

## 5.4.1

### **Draft Overture:**

Overture to Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan from Sonlight CRC, Regina, SK

Re: Concerns About Acting on the Recommendations of the Human Sexuality Report

In 2016 Synod adopted the following overture from Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan:

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

The Acts of Synod 2016, p. 929

### **Introduction**

Sonlight Christian Reformed Church is a small but diverse congregation in the heart of the Canadian prairies with a strong desire for unity and inclusion. We do not agree on everything, and notably we do not claim to have one mind about the topics presented in the Human Sexuality Report, but we have committed to work and worship together peaceably and humbly to the glory of God. We are concerned about how the recommendations of the HSR will affect our ability to encourage ongoing discussion and engagement with difficult topics as we strive to promote unity and inclusion for all God's children.

In 2016, Sonlight Christian Reformed Church created an overture which was approved by Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan and adopted by Synod in the above form. The overture was part of the discussion surrounding the report on pastoral guidance re same sex marriage which was presented at Synod that year, and was therefore also one of the catalysts for commissioning the committee which created this Human Sexuality Report. Given our unique relationship with this report, we feel moved to respond to it and express our concerns about acting on its recommendations.

### **Background**

In 1973 "Report 42" was adopted by the denomination and declared that each sexual minority Christian "*be wholeheartedly received by the church as a person for whom Christ died.*" It instructs us that "*churches should recognize that their homosexual members... are to be given opportunity to render within the offices and structures of the congregation the same service that is expected from heterosexuals.*" (Acts of Synod, 1973, pp. 609-633) There have long been hopes expressed for greater acceptance and integration of these children of God that would reflect the report's calls to action, but the denomination has repeatedly recognized that this has been lacking.

Over the past decade or so there has been an increasing desire to address the gap between what Report 42 hoped for and the situation that currently exists. This has revealed deep

disagreements between churches and members on questions about the acceptance and participation of sexual minority persons in the CRCNA. Some wish to find one final, incontrovertible answer and seem to feel that an end to the discussion will mean an end to the need to struggle with this issue. By adopting the recommendation from Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan, however, Synod 2016 strove to widen the discussion rather than limit it. In fact, they committed to inviting *as much as possible, the presence and involvement of same-sex members*. They recognized that the offices and structures of the church have not afforded homosexuals or other sexual minority Christians an adequate avenue for being heard, and once again put the burden on churches to seek out engagement.

When Synod established the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, however, its criteria for who could be appointed effectively limited the discussion. As Nicholas Wolterstorff indicates in his white paper, “this present committee was destined to fail us when issuing moral counsel”, because its members were required to commit themselves in advance to a particular moral interpretation. As such, he points out, “the committee’s mandate ensured that it would engage in results-orientated interpretation.” Essentially, the conclusions were made before the work began because diverse interpretations were excluded. The single-perspective committee that Synod created does a great disservice to the CRCNA’s rich and fearlessly engaged scholarly tradition. Furthermore, it fails to live up to its commitment to involve the voices of those whose lives will be subject to the moral counsel delivered by the report. (Nicholas Wolterstorff; Response to the CRCNA Human Sexuality Report to Synod 2020, December 2020)

Guided by the moral interpretation required of them, the committee commissioned by Synod to author the HSR failed to invite the presence and involvement of diverse thinkers and theologians of our own and other Christian denominations through their choice of resources. For example, the report references as an authority the ‘Great Lakes Catechism of Marriage and Sexuality’ of the Reformed Church in America, which supports the committee’s conclusions, but which had not been accepted by the RCA at the time of writing. However, the report does not include similar documents accepted by other denominations, like the ‘Social Statement on Human Sexuality’ which was accepted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada in 2011 but which does not share the same conclusions. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a ‘denomination in dialogue’ with the CRCNA, but there is no evidence of engagement with them or their scholarship on this topic, though we are having many of the same discussions right now. In addition, the scholars whose work buttresses the findings of this report are given preference over those whose work does not. Experts who come to different conclusions are mainly referenced in one of two instances; when they share a point of agreement with others whose work is in alignment with this report’s conclusions, or when the committee wishes to rebut their conclusions.

The committee who authored this HSR also failed to adequately invite the presence and involvement of sexual minority Christian siblings through their presentation of the personal stories which are included throughout this report. Our best count indicates that there are 39 stories included. Of these, approximately (we use this word to allow for some slight difference of opinion on how certain stories are categorized) 35 reinforce the conclusions of this report, and 4 have no clear resolution but do not question the conclusions. In particular, the stories of homosexual and transgender Christians are misleading and disproportionately support what this report concludes about acceptable Christian norms. Our findings are as follows:

6 of 15 stories about homosexual people glorify someone who ended or will end a committed relationship, apparently as a result of spiritual growth. 4 others end with the subject either marrying or seeking to marry a heterosexual partner, also as a result of spiritual growth. The others highlight people living celibate lifestyles. 3 of 8 stories about persons suffering from gender dysphoria suggest that peer pressure caused their gender issues. 4 others imply that their gender dysphoria can or will be cured by the presence of sympathetic friends, while 2 demonstrate that a person's gender issues cause distress to the people around them. 1 indicates that we should be careful because sometimes transgender people are actually predators trying to fly under the radar. In every case, the subject of the story is broken, distressed, confused, and weak in faith.

There are no stories that represent healthy, committed, Christian same-sex relationships. There are no stories about transgender believers who are healthy and accepted and active members of their church families. There is no one who is affirmed in their same-sex relationship or their gender transformation as they grow spiritually. Their perspectives are missing; they have been excluded from this report. Although individuals may read certain of the stories in ways that slightly change our interpretations, and there are other stories not highlighted here, the narrative of this report was strongly biased toward one narrow portrayal of the experiences of sexual minority Christians. The committee failed to seek "*as much as possible*" other diverse voices that could have expanded our mutual understanding as the family of God.

The authors of the HSR acknowledge our shortcomings as a denomination in creating the inclusive and supportive community called for in Report 42, but the solution they recommend is to exclude and silence conversations about the complex components of human sexuality. Their recommendations, particularly advocating that their interpretations hold confessional status, require conformity rather than unity. Without prayerfully engaging and including a variety of voices from among our sexual minority siblings, not just once or twice but repeatedly and over a lengthy period of time, we are not ready to support such far-reaching conclusions as a denomination. Adopting the recommendations of the HSR at this time will only serve to hasten the division we all fear.

## Overture

The Council of Sonlight Christian Reformed Church, Regina, Saskatchewan overtures Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan to overture Synod:

- a. to withhold action on the Human Sexuality Report.

### *Grounds*

1. Synod can choose to receive a report as information, to recommend a report to the CRCNA, to act on recommendations, to adopt recommendations to reject recommendations. We are asking Synod to withhold action on this report, to not act on it at all.
2. The intention of the overture to Synod 2016 from Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan was to encourage the CRCNA to be in healthy and prolonged dialogue with the many voices engaged in a conversation around human sexuality. We deem this committee to have failed to achieve the expectation Synod set for our congregations and classes, that is, to “invite, *as much as possible*, the presence and involvement of same-sex attracted members when dealing with matters that affect the lives and discipleship of same-sex attracted members within the CRCNA.” (The Acts of Synod 2016, p. 929, emphasis added).
3. This committee did not interact fully or carefully with the work of denominations engaged in similar discussions about same-sex marriage. They prioritized works that agreed with their own conclusions and ignored those that differ.
4. This committee failed to meaningfully involve the voices of allies and affirming theologians. It grants significant weight to thinkers and theologians whose work buttresses the findings of this report and minimizes the significance of those thinkers and theologians that disagree with its findings.
5. This committee shared many stories, but only selected stories that either affirmed their conclusions or at minimum, did not contradict these conclusions. We know, however, that there are many God-fearing sexual minority people who faithfully live out their Christian calling and whose stories do not reinforce the conclusions of this report. The bias of this report mutes the very stories that help shape the challenging questions the church faces.
6. Adopting the recommendations of this report effectively curtails future dialogue on these topics and silences dissenting voices. Declaring a *status confessionis* is not only premature and poorly supported, but it also poses an immediate threat to the unity of the body of Christ.

## 5.4.2.

### Overture from Maranatha CRC, Calgary To Classis Southern Alberta, Spring MTG 2021

#### *Overture:*

In response to the Human Sexuality report, the Council of Maranatha CRC, Calgary overture Classis to overture Synod to accept recommendation C of the report which encourages churches to take the time to gather in small groups to discuss aspects of the report which may be controversial (p. 148) while delaying any further action on the report for at least two years.

While appreciating the report's counsel on a variety of points, there have been some initial concerns with the report raised within our church, especially with the recommendation that the stance of this report is to have *confessional* status (Recommendation D, pg. 149), which have significant implications on our Maranatha church family. We were disappointed with the little time given to process and respond to this thoroughly, and therefore request that more time is given for engagement and feedback with our congregation before any further decisions are made on the sexuality report.

#### *Grounds:*

- The report itself recommends using the “Challenging Conversations Toolkit” curriculum prepared by the Pastor Church Resources. We need time as a church to respectfully engage with this recommended resource and with each other to hear the various perspectives held by members, including office-bearers, at our church. Having a clearer sense of where the Maranatha community is at will help us to respond more meaningfully to the report.
- The “Challenging Conversations Toolkit” curriculum has within it a way for the feedback about this report to be received by the local church council, and then for the council to consider what to do with this feedback as it engages with the larger assemblies of the church. To consider Recommendation C after already accepting the report (Recommendation B) puts the ‘cart before the horse.’
- The report is 176 pages of in-depth, academic reading requiring many people a significant amount of time and effort to be able to thoroughly read, understand, process and respond to this report.
- As noted above, the authors of the recommendations recognize the potential controversy in this report (“may be controversial”) and therefore sufficient time is required to reflect on it, and provide responses and overtures to it.
- A timeline of at least two years would give Maranatha a year to engage in small group conversations followed by time for Classis to engage in regional conversations about the report.

- The COVID pandemic limits our ability to gather in-person, the preferred means for having engaging conversation. More time is needed as we continue to develop and learn how to meaningfully engage with each other in new ways.
- While the report includes many stories and diverse voices it lacks the stories and voices of Christians who are in loving, faithful, same-sex relationships as well as trans-gender Christians. We need more time to better understand the perspectives of those who are most impacted by the implications of this report.
- The make-up of the report's authors were only individuals who agree with the 1973 report. There are many within the CRCNA who hold alternative perspectives and understandings to the conclusions of this report, including pastors, theologians, professors, elders, and others. Taking time to invite and hear alternate perspectives within the CRCNA to the report is important for Synod to consider before making any further decisions on the report.

Signed,

Council of Maranatha Christian Reformed Church, Calgary

### 5.4.3.

## **Taber First CRC Overture re. the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality**

**Passed by Taber CRC Council, January 13, 2022**

Upon significant discussion in council meetings, assigned review groups and gathering congregational feedback, Taber First CRC feels that the theological background provided in the Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality is sound. We do however have a lot of questions and concern around what the committee considers confessional status against the many other differing opinions of confessional status and what this confessional status would look like for the CRC denomination, if the report was accepted in its entirety.

Taber First CRC reviewed several Overtures from other CRC Classis and Churches and cited literature from Eastern Avenue CRC and Church of the Servant CRC – both from Classis Grand Rapids East to form their overture as these aligned to the discussion from both congregational and council meetings.

Taber First CRC overtures Classis Alberta South/ Saskatchewan to overture Synod to not accede to Recommendation D of the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

### **Background**

Recommendation D of the report concern the status of various teachings and practices concerning human sexuality.

*D. That synod declare that the church's teaching on premarital sex, extra-marital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status.*

Confessional status means elevating teachings on sexuality to the level of doctrines of God and salvation. The report deems that unrepentant contravention of the report's biblical interpretation of several areas of human sexuality—whether by teaching or action—endangers a person's salvation and requires church discipline up to and including excommunication. These are deeply serious matters for the church.

