

Council of Delegates Comments regarding Overture 10

MEMO

To: Synod 2024

From: CRCNA Council of Delegates

Re: Overture 10: Suspend the Work of the Dignity Team

Date: April 2024

Introduction

In its overture to Synod 2024, the council of St. Joseph (Mich.) CRC requests that synod “immediately suspend the work of the Dignity Team until a just process for the determination of abuse can be developed and required as part of the Dignity Team’s mandate prior to the Dignity Team becoming involved in cases of alleged abuse.” The overture grounds that request in the Heidelberg Catechism’s explanation of the ninth commandment.

Comments

In its consideration of Overture 10, the Council of Delegates (COD) would like to provide the following insights to synod:

1. The Dignity Team is very new. It arose out of a task force appointed by Synod 2018 to “bring recommendations . . . to Synod 2019 regarding how the CRCNA can best address the patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination” (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 523). Synod 2019 adopted a range of recommendations for the COD to implement. The COD, acting in lieu of synod, approved the Dignity Team in June 2021. The inaugural Dignity Team was subsequently appointed by the Council of Delegates in May 2022 and endorsed by Synod 2022.
2. We agree with Overture 10’s central contentions that accusations of abuse are incredibly serious and that Scripture is clear that the pursuit of justice must follow a just process. It would be ill advised for a body seeking to foster reconciliation to presume to know a priori who is the innocent and who is the culpable party. Such a framing would introduce juridical *conclusions* without first doing a juridical *process*.
3. 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. Rather, it is to function with “moral suasion” in “nimble, less formal,

pastoral ways” so as to function “in ways that promote reconciliation, healing, and restoration” (from the Dignity Team mandate, crcna.org/dignityteam; see *Agenda for Synod 2021*, pp. 63-68; *Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 935).

4. 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 named above.
5. 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.

Note: This communication is submitted to synod per the synodically approved “Right of Comment” policy in the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook, which states the following:

1. The COD itself (i.e., without staff initiation) may judge that synod would be well served by a formal communication in response to a matter on synod’s agenda that affects a ministry that falls under the governance of the COD.
2. If time permits, the COD may ask staff for background information.
3. The communication that emerges may be adopted or endorsed and communicated to synod via the COD’s Supplement Report.