

Agenda Materials for the 156th meeting of
Classis Lake Erie
of the Christian Reformed Church
to be held via Zoom, March 6, 2021

Supplement

I. Reports for the Agenda Supplement

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Procedural Note:

The CRCNA's Council of Delegates very recently decided to postpone formal consideration of the 2020 Report on Human Sexuality, and all related overtures, until Synod 2022. The Council at Ann Arbor CRC began work on an overture not long after the publication of said report, expecting deliberation to occur at Synod 2021. Any overtures pertaining to the 2020 report *may still be submitted for publication* in the 2021 Agenda for Synod (even though said overtures will not be addressed in 2021).

AARC's Council intends to submit their overture in advance of the March 15 publication deadline in the hope that their efforts may benefit other congregations or Classes engaged in dialogue over the 2020 Report during the next year.

AACRC's Council invites Classis Lake Erie to consider:

1. Accepting the following overture and presenting it to Synod as an overture of Classis Lake Erie; or
2. Blessing AACRC to submit the overture directly to Synod for publication in the 2021 Agenda *without* any formal statement of endorsement by Classis.

Should the decision of Classis be that a majority are unprepared or unwilling to adopt AACRC's overture at our March 2021 meeting, AACRC may bring the overture to Classis Lake Erie's October 2021 or March 2022 meeting for formal adoption in advance of Synod 2022.

Overture to Classis Lake Erie**2.2.21****Background:**

In November of 2020 the council of the Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church received notification that the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality had posted their report. Despite not knowing if Synod 2021 would be able to meet, our Council leadership immediately laid out a plan for Council review, and two of our pastors took the denomination's Challenging Conversations Toolkit training. In January, our Council invested in three full evenings listening, learning, and discerning together. We were faithful in a timeline that, at best, served to confuse, complicate, and constrain our review of this report. While we appreciate that human sexuality is being addressed, we do not agree that what is outlined in the report holds confessional status in the CRCNA, nor that it should be given such status.

Overture:

Do not accept the recommendations B, D, E, F in the report from the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

Grounds:

1. The report's claim that its teaching on human sexuality already has confessional status is opportunistic and unfounded.

2. The report does not adequately represent Reformed scholarship on the issues of human sexuality.
3. The report does not adequately represent the diversity of voices within the CRCNA.
4. The report relies on incomplete and even faulty scientific and medical claims.
5. The report's tone often failed to reflect the grace necessary for such a sensitive conversation.

Elaboration of the grounds

1. The report's claim that its teaching on human sexuality already has confessional status is opportunistic and unfounded.
 - a. This section of the report is problematic for at least four reasons. First, this statement violates the CRC's statement on how items receive confessional status: "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) Second, the report states, "To raise the question of confessional status is to wonder whether some teaching or ecclesiastical practice, if adopted, would violate the teachings of the confessions of the church." But it is not true that a simple lack of explicit conflict results in confessional status. If this were true, "Our World Belongs to God" would have confessional status; instead, the CRC has given them the designation "Contemporary Testimonies," as they have been deemed true and helpful while not rising to the level of a confession. Third, the section states, "Even if a teaching has confessional status, that does not mean there is no room for disagreement within the bounds of that teaching." (145) This is a misleading statement that at best undersells—and at worst undermines—the way the Confessions function in the CRCNA.
 - b. We recognize and lament that the binding and retroactive status recommended by this report, if adopted, may force many current and future office-bearers to choose whether to continue serving in violation of their conscience, or to resign in personal integrity. In addition, this binding status will impact current and future membership for the local church.
2. The report does not adequately represent Reformed scholarship on the issues of human sexuality.
 - a. We found the report's overall handling of Scripture to be undergirded by theologies best described as fundamentalist. This insufficiently Reformed engagement is evident in the report's treatment of individual texts as well as the whole arc of Scripture. The report routinely interprets Scripture through non-covenantal frameworks. Further, significant voices within the Reformed tradition were either incorrectly dismissed as "novel" or simply ignored within the report.
3. The report does not adequately represent the diversity of voices within the CRCNA.
 - a. Affirming the CRC's 1973 Statement on Homosexuality was a prerequisite to serving on the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality. This foreclosed the possibility of a comprehensive treatment of the subject matter and limited the probability of a minority report for the denomination's consideration.
4. The report relies on incomplete and even faulty scientific and medical claims.
 - a. *Scientific Method* There is no description of the literature review process used in the report, which casts doubt on the reliability of the scientific evidence cited in