1. The argument for *status confessionis* is not sufficiently grounded or clear for synod to take such a serious step. The report fails to provide the “concise and clear” guidance required by the Committee's mandate. The points that follow describe some of the report's deficiencies in this area.
2. The report suggests a false equivalency between premarital sex, extra-marital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex. Including these diverse topics in one sweeping claim of confessional status does not do justice to the complexity or nuance of any one of them. The report is silent on what *status confessionis* would mean in practical pastoral terms for churches dealing with situations involving these areas.
3. It is not clear to what extent dissenting views are permissible should a *status confessionis* be declared. Historically, Reformed churches only declare a *status confessionis* when they believe the integrity of

the gospel is at stake and are willing to accept a schism over the issue. This report seems uncomfortable with that posture, since it states there is still room for disagreement:

“Even if a teaching has confessional status, that does not mean there is no room for disagreement within the bounds of that teaching. In addition, the church sometimes allows for pastoral accommodations. For example, our confessions say that the children of believers should be baptized. Yet some congregations are willing to allow members not to baptize their children.” (p. 145)

Yet the report’s contradictory statements about the permissibility of differing views promotes confusion. For example, just two pages after the above quote, the report states:

“To teach that any of these behaviors is permissible undermines the teaching and authority of scripture, Whenever the church teaches that a form of behavior forbidden in scripture is morally permissible, it is guilty of false teaching” (p. 147)

Lack of clarity on this matter leaves open urgent questions regarding the salvation, membership, and status of same-sex married believers in our congregations, divorced and remarried persons, those who are cohabiting, those who have had premarital or extramarital sex, and those involved in pornography use, as well as the large number of CRCNA members who believe the CRCNA should affirm same-sex marriages.

4. The report recognizes in passing that *status confessionis* involves pressing and difficult questions regarding officebearers as well as faculty at Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary who sign the Covenant for Officebearers (p.145). However, it fails to give any guidance on a matter that concerns the employment and ministry of many brothers and sisters in the CRCNA, its churches, and institutions. It is irresponsible to declare that a *status confessionis* already exists without consulting with the institutions that will be impacted or acknowledging the implications for people’s employment and families’ livelihoods.

#### Grounds

1. The report fails to provide the “concise and clear” guidance required by its mandate. The argument for *status confessionis* is not sufficiently grounded or clear for synod to take such an important step. The report is unclear on a number of key issues, including whether teaching or practice or both set a person outside the bounds of confessional orthodoxy; whether the Committee believes the theological section of its own report already has confessional status; and the extent to which dissenting views may be permissible should a *status confessionis* be declared.
2. Combining the topics of premarital sex, extra-marital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex creates a false equivalency. The report fails to consider what *status confessionis* would mean in practical pastoral terms in any of these areas. There is no discussion of how *status confessionis* would affect the salvation, membership, and status of same-sex married believers, divorced and remarried persons, those who are cohabiting, those who have had premarital or extramarital sex, those involved in pornography use, and those who support the full inclusion of LGBT+ persons in the church. Interpretation of *status confessionis* could end or prevent the employment and ministry of many in CRCNA churches and institutions.
3. The report states that its answers to the questions raised in the report have confessional status. This is a momentous claim, backed with little evidence in the report. This claim has profound implications for our pastors, elders, deacons, and members who are faculty at our denominational university and seminary. At one point the report refers to its conclusions as a matter of salvation.

That is a far more serious claim than the “pastoral guidance” that has marked previous Synodical statements about sexuality. We would like to see more discussion and clarity of the claim of confessional status in the report, given its momentous implications for the church.

On behalf of Taber CRC council,

John Muller (clerk)

#### 5.4.4.

### Overture from 4 churches in Calgary Alberta

#### **OVERTURE:**

River Park CRC, Emmanuel CRC, The Lantern, and The Road Church overture Classis to overture Synod to not accede to recommendations D and E of The Report to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (“The Report”).

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Recommendations D and E read as follows:

*D. That synod declare that the church’s teaching on premarital sex, extra-marital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status.*

*E. That synod declare that Church Order Article 69-c<sup>1</sup> is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report (p. 149).*

**What does “confessional status” mean?** The CRC has three “confessions” (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort), which are “subordinate to the Scripture” but accepted as “true interpretations” of the Word of God. When a CRC member becomes an elder, deacon, commissioned pastor, or minister they are considered “office-bearers” and bound to agreement with the confessions.

**What are the implications of these recommendations?** If recommendation “D” is accepted, anyone who disagrees with The Report’s conclusions (in part or as a whole, whether “progressive” or “traditional”) could not be members in good standing in the CRC and would not be eligible to hold church office. If recommendation E is accepted, The Report’s conclusions on what constitutes a marriage (or remarriage) that is “in conflict with the Word of God” would be as authoritative as the Word of God itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 69-c says, “Ministers shall not solemnize marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God”

## GROUNDS:

### 1. Declaring that the church's teaching on sexuality "already has confessional status" ignores previous synodical decisions and processes and sidesteps The Committee's mandate.

- a. By declaring the matter "already confessional" The Report subverts the normative and historic process for considering matters confessional.<sup>2</sup>
- b. Synod 1975 adopted recommendations specifically articulating the 'measure of agreement expected' regarding Synodical decisions. These recommendations make clear that report 42 from 1973 does not have confessional status, but rather was framed as 'pastoral advice.' And all following related reports (2002 and 2016) also were framed as 'pastoral advice,' not requiring confessional agreement. None of these decisions made by Synod 1975 which contradict this conclusion of The Report are addressed.<sup>3</sup>
- c. Synod 2016 mandated the committee to explore questions concerning confessional status and human sexuality for "future synods" with reference to a future "team" to draft a new confession. The Report disregards this prescribed process by declaring the matter "already confessional".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Belhar Confession and Our World Belongs to God are two examples of statements which are celebrated as Contemporary Testimonies and yet were intentionally *not* adopted as having confessional status precisely because declaring something confessional would compel full agreement on *all* points from *all* officebearers in the CRCNA. Acts of Synod 2017 named the Belhar Confession "a dynamic statement of faith that serves the CRCNA... a statement that speaks to essential matters in a given time period... useful for study, faith formation, teaching, and worship" while intentionally refraining from compelling agreement on all points by office bearers. The Report suggests that their conclusions be deemed confessional which would, effectively, make The Report a fourth confession of the CRCNA by "the back door" (i.e. without due process or consideration).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Acts of Synod, 1975. Adoption of Report 47 is found pg. 44-45; the full Report 47 is found pg. 595-604. From the full report, under the heading "The Measure of Agreement Expected," we find this: "Full agreement with the confessions is expected from all members of the church and subscription to the confessions is required of all officebearers by signing the Form of Subscription. While synodical decisions are "settled and binding," subscription to synodical decisions is not required" (pg. 601-602). Reflecting on levels of expected agreement around synodical decisions in the *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* (2010), Dr. Henry DeMoor writes, "It is significant, for example, that Synod 1973 twice framed all of its "statements" on homosexuality, including its "ethical stance," as "pastoral advice" (*Acts of Synod, 1973*, pg. 51). It intentionally avoided referring to them as an "interpretation" of the Heidelberg Catechism's use of the term "unchastity" in Lord's Day 41." (p. 168)

<sup>4</sup> Acts of Synod 2016, page 916, sets forth a mandate for The Committee: "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 a) changing the main text of Church Order Article 69 (see Overtures 18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 38). b) declaring a *status confessionis* (see Overture 16). c) appointing a team of individuals to draft a new confession, in the style of the Contemporary Testimony, on human embodiment and sexuality that reflects and secures the

## 2. The Report ignores, simplifies, or dismisses voices and perspectives which do not fit with its conclusions.

- a. The Report's presentation of real, personal testimonies surrounding sexuality is touching but not balanced and overlooks many marginalized voices that don't fit The Report's conclusions. For example, there are no testimonies of faithfully married same-sex couples in The Report.<sup>5</sup>
- b. The Report did not adequately engage views that differ from their conclusions in academia, the public square, or even among very significant constituents and stakeholders such as Calvin University.<sup>6</sup>
- c. The structure and process of the committee tasked with creating The Report inhibited the inclusion of marginalized voices. For the first time in CRCNA history a committee was formed requiring members to adhere to a singular view (Synod 1973) concerning the very topic they were tasked to study.

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teachings and conclusions of the report (see Overture 28)." The Report's recommendation effectually cuts off the process set forth by Synod 2016 with the declaration that their findings are "already confessional."

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps those not involved in local ministry contexts don't realize same sex married CRC Christians actually exist! Also absent from the Report are CRC members who are gay but celibate who nevertheless don't believe celibacy to be their only option; members whose gender self-identification has changed; members who attribute the church's positions and church's culture as contributing to their gender dysphoria, confused sense of sexual identity, self-loathing, depression, etc.; suicide survivors and families of suicide victims who took their lives because of real or perceived rejection from their churches or families. Also absent from the Report are former members of the CRC, who have left the CRC because of positions around human sexuality. Also missing from the Report are the voices of friends, parents, and family members of LGBTQ persons whose perspectives on human sexuality have changed. These omissions further serve to render recommendations D and E "top down" and fail to appreciate the nuance, tension, and struggle of real people.

<sup>6</sup> For example, four pages of signatures graced a public letter (see appendix) sent on December 10 to President Dr Michael LeRoy from staff and faculty of Calvin University arguing, "The report insufficiently engages with relevant scholarship from our disciplines, leading to a biased view of the theological, scriptural, and scientific basis for the report. The discussions of gender identity and sexual orientation lack the scientific and hermeneutic rigor and accuracy of prevailing peer-reviewed scholarship and thereby have the potential to compromise Calvin's academic reputation." Also, the Report tells us they "consulted" persons widely known and read by CRC constituents such as Wendy VanderWal-Gritter but the content of such consultations was not reported. The Report references well known speakers such as Matthew Vines and David Gushee but seems to engage on an "I watched the YouTube video but didn't read the book" level. The Report is similarly non-thorough with respect to scientific engagement, most notably dismissing the biological basis for same sex attraction by quoting Melinda Mills in Science stating, "the claim that attraction to the same sex has a biological cause has been seriously challenged by recent research" while apparently unaware that Mills herself warns against this very conclusion in the study being cited (Mills, Melinda. "How Do Genes Affect Same-Sex Behavior?" Science, Vol. 365, Issue 6456 (Aug. 30, 2019), pp.869-870. Again, this is an example of differing voices being marginalized and misrepresented.

**3. Declaring the conclusions of The Report as “confessional” would harm the unity of the Christian Reformed Church.**

- a. The conclusions of The Report represent one view among many concerning human sexuality. It is not as simple as “the traditional position” vs. “the progressive position.” There are many articulations, for example, of a “traditional” view of marriage that differ from The Report’s particular analysis and conclusions. If recommendation D were adopted, both “traditional” AND “progressive” positions that differ from the conclusions of The Report would disqualify CRC members from eligibility to bear office.<sup>7</sup>
- b. The Report does not adequately address the implications for officebearers who are not in agreement with the conclusions of The Report.<sup>8</sup>
- c. The Report’s conclusions demonstrate little interest in moving forward in unity, undercutting the many local conversations led by local leaders advocating for respectful dialogue in an age of heightened polarity.<sup>9</sup>

**4. Adopting recommendation E would essentially raise the Report to confessional status by binding all ministers to its conclusions in terms of which marriages they can officiate, erasing the personal discernment of which current church order and previous synods have afforded.**

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<sup>7</sup> Agenda for Synod 2016 details the 2014 survey of 700 ordained ministers in the CRCNA in which 98 of 700 ministers reported they would be in favour of same sex marriage in the church, while 100 of the same 700 ministers think same sex attraction is sinful. Both these positions (and many more besides) would disqualify a person from holding office in the CRC (i.e. 28% of ordained ministers surveyed would not be eligible to hold office in the CRCNA).

<sup>8</sup> For example, all four of the churches writing this overture would have officebearers that need to step down (or conceal their disagreement). As referenced above, professors at Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University are also required to be in agreement with anything named as ‘confessional’ in the CRCNA (and have grave concerns with The Report’s potential implications on Calvin University as expressed in the public letter (see appendix)).

<sup>9</sup> The Report endorses the use of the Pastor Church Relations’ “Challenging Conversations Toolkit” which, like the Colossian Forum, encourages honesty and growth with brothers and sisters in Christ amidst deep differences in opinion. At the same time, The Report undercuts the efficacy of these local conversations and the process of restorative circles by declaring one point of view “already has confessional status” and employing language about the “true church” and “false church” (The Report, ages 146-148).

