Catechism to the Contemporary Testimony Category

I. Background

In 2017 the New City Catechism was produced by the Gospel Coalition and Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City as a tool to assist people of this generation to learn the basics of the Reformed faith. The Gospel Coalition is a broadly Reformed network of churches, and Redeemer Presbyterian Church was founded by Pastor Tim Keller.

The New City Catechism consists of fifty-two questions and answers that are clear and concise and include content similar to the Heidelberg Catechism. The format consists of the familiar Creation – Fall – Redemption – Restoration sequence, and the content includes specific topics such as the Ten Commandments, Prayer, and the Sacraments. For example, Q. and A. 1 of the New City Catechism is an abbreviation of Q. and A. 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Question 1 asks, “What is our only hope in life and death?” The answer is “That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.”

While much of the content is similar to the Heidelberg Catechism, the New City Catechism places greater emphasis on the purpose of humanity than does the Heidelberg Catechism. For example, even though Q. and A. 4 of the New City Catechism has content similar to Q. and A. 6 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 4 of the New City Catechism asks much more directly, “How and why did God create us?” The answer declares, “God created us male and female in his own image to know him, love him, live with him, and glorify him. And it is right that we who were created by God should live to his glory.” Question 6 of the New City Catechism then goes a step further by asking, “How can we glorify God?” The answer is “We glorify God by enjoying him, loving him, trusting him, and by obeying his will, commands, and law.” These two Q. and A.s provided in the New City Catechism on humanity’s purpose present vital questions that people are asking in our society. All too often it seems that people are enticed into thinking that God is pleased and glorified by any decision that makes us feel good about ourselves. These two Q. and A.s boldly speak to this important matter by appropriately realigning our minds and hearts with God’s Word and will.

A second example in which the New City Catechism goes a step further in focus than the Heidelberg Catechism is that it provides a definition of the *doctrine of sin*. The Heidelberg Catechism, while discussing sin and misery, never offers a succinct explanation of *sin*. In our society in which sin is trivialized by many, the New City Catechism wisely speaks of this essential truth in Q. and A. 16: “Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law – resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation.” This answer not only provides a clear definition of sin but also describes the results of sin in our world.

Another point regarding the New City Catechism is that it provides a more concrete Q. and A. on the work of the Holy Spirit than does the Heidelberg Catechism. Question 37 of the New City Catechism asks, “How does the Holy Spirit help us?” and answers, “The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, comforts us, guides us, gives us spiritual gifts and the desire to

obey God; and he enables us to pray and to understand God's Word." This concrete answer is valuable as people will see that the Holy Spirit works in a variety of ways, ways that aren't always comfortable but that always concur with God's Word and will.

In all three examples given above, one observes that while the content of both documents is similar, the New City Catechism speaks more directly to these particular matters. This should be viewed as a positive quality since any document that is added to the Contemporary Testimony category should embrace theology that agrees fully with our Three Forms of Unity. In addition, the New City Catechism's format and style communicates these teachings in a way that is especially helpful to children and youth. The answers are brief and are complemented by simple illustrations and Scripture. The online version, as found at www.newcitycatechism.com also includes the questions and answers put to music so that children can sing them. This serves as an aid to memorization. In addition, this catechism has been translated into seven other languages: Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Synod 2017 adopted the new category of contemporary testimony with the following definition:

A contemporary testimony is a dynamic statement of faith that serves the CRC-NNA—its congregations and members—as an important statement that speaks to essential matters in a given time period. It is useful for study, faith formation, teaching, and worship. As such, it must periodically be reviewed if it is to speak contemporaneously and perhaps (1) be revised if authorship belongs to the CRCNA or (2) be provided newly revised accompanying explanatory material if authorship belongs elsewhere.

(Acts of Synod 2017, p. 699)

Synod 2017 placed Our World Belongs to God and the Belhar Confession into this new category (see *Acts of Synod 2017*, pp. 699-700, 707-708). These documents were added to the contemporary testimony category because synod recognized that their content speaks to important issues in our society. Likewise, the New City Catechism is a document that speaks to essential matters that Christians wrestle with in our society. Given its content and structure, this document is also useful for study, faith formation, teaching, and worship. It can be used in book form or digitally, via the Internet or phone app (see www.newcitycatechism.com). Therefore, the New City Catechism is a great resource for the CRCNA that will assist in the instruction of its members, especially children and youth.

II. Overture

That synod place the New City Catechism into the category of contemporary testimony.

Grounds:

1. The format and content of the New City Catechism concur with a Reformed understanding of Scripture and with the Heidelberg Catechism.
2. This document is clear and concise and will be of particular benefit to children and youth.
3. The New City Catechism is in accord with the definition and purpose of the new contemporary testimony category. As described above, it

speaks to essential matters in our society and will be useful for study, faith formation, teaching, and worship.

Council of Williamsburg (Ont.) CRC
Brent DeVries, clerk

Note: The above overture was considered by Classis Eastern Canada at its March 2018 meeting but was not adopted. The council subsequently submitted the overture after the March 15 deadline for consideration by Synod 2018; therefore, it is before Synod 2019 for consideration.

Overture 14: Appoint a Committee to Study the Morality and Advisability of Ecclesiastical (Non-Civil) Marriages

I. Background

As a church with many older-age individuals, the scenario of late-in-life remarriages presents peculiar opportunities and challenges. One of the beautiful things about late-in-life remarriages (for example, a widow and a widower, both in their eighties, decide to get married), is that marriage as a source of companionship and continued growth brings glory to God, who created marriage. A big challenge, however, takes shape surrounding financial concerns that often rise up in old age. Suppose a man and a woman marry, but within a few years one of them needs nursing-home care. Potentially, the spouse who is not in the nursing home has all of the money that he or she saved over many years depleted in short order. To get around a financial difficulty like that, many couples desire to be married in the eyes of the church but not in the eyes of the state; they want to separate ecclesiastical marriage from civil marriage.

