

transforming lives and communities worldwide

AGENDA FOR SYNOD

2012



Christian
Reformed
Church

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2012



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Church

June 8-14, 2012
Redeemer University College
Ancaster, Ontario

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The Christian Reformed Church is active in missions, education, publishing, media, pastoral care, advocacy, diaconal outreach, and youth ministry. To learn about our work in North America and around the world, visit www.crcna.org.

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Synod 2012 begins its sessions on Friday, June 8, at 8:30 a.m. in the Auditorium at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario. Ancaster CRC in Ancaster will serve as the convening church. The pastor of the convening church, Reverend M. Jeffrey Klingenberg, will serve as the president pro-tem until synod is duly constituted and its four officers have been elected. Rev. William C. Veenstra will deliver the message at the synodical Service of Prayer and Praise that will be held Sunday, June 10, 2012, at 3:00 p.m. in the Auditorium on the campus of Redeemer University College, 777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, Ontario.

All delegates and advisers to synod are encouraged to take time to listen to the audio orientation for synod, accessed on the special delegate site. There will be a reception for first-time delegates and advisers on Thursday, June 7, at 7:00 p.m. Opportunity will be given to be introduced to denominational staff, agency and ministry directors, college presidents, and seminary faculty advisers during the reception.

The congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in North America are requested to remember the synodical assembly in intercessory prayers on Sundays, June 3 and 10. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will equip the synodical delegates to serve in faith and obedience and will lead the Christian Reformed Church into new and challenging areas of ministry. May we together experience “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) as we strive to know and to do the will of the Lord.

Joel R. Boot
Executive Director of the CRCNA

I. Welcome

Thank you for serving as a delegate to Synod 2012. Whether you are a returning delegate or you are coming for the first time, we sincerely hope and pray that you will find synod to be a pleasant and blessed experience. You come together as disciples of Jesus Christ, as members of the CRC, and as representatives of the classes that delegated and appointed you to serve. Synod is more than just a gathering of church leaders or a governing body. It is a reflection of the church and a time for reflection and celebration of what God is doing in and through the Christian Reformed Church in North America. God has richly blessed us, and you have been given a unique privilege to serve him and his kingdom by your work at synod.

The synodical services staff, under the leadership of Ms. Dee Recker, is available to assist you in whatever way they are able. Please feel free to contact the synodical services office if you need information or have any questions before arriving by writing drecker@crcna.org or calling 800-272-5125 or 616-224-0827.

II. Confidentiality of the executive sessions of synod

The Board of Trustees calls the matter of confidentiality to the attention of Synod 2012 and urges that all necessary precautions be taken to prevent violations of confidentiality.

Synod 1954 stated that “the very principle of executive sessions, or sessions that are not open to the public, involves the practical implication that reporters may not ‘report’” (*Acts of Synod 1954*, p. 15). If reporters are not permitted to report on executive sessions of synod, it is certainly a breach of confidentiality also for delegates to the synodical assembly to report—publicly, privately, orally, or in print—on the discussions held in an executive session of synod (cf. *Acts of Synod 1982*, p. 16).

III. Audio and video recordings of synod

Synod 1979 authorized the making of an official audio recording of the entire proceedings of the general sessions of synod as a way to verify the written record of the synodical proceedings. Although the general sessions of synod are recorded, executive sessions are not recorded. Delegates to synod are informed at the opening session of synod that all the general sessions are being recorded. Synod has designated that the office of the executive director be responsible for the use and storage of these materials.

The following regulations were adopted by Synod 1989 concerning audio and video recordings of synodical sessions by media representatives and visitors:

A. Representatives of the media are permitted to make video recordings of synodical proceedings provided they observe the restrictions placed upon them by the synodical news office under the direction of the general secretary of synod.

B. Visitor privileges

1. Visitors are at liberty to make audio recordings of the public proceedings of synod provided they do so unobtrusively (i.e., in no way inhibiting or disturbing either the proceedings of synod, the synodical delegates, or other persons).
2. Video recordings are permitted provided the following restrictions are observed:
 - a. Video cameras are permitted only at the entrances, not backstage or in the wings.
 - b. Auxiliary lighting is not permitted.
 - c. Videotaping [video recording] is to be done unobtrusively (i.e., in such a way that it in no way inhibits or disturbs either the proceedings of synod, the synodical delegates, or other persons).

(*Acts of Synod 1989*, p. 445)

IV. Proposed daily schedule

Although each new assembly is free to alter the schedule, the following general schedule is tentatively in place for Synod 2012:

Thursday orientation

5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Orientation for ethnic advisers, faculty advisers, and young adult advisers
7:00 - 8:00 p.m.	Reception for first-time delegates and advisers
7:30 - 8:30 p.m.	Orientation for chairs and reporters, and for alternate chairs and reporters of advisory committees

Opening Friday

8:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Opening session of synod Election of officers Finalization of committee assignments Advisory committees meet for introductions
11:15 - 12:15 p.m.	Lunch
12:15 - 1:15 p.m.	Orientation for officers of synod
12:15 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings
1:30 - 3:00 p.m.	Break
3:00 - 3:20 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings
3:30 - 5:00 p.m.	Dinner
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Tentative plenary session
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	

Saturday

8:15 - 8:45 a.m.	Opening worship
8:45 - 9:15 a.m.	Brief plenary session
9:15 - 11:45 a.m.	Advisory committee meetings
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 5:00 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Advisory committee meetings

Sunday

3:00 p.m.	Synodical worship service
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Monday – Thursday

8:15 - 8:45 a.m.	Opening worship
8:45 - 11:45 a.m.	Plenary session
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 5:00 p.m.	Plenary session
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Plenary session

DELEGATES TO SYNOD 2012

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Alberta North		
Ministers	John Pasma John A. Ooms	Ministers Leonard H. Batterink Arthur L. Verboon
Elders	Gordon H. Van'tBosch Carolyn Dieleman	Elders Frank VandenBrink August Luymes
Alberta South/Saskatchewan		
Ministers	Edward Jager S. George Koopmans	Ministers Tony Maan Brian D. Kuyper
Elders	Calvin C. Offereins J. Calvin Bruinsma	Elders _____ _____
Arizona		
Ministers	Derek Van Dalen Eduardo A. Gonzalez	Ministers Harry J. Weidenaar Jeffrey A. Dykema
Elders	José Rayas Rodney Hugen	Elders David A. Reynolds _____
Atlantic Northeast		
Ministers	James C. Kirk William S. Johnson	Ministers Bruce M. Dykstra Derek M. Zeyl
Elders	Ryan M. Goding James Simpson	Elders Timothy C. Brown _____
B.C. North-West		
Ministers	Andrew P. Turkstra David Cheung	Ministers Sidney Ypma Andrew E. Beunk
Elders	Joel Pel Bill Van Delft	Elders Margaret Foster John van der Woude
B.C. South-East		
Ministers	Colin Vander Ploeg Grant W. Vander Hoek	Ministers Henry Jonker Peter C. Stellingwerff
Elders	Lee Hollaar Norm Groot	Elders William Tinsley Norman Brouwer
California South		
Ministers	Sung Hak (Rick) Kim José F. Munoz	Ministers J. Harold Caicedo William Verhoef
Elders	LeeVale Butler Phil Du Bois	Elders John Jansen Dirk D. Jasperse
Central California		
Ministers	Bruce A. Persenaire Joel W. Renkema	Ministers Maurice Vander Veen Marc J. Holland
Elders	Fernando L. del Rosario, Jr. Scott Kamper	Elders Titus Davis Douglas R. Vander Wall