## **APPENDICES:**

### **Appendix 1: Introducing the Reader to our Congregations**

In a season of mistrust and heightened polarity, we understand that it can be easy to dismiss one another quickly. This is harder to do face-to-face after years of connecting, which is one reason this overture is oriented to asking for local conversations. But given that most readers of this overture will not know who we are, it seemed good for us to provide brief introductions to each of our four congregations, and introduce ourselves in a way that shows why this conversation about human sexuality and same sex marriage matters to our local congregations as we live into the mission of God in our local contexts. We hope this small act of 'embodiment' will help the reader to hear us with generosity of spirit.

#### **Emmanuel Christian Reformed Church - Calgary, AB, Canada**

Established in 1956, Emmanuel is a long-established part of the CRC presence in Alberta. Emmanuel members have encouraged, initiated and invested in Christian day schools, Christian universities, Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), and heavily support denominational ministries, as well as local neighbourhood efforts seeking justice, mercy, and the knowledge of the love of God in Christ.

Our current membership consists of not only newer Christians and folks in the surrounding blocks, but is blessed with many families who have attended Emmanuel for generations; great-grandparent, grandparent, parent and child side by side in the same pew. That particular mix of new community and legacy has become an integral part of our identity, part of the strength of who we are and how we hope to model Christ's kingdom here on earth.

But this identity has not come without struggle or cost. Emmanuel, in its 64-year history, has journeyed together as a faith community through some difficult and potentially divisive issues. The changing worship landscape, women in ecclesiastical office (the fact that it's entirely expected and natural for women to preach, chair Council, indeed, serve on the very Synod committee that produced the current Report, should not blind us to a time when these issues split churches and families apart), the literal seven-day creation narrative, and the Pentecostal/charismatic movement were key issues that shaped the Emmanuel church community. We remember the painful conflict in our membership. We remember family and friends leaving for other communities or leaving the church permanently. Those scars and the legacy of that division remain with us.

Because of our identity and history, Emmanuel is dedicated to having the difficult conversations of the day with each other led by the Holy Spirit. Preaching, leadership training, congregational conversations, small group discussions, book studies, and two different Colossian Forums concerning Sexuality are only part of Emmanuel's continuing effort to grapple with having difficult conversations about this topic in a spirit of love and unity. Our goal is to understand that our primary identity is in Christ, and that being able to disagree in love and respect on issues like gay marriage, gender identity, and homosexuality can only strengthen our witness for Christ and his Kingdom. And it is not simply that our congregation, our membership,

our leadership, and our council have differing, strongly held views on sexuality, it is that we ourselves are sexually diverse. For Emmanuel it is anything but a theological or academic discussion alone.

A decision to adopt the recommendations of the committee, sweeping away as invalid any other position, would be devastating to Emmanuel - likely more so than any previous controversy. It would undermine the years of effort and growth spent trying to understand this issue and learning to disagree with compassion. It would undermine the notion that our unity and identity in Christ is primary and paramount by singling out sexual identity as having heightened importance within the CRC. There is no doubt that members of council would step down from office and perhaps leave Emmanuel, and some members and families would do the same. There is no doubt that many of our members could not or would not hold positions of leadership. It is possible this could even extend to our pastors. But most damaging, our church family would be put in opposition to itself, one side feeling wronged, rejected and ignored, the other feeling justified and emboldened. And this schism would reverberate throughout the community, the schools and institutions Emmanuel supports, the neighborhoods we live in, right down to our individual witness of Christ.

### **The Lantern Church - Calgary, AB, Canada**

The Lantern got fuelled and lit in the Spring of 2002 with high hopes of reaching the communities of Inglewood and Ramsay in the heart of Calgary's heritage beginnings. From the beginning, the congregation regularly repeated the belief that anyone living in the community was a member of the Lantern whether they knew it or not.

The congregants encouraged each other to provide the whole kit-and-caboodle to its neighbours, from music and art schools to theatre shows, from concerts to worship services, from dance exhibitions, to gymnastics and special events. Genuine partnerships were built. Everyone was welcomed to be part of it, Monday to Monday. Everyone.

And so, trusting the Holy Spirit, the Lantern received and celebrated folks from all walks of life. Rich and poor . . . crazy and normal . . . weird and wonderful. Straight and not-so-straight.

Original congregants quickly had to admit that 'those' people were not so different from the very people starting the church. 'Those' people became friends.

The story of the Lantern and her long walk with the gay community isn't so much about legal statements of right and wrong, verses and rules. It's pretty much all about the heart. Those not cut of the same cloth as the heterosexual norm gave The Lantern many gifts.

They became us.

For many years now these folks are not 'those folks'. They are just 'simply folks'.

Through the years, The Lantern has learned to recognize the concerns of the heart and not judge the nature of attractions. That is, The Lantern realized that arguing about the traditional rules of sexuality played a secondary role to expressing the depths of one's genuine soul.

We learned to love those different from us as they learned to accept and forgive us.

They are us.

We are heart-broken that the denomination is considering segregating us and putting The Lantern in its correct theological place. We could no sooner abandon our friends in such a manner as we could sever parts of our arm or leg.

We pursue this not in an arrogant/confrontational manner but rely on the mercy of Christ.

### **The Road Church - Calgary, AB, Canada**

The Road Church launched in October, 2015, as a merger between two 15-or-so year old Calgary church plants (Hillside Community and New Hope). Allowing for our shared identity in Christ to define us over and against the diversity we embody (on a myriad of registers) has been a huge part of our journey, joy, and struggle.

For the most part, our theological diversity, the diversity of thought around any number of issues, as well as the diversity of Christian traditions, experiences, and backgrounds has been incredibly life giving and strengthening. We have learned a great deal from one another, living into the Apostle Paul's metaphor of being members of Christ's one body whose attitude and posture toward one another should be that of curiosity, learning, and mutual encouragement.

Nevertheless, while our tolerance and acceptance of one another is a great thing, how we've lived it might also be a contributing factor to why our community has at some times refrained from engaging in really tough conversations (like politics, like human sexuality). Perhaps "fear of division" has kept us from *really getting into* the messiness of relationship and community founded on Christ's love that transcends disagreement - even emotional, theological, tough disagreements.

Both the interim report and, more recently, the final Report from this Human Sexuality Committee have been catalytic in moving The Road Church to delve into hard conversations around human sexuality. The report has prompted some of our staff and leadership to speak up and "own" their positions which differ from the conclusions of the Report. We have launched and finished a Colossian Way forum with more planned for 2021 and we are also launching "listening circles" on the topic of human sexuality in 2021.

Engaging in these conversations we have found: (a) we regret not having done so earlier, especially for the sake of those LGBTQ+ and allies among us, (b) we learned that we do, indeed, have a great diversity of opinions on this topic. So much that we cannot fairly articulate a "church position" that represents our whole community at this time, but (c) we've learned that BOTH the traditionalists and progressives in our community see our identity as brothers and sisters in Christ as far far far more important than where we land intellectually, theologically, and spiritually on the issues regarding human sexuality.

For this reason, the idea in the Report that office bearers (present and future) would be *compelled to agree* that the conclusions of the human sexuality Report *already have* confessional status if they wish to serve the church would constitute a huge denominational / synodical overreach concerning the authority and autonomy of the local church and council. In the same way, the suggestion that *not agreeing*

with the opinions argued for in the Report *can undermine a person's salvation* in Christ is contrary to the lived experiences of Christian unity amidst diversity of many churches including The Road.

### **River Park Church - Calgary, AB, Canada**

Until recently, we were named First Christian Reformed Church of Calgary. By God's grace, we have been witnessing to the death and resurrection of Jesus since we were established in 1952 as a part of the post-WWII immigration boom in the Canadian CRC. If you've read Rev. Tymen E. Hofman's *The Canadian Story of the CRC: Its First Century*, then you've read a book by one of our earliest pastors. We are glad to be a part of the Canadian CRC he depicts, including the work to develop deeply Reformed Christian organizations in Canada, to bring our best gifts to the larger CRCNA and continue to work to embody our God-given unity within diversity.

Also in Hofman's book, you will hear about the charismatic movement within the CRC, noting specifically the work of Rev. Henry Wildeboer during his time as pastor at our church. If you've read Henry's book, *When GOD Shows Up: A pastor's journey*, then you've heard about a significant shaping part of our history as Henry spends five of his twelve chapters to tell the story of his ministry with us at First CRC in Calgary. That time imparted to us a strong commitment to remain open to the transformative power of the Spirit. Subsequently, under the leadership of Rev. Mike Reitsma, our church became increasingly outward focused and open to the broader community. This culminated in our church launching two church plants in the City of Calgary and being one of the key communities to catalyze with our classis the campus ministry at the University of Calgary.

This outward posture continued as our church created the annual Marda Loop Justice Film Festival, which has become a staple for good conversations about justice city-wide. But this outward posture was always bolstered by spiritual practices and faith formation. One notable example of this is the work of Rev. Phil Reinders, our pastor for many years, who published *Seeking God's Face*. His book points to another way that First CRC (which changed to River Park Church during his tenure) has been shaped by the Spirit - soaking in the richness of Scripture and prayer.

Like many of our individual church histories, we've had ups and downs, times of grieving and times of growth, jubilant celebrations and soul-wrenching laments. But at the centre of our story has always been the same thing: Jesus and his grace-filled invitation to join him in the mission of God by the power of the Spirit. Our current vision reminds us to continually be 'reaching out, drawing in, and creating community.' One senses in that language the centredness of it all - we reach out, draw in and create community all with Jesus at the centre.

One recent part of our history has been to move intentionally in the direction of being a multicultural church. While we have a long ways to go, we rejoice in who God has brought into our community. And once again, as the ethnic and cultural diversity in our community increases, we've renewed our commitment to ask the Spirit to centre us around Jesus, to sit at the foot of the cross, to be transformed by his death and resurrection.

But one of the pieces of work needed to retain a strong central focus is to identify what is not at the centre. Given our history, it is likely no surprise that our community is diverse in terms of experiencing the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. Our community holds deeply diverse cultural norms around things like deference to authority. Like many other churches, our community is diverse around political affiliation. And, to the point of this overture, our community is diverse around how it considers same sex marriage. But we have decided that all of this diversity is welcome, that Christians can disagree about these things, and we trust the Spirit to make us stronger because of our unity amidst this diversity. But none of these topics or conversations are what define our centre. What unifies us is our belief that all Christians confess with their mouths “Jesus is Lord” and wholeheartedly believe that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9).

We confess that Jesus is our centre. Please do not ask us to confess the conclusions of this committee; their conclusions are not central to the Gospel.

## **Appendix 2:** Letter from members of faculty and staff at Calvin University

### **Calvin University**

December 10, 2020

Dear President LeRoy and members of the Confessional Commitments and Academic Freedom (CCAF) Committee,

We, the undersigned faculty and staff of Calvin University, write to you in response to the report that was recently released by the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality. We have a number of grave concerns about the report, if ultimately adopted by Synod, and its potential impact on Calvin as a Christian liberal arts university as described by our Vision 2030.

Of primary concern are the report’s conclusions stating that prohibitions of “homosexual sex already have confessional status,” that homosexual sex “threaten[s] a person’s salvation,” and that the failure to call people in same-sex relationships “to repentance is ... acting like a false church” (p. 148). The report’s central claim appears to be at odds with Calvin’s own Confessional Commitment and Academic Freedom document, according to which “it is problematic to assert that a topic like homosexuality is either confessional or not” (p. 21). The report insufficiently engages with relevant scholarship from our disciplines, leading to a biased view of the theological, scriptural, and scientific basis for the report. The discussions of gender identity and sexual orientation lack the scientific and hermeneutic rigor and accuracy of prevailing peer-reviewed scholarship and thereby have the potential to compromise Calvin’s academic reputation. In sum, the report and its potential adoption by Synod could undermine the academic freedom of faculty and our standing as a reputable academic institution in the Reformed tradition.

Also of significant concern is the matter of faculty compliance with the Covenant for Faculty Members. Faculty members who have assented to the Covenant have done so when there was no claim that views on same-sex marriage and gender identity were confessional in nature. We would not want our assent to the Covenant to suggest, retroactively, that we support such a claim. Adoption of the report's claims by Synod could place many of us in noncompliance with the Covenant for Faculty Members and the Handbook for Teaching Faculty.