Is it morally right for a church to recognize or declare marriages that are not recognized or declared simultaneously by the state? One might also consider such marriages among younger people. Perhaps student housing, tax policy, or health insurance might make marriage financially problematic. Sometimes among immigrant and refugee populations the church runs into difficult questions about marriage (for example, what if people have been married, but that marriage is only recognized by the families or the village in the country of origin and not by a regional or national government?). Should the church make allowances for non-civil marriages, or are such marriages themselves incompatible with what the Bible teaches about marriage? Is it a biblical requirement that marriages among Christians always be marriages recognized by the state? An argument can be made that marriage comes with risks and responsibilities (as implied in many marriage forms) and these ought to be embraced by Christians. At the same time an argument can be made that the current form of marriage as an institution that is at once civil and ecclesiastical is something alien to the Bible.

Given that our denomination excels at careful and nuanced thought, Classis Georgetown overtures synod to appoint a committee to examine the compatibility (or lack thereof) of church-only marriages with the ministry of the church; in addition, that synod task the committee to offer advice and guidelines for the church as we seek to uphold God's design for marriage and help couples to thrive in a fallen world.

II. Overture

Cassis Georgetown overtures synod to appoint a committee to study the morality and advisability of ecclesiastical (non-civil) marriages or recommend the matter to an existing CRC entity (such as the synodical Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality).

Ground: This would help congregations and pastors better minister to couples seeking marriage in situations where civil marriage creates financial problems.

Cassis Georgetown
Glenda Tebben, stated clerk

Overture 15: Do Not Adopt Recommendation 4 of the Synod Review Task Force Report

Cassis Holland overtures Synod 2019 not to adopt Recommendation 4 of the Synod Review Task Force report, which recommends the introduction of a registration fee from the classes for each synodical delegate.

Grounds:

1. The churches already have a sense of financial ownership in denominational matters through the ministry-share system, and it is doubtful that requiring more financial obligations will foster a greater sense of ownership.
2. The costs of synod are already included in the ministry shares requested from each CRC congregation, thus a registration fee should not be necessary.
3. Ministry-share costs continue to rise, despite instructions of Synod 2016 to the BOT (at that time) to minimize the denominational footprint (see *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 858). Requiring a registration fee is, functionally, another increase to ministry shares but with a different name.
4. The grounds given for Recommendation 4 do not address any particular need/reason for introducing a registration fee, other than to give churches a greater sense of ownership. There are many other ways to promote ownership within the denomination that would not require further financial burdens on the churches of the CRC.

Cassis Holland
Calvin Hoogstra, stated clerk

Overture 16: Do Not Adopt Recommendation 20 of the Synod Review Task Force Report

I. Background

The Synod Review Task Force report, in its Recommendation 20, suggests “that synod encourage diversity in classical delegations to synod, as previously approved by synod, and require each classis to include at least one woman *or* one ethnic minority person in its delegation of one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod.”

Although encouraging ethnic diversity is commendable, requiring ethnic and gender diversity is unwise and impractical.

Note the word *require* and compare this to the decision of Synod 2000 (*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 694):

Although there are within the denomination firmly held differences on the issue of ordaining women to the offices of elder, minister, and [commissioned pastor], these differences do not separate us from Christ, nor are they of such an essential nature that they warrant division within the church. Therefore, it is our responsibility to seek earnestly to live together in unity and to minister together for the glory of God.

Grounds:

- a. The Lord of the church and his apostles call us to live in unity (John 17; Eph. 4:1-3).
- b. In spite of different conclusions, all have drawn their arguments from Scripture and are together in desiring to honor Christ as Head of the church.
- c. As a denomination we have a rich heritage together and have been led into many important ministries.
- d. Living and serving together in love will be a blessing to us and our children, a witness to other churches and the world, and God glorifying.

II. Overture

Classis Central Plains overtures Synod 2019 not to adopt Recommendation 20 of the Synod Review Task Force (SRTF) report.

Grounds:

1. It is the prerogative of local congregations and classes to delegate those people they deem scripturally qualified, capable, and willing to go. (See Church Order Art. 3 and its Supplement; Supplement, Art. 40-a, point b; and Supplement, Art. 45, point b, 1.)
2. Mandates requiring certain diversity in makeup are arbitrary and unhelpful. Delegates will naturally reflect the makeup of the respective churches, and in many of our congregations, our current delegates faithfully reflect that makeup.
3. This requirement impinges on the consciences of members of our denomination. To require that delegates to synod have gender diversity overrides the classical-local option approved in 1995. Congregations and classes that see fit to ordain women are free to delegate them. At the same time, congregations and classes that understand that women serving as elders and pastors is in violation of the Word of God naturally will not have women to delegate as they are not serving in those offices (see *Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 694).
4. The second ground of the SRTF recommendation states, “This practice would eventually eliminate the need for nonvoting advisers.” While this would be a way to cut costs, we need to remember that advisers are a good thing, not to be regarded as something to be eliminated. Synod has been, and will continue to be, well served by its nonvoting advisers, including youth and theological advisers. Synod will never be a completely representative body and should continue to engage advisers as a necessary, worthwhile cost. Proverbs 15:22 states, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

Classis Central Plains
Jonathan Spronk, stated clerk

Overture 17: Do Not Adopt Recommendation 20 in the Synod Review Task Force Report

I. Background

The Synod Review Task Force has submitted its report for discussion and careful review. Having reviewed the recommendations for changes to synod, one matter concerns Classis Georgetown—Recommendation 20, inserted below:

That synod encourage diversity in classical delegations to synod, as previously approved by synod, and require each classis to include at least one woman or one ethnic minority person in its delegation of one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod.

Grounds:

- a. This requirement would increase the number of ethnic minority and women delegates.
- b. This practice would eventually eliminate the need for nonvoting advisers.

What troubles Classis Georgetown, for two reasons, is the language that synod *require* each classis to include a person who fits within certain ethnic or gender parameters.

One reason is biblical: in the light of passages such as Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11, is it appropriate to set up ethnic or gender qualifications (even if for only 25 percent of a delegation)? The other reason has to do with our Church Order. If authority originates in the local council and that authority is then delegated to a classis and from a classis to synod, isn't synod reversing the flow of authority by setting such requirements on the delegations to be chosen by each classis? Would it be appropriate for a classis to make such demands of a council regarding its delegation to classis?

An additional consideration is the fact that Classis Georgetown has had a difficult time finding people to serve as delegates to synod; any reductions in our pool of potential delegates will adversely affect our efforts. Furthermore, synod continues to invite women and ethnic advisers, and if the other recommendations regarding power and privilege awareness training are adopted, it seems that synod will be well positioned to be a welcoming and safe space for everyone. It is hard to understand how Recommendation 20 would then improve the already collegial atmosphere of synod.