- the report. It would have been prudent to involve a medical adviser on matters of human sexuality, but there is no mention of this type of consultation occurring.
- b. *Opinions seeking data* The report repeatedly presents incomplete analysis which lead to claims that are oversimplified or simply incorrect. In one example, the report asserts that “a child who is given hormones to block puberty and who then later takes hormones to change their sex will become sterile.” (71) However, the issues around fertility and hormone treatment are complex, and not all treatments cause sterility. Elsewhere, the report claims that “attraction to the same sex has a biological cause has been seriously challenged by recent research.” (93) The study cited is weak and inconclusive, and its use is apparently designed to reinforce a predetermined conclusion. Incorrect use of the medical literature can increase fear and stigmatization, and it impairs the Church’s discernment.
 - c. *Resources* The report includes pastoral resources, such as kelseycoalition.org, which offer highly biased and medically inaccurate information. It is unacceptable to recommend resources that do not present balanced, compassionate and medically accurate review of complex issues such as gender dysphoria. While pastoral care involves much more than balance and medical accuracy, it does not involve less. The resources go beyond being merely unhelpful; in several instances, the guidance offered may actually induce harm to individuals and families.
5. The report’s tone often failed to reflect the grace necessary for such a sensitive conversation.
- a. We found the report to lack sufficient pastoral sensitivity and relational wisdom, especially as it wrote off positions that seemed to disagree with the report’s conclusions. Our council struggled with the definitive statements that were directed to people we love and with whom we desire to live a life of faith.

New Church Development March 2021 Update

CRC Classis Lake Erie

Mark Van Andel

Hesed Community Church – Rev. Mark Van Andel and Rev. Nate Bull continue to partner in this joint CRC /RCA venture in Detroit neighborhoods. They currently have a presence in the Morningside, Brightmoor and Piety Hill neighborhoods and are praying about which other neighborhoods they may be able to expand to as they develop new leaders within their ministry. In December, they hired a new Housing Director, Abbey Waterman, who is working with neighbors to keep their homes, purchase homes, and improve neighborhood housing quality. You can meet Abbey through this short video: <https://youtu.be/FZSIYJWxbP0> They have also initiated a tutoring program in Brightmoor and continue to disciple new believers from their presence within the Hesed ministry houses. You can contact Mark and Nate at: hosedcc@gmail.com, follow them on Facebook.com/HesedCC or Instagram.com/HesedChurchDetroit

New Opportunities - Mark Van Andel, in his role of Local Mission Leader for Resonate, continues to connect with new potential ministry leaders. **Pastor Roland Rizallaraj** who has been planting a church in Grand Rapids has also made connections with the Albanian community in Metro Detroit. He is still looking for a CRC church in Southeast Michigan to partner with in order to begin more intentional ministry to Albanians in this region.

Mark has also been meeting with **Steve Perry**, who has previously served a newly developing CRC church in Holland, Michigan. He has now launched **Word Encounter Church** on East Seven Mile Road in Detroit. He desires to have more connection with the CRC and is exploring a partnership with Resonate Global Mission as well as potentially commissioned pastor status in Classis Lake Erie. He needs an established CLE Church to support this new church development.

Please continue to pray that we will develop a cooperative holistic mission network of ministries across Detroit that will mutually benefit each other for Kingdom expansion.

If your church desires to be involved in any of these opportunities, please contact Mark Van Andel at MVanAndel@crcna.org

Letter of Endorsement for Preaching: Candidate Chava Vang

Note: The process of evaluation for candidates pursuing ordination via Article 23 (Commissioned Pastor) is flexible, and often varies from candidate to candidate. Whereas candidates for Minister of the Word must undergo formal sermon evaluation by two Classis delegates, the Candidacy Committee allows a variety of approaches for Commissioned Pastors. Because candidate Chava Vang preaches in Hmong, his first language, it was deemed acceptable by the Candidacy Committee to solicit a preaching endorsement from a member of Chava's congregation (in addition to the sermon manuscript Chava translated into English for the benefit of Classis).