Adoption of the report's claims regarding confessional status would cause harm to our Reformed community by severely impairing staff and faculty's ability to care for our LGBTQ+ students in the way that our conscience dictates and the scholarship supports. While staff are not required to sign the Covenant for Faculty Members, some would consider working for an institution for whom the report was afforded confessional status a violation of conscience. Thus, it would become harder to attract and retain faculty, staff, and students.

Finally, the report's adoption and its declaration that issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are confessional and matters of salvation would be playing into the narrow culture wars' conception of orthodoxy and detract from our larger Christian mission at a time when we want to lead, not just nationally, but globally as agents of renewal.

While we understand that the potential impact of the report, if adopted by Synod, will be discussed by the CCAF subcommittee of PSC, we urge you to also communicate with the Council of Delegates (COD) of the CRCNA that

1. adoption of this report by Synod has the potential to negatively impact Calvin University's status as an academic institution;
2. adoption of the report by Synod has the potential to harm Calvin University's Vision 2030 goals;
3. Calvin University plans to continue to support its LGBTQ+ students by fully including them in the life of the University, and plans to continue to support staff and faculty as they care for our LGBTQ+ students in the way that their conscience dictates;
4. Calvin plans to continue to protect its faculty and staff on these issues especially in their scholarship, teaching, and service.

Believing strongly in Calvin University and its mission, we offer our continued service and scholarly expertise as the discussion of this report progresses.

Sincerely,

[signed by 147 faculty and staff]

#### 5.4.5.

As The Road Church Council, we have received this overture from a group of post-secondary students. As the only avenue available to them to have their voices heard at Synod is to follow the flow from Congregation to Classis to Synod, The Road Church Council has adopted this overture to provide the means by which these student voices can be heard both at Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan and at Synod. The following content was written by these students in their own voice. Since at least one of the students involved in this overture are members of The Road we are presenting this overture on their behalf to Classis, asking Classis to adopt the overture and submit it to Synod. We believe it is important for their voice to be heard and we share their concerns.

#### **Overture to:**

- 1. Make amendments to the recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality**
- 2. Create a plan of action to continue careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage) and engagement with people affected by these issues**
- 3. Prioritize the unity of the body of Christ in the CRCNA by delegating the issue of same-sex marriage as a decision of local conscience (while actively studying the fruit of this decision to inform further dialogue)**

#### **I. Introduction to Student Authors**

This overture is a collaborative effort by over 25 students across 10 post-secondary campuses. Our team includes student representatives from 6 post-secondary institutions who have ties with the CRCNA (Calvin University, The King's University, Redeemer University, Trinity Christian College, the Institute for Christian Studies, and Calvin Theological Seminary) as well as students from several other post-secondary institutions<sup>1</sup> who heard of our efforts and asked to join us. The school with the most representation was Calvin University with 7 students. Our passion for both the church and LGBTQIA+ concerns inspired us to collaborate, blessing us with new connections and an enriching experience. We are diverse in:

- Gender: Male, female and nonbinary people were represented
- Sexual identity: Both straight and queer sexual identities were represented
- Ethnicity: White American, White Canadian, Dutch American, Jewish, Chinese Canadian, Japanese American, Hispanic, Latino
- Geographical location: Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, Colorado, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia
- Age: 19 to 45 years with 20 of us under age 25 years

Several churches offered to bring our overture to their councils. In the end, this overture was adopted by several church councils and forwarded to the Classical level for consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Augustana University (Sioux Falls), Seattle Pacific University, University of Western Ontario, Wycliffe College (Toronto School of Theology, U of T), Knox College (Toronto School of Theology, U of T), University of Toronto

Why did we choose to write this collaborative overture in addition to involvement in our local congregations? We seek to follow the intended flow of church order from local congregation to Classis to Synod and therefore, many of us are also involved in overture efforts within our local congregations. However, it seemed important to also submit an overture entirely written and signed by post-secondary students because we have unique concerns, a unique voice and may be under-represented in these conversations. Although we were approached with requests from youth, alumni, chaplains and faculty members to join our efforts, we limited involvement in this overture to post-secondary students only. We advised these other contacts to engage via their own congregations. While assembling our team, we discovered three categories of post-secondary students who wanted to be involved.

1. Current and active CRCNA members who have serious concerns with the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (19 students from 10 CRCNA classes who represent the majority of our team and primary authors of this overture<sup>2</sup>)
2. Students who were CRCNA members at one time but no longer consider themselves CRCNA members and no longer attend a CRCNA local congregation because of the pain and harm experienced around CRCNA's posture towards human sexuality issues (1 student)
3. Students who are not CRCNA members but are attending schools with ties to the CRCNA and/or care deeply about the flourishing of the denomination (7 students<sup>3</sup>)

As such, in the Personal Impact Statements section below, students are identified by name, post-secondary institution and CRCNA membership if applicable.

We write to you because we care deeply about the health and unity of the CRCNA. Some of us may even be future ministers or leaders (or current lay leaders) within the CRCNA. We take God's Word very seriously as well as the ongoing flourishing of the church now and into the future. First and foremost, our hearts cry out for unity, forbearance and a commitment to Christian communion. The mystery of God's will has been revealed to us in Christ and its goal is the unity of all things in Christ. "With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into

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<sup>2</sup> CRCNA members who signed this overture: Andrews, Jessica (The Road CRC in Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan); Beck, Renya (Jubilee Fellowship CRC in Classis Niagara); Bouman, Abigail (Neland Ave. CRC in Classis Grand Rapids East); Bouma, Emily (River Park CRC in Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan); Bonsma, Ben (Jubilee Fellowship CRC in Classis Niagara); Bonsma-Fisher, Madeleine (First CRC Toronto in Classis Toronto); de Boer, Shayanne (Redeemer CRC in Classis Chatham); Clemens, Jonathan (First CRC Toronto in Classis Toronto); DeJager, Catherine (Washington DC CRC in Classis Hackensack); Elgersma, Kat (First CRC of Denver in Classis Rocky Mountain); Klompmaker, Kirsten (Jubilee Fellowship CRC in Classis Niagara); Krале, Lauren (CrossPoint CRC in Classis Toronto); Lise, Nathan (Holland Marsh CRC in Classis Toronto); Overbeek, Nicholas (Calvin CRC in Classis Grand Rapids East); Roseboom, Michelle (Terrace CRC in Classis B.C. North-West); Schat, Kyra (First Hamilton CRC in Classis Hamilton); Tuit, Samuel (Neland Ave. CRC in Classis Grand Rapids East); Jodi VanWingerden (Neland Ave. CRC in Classis Grand Rapids East); Tolsma, Theoren (Fleetwood CRC in Classis B.C. South-East)

<sup>3</sup> Non-CRCNA members (or no longer members) who signed this overture: De Martinez, Brandon (Calvin University); Ford, Maggie (Redeemer University); Murashima, Claire (Calvin University); Newton, Jo (Calvin University); Ross Barz (Trinity Christian College); Salamun, Sean (Calvin University); Van Arragon, Emma (The King's University); Young, Justus (Calvin University)

effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Ephesians 1:8-10 NIV).

We acknowledge a charitable posture toward the committee and gratitude for their many efforts so far. We strongly agree with Synod 2016’s grounds for the human sexuality committee in that “the consideration of *status confessionis* is a **weighty matter** that requires **extended and careful deliberation**” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 926-27; *Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality Report 2020*, p. 3) We lament that from its very inception, both in committee makeup and Synod-assigned mandate, this committee fell short of the deep vulnerability and humility required of “careful deliberation” which, in our understanding of the term, would have required a posture of balanced openness to conflicting Biblical and theological viewpoints and extensive listening, particularly to harmed and marginalized voices among us. We are saddened that the restricted synodical mandate from the outset put the committee members in a tricky and contentious position and our hearts go out to them as our family members in the body of Christ. We experience this as a flawed process with the resulting report falling short of our Reformed heritage and values of fairness, perspicacity, and thorough Biblical scholarship as well as deeply hurtful for its exclusion of the Godly voices and perspectives of LGBTQIA+ family members and allies among us.

## II. Background

In response to multiple overtures, Synod 2016 created the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality (henceforth referred to as the human sexuality committee) with a mandate 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...  
(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 919-20)

At the end of October 2020, the report of the human sexuality committee was published in preparation for deliberation at Synod 2021. We commend the committee for their five years of hard work in addressing a multitude of concepts related to human sexuality including pornography, gender identity, homosexuality, singleness, premarital sex and cohabitation, polyamory, divorce and sexual desire. The report highlights the challenges of our current contemporary cultural context around issues of human sexuality and it seems as though its recommendations are based on a genuine desire by its members to demonstrate loyalty and submission to the authority of Scripture (even though we disagree with some of their conclusions). However, the report is lacking in the following key areas:

- A. It insufficiently meets the goal of “extended and careful deliberation” of these “weighty matters” of human sexuality.
- B. It insufficiently reflects and represents the membership of the CRCNA.

- C. It lacks constructive suggestions or guidance for how our denomination might move forward in unity to continue to fulfill our Christian mission while respecting the lack of consensus on human sexuality issues.

*A note regarding timing:* We acknowledge that our response is limited by the timeline and will lack the level of in-depth study and analysis we would have preferred to include. As such, major areas of concern will be noted but analysis will be brief or absent. Although “prior opportunity” (according to Article 47 of CRCNA Church Order) was met since the final report was published Oct. 29, 2020, the report is much longer than typical committee reports and therefore the timeline provided between October 29, 2020 to March 15, 2021 was insufficient to thoughtfully and thoroughly engage with all aspects of the 175 pages. To meet the church order requirements for submitting an overture through both church council and classis, overtures needed to be completed by the turn of the year. After taking into account our student responsibilities with midterms and finals, this left very little time in November and December to organize ourselves and respond well to this report. We believe that the “how” of being God’s people is as important as “what” we believe and that we are not called to be frantic or rushed, especially in grappling with such important matters. It seems to us that we and many of our contacts within the CRCNA, out of polite respect and good faith in the human sexuality committee, have waited for the final outcome of this report only to be seriously disappointed in the lack of balance therein. We grieve that the result of this will likely be further delay in providing clear, ethical guidance or any prompt resolution to these issues.

A. *The human sexuality report insufficiently meets the goal of “extended and careful deliberation” of these “weighty matters” of human sexuality as referred to in the report’s mandate (Acts of Synod 2016, pp. 926-27; Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality Report 2020, p. 3). Article 29 in Church Order 2020 also states “decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon **due consideration**” (p. 44). In light of the clearly lacking denominational consensus regarding credible, sincerely held Biblical interpretations around LGBTQIA+ issues, the human sexuality report does not meet an acceptable standard of careful deliberation or due consideration. The human sexuality report can be received as a hearty effort into exploring a traditional view of Biblical and theological scholarship but it remains a partial effort towards due diligence in adequately examining these issues-- certainly not meeting the standard of due consideration required for either *status confessionis*, confessional status or any change to church order. Additional study and listening to supplement the work of the current human sexuality committee is needed.*

- a. The report insufficiently presents vigorous discussion or exploration of Biblical and theological support in favour of same-sex marriage and full inclusion and celebration of LGBTQIA+ people.
- b. The report insufficiently engaged in robust listening. For example, only four LGBTQIA+ people were interviewed for this report (*Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality Report 2020*, p. 4). In the range of personal stories included in the report, there were no stories that depicted faithful, married same-sex

couples. Theoretical research was given precedence over listening to the voices of real people. In-depth local conversations have also not yet been fostered. There is work yet to do and we cannot consider these teachings settled and binding without generous, extensive listening to our CRCNA members.