Finally, we wish to make known that we appreciate the desire of the task force to promote more diverse synods. We do not believe that the language of *require* is appropriate and would prefer that *require* be changed to another word (*desire, recommend, ask, etc.*).

II. Overture

Classis Georgetown overtures Synod 2019 not to adopt Recommendation 20 of the Synod Review Task Force report using the current word *require*.

Grounds:

1. This recommendation seems to go against the Bible's teaching that the identity of a believer in Christ transcends gender and ethnicity.
2. This recommendation seems to go against church polity.

Classis Georgetown
Glenda Tebben, stated clerk

Overture 18: Do Not Adopt Recommendation 20 of the Synod Review Task Force Report

I. Background

Synod 2016 established the Synod Review Task Force (SRTF) “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; see *Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 826-27). It is clear that much time, work, and thought was put into the recommendations brought by the SRTF. However, Recommendation 20 causes unnecessary tension and change to the positions of the CRCNA and current synodical practice.

Recommendation 20 proposes “that synod encourage diversity in classical delegations to synod, as previously approved by synod, and require each classis to include at least one woman or one ethnic minority person in its delegation of one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod.” The stated grounds are (a) “This requirement would increase the number of ethnic minority and women delegates” and (b) “This practice would eventually eliminate the need for nonvoting advisers.”

II. Overture

Classis Iakota overtures Synod 2019 not to adopt Recommendation 20 of the Synod Review Task Force report.

Grounds:

1. Classis Iakota and other classes have experienced disagreement regarding individual churches having women in office as delegates to classical and synodical meetings. The denomination officially recognizes that there are biblical grounds for both the positions to allow women in office as well as to not allow. To require every classis to potentially send at least one woman delegate would create hardship or a burden on the consciences of those classes which do not permit women as delegates or who are not able to find a woman delegate.
2. Classis Iakota and other classes are made of local congregations that are predominantly monocultural. In many places, this reflects the cultural, racial, and ethnic make-up of the communities within which they are located. We are not against diversity or striving to reflect the all nations, languages, tribes, and races make-up that we believe Christ’s kingdom is to include. We, local congregations and classes, should be encouraged to pursue welcoming and including ethnic minorities in our congregations, and if qualified and called by God, to include those members in our leadership. However, with a limited number of people from ethnic minorities in our churches currently, a “requirement” to have an ethnic minority as part of our delegation, particularly if a classis will not send a woman, is an unnecessary burden.
3. The SRTF offers no protocol or option if a classis is unable or unwilling to send either a woman or an ethnic minority person. It is unclear but assumed, if this is a requirement, that classes that are unable or unwilling to send such a delegate may only send three delegates rather

than four. The addition of deacon delegates has noticeably been a hardship for some classes since their addition, resulting in some classes not being able to send a full delegation and thus not having an equal voice. This recommendation would create an unnecessary change to synodical practice limiting certain classes.

Classis Iakota

Bernard J. Haan, stated clerk

**Overture 19: Replace the Word *Require* with *Recommend* in
Recommendation 20 of the Synod Review Task Force Report**

Classis Heartland overtures synod to replace the word *require* with *recommend* in Recommendation 20 of the Synod Review Task Force report. Recommendation 20 of the report states

That synod encourage diversity in classical delegations to synod, as previously approved by synod, and *require* each classis to include at least one woman or one ethnic minority person in its delegation of one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod.

Grounds:

- a. This requirement would increase the number of ethnic minority and women delegates.
- b. This practice would eventually eliminate the need for nonvoting advisers.

Grounds:

1. Classis Heartland does not allow women to be seated at classis, which would prevent our classis from delegating "at least one woman."
2. Classis Heartland is limited in its ability to provide enough ethnic minorities to serve on the synodical level. (Most of our churches' delegations to classis are Caucasian men.)
3. Synod allows varying opinions/perspectives on the woman in office issue (i.e., *Acts of Synod 2007* – Synod decided that classes "may, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers not be delegated to classis"). By requiring at least one woman or one ethnic minority to serve, synod would be forcing the hand of each classis, especially when it comes to the women-in-office issue, to fully integrate and allow women in ecclesiastical office, which goes against Classis Heartland's understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office.

Classis Heartland

Robert D. Drenten, stated clerk

Overture 20: Do Not Adopt Recommendations 4, 20, and 25 of the Synod Review Task Force Report

I. Background

The Synod Review Task Force (SRTF) report invited responses from congregations and classes. As a classis, we submit this communication to speak in support of recommendations we believe are most helpful and to speak against three recommendations.

The report demonstrates that the SRTF carried out its stated task with thoughtfulness, depth, and clarity. We appreciate how the team summarized evaluative feedback in sections III, C and D and carried this over into some of their recommendations. Recent delegates to synod affirm that agenda summary documents (Recommendation 18) and orientation improvements (Recommendations 16, 24, and 26) will help delegates fulfill their responsibilities. We appreciate the committee's focus on financial stewardship in locations selection (Recommendation 3). We also strongly agree that current social media necessitate new guidelines for delegates' electronic communication during synod (Recommendation 28). The updated description of synod itself (Recommendation 16) and limiting the number of major study reports to be considered at a synod (Recommendation 13) also seem like wise provisions.

While we welcome the SRTF's encouragements to classes in statements such as Recommendations 5 and 19, we believe the task force has stepped beyond its mandate by proposing new rules classes must follow in Recommendations 4 and 20. The report under consideration does not specify repercussions that a classis would face if it were unable to fulfill either of these requirements. The SRTF did not provide any budgetary estimates for classes' costs, which is crucial information to have before considering Recommendation 4. Our classis has met the requirements found in Recommendation 20 only once in the past six years, and we do not know how much this may or may not change in the near future. The report also wrongly assumes that "power and privilege" training is a biblical and wise way to nurture mutual appreciation and respectful collaboration among delegates. We believe synod should not adopt Recommendations 4, 20, and 25 because they do not reflect biblical teaching or ecclesiastical precedent.