February 23, 2021

Hmong Christian Ministry
2618 S. Waverly Road
Lansing, MI 48911

Subject: Chava Vang Sermon Evaluation

Classis Lake Erie,

On February 21, Chava gave a sermon on the topic "The Foundational Truth". His biblical reference is Matthew 7:24-28. He made 3 points in these passages. They were: 1) the wiseman's foundation, 2) the foolish man's foundation, 3) obedience of Jesus' teaching. He clearly demonstrated the Bible verses to get points across. He also drawn real life examples and experiences so the audience can relate.

Chava is authentic in his walk with God. In many of his sermons, he shown his Bible knowledge. From listening to his sermons, his topics are relevant to our daily lives as a Christian. His expression and posture captivate the audience. He's very engaged and relates well to the younger crowd.

In terms of relevance and life-changing, I have had the opportunity to visit fellow members with Chava in time of spiritual need. We recently visited a young member who's been sick for quite sometimes. This gentleman has stopped coming to church for the 3 years although his parents attend our church. Pastor's prayers and words of encouragement gave the gentleman a sense of hope and healing. He encouraged the young man to re-dedicate his life to Christ. Recently, the young man and his wife have come to worship the past weeks. It was awesome witnessing the power of prayers and God's work to those who are gifted in prayers such as Chava.

It is a blessing to have Chava to come to serve at Hmong Christian Ministry church. He wants the church members and leaders to grow strong in Christ and know His words. We are starting to see members who are absent coming to attend church. We are excited about his goals/visions for the church.

Regards,

Hue Vang
Hmong Christian Ministry

Classis Lake Erie Proposal for a Racial Justice Team

Proposal:

That delegates of Classis Lake Erie recommend the formation of a CLE racial justice team tasked with the following:

- Gather stories from CLE congregational leaders and pastors to gain a deeper understanding of historical and present racial injustices or inequities existing within the communities in which our congregations serve.
- Gather stories from CLE congregations to gain an understanding of the racial barriers that exist between our CLE congregations, particularly between our current reality of majority Korean and majority white congregations.
- Work alongside CLE congregations to develop actionable steps toward bridging racial divides, confronting racial injustice, and lamenting the church's complicity in harm to brothers and sisters of color.
- Build on and bridge the work of similar teams at the congregational level in CLE
- Serve as a theological resource, bridge-builder, and catalyst for collaboration between congregations who seek to unite in the work of lamenting injustice, confronting prejudice, and modeling *shalom* to our communities.

Context:

The unity, reconciliation, and justice of God is both a mandate and a gift for the church in the world. Scripture testifies consistently that justice is a central characteristic of God which is manifest in Christ's work, a gift that welcomes us to learn from diverse perspectives, witness the global impact of Christ's work, and cherish the image of God in every human being. We are saved from the wages of sin, and gratitude calls us to right action (Romans 6). As God's Kingdom emerges, we are *mandated* to participate in the transformation of not just individuals but also structures formed by sin (Ephesians 2:12-16, Galatians 3:28), beginning first with our own biases and blind spots.

We recognize that we as a Classis strive to represent a reconciled body of Christ, one where all nations, cultures, and ethnicities can work and worship together, yet we lament that we so often fall short. While national instances of racial abuse and injustice can prompt quick responses of anger, fear, or denial, we seek to create a team which will support our congregations in promoting the project of racial reconciliation, which Dr. Brenda McNeil defines as an "ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish."*

Details:

We recommend that the team:

- Be composed of a diverse group (age, race, and position) of 5-6 CLE pastors, leaders, and laypeople, with one designated leader.
- Present actionable items which emerge from CLE congregations (i.e. listening events, nights of lament, trainings, bridge-building initiatives, or story-telling evening) to Classis.

Campus Edge Report to Classis Lake Erie - Spring 2021

This past ministry season God has blessed Campus Edge Fellowship and allowed it to thrive in the midst of the transition and the challenges of the pandemic. In August, our former pastor Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink accepted a position at the University of Toronto as campus pastor. She transitioned from her position at Campus Edge to Toronto over the course of the semester. In December, I accepted the position as Campus Pastor for Campus Edge Fellowship. In the interim, the board and student leadership team conducted the pastor search and did an incredible job of holding things together. As the pandemic continued and restrictions on gatherings increased, they led on-line Bible studies, hosted Pub Theology via Zoom and helped maintain the Christ-centered community that Brenda had fostered through her years of leadership.