- c. There is much contested about the report's claim that "the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status" (p. 149). According to CRCNA church order expert, the Rev. Dr. Henry DeMoor, the report claims confessional status around same-sex relationships where none exists.<sup>4</sup> (There is also confusion around the use of the terms *status confessionis* and confessional status which seem to be used interchangeably but may have two different definitions.<sup>5</sup>)
- d. The report insufficiently addresses the potential for a new movement of the Holy Spirit or the abundant evidence of the fruit of the Spirit present in the lives of faithful LGBTQIA+ Christians.
- e. The report does not engage in the level of balanced study or formal listening that we have seen modelled by fellow Reformed denominations.
  - i. For example, the Presbyterian Church of Canada (PCC) is currently grappling with the issue of same-sex marriage. Part of its methodology was for its Committee on Church Doctrine to appoint two teams of learned and gifted people. One team thoroughly articulated the Biblical foundations and theological arguments for a traditional view of marriage as only between one man and one woman and the second team thoroughly articulated the Biblical foundations and theological arguments for a view affirming same-sex marriage. They also attended to the growing evidence of harm done to LGBTQIA+ people and its pastoral implications within Christian communities. In this way, they presented a balanced resource to their General Assembly (Synod) and membership for listening and learning regarding this issue. After this document was shared and widely considered within the PCC, the General Assembly decided to draw up legislation that allows for same-sex marriage and ordination of married LGBTQI clergy while it also allows for freedom of conscience on the matter. This legislation was voted on by each local Presbytery (Classis) and about 70% of these voted in favour of the new legislation. In 2021 this legislation is going back to the General Assembly for a final vote.<sup>6 7</sup> In regards to listening to marginalized people, the 2019 General Assembly declared it "a matter of urgency...[to] provide a means for those affected by this decision to express their concerns, views and pain in a safe environment, and that these concerns be reported back to the

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<sup>4</sup> DeMoor, Henry. *Status Confessionis*, The Network, November 11, 2020. Retrieved December 31, 2020 from <https://network.crcna.org/church-order/status-confessionis>

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to the overture from First CRC Toronto and its discussion of *status confessionis* and confessional status.

<sup>6</sup> Email communication with Dr. Charles Fensham (Knox College professor), December 31, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Kendall, Stephen and Muir, Don. 2019 *General Assembly: Summary of decisions regarding human sexuality*, June 2019. The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Retrieved December 31, 2020 from file:///media/fuse/drivefs-6d44a3bacf91b5e895d80cab61e3d569/root/PCC/2019-General-Assembly-Decisions-re-Sexuality.pdf

2020 General Assembly”<sup>4</sup> and the 2017 General Assembly had already “established a listening committee, the Rainbow Communion, to create safe space for LGTBQ+ persons to tell of their experiences in the church.”<sup>8</sup>

- f. The report insufficiently engages with the potential that changing our minds to increased acceptance and celebration of LGBTQIA+ people may be a deeply devout response, particularly in relationship to the harm being caused by non-affirming theology.
- g. The matter of current and historical harm done towards LGBTQIA+ people at the hands of the church is insufficiently addressed in this report.
  - i. As we continue in careful deliberation around these human sexuality issues and a Christian pastoral response, it is essential that we highlight and grapple with the issue of harm towards LGBTQIA+ people at the hands of the church. Theology that does harm calls into question the validity of the theology and Biblical interpretation itself.
  - ii. The human sexuality report has the potential to do harm by assuming that those with developmental sexual disorders or those who identify as LGBTQIA+ have a “disordered sexuality” (p.19) and that this is a result of the fall. There is no clear teaching in Scripture on this. This is an exceedingly important distinction due to the close connection between one’s gender and sexual identity and one’s identity as God’s image bearer.
  - iii. Our students have several pastoral care concerns with the report. For example, in the gender identity section, it says that using correct names and pronouns decreases suicide risk, but immediately follows this by suggesting that congregations need not use correct names and pronouns if they do not want to (p.86).
  - iv. Length of process- Although delay is required for careful deliberation, we acknowledge that further delay in providing resolution to many of these issues of human sexuality is painful to individuals, families and congregations.

Continued careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage) and engagement with people affected by these issues is still required. In the overture section below, we offer some practical suggestions to this end.

*B. The human sexuality report insufficiently reflects and represents the membership of the CRCNA.*

The report was written by a committee that was restricted in both its make-up and mandate. This restriction does not reflect the broad lack of consensus on these issues within the CRCNA and therefore provides imbalanced Biblical and theological interpretations and recommendations.

- a. In the 2014 survey by the Calvin College Center for Social Research 21% of church members, 31% of CRCNA students, and 14% of ministers agreed with same-sex

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<sup>8</sup> Currie, Amanda. Letter from the Moderator of the 2019 General Assembly, September 3, 2019. The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Retrieved December 31, 2020 from file:///media/fuse/drivefs-6d44a3bacf91b5e895d80cab61e3d569/root/PCC/Pastoral-Letter-from-the-Moderator-2019.pdf

marriage.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, 17% of church members, 34% of CRCNA students and 16% of pastors surveyed said that gay Christians should celebrate the sexual identity God has given them.<sup>10</sup> The human sexuality report misrepresents a singular Biblical interpretation as an already settled matter. There are clearly a spectrum of beliefs on this issue within the CRCNA, and therefore it is unwise and injurious to promote a one-sided report to confessional status in light of this reality.

- b. Committee make-up was restricted to adherence to 1973 teaching regarding homosexuality. Restricting the allowed viewpoints on a study committee is discriminatory, reflects poor governance, and is inconsistent with the CRCNA's historical methods and its ethos of valuing thoughtful, multi-faceted scholarship and engagement.
- c. Synod 2016 requested that a chaplain or campus minister be on this committee as a way to represent the diversity of pastoral vocations in the CRCNA. When the committee member that was a campus minister, and perhaps most closely in touch with students such as ourselves, had to resign in 2017 because of his move to Korea, he was not replaced even though there were still three years remaining before the due date for the report's publication (Nov 1 2020).
- d. Synod 2016 specifically articulated its desire that a person who identifies as 'gender dysphoric' serve on the committee. As far as we can tell, no one who identified as gender dysphoric was ever on the committee, and the committee consultation with one "FtM (female to male) transgender person and his father" (p. 4) was very late in their process (May 28, 2020). Given the clarity of this representation desired by Synod 2016, this minimal interaction from the committee is insufficient.
- e. Even if the compositional mandate of the committee as desired by Synod 2016 had been met, the representation of gender minorities and sexual minorities on the committee and in the consultative process is markedly insufficient, especially noting the perspectival requirement around adherence to 1973.
- f. Representation of young adults was missing on the human sexuality committee. Nobody who signed the report was under the age of 40 years. As post-secondary students, most of us young adults ourselves, we may navigate these questions differently than other age groups. In our experience, the younger generation is generally more accepting of unity amidst diversity and remaining in the tension of uncertainty. We tend to be more sensitive to power dynamics that exist due to the influences of patriarchy, colonization, and racism. These are valued parts of our worldview that we feel will serve us well as we faithfully navigate our present and future cultural contexts. We, as the younger generation, are deeply interested in the content of this report because we will carry the long term burden of its ramifications. We also lament the increasing loss of our age group among church membership. For example, in reaching out to post-secondary institutions, numerous students told us that they could not, with integrity, be involved with this overture because they had "already left the CRC far behind" because of its posture

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<sup>9</sup> *Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re: Same-sex Marriage (majority report) 2016*, Appendix A, p. 49. Retrieved December 31, 2020 from [https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex\\_marriage.pdf](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex_marriage.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> *Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re: Same-sex Marriage (majority report) 2016*, Appendix A, p. 53. Retrieved December 31, 2020 from [https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex\\_marriage.pdf](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex_marriage.pdf)

towards LGBTQIA+ people. We ask you “listen to the voices of every generation”<sup>11</sup> as the CRCNA has made this a denominational priority in *Our Journey 2025*.

- g. There is a lack of collective congregational leadership experience among the human sexuality committee members.<sup>12</sup> Pastors may become experts on fostering unity among non-unified congregations to continue worshipping together despite disagreement. We can imagine that the wisdom gained through navigating ‘worship wars’, differences of conviction regarding women in church office, and even the recent COVID19 crisis around worship in person versus worshipping online would be helpful wisdom to guide a denomination towards unity even when there is not a consensus around the issues of human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage). This type of wisdom does not seem to be accentuated in this report.

*C. The human sexuality report lacks constructive suggestions and guidance for how our denomination might move forward in unity to continue to fulfill our Christian mission while respecting the lack of consensus on human sexuality issues.*

- a. The human sexuality report implies that holding a view that affirms same-sex marriage is Biblically heretical, condemning such as false teaching with severe words of warning (p. 146-8). Yet there are faithful and respected individuals, leaders and scholars within the CRCNA who hold this view in their best conscience.<sup>13</sup> We are concerned that some of the teaching in the report will increase divisiveness within the church by unduly burdening those with traditional Biblical perspectives with a fear to remain in communion with those acting upon affirming views (p. 146-8). Generally speaking, it seems that those with LGBTQIA+ affirming views are asking their more traditional church family members to be willing to remain in communion despite disagreement. However, the report encourages those with traditional/non-affirming views to require agreement with a singular Biblical interpretation at the risk of breaching unity.
- b. The report is inconsistent with precedent in CRCNA church history for addressing controversial issues. In previous cases of faithful disagreement around Biblical interpretation (ie. female ordination and divorce), the CRCNA has recognized that differing interpretations may “arise from credible and sincerely held interpretations of Scripture.”<sup>14</sup> Historically, the CRCNA has favored the option of exception at the local level as a way to uphold church unity and allow congregations freedom for careful and deliberate discernment on complex issues. Local discernment can bear healthier fruit on

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.crcna.org/news-and-events/news/announcing-our-journey-2025>

<sup>12</sup> The best we could do to research this data was to use the CRCNA’s yearbook website (<https://www.crcna.org/yearbook>). These are the results we found for the 6 committee members who are ordained ministers or commissioned pastors in the CRCNA, noting only their years as pastors of congregations (not total years of ordained service): Jeff Weima-0 years; Mary Vanden Berg-0 years; Paula Seales-4, starting in 2016; Jose Rayas-6, starting in 2014; Charles Kim-20, starting in 2000; Mary Lee Bouma-23 starting in 1997). Adding Matt Tuininga, who supported the report’s creation until nearly the end, adds 0 years of congregational pastoring. Total congregational pastoring years by the report’s signers is 53 years (which includes 16 years from 2016-2020). This total would be close to the amount of years served by many of our retiring ministers all on their own.

<sup>13</sup> To name a few: Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff, Dr. Duane Kelderman, and the Rev. Leonard VanderZee

<sup>14</sup> *Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality Report 2019*, p. 82.

- some vulnerable, contentious matters because it is harmful to remove the “particulars” of an individual’s story to create a “universal rule” in our quest for the false idol of certainty.
- c. The practical ramifications of this report claiming confessional status and a singular “right” way of interpreting Scripture are numerous and devastating, yet they are not considered or discussed in this report. Taking a moment to consider the potential fruit of this report were it to be assigned confessional status demonstrates its own insufficiency. For example, would all current office bearers who agree with same-sex marriage be required to relinquish their positions? Would ordination candidates who consider gender diversity to be a reflection of God’s goodness in creation (and not a result of the fall) lose their candidacy status and be blocked from potential ordination? Would this proposed confessional status apply retroactively to remove church membership for those in disagreement with the report or only apply to new members? Would LGBTQIA+ members who do not feel called to celibacy have to leave the denomination? Would non-celibate LGBTQIA+ people or those who affirm same-sex marriage employed at organizations associated with the CRCNA lose their jobs?
  - d. Corpus linguistics analysis indicates room to grow in the human sexuality report.<sup>15</sup>
    - i. For example, more use of “we” in the sections on singleness and pornography indicates that the report writers identify more with these groups of people than the sections on gender identity or homosexuality. In particular, frequent use of “you” with less frequent use of “we” in the report’s section on homosexuality may indicate that people who are not heterosexual may be seen as outsiders.
    - ii. Only one case study in the report uses the first person “I” language (p.41). Direct quotations allow people to tell their story in their own words and prevent paraphrasing towards any particular (intended or unintended) bias.
    - iii. It was good to see the recommendation to listen in the sections on gender (7x) and homosexuality (4x) but vocabulary about listening was low in the report in general and absent in the remaining sections.
    - iv. Scriptural arguments made by negation are higher in the gender identity scripture section while absent in the pornography scripture section. Providing more positive arguments prevents straw man arguments.
    - v. The current human sexuality report uses a more passive voice than the 1973 report on homosexuality. This is concerning because it suggests to readers that the report content is from a neutral, objective source, rather than reflective of the views/interpretations of its authors.