A. Response to Recommendation 4

Recommendation 4 proposes that each classis make a "modest contribution . . . in the form of a 'delegate fee' and partial payment of travel costs." In other words, the SRTF is recommending classes pay part of the cost to conduct synod. Why fund one assembly's meeting with funds from another assembly, both of which are financed from congregations through ministry shares? Would a classis ever require delegates from its member churches to pay a fee to participate in classis deliberations? If not, synod should probably not do this either. The note under this recommendation acknowledges some classes would find it difficult to make this contribution and goes on to state that a higher contribution would be imposed on financially healthy classes whose churches are not paying enough denominational ministry shares.

This shift in funding sources and plan to collect additional money from some classes is put forward without solid grounds. The only rationale given

is the first ground (IV, 4, a) which states, “Such contributions could help to enhance a sense of ownership of denominational matters by classes and their local congregations.” This move could easily have the very opposite effect among some classes and congregations. It is difficult to imagine a classis made up of churches who appreciate each other but struggle to appreciate denominational agencies will take more ownership in denominational matters because synod now requires them to pay to participate. If denominational ministry shares are inadequate, synod should investigate this challenge. If this ministry share shortfall has been studied, a summary of this analysis ought to be considered as synod responds to Recommendation 4.

B. Response to Recommendation 20

Recommendation 20 in the SRTF report begins with an encouragement for classes to delegate a diversity of persons to synod, then goes on to propose that synod “*require* each classis to include at least one woman or one ethnic minority person in its delegation” [emphasis added]. In other words, the task force recommends that synod impose a gender and/or ethnic quota for delegates from each classis. While we appreciate such diversity, we do not believe this one-size-fits-all rule should be carried out because it fails to acknowledge that congregational cultures and community demographics differ from church to church, and from classis to classis. The proposed recommendation might be easy for some classes to carry out. There will be occasions in other classes when no one who meets one or both of these criteria is willing and able to serve. With Acts 15:2-3 as a cue and Church Order Article 34 as a guide, the assembly of classis should remain solely responsible for selecting synod delegates without adding qualifications for church leaders beyond those given by Scripture and established in CRCNA polity.

This proposal to mandate diversity among synod delegates reflects a common strategy for representational leadership in North America today. However, this approach is not one that emerges in New Testament accounts of the church or imperatives for the church. Our understanding of representational authority, as the SRTF report states in its overview (section III), must begin with the headship of Christ. As Jesus Christ represents us before God the Father, our Lord’s incarnate gender and ethnicity neither helps nor hinders his fulfillment of his office. Likewise, the New Testament never suggests that church leaders better represent those they lead if they share gender or ethnicity. When the Grecian widows were being overlooked (Acts 6), the apostles did not consider gender or ethnicity in their appointments. Rather, they sought after men who were Spirit-filled and wise. Divisions between Jews and Gentiles were among the greatest threats to the New Testament church, yet no apostle instructed the church to take ethnicity into account as they appointed leaders. Leaders are united to their brothers and sisters in Christ, whom they serve, by something that unites deeper than our diversity categories: the gospel (Eph. 2:14; Gal. 3:28-29). United in Christ, churches can be united as God’s people in ways that subvert the sinful ways ethnicity and gender often divide humanity.

The book of Revelation gives us a vision of God’s diverse people worshiping in unity (Rev. 5:9 and 7:9). We must make every effort to enfold fellow believers who differ from us in terms of age, gender, vocation, education, and ethnicity, as well as follow those whom the Lord has called and gifted

to be leaders. All believers ought to lament the reality that some people have been marginalized, ignored, or abused by churches. Our church assemblies are wise to take steps to ensure such individuals and groups are better represented among their leaders as a dimension of repentance and reconciliation. By applying the gospel of Jesus Christ to particular circumstances, we avoid the worldly ideas that leadership diversity is the supreme metric of progress and leaders only adequately represent people with whom they share certain identity markers like race and gender. It is imperative that leaders work to understand and represent everyone entrusted to their care. It is imperative that churches encourage and equip those God raises up as leaders to fulfill such duties. We best not put quotas on who our Lord will lead into leadership across all classes of the CRCNA.

C. Response to Recommendation 25

Recommendation 25 asks synod to “incorporate power and privilege training into its scheduled training and orientation for delegates.” The two grounds convey the intended results: that synod “function in healthy ways and accomplish its tasks well” and “minorities will be more affirmed and encouraged in their participation at synod.” We do not believe this approach will lead to the intended results, for two reasons. First, the SRTF report did not include a summary of reported problems that this recommendation is aiming to solve or avoid repeating. Second, we question the validity and usefulness of race and gender critical theories that power and privilege training usually entails.

The report under consideration does not articulate how synod itself has functioned in unhealthy ways, devalued minorities, or discouraged their participation. One of the problems with critical theory is that problems are assumed, that struggles of power between different groups are endless, and that there is no real space for people living out a state of reconciliation and peace. Our experience as delegates is that advisory committee leaders do an excellent job of seeing that everyone is given the opportunity to participate, and disagreements are handled in respectful ways. In deliberations on the floor of synod, delegates of different ethnicities and genders have supported each other’s perspectives and defended their right to hold differing viewpoints. This is not to say that some have not wronged others at synod. Such instances are best addressed by synod itself under provisions provided by Church Order Article 30-b, with the goal of mutual understanding and reconciliation. Without naming and assessing the current challenges, this recommendation seems to be pushing a particular agenda rather than responding to an agreed-upon challenge. Fixing what is not broken can do more harm than good.

It is beyond the scope of this overture to undertake a comprehensive critique of the worldview commonly embedded within power and privilege training. We summarize why this is neither a wise nor biblical approach toward achieving the desired outcomes (named in the grounds of Recommendation 25) with the following four points:

1. Power and privilege theories are based largely on anecdotal observations which presume to explain the cause of disparities in representation and achievement across society. However, plenty of anecdotal evidence exists

that undermines the privilege and power narratives. This is why critical theory remains unsettled and controversial across North America.