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Central Plains		
Ministers	Ryan Faber	Ministers Brian L. Ochsner
	Merwin E. Rylaarsdam	Gary Brouwers
Elders	Marvin D. Goodyk	Elders _____
	James E. Warden	_____
Chatham		
Ministers	Craig L. Hoekema	Ministers Jacob Kerkhof
	Robert J. Loerts	William T. Koopmans
Elders	Jenny Douma	Elders Pete Weeming
	Martin P.J. Bosveld	Peter Beerda
Chicago South		
Ministers	L. Bryce Mensink	Ministers Michael J. Kooy
	Phillip S. Leo	Gerald R. Erffmeyer
Elders	Rebecca J. Nicholes	Elders _____
	Eleanor Lamsma	_____
Columbia		
Ministers	Anthony R. DeKorte	Ministers D. Vance Hays
	Randall Simon	Thomas A. De Does
Elders	James H. Mather	Elders Ivan R. Imig
	Harry Visser	Chad E. Werkhoven
Eastern Canada		
Ministers	Harold A. Winter	Ministers John H. Noordhof
	Jacob M. Van de Hoef	David A. Vroege
Elders	Sarah H. Cook	Elders Patti L. Wijsman
	Dale H. Poel	Peter Bylsma
Georgetown		
Ministers	Terry L. Genzink	Ministers David E. Den Haan
	Timothy L. Holwerda	Larry J. Doornbos
Elders	Carl Wiersum	Elders _____
	Ken Schaaf	_____
Grand Rapids East		
Ministers	Jack Kooreman	Ministers Rebecca Jordan Heys
	Thea N. Leunk	David H. Kromminga
Elders	Linda Naranjo-Huebl	Elders George N. Monsma, Jr.
	Kenneth Piers	Corwin E. Smidt
Grand Rapids North		
Ministers	Jonathan L. Huizenga	Ministers Sean Baker
	William G. Vis	James D. Alblas
Elders	Carl L. Vande Pol	Elders _____
	Gordon J. Dekoekkoek	_____
Grand Rapids South		
Ministers	Paul O. Sausser	Ministers William J. Renkema
	John M. Ouwinga	Henry John Schenkel, Jr.
Elders	John Moes	Elders Wilma Knoll
	Sheryl L. Engbers	_____
Grandville		
Ministers	John P. Douma	Ministers Kent Rottman
	G. Duane Nieuwsma	Thomas K. Groelsema
Elders	Lawrence Hoogerhyde, Sr.	Elders Jim Heethuis
	Lee Van Drunen	_____

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Greater Los Angeles		
Ministers	Joel D. Van Soelen Charles C. Oh	Ministers Matthew M. Le Brent Wassink
Elders	Fatu Auau Maged Fayez Dakdouk	Elders Jonas T. Muljo _____
Hackensack		
Ministers	Gary Roest Joseph Yosug Chung	Ministers Trevor Payton David J. Weemhoff
Elders	Wanda M. Tugman Kenneth E. Verbrugge	Elders Beth Fylstra David Vander Hart
Hamilton		
Ministers	Paul Vanden Brink Kenneth F. Benjamins	Ministers Henry P. Kranenburg Andrew Zomerman
Elders	Mark Vandervliet Henry Brouwer	Elders Al Karsten _____
Heartland		
Ministers	Tom Van Engen Kenneth J. Vanderploeg	Ministers Norlyn J. Van Beek David L. Heilman
Elders	Brad A. Kraayenbrink Brad Noteboom	Elders _____ _____
Holland		
Ministers	Marvin J. Hofman John A. Byker	Ministers Mark A. Quist Daniel J. Roels
Elders	James Hekman Luanne B. Buikema	Elders Bern Luurtsema Larry Nienhuis
Hudson		
Ministers	Rod D. Gorter Albert Sideco	Ministers Joel D. Vande Werken Joseph Changguk Byun
Elders	John F. Boddeus Natalie S. Beattie	Elders _____ _____
Huron		
Ministers	Harry J. Frielink Ray Vander Kooij	Ministers Brian J. Bork William F. Hoogland
Elders	James VanderBerg Janet A. Ryzebol	Elders Arnold Depooter Marguerite Ridder
Iakota		
Ministers	Bernard J. Haan, Jr. John R. Lee	Ministers Joseph A. Brinks Clifford Hoekstra
Elders	Mick Vanden Bosch Brad Van Surksum	Elders Sheldon Schelling _____
Illiana		
Ministers	Richard T. Vanderwal Heino Blaauw	Ministers Joel W. Zuidema Laryn G. Zoerhof
Elders	Bernard Smit Donald Dykstra	Elders Lawrence W. Ouwenga Ralph Veldboom
Kalamazoo		
Ministers	Simon A. Tuin Ronald De Young	Ministers Gregory P. Timmer Benjamin M. Hulst
Elders	David J. Batts Ralph J. Suk	Elders Hendrik De Vries Steven J. Van Heest

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Lake Erie		
Ministers	Christopher B. Lanham John Kim	Ministers David L. Spoelma Jung Un Park
Elders	George F. Vander Weit	Elders _____
Lake Superior		
Ministers	Albert Postma Steven A. Zwart	Ministers Cody Statema Donald G. Draayer
Elders	Kevin Koppendraayer Hank H. Tempelman	Elders Doug Shank Eta Meinders
Minnkota		
Ministers	Timothy J. Brown Roger W. Sparks	Ministers Randall C. Raak Joseph Vanden Akker
Elders	Michael Schuller Eldon G. Bonnema	Elders Chester Vander Zee
Muskegon		
Ministers	Robert L. Bierenga James H. Kuiper	Ministers Drew K. Sweetman Nathan Alan Visker
Elders	Carol R. Spelman Arie Fikse	Elders Stephen J. Marotti
Niagara		
Ministers	Christopher W. deWinter John Heidinga	Ministers Ryan W. Braam Gregory A. Fluit
Elders	Karen M. Gerritsma Cornelis Van Solen	Elders Ineke Bezuyen Isaac Van Geest
Northcentral Iowa		
Ministers	Harrison F. Harnden Jonathan Spronk	Ministers Thomas J. Vos Michael L. Bentley
Elders	Dennis Hippen Daniel Lindley	Elders Nick Verbrugge
Northern Illinois		
Ministers	Phil Covert David R. Armstrong	Ministers Jake Ritzema Mark W. Van Stee
Elders	Scott Smits Edward J. Gabrielse	Elders _____
Northern Michigan		
Ministers	Larry D. Baar Steven J. Datema	Ministers Wendell Davelaar Chris Kostelansky
Elders	_____	Elders _____
Pacific Hanmi		
Ministers	Jason Kihyun Jun Kyung-Hyun Cho	Ministers Hyung Ju Park Sung Chang Choi
Elders	Peter Chul Gui Yi Peter NakYoung Ryu	Elders Paul Im Tong Kun Park
Pacific Northwest		
Ministers	Robert Cumings Douglas Fakkema	Ministers Brian Turnbull Alfred J. Van Dellen
Elders	Matthew Atkins Paul DeKoekkoek	Elders Mark Wageenaar Jay Hibma

Classis	Delegates	Alternates
Quinte		
Ministers	Kevin te Brake H. Richard Nanninga	Ministers Jake Kuipers Kenneth R. Ritsema
Elders	Alisha L-M Dreyer Martin Spoelstra	Elders Sid Vander Wilp Hans Vink
Red Mesa		
Ministers	William J. Kempkes John W. Dykhuis	Ministers Bobby L. Boyd John J. Greydanus
Elders	Ronald H. Donkersloot Kennedy R. Phillips	Elders Philip L. Kamps Norman Chee
Rocky Mountain		
Ministers	Joel Schreurs Allen Kleine Deters	Ministers Joseph M. Kamphuis John Terpstra
Elders	George R. Eakin Terry M. Gray	Elders Robert L. Westenbroek
Southeast U.S.		
Ministers	Thomas R. Dykstra Cary Holbert	Ministers Gerrit Besteman R. Joe Dieleman
Elders	Todd Kuperus William Whitt	Elders John Granada Sandy Wagner
Thornapple Valley		
Ministers	R. Scott Greenway James A. Kralt	Ministers Ben J. Ridder Paul R. De Vries
Elders	David Radius Robert Reitsma	Elders Phyllis Moes
Toronto		
Ministers	Michael J. Vander Laan Nick Cornelius Overduin	Ministers John Tenyenhuis Nathaniel E. Van Denend
Elders	Shiao Chong Asha K. Soans	Elders Joseph W. Bowman
Wisconsin		
Ministers	Leslie J. Kuiper Michael Winnowski	Ministers Douglas L. Aldrink Robert A. Sizemore
Elders	Jerry W. Heinen Kenneth Morris	Elders Larry D. Gunnink Randy Sneller
Yellowstone		
Ministers	Mark E. Hofman Timothy B. Toeset	Ministers Peter J. DeVries
Elders	Clifton G. Sanders George Den Hartigh	Elders David Douglas
Zeeland		
Ministers	Tyler J. Wagenmaker Mark D. Neymeiyer	Ministers Ronald J. Meyer Timothy Howerzyl
Elders	Doug Riemersma Donald Kloosterhouse	Elders Harvey Koetje

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT

The Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (the Board or BOT) presents this report as a summary of the activities carried out on behalf of synod during the interim between Synod 2011 and Synod 2012.

I. Introduction

A. General

Our Lord Jesus Christ, upon his ascension into heaven, entrusted the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to his disciples and commanded them to be his witnesses, teaching all nations to obey everything he had commanded.