In the introduction of the CRCNA’s *Church Order and Its Supplements 2020*, John Calvin is quoted, “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

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<sup>15</sup> Catherine DeJager is a 5th-year senior at Calvin University majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Mathematics, Data Science, and Linguistics. She learned Corpus Linguistics at Calvin in 2018 and has been using it ever since. As a lifelong CRC member and an advocate for LGBTQIA+ issues, Catherine decided to use her Corpus Linguistics skills to investigate and respond to this report. Her full analysis can be found here:

<https://gitlab.com/cmd16/crc-sexuality-reports/-/blob/master/results.ipynb>

guide, all will be safe” (Institutes, IV.X.30). Let us rebuild mutual trust and follow careful and due process while letting the Word, love and the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit be our guide as we continue to navigate these complex issues of human sexuality together.

## **Personal Impact Statements**

We offer the following personal impact statements written by the students behind this overture as additional background information. We do not ever want policy decisions or scholarly discussions to be disconnected from the lived realities of our Christian family.

*I have long been proud of the CRC for its commitment to love of neighbor, activism, and thorough, well-rounded biblical scholarship. This report flies in the face of all that. I am devastated. I want a church where I know people will love me and respect me as I am, and where I can love and respect other people in turn. I want a church where I can bring LGBT+ friends and know they will be loved and welcomed just like anyone else. I want a denomination where I don't have to caveat with “well, I agree with them except for the LGBT+ stuff”. I want to know that no matter what someone's sex, gender identity, gender expression, and interaction of all those factors is, that their chosen name and pronouns will be used by everyone in the congregation (or at the very least the leaders will set an example) because that's what it means to love our neighbor. I want full membership in a church that doesn't see me as sinful or broken just for who I love. I am bisexual, and I want a church that doesn't force me to choose between a man and celibacy. I look forward to when I move this summer and get to find a new church that is affirming, because I don't want to stay in the CRC given its treatment of LGBT+ issues.*

Catherine DeJager, she/her pronouns, student at Calvin University, member of Washington DC CRC

*I am a senior at Calvin University. Four and a half years ago, I spent countless hours searching for a college where I could live authentically as a nonbinary queer person and worship God inside the classroom as well as outside. Calvin was the only place I felt that met both requirements to my satisfaction, and I was amazed to find out it was the flagship institution of the CRC. While the CRC may hold an unaffirming stance, plenty of faculty and staff, and almost three-quarters of the students I've met are affirming. I love that Calvin is a space for diverse opinions and mutual respect, and I hope to see the CRC as a whole move in that direction. Yet this report has made me incredibly anxious, both for LGBTQIA+ members of the denomination and for myself. I fear that, if adopted, this report will force Calvin and the other CRC-affiliated institutions to reprimand their LGBTQIA+ students for living authentically as they feel called to. I'm afraid that, as I pursue transitioning (something I have discussed with two of the three chaplains at Calvin University, as well as my therapist, psychiatrist, and doctor), Calvin will be forced by the CRC to take action against me.*

Jo Newton, student at Calvin University, they/them pronouns

*Having grown up in a CRC church and being a current member, I find the CRC an almost impossible thing to talk about with my non-Christian friends. Since my faith is an important part of my identity I would like to be able to share why it is important to my many non-Christian friends. However, I find it impossible to tell others about a loving God when the Church I am part of is actively causing harm. When I do share with others it is full of caveats stating that the current church I attend, Jubilee CRC, is relatively accepting and that I myself am not, "one of those conservative Christians." Without these caveats my statement of faith would have little bearing with others who can see the harm the Church has done, and being kind and loving people themselves, want nothing to do with the CRC or Christianity as a whole. It is tragic that the part of me that most motivates me to love others, is the part of me that I have to both hide and caveat to actually show others that I love.*

Ben Bonsma, he/him, student at Redeemer University, member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC

*I am currently an MDiv student who is candidating for ordination within the CRCNA. I experienced a strong vocational call toward pastoral ministry later in life, when my three kids were grade school age. I love my church and the people that I am blessed to be in relationship with through the church. Supportive Christian community has and continues to be one of the most formative aspects of my lifelong faith journey. Three years ago I had an uninspected, inherited theology that was non-affirming. After two years of praying, studying and researching these issues, as well as listening to stories of faithful LGBTQIA+ Christians, I felt compelled by my faith in Jesus to change my theology to become fully affirming. The resulting peace of God around this issue in my life has brought my spirit much consolation. One of the biggest factors for me in this journey was hearing about the harm LGBTQIA+ people had experienced from the very body of Christ that had always been so supportive of me. This human sexuality report has hit me like a ton of bricks. I have felt incredulous, grieved, angry, suffered insomnia and shed many tears. My love of Jesus compels me to fully accept and celebrate my LGBTQIA+ family members and I know that the church's future is in God's hands. However, because I am in favour of same-sex marriage, I am scared that when I am examined for ordination, I will be rejected.*

Jessica Andrews, she/her, student at Knox College (University of Toronto), member of The Road CRC

*For several generations, my family has been involved with the CRC as active members, teachers at CRC affiliated schools, and preachers. I was raised in the church and attended Fellowship CRC in Edmonton for most of my life. However, I no longer feel at home in the CRC and cannot foresee a future where I return to the denomination. While there were many factors leading to this decision, the biggest one was that I could not be a part of a denomination that does not recognize LGBTQIA+ identities as biblically legitimate. This was not a doctrinal concern but a personal one, as I am a lesbian. Despite the support of many in my congregation, being a part of a denomination that views LGBTQIA+ identity as incompatible with Christianity made it impossible to stay. How can we say we want to emulate Christ while preaching an exclusive, conditional understanding of what it looks like to love our neighbor? How can we claim to represent the love of God when we fail to*

*adequately love each other? I attend a CRC affiliated university, where I have been working to establish support for LGBTQIA+ students. Despite significant progress, our connection to the CRC has caused many problems. The CRC's position on human sexuality limits the ability of LGBTQIA+ students to integrate within the community and limits the ability of the administration to support students without fear of repercussions. If there is a future for the CRC, it is embodied in the grace of LGBTQIA+ people who remain in a church that does not fully accept them. However, for myself and many other LGBTQIA+ people who were raised in the CRC, staying within the denomination is no longer possible.*

Emma Van Arragon, she/her pronouns, student at The King's University, former/inactive member of Fellowship CRC

*I personally do not identify as a member of the CRC church. Yet, I am a student at Calvin University, which predominantly consists of students who are of the CRC faith. I was raised in the Roman Catholic church my entire life. My own faith, like others in the CRC, is very important to my wellbeing and plays a vital role in my life everyday. Here at Calvin University, I am honored with the incredible opportunity to have an intimate look into many of the views and beliefs that CRC Christians follow. It allows me to use my own faith upbringing and filter it through this lens, while trying to better understand that even though we are of different faiths, we are still branches of the same Divine Tree.*

*At Calvin University, we follow the mission statement of "to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly." As Christians and non-Christians alike, we must believe that the LGBTQIA+ community is loved; they too are just as Christian and vital as any one of us, and they must be validated with that same Christian spirit as well. Many friends that I have made while attending Calvin University, who also identify as Christian and the LGBTQIA+ community are personally affected by this Report. Their voices and their views absolutely matter because they too are "Christ's agents of renewal in the world." So, I plead with the readers of this report that you carefully, thoughtfully, listen and follow the recommendations these important voices in this response have outlined. It's so imperative to make considerations and edits for a true, equal, and equitable future.*

Sean Salamun, he/him, Student Senate Team Leader at Calvin University

*I have attended a CRC church and CRC affiliated schools all my life and have been thoughtfully disciplined and cared for by these communities. As most of the institutions within which I have been disciplined have held what the report refers to as a "traditionalist" perspective on issues of gender and sexuality, I also held this perspective without a great deal of consideration for much of my life. However, in recent years, I have felt called upon to engage with a greater variety of perspectives in this conversation. As I have allowed space for tension, made note of areas of dissonance, and wrestled prayerfully with my theological convictions, my relationships, both with God and with my neighbours, have been enriched and deepened. I am grateful for the report insofar as it thoroughly and thoughtfully provides one perspective on issues of gender and sexuality held by members of the CRC and serves as a much-needed catalyst for dialogue within our denomination. That said, I lament the significant reality that my LGBTQIA+ family members and friends have experienced fear, anger, and grief in reading this report. I am concerned about its implications for myself and*

*others considering, pursuing, or participating in vocational ministry within the CRC who do not support all of its conclusions. While this report is helpful in some respects, I believe that it ultimately falls short of adequately including the voices of our denomination's LGBTQIA+ members, thoughtfully representing the variety of perspectives held by members of the CRC, and engaging fully with its pastoral and missional implications. Ultimately, I worry that the adoption of this report will further inhibit the fostering of unity (already so rare in the context of this conversation) and create a confessional barrier to full participation for many who currently call this denomination home.*

Kyra Schat, she/her, student at Redeemer University, member of First Hamilton CRC

*I have grown up in the CRC denomination and it has been something that I have found great comfort in. When I left for university, the CRC was something that I strongly identified with and was a community that I longed to extend in a new city. I especially connected with new friends over our shared CRC background. As I have developed more relationships with people who are not part of the CRC denomination or do not consider themselves Christian, I have become increasingly aware of how the CRC's statement demonstrates an exclusive stance. While the congregation that I grew up in nurtured my faith and encouraged my exploration of my faith – especially through my youth group – I felt an underlying tension about how the church viewed and (un)welcomed the LGBTQIA+ community and how we are called to be in relationship with others. Although I am blessed to have several CRC mentors, friends, and other perspectives who I can discuss LGBTQIA+ inclusion with, I am more hesitant to share my CRC affiliation with others because of its position on the LGBTQIA+ community. Despite personally identifying as a cisgender female, I cannot – and I believe that we as a church cannot – simply ignore, forget, or even worse, punish our fellow believers who identify differently than I do; I am not called to judge my neighbour but to love them. Being part of and growing up in the CRC is something that I treasure and am grateful for, but it is also something that brings discomfort in identifying with because I know the harm that the CRC has brought and will continue to bring until we amend our perspective to be inclusive of our LGBTQIA+ neighbours.*

Emily Bouma, she/her, student at The King's University, member of River Park CRC

*I have been a member of the CRC all my life and as a child I always thought that it was the best denomination of all. In recent years, and especially upon reading this report, that is no longer my opinion. Church is meant to be a community of people who love and care for each other no matter what. This report does not reflect that love. If I did not feel that I could safely bring my LGBTQIA+ friends into the church before, now I know that I could not. Many of my closest friends have already faced religious harm from other churches and I have always had hope that mine would be different. It hurts to know that my church is still stuck in a place that calls for judgment on LGBTQIA+ members of the community. I cannot comfortably say that I trust in the CRC and its decisions any longer. Our choice should be one of never failing love, like that of Christ, not judgment and harm that could last a lifetime.*

Shayanne de Boer, she/her, student at University of Western Ontario, member of Redeemer CRC

*The CRC, in unique fashion, has found a way that allows me (a woman) to serve in every possible leadership position. While the denomination's decision to make allowances for differing Scriptural interpretations on this matter has not been embraced by every single individual or congregation within the denomination, I firmly believe that gracious decision has been a witness to the unity of all believers that is possible in Christ—the unity that Jesus himself desired for us—“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you ... that they may be brought to complete unity [so that] the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:21-23). Jesus knew that the church would never have uniformity—but yet he tells us that unity is possible through him.*

*I have had so many opportunities to love and be loved by the church in ways I never would have imagined—Sunday school teacher, committee member, youth elder, classis delegate, chair of council, seminary student. Through those experiences I have received the love and the Word of God. I have learned about God, about grace and forgiveness extended and received, about the beautiful complexity of the body of believers. I have learned that a life of faith is a life of learning how to hold tension—light and darkness, justice and mercy, truth and human fallibility, strength in weakness, power in humility. These opportunities have been a means of grace.*

*It pains me that the church has become known more for excluding rather than embracing—particularly among younger generations. Who are we to deny these means of grace to others, especially when thoughtful, educated Christians have arrived at different interpretations with strong Scriptural support? In cases like this, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to extend more grace, rather than place more limits on it. And in so doing, we also have an opportunity and a responsibility to be a witness to the world that “in Christ, all things hold together” (Col. 1:17).*