2. Power and privilege manifest themselves in local contexts and change for a person from location to location. It is hubris for anyone to think values are easily assigned to these variables among synod delegates based solely on gender, ethnicity, position, and age. Doing so relies on stereotypes, which is the very thing we must overcome to best treat each person as an individual with unique gifts and contributions to offer at synod.
3. Places where such power and privilege ideology have taken root (especially colleges and universities) are places where civil discourse has been severely compromised and diversity of thought nearly eliminated. Intelligent people of both genders and various ethnicities have spoken against privilege and power ideology, criticizing it for inhibiting free speech and building victimhood culture. There is little evidence that the spread of such training has improved how we navigate diversity in Canada or the United States.
4. Many tenets of critical theory encompassed in power and privilege training are not supported by biblical doctrine. For example, while Scripture teaches that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), critical theory divides society into morally superior victim groups and morally inferior oppressor groups. In this worldview the sins of victims are usually justified, and the sins of oppressors are often seen as unforgivable. While Scripture highlights how genders are to work together and complement each other (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 11:11-12; Eph. 5:28), critical theory of gender posits that men and women are locked into a permanent battle for power over each other. This perspective resists holding any underprivileged group accountable or making room for redemption. It may be that the SRTF has a significantly different form of power and privilege training in mind that addresses the pitfalls listed above. If so, why use this label when it includes so much cultural and political baggage?

In conclusion, we offer three ideas for synod to consider as it works toward the intended goals (grounds of Recommendation 25) during orientation. At the risk of “speaking to the choir” and stating things that synod may already be doing, we are convinced we should not speak against Recommendation 25 without affirming the goals articulated in the grounds and offering alternative ideas:

1. As synod prepares delegates for healthy collaboration and deliberation, it ought to direct their attention to Mark 10:42-45, Philippians 2:1-11, and other passages that call us to imitate Christ by laying our power and privileges aside or directing them toward the good of others.
2. Synod’s orientation ought to challenge delegates to break down their stereotypes and realize that not all women think one way, not all people of a given ethnic group have the same story, etc. This can also help delegates resist the tendency to assign wrong motives to their fellow delegates’ perspectives and convictions.

3. It might be helpful for all delegates to anonymously answer a question like "What is the greatest challenge you are facing to serve the Lord well at synod?" and in the orientation to read through these responses in groups to acknowledge the struggles people have and to heighten everyone's sensitivity toward their brothers and sisters in Christ.

II. Overture

In light of this, Classis Atlantic Northeast overtures Synod 2019 not to adopt Recommendations 4, 20, and 25 in the Synod Review Task Force report.

Grounds:

1. There are insufficient grounds put forward to justify taking funds designated for one level of ecclesiastical assembly (classis) and reallocating them to another (synod).
2. No budgetary estimates have been provided for how Recommendation 4 would impact classes' funds, which we believe is a prerequisite for adopting this change.
3. Mandating a gender and / or ethnic quota for delegates from each classis improperly encroaches upon classes' responsibility to choose their own delegates, as stated in Church Order Article 34.
4. The denomination-wide standard proposed in Recommendation 20 fails to account for differences in the numbers and availability of such delegates from one classis to another.
5. Power and privilege training entails a problematic worldview that does not align with biblical teaching.
6. It is unclear how power and privilege training has helped other North American institutions become healthier as they work together and accomplish their responsibilities well. Therefore, synod would be best served with an alternative strategy for addressing their stated goals.

Classis Atlantic Northeast
David D. Poolman, stated clerk

Overture 21: Do Not Adopt Recommendations 4, 20, and 25 of the Synod Review Task Force Report

Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2019 not to adopt the following:

- A. Recommendation 4 of the Synod Review Task Force report.

Grounds:

1. Recommendation 4 would effectively penalize classes for sending delegates.
2. Recommendation 4 would place an undue financial burden on classes.

- B. Recommendation 20 of the Synod Review Task Force report.

Grounds:

1. Recommendation 20 presumes an improper mandate for synod to impose on the classis delegation when synodical authority itself derives from the classis delegation.

2. Recommendation 20 disregards the classes and congregations that maintain the equally biblical position on women in ecclesiastical office (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 731).
 3. Recommendation 20 would place an undue burden on ethnic minorities in classes that have few ethnic minorities, requiring the few ethnic minorities in those classes to shoulder a disproportionate responsibility of being delegates to synod.
- C. Recommendation 25 of the Synod Review Task Force report.

Grounds:

1. Recommendation 25 is vague on what such training would look like, who would conduct the training, what narratives of power it would assume, or how it would encourage more diverse participation.
2. Recommendation 25 would raise the cost of synod more than any other recommendation.

Classis Zeeland

Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

Overture 22: Do Not Adopt Recommendations 7, 19, and 20 of the Synod Review Task Force Report

I. Background

The Synod Review Task Force (SRTF), approved by Synod 2016, submitted a final report in fall 2018 for consideration by the churches and the classes. While substantive and thorough in addressing various concerns and issues related to our peculiar mechanism of church government we call synod, the SRTF report nevertheless offers several recommendations that run counter to the Church Order of the CRCNA and violate the right and responsibility of classes and their member churches to choose their own delegations.

Recommendation 7 of the SRTF report asks that synod select officers at the end of each synod to serve the following synod. Recommendation 7, d indicates that “officers chosen for the next synod would come to that synod as part of their classis delegation. If an elected officer of synod moved from one classis to another in the intervening year, that person would be part of the delegation of his or her new classis.”

Recommendation 19 of the SRTF report asks “that synod encourage classes to send one or more delegates to synod for two consecutive years, if possible . . .”

Recommendation 20 of the SRTF report asks, “that synod . . . require each classis to include at least one woman *or* one ethnic minority person in its delegation.”

In each of these cases, the recommendation of the SRTF is to compel classes to delegate certain individuals as their delegates to synod. This compulsory action exceeds the bounds given to synod by the Church Order, which stipulates in Article 34 that “the major assemblies (e.g., classis and synod) are composed of officebearers who are delegated by their constituent minor assemblies.” The intent of Article 34 is to protect the rights of the

minor assemblies to form their own delegations to the major assemblies. To recommend that the major assembly (synod) somehow can choose the composition of the delegates who are delegated to it both denies the plain reading of Article 34 and violates the spirit of a delegated governance structure.

Church Order Article 27 reminds us of this important principle of delegated governance when it states, “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.” For synod to now be given the ability to choose or direct the composition of its delegation means that it can no longer be called a delegated assembly, for it has assumed an authority that properly lies with councils and classes alone.