As followers of Jesus Christ, the church corporately and each of its members individually, led by the Holy Spirit, are called to share this gospel of the kingdom within the fellowship of the church and with people throughout the world by proclaiming God's Word and giving God the worship and honor that are his due, in the confidence that Christ is building up the church and is establishing the kingdom.

To carry out this mission, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (hereinafter *synod*) has created the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and such agencies, committees, and institutions as are listed in its bylaws. These agencies, committees, and institutions function primarily within Canada and the United States, where the Christian Reformed Church is committed to being a binational denomination. Each organizational entity and each national expression of the Christian Reformed Church in North America makes its own unique contribution to God's mission in the world as the whole denomination strives to live the fullness of the gospel.

(Preamble, Constitution of the Board of Trustees)

The Board, a synodically elected and appointed governing body, whose members also serve as the directors of the CRCNA-Canada Corporation and the CRCNA-Michigan Corporation, has met two times since Synod 2011 (September/October 2011 and February 2012) and is scheduled to meet again in May 2012. The Board's agenda normally consists of agency matters (program review, personnel appointments, focus of the agency, and so forth), polity matters (study reports, board appointments, interim committee of synod concerns), as well as normal organizational matters that come up in a complex organization such as the CRCNA. In addition, the Board oversees the work of the executive director.

Nearly all the matters addressed by the Board impact the full CRCNA as a binational church, but, in compliance with Canadian regulations governing Canadian registered charities, the Canadian trustees review and approve all actions taken by the full Board and, as necessary, address any matters that

relate directly to uniquely Canadian issues and matters of law. The Board, as synod's agent, is grateful for the opportunity to serve the entire church.

B. Membership

The members of the Board from the United States are Mr. Mark Charles (member-at-large), Rev. Peter J. DeVries (Region 5), Ms. Joan Flikkema (Region 11), Dr. R. Scott Greenway (Region 11), Rev. Sheila Holmes (Region 12), Rev. Robert A. Lyzenga (Region 9), Rev. Christian Y. Oh (member-at-large), Mr. Kyu Paek (Region 6), Rev. Eleanor M. Rietkerk (member-at-large), Rev. Angela Taylor Perry (Region 10), Rev. John Terpstra (Region 7), Mr. Gary Van Engelenhoven (Region 8), Mr. Chris Van Spronsen (Region 11), and Mr. Loren J. Veldhuizen (Region 8). One U.S. position from Region 10 is presently vacant.

The members of the Board from Canada are Mr. Wiebe Bylsma (Quinte), Mrs. Elaine Dee (member-at-large), Mr. Bruce Dykstra (member-at-large), Rev. Harold de Jong (Lake Superior), Rev. Dale Melenberg (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), Mrs. Grace Miedema (Chatham), Mr. Peter Noteboom (Toronto), Rev. Darren Roorda (Huron), Ms. Gavriel Tran (B.C. South-East), Ms. Katherine M. Vandergrift (Eastern Canada), Rev. Trevor Vanderveen (B.C. North-West), and Rev. William C. Veenstra (Hamilton). Two BOT members resigned from service on the Board as of February 2012 due to health issues: Ms. Irene Bakker (member-at-large) and Mr. John TeBrake (Niagara). We are grateful to God for the valuable contributions made and the commitment given over the past year. We wish God's abundant mercy to rain down and for him to lay his healing hands upon Mr. TeBrake and Ms. Bakker.

The executive director (Rev. Joel R. Boot) serves ex officio as a corporate trustee and member of the Board of Trustees (without vote).

Following are the officers of the Board and respective corporations for the 2011-2012 term:

1. Board officers: Rev. J. Terpstra, president; Ms. K.M. Vandergrift, vice president; Rev. J.R. Boot, secretary; Rev. S. Holmes, vice-all.
2. Corporation officers
 - a. CRCNA-Canada Corporation: Ms. K.M. Vandergrift, president; Rev. W.C. Veenstra, vice president; Mrs. G. Miedema, secretary.
 - b. CRCNA-Michigan Corporation: Rev. J. Terpstra, president; Rev. S. Holmes, vice president; Rev. J.R. Boot, secretary; Rev. D.S. Greenway, vice-all.
3. Executive Committee: Rev. D.S. Greenway; Rev. S. Holmes; Mrs. G. Miedema; Rev. J. Terpstra, chair; Ms. K.M. Vandergrift; and Rev. W.C. Veenstra. Rev. J.R. Boot serves ex officio.

C. Current executive staff functions

Even before Synod 2011 appointed Rev. Joel R. Boot to be the executive director, it was apparent that no one person could fill the current organizational need. In consultation with the executive committee of the Board of Trustees, Rev. Boot requested Dr. Peter Borgdorff to serve as the deputy executive director for a term concurrent with his own. Dr. Borgdorff served the denomination in an executive leadership position for many years, having

retired in 2006. While the position title “deputy executive director” is a new designation, it is meant to reflect that the functions of leadership are shared as needed. The responsibilities that consume most of the time and energies of these two positions include relating to the agencies and ministries of the denomination, ecumenical relations, assisting synodical committees, providing general oversight of the denominational offices, and relating to the myriad of activities that involve classes and congregations. Rev. Boot and Dr. Borgdorff work in collaboration with other agency and denominational staff, and collectively this group of denominational appointees serves the church as a whole.

D. Salary disclosure

At the directive of synod, the Board reports the following salaries for senior denominational services staff directly employed by the Board of Trustees:

Job level	Number of positions	Compensation quartile (includes housing allowance)
20	1	2nd
19	2	4th
18	1	2nd
17	3	2nd and 3rd

Salary ranges within which the agencies will be reporting actual compensation for the current fiscal year are as follows:

The Christian Reformed Church in North America 2011-2012 Salary Grade and Range Structure						
Level	Minimum	U.S. Range Midpoint	Maximum	Canadian Range		
				Minimum	Midpoint	Maximum
20	\$115,291	\$144,113	\$172,936			
19	\$103,936	\$129,921	\$155,905			
18	\$92,638	\$115,798	\$138,957	\$102,262	\$127,828	\$153,394
17	\$83,144	\$103,930	\$124,716	\$88,853	\$111,066	\$133,279
16	\$74,835	\$93,544	\$112,253	\$77,756	\$97,195	\$116,634
15	\$67,840	\$84,800	\$101,760	\$68,492	\$85,616	\$102,739
14	\$59,271	\$74,089	\$88,906	\$60,406	\$75,507	\$90,609
13	\$52,105	\$65,132	\$78,158	\$53,907	\$67,384	\$80,861

II. Activities of the Board

A. Polity matters

1. Interim appointments

On behalf of synod, the Board has ratified the following appointments made by classes:

Board	Classis	Member	Alternate	Term
Synodical Deputies	California South	Mr. Steve Wunderink		
	Note: Mr. Wunderink is a ministry associate serving as a solo pastor (cf. Church Order Supplement, Article 45, b, 2).			
	Heartland	Rev. Todd M. Zuidema		2015(1)
CRWRC	Chicago South	Rev. Roger Nelson		2015(1)
	Illiana	Mr. James L. Groen		2014(1)
	Yellowstone	Mr. Clair Abee		2014(1)

2. Classes that have declared that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons) may not be delegated to classis

In accordance with the instructions of Synod 2007, the executive director keeps a list of those classes that, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons) may not be delegated to classis. Although some of these classes have developed their own regulations regarding the permissibility of women officebearers participating in classis meetings, some classes have adopted a decision to declare that women officebearers may not be delegated to classis. A list of these classes may be obtained by contacting the office of the executive director.

3. Board nominations

- a. Regional members

Whenever a new Board of Trustees member is needed from a region or when a member's first term is completed, each classis in the region is requested to submit or approve names for the position. Nominations are then prepared by the Board and are forwarded to synod for election. Generally, all first-term elections are from a slate of two nominees, and all second-term elections are from a slate of single nominees (see Rules for Synodical Procedure, VI, D, 2).

The Board recommends the following slates of nominees from various geographic regions for election to a first term:

Region 9

Mr. Henry Doorn Jr., a member of Orland Park CRC in Palos Heights, Illinois, is the executive director of the Barnabas Foundation. He holds a B.S. in accounting from Trinity Christian College. Mr. Doorn has served as a board member for Trinity Christian College, Southwest Chicago Christian School, and Roseland Christian Ministries Center. In addition, he has served the church in various capacities, including as elder, deacon, and council treasurer. He currently serves on the Roseland Christian School Foundation, Elim Christian Services board, and JCM Partners.

