

Advisory Committee 5, Congregational Care and Justice, Rev. Anthony DeKorte reporting, presents the following:

## **I. Council of Delegates**

### *A. Materials*

1. Council of Delegates Report (sections II. C. 4-5, II. D. 1 -2; II. D. 4; III. D. 4; including Appendix A), pp. 28-30; 34-35; 61-62
2. Council of Delegates Supplement Report (sections I. D; I. G; II. B - C; II. E - H; including Appendices B, C, E & H)

### *B. Privilege of the floor*

Michael L. Ten Haken, chair of the Council of Delegates; Greta Luimes, vice chair of the Council of Delegates; Zachary J. King, general secretary; and members of the executive staff as needed when matters pertaining to the Council of Delegates, ReFrame Ministries, Resonate Global Mission, or other ministries of the CRCNA are discussed

### *C. Recommendations*

1. That synod take note of the COD's report of the "Gather" events and pay special attention to General Secretary Zachary King when he highlights the events to synod delegates. (COD Report Appendix A, pp. 61-62).
2. That synod note that the mandate of the "Report on Virtual Churches" is limited to "virtual churches" and not online permutations of traditional in-person churches.
3. That synod encourage the Virtual Church Team to highlight the portions of their work related to the online portions of traditional in-person churches or hybrid churches. (See COD Report section II.D.2, pp. 29-30).
4. That synod receive for information the report on CRCNA statements on social, economic, or political matters in response to the task assigned by Synod 2023 regarding Overture 3: Refocus Ecclesiological Communication (COD Supplement section II, B; Appendix B).
5. That synod receive for information the Intercultural Ministries (Canada) report (COD Supplement section II, C; Appendix C).
6. That synod celebrate six years of observance of the Day of Justice and recognize its continued expression in ongoing venues (COD Supplement section II, G).
7. That synod take note of the updates on addressing Synod 2019's directives regarding abuse of power (III, D, 4).
8. That synod adopt the following changes to the Church Order proposed by Synod 2023 in relation to the Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders (III, D, 4, d, 2).

*Proposed changes to Article 5 and its Supplement*

Add the following new Article 5-b and Supplement, Article 5-b to the current Church Order Article 5 and its Supplement (the existing Article 5 and its Supplement would become Article 5-a and Supplement, Article 5-a; additions are indicated by underline).

Article 5-b

All officebearers shall uphold the standards of behavior summarized in the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 5-b

Supplement, Article 5-b

*[The full text of the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders, as presented in the Acts of Synod 2023, pp. 998-1002, would become the text of Church Order Supplement, Article 5-b.]*

*Proposed change to Church Order Supplement, Article 13-c, section c*  
(addition indicated by underline)

The duties of the minister are spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling, and such duties do not conflict with the minister's commitment to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church as required by one's signature to the Covenant for Officebearers and as articulated in the Code of Conduct.

**II. CCG/Centre for Public Dialogue***A. Materials*

Committee for Contact with the Government/Centre for Public Dialogue, pp. 251-53

*B. Recommendations*

1. That synod acknowledge and thank CPD Director Mike Hogeterp for his 21 years of service to the ministry of CPD.
2. That synod receive the CCG/CPD report for information.

**III. Indigenous Ministry (Canada)***A. Materials*

Indigenous Ministry Canada Report, pp. 257-59

*B. Recommendations*

1. That synod thank Adrian Jacobs for his ongoing work as the senior leader of Indigenous Ministry (Canada).
2. That synod receive the Indigenous Ministry (Canada) report for information.

## IV. Thrive

### A. Materials

Thrive Report, pp. 277-82

### B. Recommendations

1. That synod receive the report from Thrive for information.
2. That synod note an increase in the time churches are searching for ministers. The average length of time without a minister has increased to more than three years. Thrive is in conversation to help address the shortage of available ministers. Thrive is also providing tools to help churches without ministers.
3. That synod note the increased amount of requests that Thrive has received (particularly the work formerly done by Pastor Church Relations and Safe Church) to engage in conflict resolution among church leaders. These conflicts are both between pastors and councils as well as between pastors who serve at the same church.
4. That synod commend co-directors Lesli van Milligen and Chris Schoon for their work leading Thrive.