In addition, Recommendation 20, which mandates that delegations include gender or ethnic diversity, runs counter to Church Order Article 25, to our forms for ordination that we use within the CRCNA for the installation of elders and deacons, and to Scripture itself. Neither Article 25 nor the forms for ordination list gender or ethnicity as qualifications to serve as an elder or deacon, and Scripture contains no qualifications for elders or deacons that relate to ethnicity or the female gender. Yet Recommendation 20 conceivably could be used to force councils to ordain women or minorities as elders—regardless of their actual gifting or call to serve—just so that a classis could fill a mandatory delegate spot reserved for women/minorities. To require councils to consider qualifications not found in Scripture is both heavy-handed and unbiblical. Moreover, synod, in keeping with prior decisions, ought not to force councils or classes who hold to a complementarian perspective on women serving in office to ordain a woman or otherwise forgo a delegate spot to synod. Such a course of action would minimize the voice of those who are complementarian in practice, which also seems heavy-handed and unbiblical. This is not to denounce the importance—even wisdom—of seeking representation from all parts of our church body. But to place characteristics of ethnicity or gender above or alongside the scriptural qualifications related to spiritual gifting is not in keeping with the CRCNA confession that we are completely subject to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds which interpret this Word (see Church Order Article 1-a).

Finally, Recommendations 7 and 19 lead to possible scenarios in which an elder or deacon in their final year of service to their church is asked to return the following year. In order to serve as a delegate again, synod would be, in effect, mandating that his or her church ordain him or her for an additional year. This violates the express wording of Church Order Article 25-a, which states, “The elders and deacons shall serve for a limited time as designated by the council.” There is no provision in this article for elders and deacons serving “as designated by synod,” and synod needs to honor the authority of councils alone to elect and ordain officebearers as they deem appropriate.

II. Overture

Therefore, Jeremy Oosterhouse overtures Synod 2019 not to adopt Recommendations 7, 19, and 20 of the Synod Review Task Force report.

Grounds:

1. Church Order Article 34 provides that only minor assemblies may delegate officebearers to synod.
2. Church Order Article 27 specifies that the authority of synod is delegated, not original.
3. Church Order Article 25 and the forms for ordination do not list gender or race as qualifications to serve as an elder or deacon.
4. Scripture does not list the female gender or race as qualifications to serve as an elder or deacon.
5. The CRCNA has a history since 1995 of honoring the complementarian perspective of councils who decline to ordain women and classes who do not seat women as delegates.
6. Church Order Article 25 provides for only councils to determine the length of terms of service of elders and deacons.

Jeremy Oosterhouse, member of
Palos Heights CRC, Palos Heights, Illinois

Note: The above overture was not processed through the local council or classis, so it is being included for information (see Rules for Synodical Procedure, section V, B, 7). Synod by way of its officers will be asked to decide whether the overture is to be considered on synod's agenda.

Overture 23: Do Not Adopt Recommendation 25 of the Synod Review Task Force Report

I. Background

The report of the Synod Review Task Force (SRTF) offers many good and helpful recommendations to synod for improving the efficiency and efficacy of synod. Some of these helpful recommendations are the several recommendations for training for delegates and officebearers. These include Recommendation 6, for a mentor / guide for young adult representatives and ethnic minority advisers or delegates; Recommendation 15, for a review of the Rules for Synodical Procedure for delegates; Recommendation 24, that synod offer more extensive training for all delegates prior to synod; and Recommendation 26, that synod require training of advisory committee chairs and reporters regarding their leadership tasks. All of these recommendations are worthy of consideration by the delegates to synod for adoption as they provide for orderly and well-trained delegates. Indeed, the SRTF notes that “numerous past delegates have raised concerns pertaining to . . . clarity on some rules of synodical procedure, and the desirability of enhanced training for synodical participants.”¹ To the extent that delegates themselves have requested additional or enhanced training, these recommendations serve synod well.

However, the SRTF added one additional training recommendation in addition to those noted above. This is Recommendation 25, “That synod incorporate power and privilege training into its scheduled training and

¹ Report of the Synod Review Task Force, p. 450.

orientation for delegates to help synod participants better understand the power with which they are privileged, especially with regard to gender, ethnicity, position, and age.” This recommendation is unwarranted, overtly political, and is contrary to the Church Order of the CRCNA and the Word of God, and synod is encouraged to think critically about the implications of the adoption of this recommendation.

Before discussing the grounds for why synod should not adopt Recommendation 25, let us briefly review the theory of power and privilege which is the theme of Recommendation 25. Gerhard Lenski, one of the foundational developers of the theory of power and privilege, posits that the source of inequality in society is due to the inherent imbalance of power and privilege.² Or, to put it another way, this theory posits that an equitable distribution of power (control of resources) and privilege (unearned advantages) would reduce or eliminate social inequality and oppression.

An astute reader no doubt sees in the theory of power and privilege shades of Marxist thought. Indeed, the International Socialism Journal notes the roots of the theory of power and privilege in Marxism.³ This same article notes the close relationship between the theory of power and privilege and the theory of intersectionality, which is a theory that individuals and groups can face multiple oppressions, and that individuals can be privileged in some areas and oppressed in others.⁴ The theory of intersectionality is germane to this overture because the theory of power and privilege is, at its core, a theory of oppression. When proponents of the theory of power and privilege discuss these concepts, they are, either implicitly or explicitly, talking about the oppression received by those on the unequal side of power and privilege. Let us be clear: when the SRTF recommends training to delegates on power and privilege, they are recommending training to delegates not just on power and privilege but also on the perceived oppression those with power and privilege supposedly promulgate.

Therefore, let us consider the ways in which Recommendation 25 is deficient:

1. Recommendation 25 is not based on factual data.

In contrast to the other four recommendations for training, all of which are based on the feedback of delegates themselves, the SRTF offers no feedback from delegates noting abuses of power or privilege or instances of oppression. The statement of the SRTF that “It is also important that all delegates feel empowered to participate in the deliberations of synod”⁵ is simply an editorial comment that does not appear to reflect any actual feedback from delegates of being oppressed from participation in the deliberations of synod. Indeed, the grounds for Recommendation 25 do not include any specific mention of racism, sexism, ageism, or any other forms of oppression shared by delegates to synod. Moreover, it appears

² Lenski, Gerhard. *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

³ Choonara, Esme and Prasad, Yuri. “What’s wrong with privilege theory.” *International Socialism Journal*, 142, April 2014. isj.org.uk/whats-wrong-with-privilege-theory/#.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Report of the Synod Review Task Force, p. 452.

that quite the opposite of oppression or misuse of power is the norm for synod. Anecdotal evidence from many delegates offers support for the perception that first-time, women, and minority delegates are received and welcomed quite warmly by their peers in virtually all instances.

