

Declare Members and Churches in Protest Disaffiliated

I. Background

A small number of CRCNA members and churches have submitted communications (see Communications 15-26, *Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 587-614) that demonstrate a continuing pattern of insubordination and refusal to accept properly deliberated, settled, and binding synodical decisions. These communications give no indication that these churches or members are methodically and faithfully working their way through difficult doctrines and just need a bit more time to get it right. Unfortunately, these signatories have not demonstrated any indications that they wish to remain faithful to our covenant on matters of human sexuality.

These communications are the result of ongoing insubordination. They are the result of efforts that began well over six years ago to manipulate CRC doctrine and polity to favor a fully affirming stance toward LGBTQ+ affirming ethics using what has been referred to as the “judicial” strategy.¹ Now, after years of difficult discussion, these signatories have formally communicated that they will not listen to the wisdom of their fellow members and refuse to honor and submit to the church’s authority.

It may seem preferable to either ignore these communications or simply send a strongly worded rejection, but these communications have precluded that possibility. These communications are not asking for synod’s approval to be members in protest, rather they’ve already declared themselves as such. Ignoring or even rejecting these communications will not change what they already consider themselves to be, or their intentions to continue divisive and sinful actions.

Synod must forcefully and definitively respond to this schismatic insubordination; otherwise it will not matter how strong our confessional subscription is or how much we tighten our gravamen process. The message will have been sent that individual CRC’s can believe, act upon, teach, and preach anything they like, no matter how much it conflicts with Scripture as long as they put an asterisk behind their name.

Paul writes, “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them” (Titus 3:10).

The time has come for synod to recognize that these churches, by their ongoing divisive words and actions, have disaffiliated themselves from the CRCNA.

II. Overture

Therefore, Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2024 to do the following:

¹ network.crcna.org/topic/leadership/crcna-and-synod/turning-crc-lgbtq-ally

- A. Receive Communications 15-26 (in which various church members and councils seek to declare themselves “in protest” or qualify their membership) as being *de facto* declarations of disaffiliation from the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Grounds:

1. There is no category in Church Order for members, officebearers, councils, or classes to be “under protest” regarding settled and binding synodical decisions concerning confessional matters, or to add “metaphorical asterisks” by their names. Future inception or tacit acceptance of such categories would be existentially detrimental to the CRCNA and to the integrity of its confessional subscription.
2. Allowing members and/or churches to publicly consider themselves “in protest,” to qualify their membership, or to make public statements against these types of settled and binding decisions sets a precedent in which any member or officebearer of the church could declare themselves to be exempted from any particular doctrine or decision.
3. These communications disregard the proper procedures Church Order prescribes for reconsidering deliberative decisions or confessional language: presenting sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration. Church Order declares that “the decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order” (Art. 29). Therefore these communications demonstrate insubordination amounting to schismatic activity.
4. The self-designations made in these communications, whether officially recognized or not, are incompatible with the membership and/or ordination vows of the signatories (see Appendix A).
5. The signatories on these protests have communicated self-designations that are not contingent upon an assembly receiving or acceding to their communication. These members and officebearers have publicly declared themselves to be “in protest,” or to have qualified memberships. Simply ignoring or rejecting these communications will not change how these signatories consider their status.
6. Many of these protests make significant claims that preclude any desire to fulfill membership or ordination vows moving forward. Many of them, using language that appears to be borrowed from a document prepared by the Better Together organization, declare “that the *only way* we can remain a Christian Reformed Church with

integrity, given Synod 2022's confessional declaration, is 'under protest'" (emphasis added).²

7. Given the following . . .

- it is not possible for members, officebearers, councils, or classes to consider themselves in "protest" of settled and binding synodical decisions;
- the signatories are not asking for synod's approval to be members in protest (they have already declared it to be the case; ignoring or even rejecting these communications will not change what they already consider themselves to be);
- many of the signatories have indicated that there is no other way for them to remain in the CRCNA;

therefore these communications must be received as declarations of disaffiliation from the CRCNA.