## V. Response to Overtures 68 (*Deferred from 2023*) and 45

### A. Materials

1. Overture 68, pp. 390-91
2. Overture 45, pp. 531-39

### B. Recommendations

1. That synod remind classes of the support that Thrive offers for churches that are seeking to disaffiliate from the CRC.
2. That synod encourage classis leaders familiarize themselves with their responsibility to offer support through a church's disaffiliation process.
3. That synod instruct the Office of General Secretary to pay particular attention to the needs of disaffiliating churches and of classes who are supporting them to ensure that the proper support is available.
4. That synod declare this to be the response to Overtures 68 (deferred) and 45.

#### *Grounds:*

- a. These overtures do not recognize the resources already available.
- b. Thrive is already prepared to offer sufficient resources to churches who are going through the discernment process about leaving the denomination.
- c. Thrive is prepared to give guidance and advice should churches eventually deem it wise for them to leave the denomination.

- d. The current process is not punitive when congregations are helpfully guided to this end.

## **VI. Response to Overture 69: (*Deferred from 2023*), Enable Listening to Facilitate Discernment**

### *A. Materials*

Overture 69, pp. 392-401

### *B. Recommendations*

1. That synod remind officebearers that they are already permitted to collaborate with others on a confessional-revision gravamina to be individually submitted.
2. That synod not accede to Overture 69.

#### *Grounds:*

- a. The request of the overture is already consistent with Church Order.
- b. Thrive is already providing such resources, specifically, Crossroads Discernment and Next Steps.
- c. The practicality of such a survey would likely generate a limited response. Also, many churches have already found others with similar outlooks through informal networks.
- d. The CRC ministries are already using direct pathways to articulate their challenges through appropriate channels under the COD and the ministry boards.
- e. Discipline (and Overture 69 E specifically) is under the purview of Advisory Committee 8.

## **VII. Response to Overtures 8 and 9**

### *A. Materials*

1. Overture 9, p. 431
2. Overture 8, pp. 429-31

### *B. Background*

We lament that racism continues to be present in our world. We wish to build on the work of previous synods. We recognize that churches are already encouraged to engage in racial reconciliation and must continue in that work.

### *C. Recommendations*

1. That synod ask the Office of General Secretary to continue to encourage churches and individuals' growth in this vital area, including the use of God's Diverse and Unified Family as well as related programs such as Hearts Exchanged.

2. That synod encourage churches to utilize the resources mentioned in recommendation one for confession and lament in worship services.
3. That synod declare this to be its response to Overtures 8 and 9.

*Grounds:*

- a. The truth of the statement from Synod 1996 has not changed. We need to be reminded of the necessity for reconciliation.
- b. The report, God's Diverse and Unified Family, "demonstrates that the Bible declares this reconciled community to be God's will" (ground from the adoption of this statement in 1996; *Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 513).
- c. "The confessions declare that the catholicity of the church means that Christ 'gathers, protects, and preserves' the church 'out of the whole human race' (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21)" (ground from the adoption of this statement in 1996; *Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 513).
- d. Hebrews 12:14 says: "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy."
- e. Church Order Article 79-a states, "The members of the church are accountable to one another in their doctrine and life and have the responsibility to encourage and admonish one another in love."
- f. The requests of Synod 1996 to classes (*Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 514) were not fully and universally implemented by the classes of the CRCNA.

### **VIII. Response to Overture 10: Suspend the Work of the Dignity Team**

*A. Materials*

Overture 10, pp. 431-33

*B. Recommendation*

That synod not accede to this overture.

*Grounds:*

- a. The Dignity Team is very new. To accede to the overture's request that the Dignity Team develop its own "just process for the determination of abuse" risks losing the unique pastoral function of the Dignity Team, confusing its role with the other synodically appointed processes.
- b. The CRCNA has a variety of such juridical processes available to claimants: the Church Order Article 30-a appeals process and the Article 30-c Judicial Code process as well as an advisory panel process and a proposed Thrive investigations process. The Dignity Team is designed to complement but not duplicate such juridical approaches.

- c. Since its inception, the Dignity Team has been overwhelmed with requests. The volume and nature of those requests has clarified for both the COD and the Dignity Team the need to clarify aspects of its original mandate. We anticipate that the Dignity Team will present a revised mandate to the COD by its October 2024 or February 2025 meeting cycles for eventual approval by Synod 2025.