Further, to suggest that the abuse of power and privilege or oppression of various types are currently an issue for synodical delegates seems almost slanderous. By creating the assumption that some synodical delegates oppress others—which is the heart and soul of power / privilege theory—the SRTF treads dangerous territory in making false accusations against brothers and sisters in Christ, all of whom are officebearers and who have been affirmed as possessing the maturity of faith and life needed to be an officebearer in the CRCNA.

2. Recommendation 25 interjects political theory into an ecclesiastical setting.

Let us note two characteristics of power and privilege theory. First, that it is only a theory, and one, at that, which has received several critiques and criticisms from scholars in the sociopolitical sphere. Second, that this is primarily a theory related to inequality in the sociopolitical order of the world, a sphere which traditionally has not overlapped with the church in regard to practices and habits.

What are some of the critiques of power and privilege theory?

One criticism is that power and privilege theory is, inherently, a subjective exercise in labeling.⁶ To put it another way, anyone can label any perceived inequity to be a matter of power and privilege and the abuse thereof. One can even make the case that the SRTF exercises their own power and privilege when they point out that some synodical delegates have power and privilege due to their age, gender, or race. (Has the SRTF received power and privilege training before using their power and privilege to recommend power and privilege training, one wonders, tongue-in-cheek?) This becomes problematic because subjective processes can be abused since there are no standards to govern them. In the case of power and privilege, there are no standards for what constitutes a “privilege” other than what appear to be characteristics that have some intangible “benefit” to a person. Even then, what one person terms a “privilege” another might find to be a hindrance. While one person enjoys the privilege of being an ordained minister of the Word because he or she gets to attend synod, another person laments the hindrance of being an ordained minister of the Word because he or she must attend synod.

A second criticism is that power and privilege discussions inevitably lead to shaming—specifically, shaming those with “privilege” into silence.⁷ If certain characteristics are seen as a negative or something to be ashamed for, then perhaps those who bear those characteristics will “check their privilege” in order to yield their space to those who are viewed as “oppressed.” But shaming a person for their knowledge, experience, and wisdom simply because they also are of a certain race, gender,

⁶ Nathwani, Nishin. “On Privilege: A leftist critique of the left.” *Harvard Political Review*, April 29, 2014. harvardpolitics.com/united-states/privilege-leftist-critique-left/.

⁷ Bovy, Phoebe Maltz. “The Perils of Privilege.” *The New Republic*, March 6, 2017. newrepublic.com/article/140985/perils-privilege-phoebe-maltz-bovy-book-excerpt.

age, or social status seems to run contrary to our understanding of how officebearers are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit to carry out the governance and leadership of the church. To the extent that power and privilege theory is used to diminish the voice of those who are otherwise knowledgeable, informed, and useful to the deliberations of synod, we ought to reject the implementation of this theory in any form.

Those who experience real oppression critique power and privilege theory in a third way, as they note the ways in which this theory diminishes the relevance of systems of actual oppression. Take, for example, racism, which is a real issue in America. "For the colonized, racism is a system of oppression and injustice." However, "describing a system of oppression and injustice for the victims as a privilege for the oppressor [in which racism is viewed as the result of white privilege] is an insult for the victim" (emphasis added).⁸ Assuming that every act of oppression is born out of the misuse of power and privilege is a slap in the face to those who have borne the actual oppression of unjust systems. In fact, we might go so far as to suggest that the theory of power and privilege is incompatible with social justice efforts to address societal systems of oppression. As suggested earlier, to the extent that real racism or sexism on the floor of synod exists, it needs to be noted and called out as such. And simple disagreement with what or how another person says should not be hidden behind the pseudoracism and pseudosexism offered by the theory of power and privilege.

It should be enough to note that power and privilege theory is simply that: a theory with several valid critiques of form and substance, and therefore not substantive enough to warrant the imprimatur of the church as valid. However, we should also remember that power and privilege theory is first and foremost a theory of social and political inequality. It has not been developed as a theory of ecclesiastical inequality for reasons that will be presented next. But in any event, insofar as the CRCNA and the larger catholic church has been cautious to infer applicability of political systems of governance or economic systems of resource management to itself, so also ought the CRCNA and the larger catholic church remain cautious about inferring the applicability of a sociopolitical theory of relationships to itself.

3. Recommendation 25 is contrary to the Church Order and prior decisions of synod.

Power and privilege theory seeks to address inequality and oppression experienced by those with differing levels of power and privilege. Yet the Church Order of the CRCNA and our synodical decisions acknowledge that difference of privilege and power are a normal part of our life in the church, insofar as we recognize the complementary nature of both the work and ministry of officebearers.

Article 35 of the Church Order notes the distinct roles and distinct tasks of ministers, elders, and deacons. Insofar as the church recognizes these distinctions, the church also recognizes that elders and ministers will have power and privilege related to their specific tasks, and deacons will have

⁸ Hira, Sandew. "A Decolonial Critique of the Concept of White Privilege: Why Injustice Is Not a Privilege." Decolonial International Network, May 1, 2017. www.din.today/a-decolonial-critique-of-the-concept-of-white-privilege-why-injustice-is-not-a-privilege/.

power and privilege that are derived from their specific tasks. The church thus recognizes that power and privilege are part of the nature of the church. Perhaps we can even say that inequality is part of the nature of the church, insofar as some persons or officebearers have different levels of power and privilege in some areas than others.

But contrary to power and privilege theory, these differences of power and privilege within the church do not automatically lead to oppression. This is an important distinction. Power and privilege theory—and power and privilege training—would have us see all differences as inequality, and therefore all differences as oppression. This is contrary to the view of the CRCNA, as outlined in Church Order Article 2, that the offices of the church “differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor.” Indeed, the SRTF notes this understanding of “different but equal” offices in section III, 5 of their report. Difference, therefore, must not be assumed to automatically lead to oppression.

Whereas Recommendation 25 seeks to minimize differences in power and privilege within the assemblies of the church, it seems that differences of some nature have always been present in our church, that differences of power and privilege have been judged in keeping with Church Order, and that they are to be embraced as illustrations of each part of the body using their unique gifts in fulfillment of their unique tasks.