Dr. Steve Timmermans is a member of Loop Christian Ministries CRC in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Timmermans holds a B.S. in special education from Calvin College and a Ph.D. in Education and Psychology from the University of Michigan. He has been serving as the president of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights since 2003. Dr. Timmermans has served his church as a deacon and elder, as well as on the worship planning and pastor relations committees. He has served as president of Illinois Campus Compact, president elect of the Associated Colleges of Illinois, and chairperson for Advancing Competencies Commission for the Council for Christian College and Universities. Previously Dr. Timmermans served on the governing board of Christ Advocate Hospital, as vice president of Breton Health Clinic board, and as president of the Grand Rapids Christian High School board. Presently he is serving as the chairman of the governing board of the Leadership Exchange.

Region 10

Rev. Kenneth Baker, the minister of worship and discipleship at Third CRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan, holds a M.Div. and a D.Min. He has served on the boards of Calvin College and Seminary and Faith Alive Christian Resources, as well as the Campus Ministry committee, classical interim committee, and CRC Youth Advisory Council. Rev. Baker has led as chair of the Kalamazoo anti-racism team, the SW Michigan Faith-Based Initiative, and the Year of Faith Nurture planning team. He currently serves on the Classis Kalamazoo ministry leadership team and as a regional pastor.

Mr. Robert W. Brower is a member of First Allendale CRC in Allendale, Michigan. Mr. Brower majored in music for two years before serving with the U.S. Navy during the Berlin Crisis. After his return he studied engineering and math at Grand Rapids Community College. Mr. Brower is a retired project engineer/manager from the Howmet Research Division of ALCOA. He has served many years for his church as elder, clerk of council, and vice president, and as chair of the education and worship committees. In addition, Mr. Brower was a delegate to Synod 1988, serving on the Education Advisory Committee, and a delegate to Synod 2011, serving on the Interdenominational Matters Advisory Committee. He currently serves as president of Love INC (Love in the Name of Christ) in Allendale, and as worship planner and song leader for summer worship at “the Tent Church,” a ministry of Pine Grove CRC in Howard City.

The Board hopes to recommend nominees for the now vacant Classis Niagara position (formerly filled by Mr. John TeBrake) by way of the BOT Supplement report to synod.

The Board recommends the following nominees from various classes or geographic regions for election (ratification) to a second term: Ms. Joan Flikkema (Region 11), Rev. Dale Melenberg (Alberta South/Saskatchewan), and Rev. Trevor Vanderveen (B.C. North-West).

b. At-large members

At-large members for the Board (a total of six) are also appointed directly by synod and exist to help create balance and/or provide expertise on the Board.

The Board recommends the following slate of nominees for a United States at-large position for election to a first term:

Rev. Emmett A. Harrison Sr., is the pastor of Oakdale Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, having recently moved from service in Eastside CRC in Cleveland, Ohio. He has over 28 years of experience in pastoral ministry in the Christian Reformed Church and has served as chair of council, as an ethnic advisor to synod, and as a four-time delegate to synod, including service as the first African American officer of synod (vice president) in 2004. He served on the synodical Committee to Study Ordination and “Official Acts of Ministry” and the Committee to Examine Alternate Routes Being Used to Enter the

Ordained Ministry in the CRC. Rev. Harrison is currently serving his second term on the Diversity in Leadership Planning Group.

Dr. Peter Szto is a member of Prairie Lane CRC in Omaha, Nebraska. He has a Ph.D. in social welfare from the University of Pennsylvania and an M.A.R. in systematic theology from Westminster Theological Seminary. In addition to his graduate studies he has extensive clinical experience in various mental health settings with preteens and adults with persistent and severe mental illnesses. Dr. Szto taught social work at Calvin College, Reformed Bible College, and Western Michigan University. He served the denomination as a regional director for the Office of Race Relations. Dr. Szto is currently working as an associate professor of social work at the University of Nebraska.

The Board recommends the following at-large nominees for election (ratification) to a second term: Mr. Mark Charles (U.S. at-large) and Mr. Bruce Dykstra (Canada at-large).

4. Annual report on gender and ethnic diversity on denominational boards

Whereas the number of women on denominational boards has decreased over the past year, there has been progress in ethnic diversity in board composition. There are presently 204 board members serving on eight denominational boards. Out of the 204 board members, 55 (27%) are women and 30 (15%) are persons of color. The 2011-2012 board term shows a *decrease* of 3 women and a *increase* of 6 persons of color on the boards since the previous year.

5. Ethnic advisers to synod

The policy for the appointment of ethnic advisers to synod follows:

At each synod, up to seven members, but not less than two, from various ethnic communities in the CRC will serve as advisers to synod. The position of ethnic adviser is continued "as long as the number of ethnic minority delegates is fewer than twenty-five, after which it shall be discontinued. The BOT should appoint as many ethnic advisers as are needed to reach twenty-five, except that no more than seven (and no fewer than two) shall be appointed."

At this writing the number of ethnic minority delegates appointed to Synod 2012 by classes is 21. To round out that number to reach twenty-five, the BOT has appointed the following persons at this time to serve as ethnic advisers to synod on an as-needed basis:

Pastor Gianni Gracia
Pastor Jeffrey Hough
Rev. Roger Y. Ryu

Ms. Sue Silversmith
Pastor Angela Taylor Perry

6. Young adult representatives to synod

In an effort to engage youth and young adults (18-26 year olds) in the current issues faced by our denomination, and to raise up leadership within the church from among our young adults, the delegates to Synod 2012 will be complemented by participation of young adult representatives to the deliberations of synod. These individuals bring a valuable and unique perspective to the issues we face as a denomination by listening, engaging delegates during advisory committee meetings, and

offering their input on matters that arise in plenary. The BOT has appointed the following persons to serve as young adult representatives to Synod 2012 (* indicates service as a young adult representative in 2011):

Mr. Travis Green	Ms. Natasha Moes
Mr. David Groen	Mr. Cedric Parcels
* Mr. John Kloosterman	Ms. Kyla Smits
Ms. Jennifer McIntyre	

7. Agency presentations at synod

Synod 1995 adopted a three-year rotation cycle for agency presentations at synod. The following roster for agency presentations is scheduled for Synod 2012:

- Calvin Theological Seminary
- Christian Reformed World Relief Committee
- Ministries in Canada

8. Synod 2013

a. Convening church of Synod 2013

The Board recommends that synod accept the invitation of Roosevelt Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, as the convening church of Synod 2013, and that synod be held on the campus of Calvin College.

b. Meeting dates of Synod 2013

The BOT recommends that synod approve the following meeting schedule for Synod 2013: convene at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, June 7, and adjourn no later than Friday, June 14, 2013.

Grounds:

1. Synod 2011 convened on a Friday due to sharing of the new wireless system with the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and Synod 2012 will convene on a Friday rather than on the traditional Saturday convening date due to the need to ship the wireless system to the RCA in time for their General Synod.
2. Convening on a Friday provides a natural break, with a day of “rest” falling between the scheduled two days of advisory committee meetings and the start-up of full plenary sessions.
3. It provides adequate time for deliberations rather than feeling rushed to complete business prior to the weekend.
4. The majority of the Program Committee (officers of Synod 2011) are in favor of continuing a Friday start date.

9. Synod 2014

Following a joint session and worship service with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) General Synod in 2011, the RCA extended an invitation to the CRC synod to meet simultaneously in 2014. With enthusiasm, the BOT recommends that synod accept the invitation from the Reformed Church in America to hold simultaneous meetings of Synod 2014 of the Christian Reformed Church and General Synod 2014 of the Reformed Church in America in Pella, Iowa, on the campus of Central

College, including one or more joint sessions, subject to a favorable site evaluation and cost analysis.

10. Judicial Code Committee

The Judicial Code Committee hears appeals from actions taken by a classis or by an agency of the Christian Reformed Church in cases where the actions are alleged to violate the Church Order or the agencies' mandates. The procedures followed by the Judicial Code Committee are set forth in Church Order Supplement, Article 30-c. The committee's nine members include people with legal expertise and both clergy and nonclergy. Members are from different parts of the United States and Canada.

a. Appeal of Maranatha CRC, Belleville, Ontario

The BOT, as the interim committee of synod, at its September 2011 meeting addressed a recommendation of the Judicial Code Committee concerning the Maranatha CRC, Belleville, Ontario, appeal to Synod 2012. The Board decided the following:

That the Board of Trustees grant that since the concurrence of the synodical deputies has not yet been obtained by Respondent (Classis Quinte) for the deposition of Rev. John Visser of Maranatha CRC as required by Church Order Supplement, Article 82-84-d, 3, the motion for stay be held in abeyance as to Rev. Visser.