Jodi VanWingerden, she/her, M.Div. student at Calvin Theological Seminary, member of Neland Avenue CRC (and previously Calvin CRC, Sheboygan, Wisconsin)

*I have grown up within the CRC church and have attended CRC affiliated schools my entire life. Throughout my time at the King's University in Edmonton I have often connected with others who attend CRC churches and this has been a way for me to create many new friendships. However, I have also developed my beliefs and understandings in this time, and have met and formed relationships with many people who do not identify with Christianity or the CRC denomination. I have witnessed people in my life experience exclusion from the CRC due to the views of the CRC regarding LGBTQIA+. I have struggled with seeing this occur and have at times felt embarrassed that the church as a whole has been so exclusive. Upon reading the statement put out by the CRC I was shocked to see just how exclusive it was, and I see that a statement such as this one would be harmful for many people. I am concerned that the CRC is issuing a statement such as this which excludes many from the church and is not loving and accepting of all people equally.*

Michelle Roseboom, she/her, student at The King's University, member of Terrace CRC, BC

*Growing up in the church has had its impact on my day to day life. My faith growing*

*up always intersected with my race, ethnicity, sexuality and educational opportunities. Because of this, I have always felt that in some way the church has excluded me because of one of my identities. Although I did not grow up as CRC, I did grow up as Roman Catholic and Pentecostal. Because of this, I often did not have a specific church I could go to as my parents did not feel comfortable staying in one church or another because of their immigrant status or because of how they would discuss topics regarding homosexuality. I ultimately felt that there was no place for me in the church and because of this I decided to leave. With that being said, I felt that oftentimes my sexuality intersected with my cultural aspects growing up. Growing up in a Hispanic household, there was not much said on my sexuality. Because of the conservative culture at home on top of the culture outside of the home, I felt the double pressure of conforming to the societal structures of being "straight" or having to be "straight passing" in order to be loved. In other words, growing up in the United States while growing up within a Hispanic house has had its challenges of accepting my LGBTQ+ identity and because of that I felt pressured to leave the church as a result.*

*However, coming to Calvin University has opened up the possibility of being gay and also being religious. Although some aspects of Calvin are fairly conservative and although Calvin is progressing as a University there is still much work to be done for LGBTQ+ students on campus. Growing up as gay and first generation in the United States has presented its unique challenges within the education system as well. As a gay first generation college student, I grew up attending mostly private academies, Christian school, and public high school, and now I am attending Calvin, a private Christian liberal arts college. Being able to see several perspectives of higher education has given me the privilege to see how my sexuality has intersected with higher education. For example, at Calvin, I have noticed that in the classroom it is not very inclusive with LGBTQ+ acronyms or simply mentioning the existence of LGBTQ+ students. Because of my experiences at Calvin, I have often felt excluded within the classroom because of the religious component. Because of being at Calvin, I noticed the recent CRC report on Human Sexuality summarizing how being "homosexual" is not tolerated and is a sin. Because of the exclusive nature of this statement, it can affect the lives of LGBTQ+ students on campus whether that be socially, politically, or even in a feeling of safety in the classroom. As a first generation, Latinx/Hispanic, multiracial, gay person of color I felt the need to add my personal opinion on this as the LGBTQ+ community is so expansive and often times queer people of color are overlooked. That is why I see it as my duty to ensure that LGBTQ+ student voices are amplified when marginalized.*

*Brandon De Martinez, he/him/él, Student Senator at Calvin University*

*I spent the first 20 years of my life in the closet. When I came out publicly in a Calvin Chimes op-ed, I had to rely on my resilience, support systems and my already strong relationship with Jesus when I faced criticism. Every single piece of criticism was from someone who called themselves a Christian- and almost everyone who called themselves a Christian or used scripture did so in a way that made me feel excluded. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ people who aren't believers will not be motivated to join our churches if they see how poorly we treat LGBTQIA+ individuals who are already in our faith communities.*

*Upon reading this report, the first thing I noticed was how quick we were to judge LGBTQIA+ individuals. Right away, I felt excluded by the use of “we” to describe straight people in the church and “them” as queer individuals who may or may not be in the church. As I read it from the perspective of a bisexual woman, I noticed that it was lacking the nuance that queer voices would have provided.*

*However, I saw a glimmer of hope when Jess Andrews and I were able to mobilize a team of over 20 students from 10 different universities across the US and Canada to write and edit a 15-page overture in the course of a month. This is the type of inclusion that I love about the CRC and Calvin; there are people who are quick to volunteer their time and talents to pave a way for marginalized populations. I’m proud of my institutions and am sharing my opinion because I want us to see the negative impact that taking a confessional, non-affirming stance will have on already excluded people in our communities.*

Claire Murashima, she/her, Student Body President at Calvin University

### **III. Overture**

Given the background above as provided by students from across North America, we overture Synod 2021 to:

1. Make amendments to the recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality
2. Create a plan of action to continue careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality (particularly LGBTQIA+ identity and same-sex marriage) and engagement with people affected by these issues
3. Prioritize the unity of the body of Christ in the CRCNA by delegating the issue of same-sex marriage as a decision of local conscience (while actively studying the fruit of this decision to inform further dialogue)

#### **1. Make amendments to the recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality**

Recommendation B: We request an amendment to recommendation B that this report be received for information but note that it insufficiently addresses:

1. A careful, in-depth exploration of Biblical and theological foundations for alternate viewpoints that favour the celebration of gender/sexual minorities and same-sex marriage.
2. The diversity of credible and sincerely held interpretations of Scripture within the CRCNA denomination and that 21% of CRCNA church members, 31% of CRCNA students and 14% of pastors agreed with same-sex marriage in 2014, a number likely to be higher at present.<sup>16</sup>
3. Practical guidance for moving forward at the level of everyday ministry and for unity in the denomination as a whole.

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<sup>16</sup> *Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re: Same-sex Marriage (majority report) 2016*, Appendix A, p. 49. Retrieved December 31, 2020 from [https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex\\_marriage.pdf](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex_marriage.pdf)

Grounds:

1. While some of the scholarship is sound in this report, some is contentious or requires additional analysis or supporting references while alternate credible Biblical and theological perspectives have been underemphasized or neglected.
2. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the close connection between one's gender and sexual identity and one's identity as God's image bearer, the teachings in this report may therefore be at risk for leading to harm in peoples' lives.

Recommendation C: We offer an amendment for recommendation C. While we believe this report may be worth considering at the local level as per recommendation C, we have offered a more robust suggestion for engagement in our second recommendation below (and particularly 2.a.iii) regarding a committee that would take this report into account as it curates or creates a collection of resources for engagement of human sexuality content from a balanced perspective, giving voice to both a traditional and fully affirming outlook.

Grounds:

1. We strongly support the use of listening circles and restorative practice theory (as per the Challenging Conversations toolkit) and heartily commend Pastor Church Resources for choosing a direction that fosters openness, vulnerability, humility and forbearance.
2. We recommend that this Challenging Conversations curriculum be seen as an insightful and helpful way to engage with parts of the needed dialogue but since a limited perspective is offered, we caution the risk of harm. People may mistakenly interpret this curriculum as addressing the full spectrum of Biblical and theological scholarship around human sexuality, and people may experience active exclusion because of its limitations.

Recommendation D: We strongly request that Synod not accede to recommendation D "that synod declare that the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status."

Grounds:

1. Confessional status is a "weighty matter" and deeming this teaching as confessional status would cause widespread devastation in our denomination, including mandatory removal of many current office bearers and harm to LGBTQIA+ people and their loved ones.
2. Proposing that the teaching of this report already has confessional status is both erroneous and an overreach.

Recommendation E: We request that Synod not accede to recommendation E "that synod declare that Church Order Article 69-c is to be interpreted in the light of the biblical evidence laid out in this report" due to the aforementioned serious limitations of this report. We suggest that Church Order Article 69-c remain unchanged and not be bound by the teachings of this report.

Grounds: This report may be one of several useful resources to consult in challenging pastoral decisions, but it would be harmful and an overreach of this report to deem it as the primary lens for interpreting this church order article.

## **2. Create a plan of action to continue careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage) and engagement with people affected by these issues**

- a. We request that Synod 2021 create a second human sexuality committee to shepherd the CRCNA through continued careful deliberation and deep listening around these issues. This committee make-up should be devoted to Scriptural authority and pay careful attention to diversity in gender identity (including nonbinary gender identities), ethnicity, binationality, ministry location (including lay leaders and/or post-secondary students), age, and sexual identity and not be restricted to adherence to the 1973 Synod Report on homosexuality. It should contain people holding both traditional/non-affirming and fully affirming views. If possible, we also recommend that this committee have at minimum one member from the human sexuality committee reporting to Synod 2021 and one member that signed the majority report to Synod in 2016 to aid in continuity. We ask Synod 2021 to assign the following tasks to this committee<sup>17</sup>:
  - i. As an initial task, create a safe listening space for LGBTQIA+ people associated with the CRCNA to submit their concerns and stories of experiences in the church without fear of repercussion.
  - ii. As another initial task, survey the congregations and classes of the CRCNA to learn how they have (or have not) meaningfully included LGBTQIA+ people in response to the advice of Synod 2016, "That synod advise the classes and congregations to invite, as much as possible, the presence and involvement of same-sex attracted members when dealing with matters that affect the lives and discipleship of same-sex attracted members within the CRCNA" (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p.929) Information gathered may inform best practices for listening to LGBTQIA+ people and for local engagement around LGBTQIA+ issues. It may also demonstrate the distance we have yet to go in terms of meaningfully including LGBTQIA+ people in our midst.
  - iii. As another initial task, curate or create a collection of resources (listening circle curricula, restorative practices, readings, podcasts, videos, etc.) for engagement with LGBTQIA+ issues as individuals, congregations, and classes, perhaps through a collaboration with Pastor Church Resources. This collection should include a balance of both traditional and affirming Biblical and theological articulations around gender identity, same-sex orientation, and same-sex marriage and engage a Reformed worldview. This collection should also include many first-person stories from LGBTQIA+ people without editing them to fit

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<sup>17</sup> If Synod 2021 does not decide to adopt our recommendation of creating a second human sexuality committee for ongoing deliberation, we request that these tasks still be adopted by Synod 2021 and delegated to appropriate channels.

conclusions, but intended to help our members hear the complexities of Christian discernment about how to faithfully follow Jesus as sexual beings. It should also include stories of how LGBTQIA+ people have been harmed by the church.

- iv. After i, ii and iii, ongoing shepherding of CRCNA communities will be needed to foster the faithful, ongoing work of listening well to both Scripture and stories, of promoting unity amidst diversity, and of continually gathering feedback for future equipping. These may be tasks for this committee or come under the proposed role described in 'b' below. (It may also be helpful to consider ways to foster conversations at the classical level, or even between congregations from different classes, so that we can experience the diversity of deep convictions within the CRCNA as we engage with this complex conversation.)
  - v. Commission a follow-up survey to the 2014 survey done by the Calvin College Centre for Social Research to gather updated denominational data regarding perspectives on human sexuality issues including same-sex orientation, same-sex marriage and gender identity. If possible, include those who have left the CRCNA because of our denomination's posture towards LGBTQIA+ concerns, especially those who seek to be reconciled with a denomination whose decisions brought them pain or harm.
  - vi. After reviewing previous applicable reports regarding human sexuality (ie. at least 1973, 2016, 2020), discern whether additional work is worthwhile regarding the articulation of an affirming Biblical theology of human sexuality to provide information alongside the traditional Biblical theology espoused in the 2020 human sexuality report.
  - vii. Consider if synod would be well served by a new group of gender/sexual minority synodical advisors (parallel to ethnic and women advisors and young adult representatives). Since a similar overture was submitted but not accepted at Synod 2016, this committee could review the grounds of the 2016 decision, discern if there are new grounds for this request, and clarify any specifics related to who might fit on this advisory group.
  - viii. For a final task, help the CRCNA discern what level of agreement is needed around beliefs related to human sexuality going forward (especially same-sex orientation, same-sex marriage and gender identity). We believe that this 'level of agreement' is at the heart of the questions around confessional status. After ongoing careful deliberation and a renewed posture of deep listening with mutual trust, we hope this committee will be prepared to make prayerful recommendations to clarify our denominational level of agreement related to beliefs around human sexuality. If it is foreseen that some congregations, office bearers and members will not be satisfied with the level of agreement recommended, it may also be wise for this committee to discern and recommend ways to kindly and generously part ways with those whose convictions mean they must depart from the communion of the CRCNA.
- b. We request that Synod 2021 recommend the creation of a new role at a senior denominational level (like the Senior Leader for anti-racism) for promoting church dialogue, education and listening around LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. The COD would be

responsible for further clarification of this role once Synod has recommended it, and it would seem wise for the one holding this role to serve *ex officio* on the committee named above. There is an acute need for raising awareness of the harm that we, the church, have caused to our LGBTQIA+ family in order to foster lament, repentance, restoration and reconciliation with LGBTQIA+ people and each other.