## **IX. Response to Overture 11: Appoint a Committee to Explore the Need for a CRCNA Licensing Board for CRCNA Pastors**

### *A. Materials*

Overture 11, pp. 434-36

### *B. Recommendations*

1. That synod thank Judy De Wit for the overture.
2. That synod direct the Office of General Secretary to look at the issues of accountability mentioned within overture 11 and report to Synod 2026 on how to address them within Reformed polity.

#### *Grounds:*

- a. Having a CRCNA Licensing Board that exists outside of existing CRCNA structures conflicts with CRCNA church polity.
  - b. Classis positions and procedures, including church visitors and Safe Church representatives, exist to address the abuse issues mentioned in this overture.
  - c. The Safe Church ministry already exists to listen to victims of abuse and help councils address abuse situations.
  - d. The Safe Church has seen an increase in its workload of addressing abuse in recent years.
  - e. The Dignity Team has been created recently and has started to do work similar to what this overture seeks.
3. That synod declare this to be its response to Overture 11.

## **X. Response to Overture 12: Ensure that Advisory Committees Review and Present All Pertinent Information When Synod Receives Overtures or Appeals on Abuse**

### *A. Materials*

Overture 12, pp. 436-37

### *B. Recommendation*

1. That synod thank Judy De Wit for the overture and recognize the need of people who have been abused to be heard.
2. That synod not accede to this overture.

*Ground:* There are necessary limitations to the amount and type of information that a synod can process.

## **XI. Response to Overture 14: Regarding Belgic Confession Article 36**

### *A. Materials*

Overture 14, pp. 439-50

### *B. Recommendation*

That synod not accede to this overture.

#### *Grounds:*

- a. Synod 1958 moved this section of Article 36 to a footnote. The footnote is still available in denominationally provided resources for discussion if churches or individuals want to use it.
- b. A change to a confession requires a high bar and substantial effort.

## **XII. Response to Overture 16: Solicit Resources for LGBTQ Ministry from the Churches**

### *A. Materials*

Overture 16, pp. 454-56

### *B. Recommendations*

1. That synod recognize the work of Thrive in providing resources for use by CRCNA churches and of the Office of General Secretary in promoting the official position of the CRCNA on the denominational website.
2. That synod encourage churches to avail themselves of the resources mentioned in the grounds.
3. That synod encourage churches in agreement with the CRC's position on human sexuality engaged with the LGBTQ+ community share their work with the Office of General Secretary to be considered for inclusion on the CRCNA website page that is continually being developed.
4. That synod not accede to overture 16.

#### *Grounds:*

- a. At the Office of General Secretary's request following Synod 2023, Thrive began gathering information on resources being utilized by churches. They provided a basic level of vetting of the material. The resources are available at <https://www.crcna.org/SexualityResources>
- b. Thrive offers funding to help create new cohorts and offers a level of accountability. There is a group of CRC churches in Toronto who exercised their option to create a group called the LGBTQ+ Hospitality Cohort. They have made their learnings available to the denomination. Any churches can avail themselves of the opportunity to join a cohort.

- c. Surveys typically lead to limited responses. The more proactive approach currently being used by Thrive is more likely to be successful.

### **XIII. Response to Overture 46: Classis Atlantic Northeast, Do Not Adopt Changes to Church Order Art 5**

#### *A. Materials*

Overture 46

#### *B. Recommendation*

That synod not accede to Overture 46.

*Grounds:*

- a. Synod 2023 spent substantial time updating the language of how to integrate the Code of Conduct into the Church Order.
- b. The proposed word “uphold” in proposed Church Order Article 5-b as opposed to “signing” already demonstrates that the Code of Conduct has less weight than the Covenant for Officebearers.
- c. Churches already have the option to use the Code of Conduct as an accountability tool for any ministry leaders within their local church.
- d. Church Order Article 83 is about special discipline. Adding the Code of Conduct to Church Order Article 83 would immediately raise the stakes of an initial discussion if a ministry leader has been alleged to have violated the Code of Conduct.

### **XIV. Response to Communication 10: Member of Ivanrest CRC**

#### *A. Materials*

Communication 10, pp. 572-76

#### *B. Recommendation*

That synod thank Lain Martinez Vasquez for the pastoral heart displayed in Communication 10 and that it be received for information. Sharing stories like this requires courage.