B. Accede to these declarations for disaffiliation and instruct the Office of General Secretary to do the following:

1. Issue a written communication to the signatories explaining synod's decision and imploring these members, councils, and classes to reconsider their decision. Such reconsideration would be recognized by a signed letter of repentance committing themselves to once again heartily believe, promote, and defend all of the doctrines confessed by the CRCNA.
2. Begin the following procedures for signatories who do not communicate in writing such a repentance and recommitment by August 1, 2024:
 - a. In the case of individual signatories not currently serving in church office, and who belong to churches whose consistory has not joined their communication, their consistory shall be instructed to initiate Church Order Article 81 disciplinary procedures.
 - b. In the case of individual officebearers who have signed a communication but whose council has not joined in their communication, their consistory shall be instructed to initiate Church Order Article 83 disciplinary procedures.
 - c. In the case in which entire church councils have signed a communication, the church will be considered to have initiated Church Order Article 38-f procedures.

² bettertogether.church/blog/churches-in-protest-a-communication-to-synod-2024. The cited quotation is repeated in many of the referenced communications (see Communications 18-20; 22-24; 26, II, III, V, and VI).

- 1) The Office of General Secretary will inform the classis that synod considers the church to have met the requirements of paragraph a in Church Order Supplement, Article 38-f.
 - 2) If the council is dissuaded from continuing the disaffiliation process, they will indicate their decision by repenting of their protest and committing themselves to once again heartily believe, promote, and defend all of the doctrines confessed by the CRCNA.
 - 3) If the congregation rejects the council's proposal to disaffiliate, the council must repent of their protest as described in the preceding paragraph or have Article 83 disciplinary procedures enacted against them by their classis.
3. Keep the Council of Delegates and subsequent synods informed of developments related to these instructions.

Classis Minnkota
LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

APPENDIX A

Further Explanation of Grounds Related to Membership and/or Ordination Vows

"The self-designations made in these communications, whether officially recognized or not, are incompatible with the membership and/or ordination vows of the signatories."

1. Members made one of these vows, depending on the form used at the time of their profession of faith:
 - a. "to accept the spiritual guidance of the church" (2016)
 - b. "to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation; and to seek those things which make for unity, purity, and peace" (2013)
 - c. to "allow us, your church family, to encourage you in your faith and hold you responsible to your commitment to Jesus and his church" and to "allow us, as your church family, to call you back to a strong relationship with Jesus and his church" (1989)
 - d. to "honor and submit to the church's authority" (1976)
 - e. that "if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline" (1932)
2. Officebearers made even more robust promises when they signed the Covenant for Officebearers:
 - a. that our confessions, "whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God . . . continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct

the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ,” and that “we promise to be formed and governed by them.” When synod clarifies the church’s understanding of a particular confessional aspect, such decisions must be considered to “fully agree with the Word of God,” unless by using the prescribed procedures sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration are presented.

- b. to “present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship.” Publicly refusing to accept a properly deliberated, settled, and binding synodical decision can hardly be considered loving or promoting of fellowship.
- c. to “heartily believe and . . . promote and defend [the confessions’] doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.” Officebearers cannot fulfill such a promise when they publicly protest the doctrines that the church, after years of careful deliberation, has attested to be true.

APPENDIX B

The Significant and Substantial Difference Between Minnkota’s Annual Synodical Protest and Protests Encouraged by Better Together

Better Together cites the protests that Classis Minnkota has filed in the background information preceding their protest template as rationale for why “the category of ‘protest’ is fitting ecclesiastical language used within the Christian Reformed Church.” They state that “protest” is a term and category used in our Church Order and its Supplements and can be found within the Rules for Synodical Procedure.³

Such a citation reflects a deep misunderstanding of Minnkota’s protests and the concept of “protest” as reflected in Church Order.

In registering its annual protest against the seating of women delegates at synod meetings, Minnkota is exercising a right to do so that is expressed in the Supplement to Church Order Article 45 (and also the Supplement to Article 40-a, which conveys the same right at the classis level). The Supplement to Church Order Article 3-a gives classes the right to hold biblical convictions contrary to synodical decisions opening up church offices to women.

Additionally, the synodical decisions underlying the women in church office issue are not interpretations of a confession, as are the decisions made

³ bettertogether.church/blog/churches-in-protest-a-communication-to-synod-2024

by Synod 2022 regarding chastity, so they are not doctrines that officebearers are covenantally bound to heartily believe, promote, and defend.

The only other place where the Church Order uses the word “protest” is in the Supplement to Article 38-g, which sets provisions for forming union churches.