The Board of Trustees in February 2012 continued the stay until the appeal can be considered and decided by Synod 2012.

b. Judicial Code Committee membership

Two members of the Judicial Code Committee are completing their first term. It is recommended that synod reappoint Ms. Deb De Jong and Mr. Joel Hoekstra to a second three-year term on the committee.

11. Proposed Board of Trustees of the CRCNA Bylaw II, B, 13

Denominational boards and synodical standing committees of the CRC have reviewed a proposed revision to Bylaw II, B, 13 of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA, which is now before synod for ratification. Essentially, the proposed bylaw clarifies the following *current* wording of Bylaw II, B, 13:

The BOT shall . . . ratify the appointments of agency staff members whose appointments are not subject to synodical ratification (e.g., associate-directors, senior administrative staff members, specialized ministry directors, and editors).

The Board of Trustees recommends the following revision to Bylaw II, B, 13:

The Board shall . . . ratify the appointments of senior denominational staff whose service and performance falls within the oversight responsibility of the Board of Trustees. A list of specific positions is maintained by the Board of Trustees and included in the Board Reference Manual.

Grounds:

1. Senior staff within an agency of the CRCNA that is served by a governing board and that formerly were ratified by the Board of Trustees can be ratified by their respective boards.
2. The positions listed are appointed by the administration (with the participation of appropriate advisory committees and/or search committees and other senior personnel) and presented to the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA or its executive committee for ratification of appointment.

12. Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture

In response to the Board's request for the resignation of the executive director of the CRCNA, and in response to pain such action caused for parties involved, Synod 2011 took considerable time to lament and pray for Rev. Dykstra, the Board of Trustees, and the CRC as a whole. Synod also took the following actions:

2. That synod reaffirm the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church and the Ministries Priorities Report to maintain a focus on creating and sustaining healthy congregations and appoint a CRCNA Structure and Cultural Review Task Force to conduct a review of the organization, culture, and leadership within the CRCNA, and that the task force make recommendations directly to Synod 2012.

Grounds:

- a. The BOT recognizes the need for a major review, as evidenced by its current plans.
 - b. A broadly based, synodically-appointed task force will diminish the perceived conflict of interest of a BOT-appointed task force.
 - c. The abrupt and painful resignation of key leaders in our denomination demonstrates the need for the task force.
 - d. Conflicting governance and administrative structures need resolution.
 - e. The current organizational culture is unhealthy.
3. That synod ask the Interim Executive Director to appoint the Structure and Cultural Review Task Force, reflecting the binationality of the CRCNA and including the following membership:
 - a. The Interim Executive Director of the CRCNA
 - b. Two members from the BOT
 - c. Two members from CRCNA agencies, committees, or educational institutions
 - d. Three members from the CRCNA at large
 - e. One member of Advisory Committee 1 of Synod 2011
 - f. A person with recognized competence in the field of organizational development and systems.

(Acts of Synod 2011, pp. 864-65)

Given the above request of synod, the ED appointed the following to serve on the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture:

Rev. Joel A. De Boer
Dr. R. Scott Greenway
Mrs. Ida Kaastra Mutoigo
Rev. Julius T. Medenblik
Mr. Peter Meerveld

Mr. Terry Van Der Aa
Mrs. Jane Vander Haagen
Ms. Katherine Vandergrift
Mr. Colin Watson
Rev. Joel R. Boot, chair

One of the first matters of business for the task force was to seek clarification of the mandate by synod from the Board. The Board decided to incorporate the mandate as recommended by the BOT subcommittee report of May 2011, in addition to the brief mandate given by synod. The task force will provide a preliminary report on its work and recommendations for synodical action by way of the supplement. Included in their report will be the full mandate for synod's information.

13. Diversity in Leadership Planning Group II

Synod 2011 requested that the Board of Trustees appoint

an expanded task force by August 31, 2011, that includes an ethnically and geographically diverse membership, with the following broader mandate, and that the director of Race Relations will serve in an advisory role as requested by the task force:

To develop further short-term and long-term strategies for increasing multiethnic representation within the leadership of the denomination and report through the BOT to Synod 2013.

(Acts of Synod 2011, p. 867)

In addition, synod recommitted the

non-adopted recommendations from the Diversity in Leadership Planning Group report (B, 2, 3, 4, 5-b, -c, -d, 9-b, -c) to the newly expanded Diversity in Leadership Planning Group for information and revision by September 30, 2012, specifically addressing the following concerns:

- a. The role of the Office of Race Relations.
- b. The addition of measurable goals.
- c. The inclusion of strategies that focus on raising up, mentoring, and providing experience to diverse leaders at all levels and that foster a multiethnic leadership development plan in local congregations, classes, regional networks, and denominational offices.

(Acts of Synod 2011, p. 867)

The executive committee of the BOT appointed the following individuals to the Diversity in Leadership Planning Group II (DLPG) and reports that they have begun the work before them:

Ms. Michelle De Bie
Mr. Bing Goei
Rev. Emmett Harrison
Rev. Stanley Jim
Rev. Dr. Peter Kang

Ms. Verney Kho, chair
Rev. Daniel Mendez
Rev. Tong Kun Park
Ms. Sandra Williams
Rev. Joel R. Boot, ex officio

The Diversity in Leadership Planning Group II, expanded with four new members, continues working hard on the challenges Synod 2011 laid before it. It is reviewing the eight goals from the 2011 planning group report, returned to it by synod, and considering more goals, adding specificity, measurability, and strategies for implementation. The DLPG II is hopeful to make available its report for the churches in fall 2012 in preparation for consideration by Synod 2013.

In addition, the Office of Race Relations continues to schedule Dance of Racial Reconciliation workshops both within and outside the denominational offices, and a new Race and Leadership Workshop was held

in December 2011. Many denominational leaders availed themselves of these opportunities to increase and enhance their “efforts to address ethnic diversity and racial justice.”

14. Leadership Exchange

The Leadership Exchange is presently undergoing programmatic review by the ED and the Leadership Exchange governing board, following the departure of its director, Mr. Chris Pullenayegem. Current programming has been suspended with the exception of Re:Kindle – the Young Adult Summit. The summit will be held as planned on the campus of Redeemer University College, overlapping the convening of Synod 2012.

15. Endorsement of Calvin College nominee for president

The Board of Trustees had the privilege of interviewing Dr. Michael K. Le Roy, nominee for Calvin College president, at its meeting in Burlington, Ontario, in February upon the recommendation presented by the Calvin College Board of Trustees. The Board communicates to synod that it unanimously endorses the recommendation of the Calvin College Board of Trustees that Dr. Michael K. Le Roy, provost and executive vice president at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, be appointed president of Calvin College, subject to ratification by Synod 2012 of the Christian Reformed Church.

16. Publications and services

a. *Yearbook*

The *Yearbook*, published annually, serves as a denominational directory and as a resource for statistical information. In addition to information about classes, congregations, ministers, and agencies, it contains a historical sketch of the life of the church during the previous year and provides obituary information about pastors who died during that year.

The *Yearbook* is published in January and reflects denominational and local-church information up to approximately August 31 of the calendar year preceding publication.

Among some of the statistics published in the *Yearbook* are the total number of members (baptized and confessing) in a local congregation, number of families, number of professing members over eighteen years of age, total number of professing members, total number of baptized members, and total number of members received from other CRCs, through evangelism, and from other denominations.

The core database that stores *Yearbook* data is used for many purposes, such as calculating ministry shares and pension assessments, mailing list requests, updating the list of churches on the CRC website, and handling requests for information that is not published in the *Yearbook*.

To better serve the churches and members by providing the most up-to-date data available, plans are underway for an online version of the *Yearbook* that includes conversion to a new core database system providing different levels of access and input for CRC offices (e.g., pension and ministerial information services).

b. *Church Order and Its Supplements*

The updated *Church Order and Its Supplements 2011* booklet reflects the updates adopted by Synod 2011. The latest version, updated by the Office of Synodical Services, was made available to the churches in early fall 2011. The *Rules for Synodical Procedure* is published separately and is available only in electronic format on the Synodical Resources web page at crcna.org/SynodResources.

c. *Agenda for Synod and Acts of Synod*

The publication of the *Agenda for Synod* and *Acts of Synod* is the responsibility of the director of synodical services under the direction of the executive director. From time to time some decisions need to be made about which material properly belongs in the *Agenda for Synod*. Erring on the side of grace seems more appropriate than erring on the side of rigid regulation. Synod itself will finally decide in all cases whether material is properly on its agenda.

d. Resources available on the Christian Reformed Church website

Given the increasing availability to and access of electronic media and a significant decline in requests for printed material, the CRCNA website (www.crcna.org) has become a valuable resource for CRC congregations and their staff in accessing denominational publications and information. The website is regularly updated, and the information and forms provided are the most current available.

e. *Manual for Synodical Deputies*

The *Manual for Synodical Deputies* is distributed to synodical deputies, their alternates, and stated clerks of classes. A revision of the manual was completed in summer 2011 by the Office of Synodical Services, reflecting the decisions of Synod 2011. Anyone desiring to read a copy of this tool for the classes may download a copy from the stated clerk web page at www.crcna.org/pages/classis_clerks.cfm.