In some ways the shift to on-line gatherings this year has been a blessing. Access to Zoom made it possible for students who had scattered when the campus closed to join in Bible studies. Students from Texas, Illinois, Ohio, Canada and Nigeria have been able to study James, Colossians and the book of Esther together. And former students, faculty on sabbatical and those who were traveling were able to stay connected to the faith community here at MSU regardless of their location.

In addition, we were really blessed to have access to outdoor gathering space at the Campus Edge house. We kicked off the year with a welcome back bonfire and have followed that with other outdoor events that helped students get some relief from feelings of isolation and provided them with a greater sense of community. Having space and the ability to gather safely in person outside has been a life sustaining gift from God over the last few months.

Still, the pandemic has taken a toll on the students. We would welcome prayer in a number of areas. First, that students would continue to be encouraged by their connections with other believers and by time spent studying God's word. We would also ask for prayer that students would be able to shake off Zoom fatigue, to engage in their studies, continue their research and make progress on their dissertations.

Another big challenge the students are facing this year is a contracted job market and funding cuts for programs and fellowships that they could normally rely on when making plans for the future. Please pray that God would give guidance, clarity and courage to the students who are looking for jobs, considering new career paths and making choices about where to live and what to do next when opportunities are limited.

God has been so good to Campus Edge Fellowship this year and the ministry has continued to flourish and grow and provide a safe and meaningful place for MSU graduate students and faculty to engage in discussions around faith and calling. And I am very excited to see where God is leading us in the coming months and years ahead.

Blessings,

Rev. Dara Lynn Nykamp - Campus Edge Pastor

www.campusedgemsu.com

(616) 283-7563

Campus Chapel 2020-2021 Board Members (with board term expiration date)

Christina Postema (June 2021): A long-time member of the Campus Chapel community, Chrissy recently retired from her position as a School Librarian in the Ann Arbor Public Schools. Chrissy has previously served as the Campus Chapel treasurer and Board secretary.

Rebecca Timmermans (June 2021): Becca is a Campus Chapel member. She works at the University of Michigan in research administration. She is a graduate of Calvin University and the U of M School of Social Work.

Megan Harris (June 2022, but left the Chapel Board in November 2020): A recent graduate of the Michigan School of Social Work, Megan works in foster care licensing for Hands Across the Water. She is a native of Pella, IA, and also graduated from Calvin University.

Allison Schepers (June 2022): Allison was a student participant in the Chapel community from 2012-16 during her studies at the U of M Pharmacy School. She has now returned to Ann Arbor to work as a pharmacist for the inpatient oncology service at UM Hospitals. She is the President of the Board.

Kathryn Van Zanen (June 2023): Kathryn is a doctoral student in the University of Michigan's Joint Program in English and Education and a graduate of both Calvin University (B.A.) and Boston College (M.A.). She calls Grand Rapids, Michigan, her hometown, and serves as Secretary of the Board.

Jim Steenstra (September 2023): Jim is a former member of Campus Chapel and now is a member of Ann Arbor CRC where he held both deacon and elder positions. He is a former Chapel Board member and past president of the board. He works for a small software development company in the Ann Arbor area.

Jeff Bouman (June 2023): Jeff Bouman is a returning member of the board, having served prior from 2000-2010. He recently completed 19 years as the faculty director of the service-learning center at Calvin College, and is now a career missionary in Budapest, Hungary with Resonate Global Mission. He completed his PhD from UM in Higher Education in 2004.

Mary Catherine Westra (January 2024): Mary Catherine is an HR Manager and Talent Recruiter for an automotive supplier in Metro Detroit. She is a graduate of Michigan State University and grew up in Dearborn, MI, where she determined as a child she would not work in the automotive industry. MC serves as the Campus Chapel Treasurer and is on the Leadership Team.

Ex-Officio Board Members: Matt Ackerman & Bailey Sarver