- c. We request that Synod 2021 task Pastor Church Resources with creating a curriculum resource and training for LGBTQIA+ support groups that can be hosted at the local level.

Grounds:

1. Issues around human sexuality and any dialogue around changing confessional status are a “weighty matter that requires extended and careful deliberation” (*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 926-27; *Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality Report 2020*, p. 3). Additional study and listening to supplement the work of the current human sexuality committee is needed.
2. We suggest it is time for renewed listening and rebuilding of mutual trust within the denomination-- to recognize the sincerity of the CRCNA community of believers and the deep engagement with Scripture of so many, even when we end up with different conclusions and convictions.
3. As per the *Rules for Synodical Procedure 2017*, which indicate that for “young adult representatives, the pool of selection will, at least in part, depend on recommendations received from the churches and classes” (p.5; *Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 537; *2015*, p. 673). Our cross-campus student response team would be happy to assist synod in finding LGBTQIA+ young adult representatives who hold a variety of Biblical perspectives (traditional and affirming).
4. Our history since 1973 has shown our difficulty in loving our LGBTQIA+ family well. If we want to truly include them and actively listen to them, we need to take formal actions to support their voices while we continue to engage deeply with these issues. Pastoral guidance has not been enough.

### **3. Prioritize the unity of the body of Christ in the CRCNA by delegating the issue of same-sex marriage as a decision of local conscience (while actively studying the fruit of this decision to inform further dialogue).**

Grounds:

1. In order to continue careful deliberation of the full breadth and complexity of the issues of human sexuality including the multiple Biblical perspectives, there will necessarily be a delay in providing ethical and clear pastoral, ecclesial and missional guidance. During this delay, local congregations should be trusted to make decisions around LGBTQIA+ participation and same-sex marriage. Individuals ought not to bear the brunt of institutional delay.
2. The option of local conscience is in keeping with historical CRCNA precedent in addressing issues in which more than one credible and sincere interpretation of Scripture is possible (as exemplified by female ordination).

3. Gathering additional information on the fruit of local interactions with the LGBTQIA+ community will aid our continued careful deliberation on human sexuality issues at the denominational level.

**Signatories:**

The following post-secondary students from across the USA and Canada are signatories for this overture.

**CRCNA Members**

NAME	CRCNA CONGREGATION	SCHOOL
Andrews, Jessica	The Road CRC, Calgary, AB (Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan)	Knox College, University of Toronto
Beck, Renya	Jubilee Fellowship CRC, St. Catharines, ON (Classis Niagara)	Redeemer University
Bouman, Abigail	Neland Ave. CRC, Grand Rapids, MI (Classis Grand Rapids East)	Seattle Pacific University
Bouma, Emily	River Park CRC, Calgary, AB (Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan)	The King's University
Bonsma, Ben	Jubilee Fellowship CRC, St. Catharines, ON (Classis Niagara)	Redeemer University
Bonsma-Fisher, Madeleine	First CRC Toronto, ON (Classis Toronto)	University of Toronto
de Boer, Shayanne	Redeemer CRC, Sarnia, ON (Classis Chatham)	University of Western Ontario
Clemens, Jonathan	First CRC Toronto, ON (Classis Toronto)	Wycliffe College, University of Toronto
DeJager, Catherine	Washington DC CRC (Classis Hackensack)	Calvin University
Elgersma, Kat	First CRC of Denver (Classis Rocky Mountain)	Augustana University (Sioux Falls, SD)
Klompmaker, Kirsten	Jubilee Fellowship CRC, St. Catharines, ON (Classis Niagara)	Redeemer University
Krale, Lauren	CrossPoint CRC, Brampton, ON (Classis Toronto)	Redeemer University
Lise, Nathan	Holland Marsh CRC, Newmarket,	Redeemer University

	ON (Classis Toronto)	
Overbeek, Nicholas	Calvin CRC, Grand Rapids, MI (Classis Grand Rapids East)	Grand Valley State University
Roseboom, Michelle	Terrace CRC, Terrace, BC (Classis B.C. North-West)	The King's University
Schat, Kyra	First Hamilton CRC, Hamilton, ON (Classis Hamilton)	Redeemer University
Tuit, Samuel	Neland Ave. CRC, Grand Rapids, MI (Classis Grand Rapids East)	Calvin University
Jodi VanWingerden	Neland Ave. CRC, Grand Rapids, MI (Classis Grand Rapids East)	Calvin Theological Seminary
Tolsma, Theoren	Fleetwood CRC, Surrey, BC (Classis B.C. South-East)	Institute for Christian Studies

#### **Non-CRCNA Members**

NAME	SCHOOL
De Martinez, Brandon	Calvin University
Ford, Maggie	Redeemer University
Murashima, Claire	Calvin University
Newton, Jo	Calvin University
Ross Barz	Trinity Christian College
Salamun, Sean	Calvin University
Van Arragon, Emma	The King's University
Young, Justus	Calvin University

## 5.4.6

**Overture:** The Council of Covenant Christian Reformed Church thanks the authors of the report and the members of the Synodical Study Committee for their dedication, wisdom and compassion. We heartily overture Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan to overture and encourage all of Synod to accept the report by the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality with all of its recommendations.

### **Introduction:**

We see Biblical sexual behavior, in large part, as a “Lordship of Christ” matter, and, with this in mind, see this report as a validation of Christ’s Authority and Lordship over all aspects of sexual morality. It is a thoughtful, accurate and helpful report that, we pray, will keep our denomination, our members and our leadership faithful to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### **Grounds:**

1. This report sensitively and Biblically handles matters of sexuality that we deal with on a regular basis. It gives great insights and useful suggestions. It is a fantastic call to action to reach lovingly and honestly into the lives of people we care about. It brings beneficial wisdom to members and leaders both inside and outside of our denomination as they seek guidance on the matters it addresses.
2. This report, together with all its recommendations is a means to hold one another accountable, as members and office bearers in the CRCNA, to the Word of God as revealed in the Old and New Testaments, and to our confessional standards of unity as a faithful reflection of God’s Word.
3. If we fail to uphold these Biblical teachings, while keeping in step with the cultural morality of North America and tolerating such immorality and teaching within our local congregations, we as leaders and those in our churches will be held accountable to our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 2:12-29).

### **Conclusion:**

It is our fervent hope that our denomination does not follow the false prophets spoken of in Jeremiah 8:11, who said “Peace, peace” when there was no peace. We pray for deliverance and protection from the kind of false teachers referred to in Jude 4, who were “ungodly people, perverting the grace of our God into a license for immorality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Sovereign and Lord.” Instead, we rise as a body in covenant with God, hating what He hates and loving what He loves. Our God is a God of grace and truth, may we reflect His heart. God gave us His Word, every chapter and verse of it, because He truly loves us. May we, likewise, truly love our brothers and sisters in Christ, as we love them according to the Word of God.

## 5.4.7.

### **Overture from Brian Kuyper re: SALT**

#### **I. Introduction**

For over 115 years the CRCNA has operated as a binational denomination. Over the last approximately 35 years, the CRC in Canada and the CRC-US have been trying to discover the best way to operate as a binational denomination. Along the way, many challenges have arisen as two separate countries try to operate in a unified way. These challenges have once again come to the forefront as recent as 2020.

This overture intends to maintain the binationality of the denomination using a model similar to that which has been successful for close to 35 years from World Renew. This model has a successful track record of operating in Canada and the US simultaneously. This overture will ask to go back to a decision agreed upon by the COD in May 2020.

#### **II. Background**

In May of 2020, the Council of Delegates (COD) adopted the proposal from the Ecclesiastical, Structural and Legal team (ESL), along with these three overarching principles (Minutes of COD, May 2020 – COD 5976, EC 20-070):

1. Going forward, leadership of the CRCNA must be done through an independent executive director (ED) in each country, who works collaboratively with the executive director in the other country on matters of shared ministry. This includes monitoring and making decisions about joint ministry agreements for shared programs.
2. In addition, there must be an ecclesiastical officer who can help shepherd the denomination forward in a way that fosters unity across the border, emphasizes our shared faith, synodical positions, and ecclesiastical polity, and advances the denomination's global ecclesiastical goals.
3. Finally, this model should be revisited in three years (and perhaps every three years) to ensure that it is working as intended. If it is decided that there is redundancy or a greater need for cross-border coordination, appropriate adjustments should be made.

The SALT report which was eventually passed by the COD in May 2021 departs from this initial decision. Instead of a dual ED structure, it created three different positions: General Secretary, Chief Administrative Officer, and a Canadian Executive Director. When the SALT report was presented to the COD, there were concerns articulated by the 15 Canada Corporation members.. After expressing those concerns, a motion to table the SALT report in order to get further stakeholder feedback was made but defeated by a margin of 28-18 in a US-majority COD.

Instead of pausing the implementation of the SALT report to get further feedback, it was adopted, and search teams were appointed to fill the senior level positions in the new structure. . This means that the delegates of Synod 2022 will be asked to deliberate and discern if the SALT report is the appropriate structure, and then immediately after, they will be asked to approve the COD nominees for the positions in the new structure. This process puts undue pressure on the delegates' deliberation of SALT.

While there are other concerns about process, these two concerns seem the most significant.

### **III. Overture**

Brian Kuyper overtures Classis Alberta South and Saskatchewan to overture Synod 2022 to:

- a. table the SALT report and cease its implementation;
- b. task the COD to provide interim leadership for the CRCNA in whatever way they deem necessary, including an ED-Canada and joint ministry agreements that allow for compliance with Canadian requirements;
- c. articulate a balanced binational structure that more closely aligns with the proposal from the Ecclesiastical, Structural and Legal team report adopted by the Council of Delegates in May 2020, including positions similar to an Ecclesiastical Officer, an ED-Canada and an ED-US (though we prefer Canadian Ministries Director and US Ministries Director for their ecclesial language as opposed to their corporate language).

#### *Grounds*

1. Concerns about the SALT Process:
  - a. First, the directors of the Canadian corporation explicitly named that they “have a fiduciary duty to canvass all stakeholders prior to making decisions of this magnitude” and a motion was put forward to table the SALT report recommendations to provide time to perform this “fiduciary duty.” This motion was voted down in a Council of Delegates that has a strong majority of US members.
  - b. Second, the CRCNA discernment of SALT is happening at the same synod meeting where synod is will also be asked by the COD to approve their candidates for the positions that synod has not yet deliberated upon and approved. This process puts undue pressure on the delegates of synod.
2. Concerns about the SALT Structure:
  - a. The SALT report does not maintain a binational balance or structural parity. While there is focus on the “Canadian office” and the ED-Canada is discussed, there is no discussion of a similar position for the US Office. Without this position being articulated, there is a concern that the Office of the General Secretary will simply coalesce with US-focused ministry. If the General Secretary ends up in Canada, then it swings the opposite direction.
  - b. The SALT structure does not fulfill the commitment to having our senior leadership embody binationality as found in the “Cultivating Binationality” report of 2014. While this might simply happen by way of potential candidates, it is problematic to adopt a new structure that does not provide for a structural shape that embeds binationality into senior leadership.
3. The co-director structure, while not fully articulated, looks to have significant benefits for our binational denomination.
  - a. The co-director model allows for a well-balanced binational structural. Much of the historic tension comes from a lack of structural parity; we hope this would give us an opportunity to resolve that tension.

- b. The co-director model satisfies the requirements of charitable law, notably in Canada.
- c. This co-director model has worked successfully for many years with World Renew.
- d. The co-director model allows for the CRCNA to continue as one denomination working together across the border.