B. *Program matters*

A large part of the Board of Trustees' work relates to the ministry programs, personnel, and finances of the denomination. The program and personnel details are reported to synod by way of the reports of the agencies and this section of the BOT's report in this agenda. Additional information regarding financial matters is contained in Appendix C to this Board of Trustees Report, as well as in the *Agenda for Synod 2012—Financial and Business Supplement* that is distributed at synod. The final budget and the ministry share request will be presented to synod by way of synod's finance advisory committee.

The BOT provides denominational oversight on behalf of synod throughout the year. The office of the executive director serves as the primary link between the BOT and the denomination's ministries. Serving within the office of the ED are the deputy executive director (DED), the director of Canadian ministries (DCM), the director of finance and administration (DFA), and the director of synodical services (DSS).

The Board of Trustees at its February 2012 meeting approved the Mandate of the Ministries Leadership Council (MLC), which was implemented immediately. The MLC is an expanded group of the former Ministries Leadership

Team and is convened by the executive director of the CRCNA. The MLC has responsibility for implementation of the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church, the collaboration of the ministries, and the review of program matters. The Board acknowledges the decision of previous synods regarding *significant structural changes* and reports to synod its decision with regard to the Mandate of the Ministries Leadership Council (see Appendix A).

The program and financial matters that were processed by the Board from July through February are presented to synod as information. Any matters that require action by synod are identified within the body of this report.

1. Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church

The Board of Trustees is mandated by synod to lead in developing and implementing the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church (formerly Denominational Ministries Plan) that provides strategic direction for the agencies and institutions of the Christian Reformed Church. The plan provides a framework for the Board's supervision of the management of the agencies; the planning, coordinating, and integrating of their work; and the integration of the respective missions of the denomination's educational institutions into the denominational ministry program.

The Ministry Plan focuses on biblical and theological identity and the core values that unite us in ministry. The Appendix to the Ministry Plan, the Identity Statement, titled "What It Means to Be Reformed," is available in booklet form through Faith Alive Christian Resources (www.faithaliveresources.org).

2. The Network: Connecting Churches for Ministry

The Network: Connecting Churches for Ministry was launched in spring 2009 with the goal of helping congregations more quickly get the answers, tools, and resources they need for ministry. Following the retirement of its director in August 2011, the Board of Trustees asked that The Network undergo a review. A small task force conducted the review and presented its findings to the ED in early February. A preliminary report and recommendations were addressed by the Board in February—one such decision being that the web-based component of The Network retain the name *The Network* and be organizationally aligned with the denominational Communications Office. Other components of The Network will be assigned to other CRC existing structures by way of proposal to the Board in May and implemented no later than July 1, 2012. There is more information about these components of The Network in the report contained in Appendix B.

3. CRC agency, institution, and specialized ministry reports

Each year the Board of Trustees submits a *unified* report to synod, composed of individual parts provided by the agencies, educational institutions, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. The individual reports of the CRC ministries appear in the following pages of this *Agenda for Synod*.

These reports paint a picture of the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church at home and around the world. As you read the material, we invite you to praise God for ministry opportunities.

4. Ratification of the director of Safe Church Ministry

The Board ratified the appointment of Ms. Bonnie P. Nicholas as the director of Safe Church Ministry. Ms. Nicholas officially assumed the responsibilities of director on October 3, 2011, after serving nearly five months as interim director for the ministry.

5. Back to God Ministries International appointment

As is noted in the Back to God Ministries International report, we mourn the loss of Dr. Robert C. Heerspink, who succumbed to pancreatic cancer in October 2011. Bob (as his family, friends, and colleagues knew him) was a gifted leader, visionary in his service as the director of Back to God Ministries International, and a true pastor at heart. We miss his wise counsel and fraternal spirit. While the condolences of the Board were expressed at the time of Bob's death, it would be appropriate that synod adopt a resolution of appreciation and thanksgiving for Bob Heerspink's life and ministry.

The BOT approved the appointment of Reverend Jimmy Tai On Lin to serve as the director of Back to God Ministries International during the time of searching for, and the appointment of, a new director for this ministry. Rev. Lin is performing this service in addition to his regular ministry as the Chinese ministry director. Rev. Lin is the first to say that he could not do this twofold duty without the assistance of other staff. Their service and dedication to the ministry are noted with gratitude and appreciation.

6. CRWRC matters

The Board took action to officially recognize the Joint Ministry Council (JMC) as the governance entity of CRWRC. The JMC is a committee of fourteen members elected and appointed by the CRWRC board of delegates (those nominated by classes and elected by synod) and members at-large. CRWRC has functioned in this way for a number of years, but their unique governance structure has never been officially recognized.

The BOT recommends that synod approve the request of CRWRC to be permitted to submit single nominees to fill at-large board membership positions.

Grounds:

1. Members at-large are recruited for specific expertise and/or geographic location and, therefore, are very person-specific.
2. The process of finding two nominees with similar qualifications and/or time-availability is very time-consuming.
3. Recruiting qualified people who then are notified months later that their service is not needed reflects negatively on the agency and on synod itself.

C. *Financial matters*

In order to assure that synod has the most up to date and accurate information, detailed financial data will be included in the *Agenda for Synod 2012—Business and Financial Supplement* that will be distributed to the delegates at the time synod convenes. This supplement will include financial disclosure information, agency budgets for fiscal year 2013 (July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013), and the recommended ministry-share amount for the calendar

year 2013. In addition, synod will be asked to approve a schedule for one or more above-ministry-share offerings for the ministries of the denomination, a quarterly offering for CRWRC (in lieu of ministry-share support), and a listing of new requests for accredited agency status for recommendation to the churches. Additional financial information and/or recommendations will also be included in the BOT supplementary report due out in late May.

1. Ministry-share program

Synod 2009 requested that the executive director, through the office of Denominational Advancement, encourage and educate the churches regarding participation in the ministry-share system and resulting ministry. Since 2009, a team of people from the CRC communication and advancement offices, with the assistance of a professional communications consultant group, deliberated and within the last year launched the “You Add. God Multiplies.” campaign—new educational initiatives and materials to enhance ministry-share awareness and participation are available at crcna.org/ministryshare. The responsibility for the continuation of this initiative has now been assigned to the CRC Communication Office.

2. Christian Reformed Church Foundation

The Christian Reformed Church Foundation began in the early 1990s, when several Christian Reformed Church members and the CRCNA executive director of ministries began the Fellowship Fund to support uniquely denominational programs and needs. Synod 1996 approved a bi-national Christian Reformed Church Foundation, now a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization in the United States. Its counterpart is the tax-exempt registered charity Christian Reformed Church in North America–Canada Foundation.

Since the Foundation’s inception, it has distributed funds received to various offices and agencies of the CRCNA or to closely affiliated organizations, including the Timothy Institute, Partners Worldwide, and CRC agencies such as Back to God Ministries International and Christian Reformed Home Missions.

Dr. Peter Harkema resigned as the director of denominational advancement in December 2011. We are grateful for the work and leadership Dr. Harkema provided during the three years he served as the director of advancement. The Foundation Board of Directors remains committed to strengthening the ministries of the CRC. The Foundation seeks financial support for new ideas and programs that fall outside the mandates of the denominational agencies and are not funded through budgets of synod, classes, or agencies.

The Christian Reformed Church Foundation does not offer estate planning services but partners with Barnabas Foundation in the United States and with Christian Stewardship Services in Canada to help families make planned gifts and develop estate plans.

III. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. John Terpstra, chair of the Board of Trustees; Rev. Joel R. Boot, executive director; and members of the executive staff as needed when matters pertaining to the Board of Trustees are discussed.
- B. That synod grant all requests for privilege of the floor by the BOT, agencies, educational institutions, standing committees, and study committees of synod contained within the reports to Synod 2012.
- C. That synod approve all requests for special offerings for the agencies, ministries, and educational institutions of the CRC that are contained within the reports to Synod 2012.
- D. That synod approve the interim appointments made by the Board for synodical deputies and alternate synodical deputies (II, A, 1), as well as to the agency and institution boards as needed.
- E. That synod by way of the ballot elect members for the Board of Trustees from the slates of nominees presented (II, A, 3).
- F. That synod by way of the ballot reappoint to a second term members for the Board of Trustees from the slate of nominees presented (II, A, 3).
- G. That synod accept the invitation of Roosevelt Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, as the convening church of Synod 2013, and that synod be held on the campus of Calvin College (II, A, 8, a).
- H. That synod approve the following meeting schedule for Synod 2013: Convene at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, June 7, and adjourn no later than Friday, June 14, 2013 (II, A, 8, b).

Grounds:

1. Synod 2011 convened on a Friday due to sharing of the new wireless system with the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and Synod 2012 will convene on a Friday rather than on the traditional Saturday convening date due to the need to ship the wireless system to the RCA in time for their General Synod.
 2. Convening on a Friday provides a natural break, with a day of “rest” falling between the scheduled two days of advisory committee meetings and the start-up of full plenary sessions.
 3. It provides adequate time for deliberations rather than feeling rushed to complete business prior to the weekend.
 4. The majority of the Program Committee (officers of Synod 2011) are in favor of continuing a Friday start date.
- I. That synod accept the invitation from the Reformed Church in America to hold simultaneous meetings of Synod 2014 of the Christian Reformed Church and General Synod 2014 of the Reformed Church in America in Pella, Iowa, on the campus of Central College, including one or more joint sessions, subject to a favorable site evaluation and cost analysis (II, A, 9).
- J. That synod by way of the ballot reappoint to a second term members for the Judicial Code Committee from the nominees presented (II, A, 10, b).

K. That synod ratify the following revision to the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA Bylaw II, B, 13 (II, A, 11):

The Board shall . . . ratify the appointments of senior denominational staff whose service and performance falls within the oversight responsibility of the Board of Trustees. A list of specific positions is maintained by the Board of Trustees and included in the Board Reference Manual.

Grounds:

1. Senior staff within an agency of the CRCNA that is served by a governing board and that formerly were ratified by the Board of Trustees can be ratified by their respective boards.
2. The positions listed are appointed by the administration (with the participation of appropriate advisory committees and/or search committees and other senior personnel) and presented to the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA or its executive committee for ratification of appointment.

L. That synod approve the request of CRWRC to be permitted to submit single nominees to fill at-large board membership positions (II, B, 6).

Grounds:

1. Members at-large are recruited for specific expertise and/or geographic location and, therefore, are very person-specific.
2. The process of finding two nominees with similar qualifications and/or time-availability is very time-consuming.
3. Recruiting qualified people who then are notified months later that their service is not needed reflects negatively on the agency and on synod itself.

M. That synod consider the following recommendations from the Chaplaincy and Care Ministry:

1. That synod urge parents, CRC youth and education ministries in our churches, and Christian schools to encourage our young people to prayerfully consider a wide range of ministry options, including chaplaincy ministries and other specialized Christian vocations.
2. That synod urge churches to pray regularly for chaplains who walk daily with those in crisis situations, have significant influence in secular institutions, and serve in difficult and sometimes dangerous situations—especially those who are separated from home and family by military deployment.
3. That synod urge churches and classes to welcome chaplains at their regular meetings (some classes have appointed a “chaplain of the day” for each meeting) and to explore with them how to use their training and gifts to benefit the care ministries of the local church.
4. That synod remind chaplains’ calling churches that they are obligated to complete a Covenant of Joint Supervision with their chaplain and with the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry and that these covenants are to be reviewed and re-signed every five years.

N. That synod consider the following recommendations from the Office of Disability Concerns:

1. That synod encourage Christian Reformed churches, classes, and educational institutions to sponsor events to celebrate Disability Week from October 15-21, 2012.

Grounds:

- a. Specific and intentional events that recognize the importance of breaking down barriers and including people with disabilities will remind God's people of the welcome our Lord gives to all of his people (Luke 14:15-24) and will encourage them to press on toward becoming a community in which every member knows that he or she is indispensable (1 Cor. 12:12-27).
 - b. This date coincides with the denominational schedule for offerings, which assigns the third Sunday in October to Disability Concerns.
 - c. The Bible calls God's people to be a caring community as the covenant people of God. In 1985, the CRC committed itself as a denomination to eliminate barriers of architecture, communication, and attitude "in order to use the gifts of all people in our life together as God's family." Although our Lord Jesus calls all of his people to ministry in his church, the church has not always made it possible for people with disabilities to participate fully and sometimes has isolated them and their families.
2. That synod note with gratitude Disability Concerns' Thirtieth Anniversary of faithful service to the CRC and thank the people who have been involved as staff and volunteers for their dedication to helping churches become healthier communities that intentionally seek to welcome, include, and be engaged by persons with disabilities and their families.

O. That synod receive as information the condensed financial statements for the agencies and educational institutions (see Appendix C).

Board of Trustees of the
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Joel R. Boot, executive director

Appendix A

The Ministries Leadership Council (MLC)

I. Mandate

The Ministries Leadership Council (MLC) is a gathering of ministry leaders of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) convened by the executive director of the CRCNA (ED) to advance the vision, mission, values, and strategic objectives of the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church as approved by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA (BOT), that governs the agencies, educational institutions and various ministries of the Christian Reformed Church.

The MLC responsibilities are as follows:

A. The MLC, on behalf of the BOT, reviews and coordinates the implementation of the Ministry Plan and may recommend changes to it. It ensures that both its decisions and those of individual CRCNA ministries are in alignment with the plan.

B. The MLC reviews and makes recommendations to the BOT concerning issues of strategic importance to denominational ministries.

C. The MLC reviews and approves as necessary the administrative and strategic decisions of the agencies, educational institutions, and specialized ministries as these pertain to the Ministry Plan and/or have an impact on other ministries.

D. The MLC reviews and endorses to the BOT policy recommendations advanced by CRCNA agencies, educational institutions, and specialized ministries for its consideration.

E. The MLC prepares and proposes a unified budget for consideration by the BOT, including, but not limited to, a recommendation for the allocation of financial resources.

F. The MLC will have the right of comment on policy, compensation, and benefit matters that are advanced to the BOT for approval by the Human Resource Committee and Finance Committee of the BOT.

II. Composition

The membership of the MLC consists of the following positions:

- The executive director, who shall be its convener and chair
- The deputy executive director, who shall be its vice-chair
- The director of Canadian ministries
- The director of finance and administration
- The director of synodical services
- The director of human resources
- The director of Back to God Ministries International
- The president of Calvin College (or their designee)
- The president of Calvin Theological Seminary (or their designee)
- The director of CR Home Missions
- The director of CR World Missions
- The co-directors of CRWRC
- The director of Faith Alive Christian Resources
- The director of the Office of Race Relations
- A representative of the specialized ministries
- The director of Communication (non-voting)

III. Relationship of the MLC to the executive director of the CRCNA and the Board of Trustees

The MLC is accountable to the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA through the office of the executive director of the CRCNA. The ED (or his/her designee) provides administrative oversight for all the ministries of the CRC on behalf of the BOT. When the ED disagrees with a decision of the MLC, the ED will inform both the MLC and the BOT about the disagreement, communicating to the BOT not later than the time that the MLC decision is reported to the Board.

A decision of the MLC may be appealed to the BOT when a member of the MLC is persuaded that a principle is compromised by a MLC decision. The response of the BOT to an appeal shall be final and binding on all concerned.

Adopted by the BOT September 2009

Revised May 2010

Revised by the BOT February 2012

Appendix B

The Network: Connecting Churches for Ministry

I. Introduction

In the fall of 2008 the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA endorsed an initiative to mobilize denominational resources for congregational health and vitality—focusing on congregations, listening to them, advocating for them, and better connecting them. The aim was to do this primarily through regional and other networks, so the resulting ministry came to be called simply The Network. With the retirement of the Network's director, Rev. Michael Bruinooge, it was decided to do a review of the Network before proceeding with finding a new director. The basic question is whether the Network as presently organized is functioning as originally envisioned and/or whether adjustments should be made at this time. The Board of Trustees will consider the recommendations at its May 2012 meeting and report on any actions in its supplementary report to synod.