4. Recommendation 25 is contrary to Scripture.

Power and privilege theory seeks to highlight perceived harmful inequalities in the distribution of power and privilege between persons. Yet the witness of Scripture reminds us that God ordains differences in roles and responsibilities within the body of Christ and that God warns against people highlighting inequality within the body for the purpose of humiliating others.

In 1 Corinthians 12:18-20, Paul writes, “But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” In contrast to the supposition of power and privilege theory that all inequalities ought to be rendered equitable in order to prevent oppression, we are reminded that God has ordained differences of position, role, and responsibility within the church, and this is for the benefit of the entire body. And this is the providential work of God, that he “has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, **so that there should be no division in the body**, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor. 12:24b-26; emphasis added). In the eyes of God, he has established differences in role and responsibilities in order that greater unity within the body of believers would result and all would share equally in joy, honor, suffering, and concern.

Therefore, any attempts by the SRTF, through power and privilege training, to label as inequality any God-ordained differences of age, race, gender, or social status, ought to be considered counter to the teaching of Scripture and to the work of God himself.

Additionally, it is important to note that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11, criticizes the Corinthian church for highlighting the inequality present in

the body of believers when they celebrated the Lord's Supper. He writes, "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval" (1 Cor. 11:17-19). Note that Paul here does not criticize the basis for divisions such as wealth or social standing. No, his criticism is directed at the showing or the highlighting of such differences, which result in "humiliating those who have nothing" (v. 22b). Paul's anger is rightly directed at those who would take their God-ordained differences, and, instead of using them for promoting the unity of the body, use them for highlighting the inferiority of the others.

This seems to be the very aim of the power and privilege training recommended by the SRTF. Power and privilege theory training highlights the differences found between members in order to point out the inferiority of some members within the body. This is done not to "humiliate those who have nothing," but rather to "humiliate those who have something" (e.g., those who supposedly possess power and privilege). Within the church and the body of Christ, there is no room for any who would seek to highlight and promote division between members. Therefore, the power and privilege training recommended by the SRTF ought to be recognized as divisive and unhelpful to promoting the unity of the body that God commands us to seek through our differences.

II. Overture

Therefore, Jeremy Oosterhouse overtures Synod 2019 not to adopt Recommendation 25 of the Synod Review Task Force report.

Grounds:

1. Recommendation 25 is not based on factual data and appears to derive from anecdotal observations of the members of the SRTF.
2. Recommendation 25 interjects a sociopolitical theory of relationship into an ecclesiastical setting.
3. Recommendation 25 is contrary to the Church Order and prior decisions of synod that affirm the appropriateness of differences in power and privilege related to the different mandates and tasks of the various offices.
4. Recommendation 25 is contrary to Scripture, where God has ordained differences of role, responsibility, and authority within the body of Christ.
5. Recommendation 25 seeks to highlight differences of power and privilege in the body of Christ, thus promoting division instead of unity in the body of Christ.

Jeremy Oosterhouse, member of
Palos Heights CRC, Palos Heights, Illinois

Note: The above overture was not processed through the local council or classis, so it is being included here as information (see Rules for Synodical Procedure, section V, B, 7). Synod by way of its officers will be asked to decide whether the overture is to be considered on synod's agenda.

COMMUNICATION

Communication 1: Classis Minnkota

The churches of Classis Minnkota affirm that men and women are created by God with equality in essence and dignity but with distinction in some roles. We praise God for the beautiful diversity he created when he made us male and female. These distinct roles are taught in Scripture, derive from God's creative will, and are to be manifest in complementary roles in the family and church. This belief is reflected in an accurate translation of the Belgic Confession, Article 30, which reads, "when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy." (See the original French wording, which refers to persons using the masculine gender.) This belief is therefore not rooted in chauvinism or patriarchy but in Scripture and in our historic confession of faith. It is our hope and prayer that this communication will provide a clear and respectful understanding of our convictions in this matter.

We believe that men and women are created equal as imagebearers of God and as heirs of salvation. We also believe that men and women complement each other in mutually enriching ways and that God has given each gender specific callings in the church and home. We seek to honor and glorify God by celebrating and using the gifts and abilities he has given to us within the roles he has established for us.

As a classis we affirm the following convictions:

1. That men and women equally bear the image of God and are called to serve him throughout their lives (Gen. 1:27-28).
2. That we are to follow Christ's example when he honored and respected women during his earthly ministry (Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42) and as he continues to equip them for service in his church today (1 Cor. 12:4-7).
3. That the roles for men and women in the church must be defined solely by the Word of God and not by human ideologies such as feminism, male chauvinism, patriarchy, or sexist oppression (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
4. That from the beginning of creation God assigned headship to males in the family and in the church (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:12-13; 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).
5. That the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man" and then grounded this argument in the good created order (1 Tim. 2:12-13). The church, therefore, should not ordain women to its authoritative offices.

6. That the purpose of spiritual gifts is not self-fulfillment but service to God and others, to the end that God receives all the glory (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26).
7. That the CRCNA's 1995 decision to open all offices to women is contrary to Scripture.

We also offer the following observations:

1. That even though Synod 1995 declared that both complementarian and egalitarian views are faithful interpretations of the Word of God, synodical practice since that time has become markedly egalitarian, making it difficult for complementarians to participate in good conscience.
2. That the complementarian position is held by many male and female members and by other officebearers, churches, and classes in the CRCNA.
3. That the CRCNA's 1995 decision to open all offices to women has resulted in offense, division, strife, loss of members, and our expulsion from NAPARC in 1997.
4. That celebration of the egalitarian position and practice through video and song (as done at Synod 2018) causes offense and pricks the consciences of those who hold to the historic complementarian position regarding women in church office.

As members of the body of Christ in the CRCNA, Classis Minnkota does not present this communication in order to offend our brothers and sisters who hold to the egalitarian view; rather we wish to explain that our convictions are rooted in the Word of God. Though under protest, we continue to participate because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination.

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

PERSONAL APPEALS

1. Ms. J. De Wit
Appeal of Ms. J. De Wit from a decision of Classis Iakota on March 5, 2019.
2. Ms. D. Kamer
Appeal of Ms. D. Kamer from a decision of Classis Holland on May 3, 2018.