The Network seeks to find ways for congregations to quickly get the answers, resources, and support they need—whether online, by phone, in person or by forming a team. Because it operates on the premise that the best ministry help often comes from peers and neighbors, it aims to better connect local church leaders with each other, as well as with other partners in ministry. The Network does not provide and administer so much as connect, facilitate, and mobilize by tapping the resources the CRC already has. The goal is to break down isolation between congregations, foster peer and regionalized approaches to ministry, and reduce obstacles in the way of creative ministry.

The Network's four strategies related to connecting churches for ministry are to

- convene groups for the purpose of sharing of best practices, networking, and training.
- use the Internet and new technologies to develop networks of learning.
- use regional networks and teams when possible to connect churches, plan collaboratively, and contextualize ministry.
- simplify access to denominational resources by creating new points of contact for churches and integrating the services provided.

The first two and a half years for The Network (July 2009 – January 2012) were a time for learning—a time to test hypotheses, values, and projects; observe the impact of strategies, and generate case studies of healthy

congregational practices. In everything it does, the Network intends to be an advocate for the local church.

The Network gives thanks to God for the pastors, ministry staff, and volunteers of the Christian Reformed Church with whom it is privileged to serve, using grants, peer learning, technology, social networking, volunteers, and regional networks.

II. Ministries of the Network

A. The Network online

A significant part of the Network's early "connecting" work has taken place on the Internet. The Network has created a variety of online peer networks on the CRCNA website (www.crcna.org/network). These online networks are places where ministry leaders can connect with each other—where, for example, elders can learn from other elders, and worship leaders from other worship leaders. The Network online was launched in early February 2010 and recently celebrated its second anniversary. There is no doubt that the online connectivity has made a major impact that has significant potential for further growth.

There are a variety of networks and forums (including webinars), with a number of them having a "guide"—a person who assembles content for the visitor and monitors discussion. The guided networks are designed for ministry leaders in the local church or classis. Thus there are guided networks for pastors, elders, deacons, youth leaders, mission teams, Sunday school teachers, administrators, technology staff, classis leaders, worship teams, small group leaders, disability concerns leaders, and Safe Church teams. For each group, an attempt has been made to identify a basic body of knowledge related to the role, as well as to inspire conversation around everyday questions and issues that arise in the context of the local church.

The Network thanks the CRC Office of Communication for developing the online concept and for its ongoing collaboration in sustaining it. The Network is also grateful to the volunteer network guides and discussion forum hosts who enable this ministry to be provided at a low cost to the denomination.

B. Enhanced agency coordination of services to congregations

Another Network initiative is to coordinate the services that CRC ministry agencies and offices offer to congregations. Several projects are involved in this initiative:

- Improve telephone access to CRC resources so that callers from churches get even quicker answers to their questions and needs.
- Host monthly meetings in Burlington and Grand Rapids for staff with direct responsibility for communication with classes and congregations.
- Develop a much improved database of congregations that includes not only statistical information but also a record of key congregational actions and interactions with denominational and classical personnel.

The goal of these coordinated services is to encourage recognition of the unique history, priorities, and interests of each CRC congregation.

C. Youth ministry and young adult ministries

The denomination does not have its own youth ministry office, having for many years directed congregations to the ministry resources of its independent partner, Dynamic Youth Ministries (DYM), which is made up of the Calvinist Cadet Corps, GEMS Girls' Clubs, and Youth Unlimited. As a result, the Network serves as the CRC's connection point with DYM. In addition, the Network presently sponsors an interagency task force on youth ministry. More recently an initiative was developed under the umbrella of the Leadership Exchange that is focused on young adult ministries. Currently there is a discussion about how to more meaningfully link this initiative with overall denominational interests. A Young Adult Summit is being planned for June 2012. Finally, attention is being given to how to relate both youth and young adult ministries with the Faith Formation initiative being considered as a comprehensive approach to these ministries.

D. Sustaining Congregational Excellence

In July 2007 a denominational program, Sustaining Congregational Excellence (SCE; www.crcna.org/sce), began encouraging and walking alongside smaller CRC congregations to foster health in their ministries.

SCE programming is intended primarily for churches with 150 active, professing members or fewer. Of 1,069 CRC congregations overall, 65 percent fall into this category. As of February 2012, 71 percent of smaller Canadian churches and 64 percent of smaller U.S. churches had participated in SCE in some way.

SCE offers five types of grants—Health and Renewal, Technology and Equipment (TE), Technology and Equipment Training, Coaching for Churches, Coaching for Pastors—and regional learning events for congregational leaders and a multimedia preaching seminar.

Health and Renewal grants allow congregations to create and design a project that fits their ministry setting. Many appreciate the freedom this offers versus a one-size-fits-all approach. The Health and Renewal projects have resulted in wonderful stories of renewed hope, life-giving encounters, strengthened relationships, stronger leadership, successful outreach, engaged youth, and encouraged pastors.

Technology and equipment purchased with SCE funds benefit smaller congregations in significant ways. For example, having equipment function properly during a worship service enhances worship and reduces stress levels for those in leadership. Often, receiving a Technology and Equipment grant is a church's first step toward other SCE opportunities.

There are two coaching options within SCE—one for the pastor and one for the pastor and a ministry leader. The second option was somewhat of an experiment and has proven to be quite successful.

Each year SCE holds a number of regional learning events. These events bring leaders from twelve smaller congregations together for mutual learning, support, and encouragement. A variety of topics related to congregational health are presented in a creative and interactive format. Attendees share best practices, meet with denominational personnel, and are given tools to apply in their ministries. As of February 2012, 286 congregations have attended a learning event.

E. Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

The goal of Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE; www.crcna.org/spe) is to support and encourage pastors as they lead their congregations. Interest remains very high after nine years of operation. For the first several years this initiative was funded with generous grants from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. Now that grant funding has been terminated, we face the challenge to continue this ministry with ministry-share funding. It is unlikely that it can be sustained at previous grant-funding levels—despite synod’s encouragement that the program be continued.

As of February, over 75 percent of CRC pastors have been in a peer learning group. The groups design their own learning and activities. For the great majority of pastors, the impact has been significant. They report healthier relationships, reduced feelings of isolation, a renewed sense of calling, meaningful collegial relationships, and better boundaries.

SPE hosts a biennial conference specifically for pastors’ spouses. Those who attend are supported, encouraged, and refreshed by the conference speakers, workshops, and each other.

To date, 79 pastor couples (pastor and spouse) have attended an SPE learning event. Together they explore transitions in ministry and how best to work through them.

Twice a year, the SPE/Calvin Theological Seminary course “The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry” is offered—once at Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) and once offsite. Initially, this course was entirely funded by SPE, but increasingly CTS is covering the expenses so that in 2012 the course will continue without SPE funding.

F. ServiceLink (www.crcna.org/pages/servicelink_front.cfm)

ServiceLink is a program that promotes and facilitates the meaningful involvement of volunteers in the life and work of Christian Reformed congregations—and their service through CRC ministries and their partner agencies. It does this through recruiting and equipping volunteers, matching their gifts with opportunities, and working with agency and ministry staff for effective placements. In addition, ServiceLink partners with the denomination and with volunteers’ local churches to find ways they can continue to serve upon their return.

ServiceLink has served the denomination for 17 years by placing volunteers in ministry, providing opportunities not only for service but also for learning how the Christian Reformed Church is transforming lives and communities worldwide.

In early 2010, after nearly 15 years of working exclusively with Canadian churches, ServiceLink became a binational program, opening a second office in the Grand Rapids denominational building. Within a short time, a growing list of American individuals and groups began to be placed in service, and a strong partnership with agencies and churches developed. There were also some challenges that emerged as agencies, especially CRWRC and Christian Reformed World Missions, desired more direct involvement with the recruitment and deployment of volunteers serving within their specific agencies. At this time, such issues are being addressed, and what was implemented in 2010 will undergo some revision in 2012.

In reflecting on the past year, ServiceLink is thankful for so many willing and gifted volunteers and for the privilege we have to serve them on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church.

Appendix C

Condensed Financial Statements of the Agencies and Institutions

Back to God Ministries International Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 1,313		250		1,563
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	4,003	-	674	99	4,776
Receivables & Advances	625	-	-	-	625
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-		-	-	-
Equities	-		-	-	-
Partnerships	-		-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-		-	-	-
PP & E	529	-	-	-	529
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	6,470	-	924	99	7,493
Accounts Payable	652	-	-	-	652
Notes/Loans Payable	369	-	-	-	369
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	773	-	-	-	773
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	1,794	-	-	-	1,794
Net Assets	\$ 4,676	-	924	99	5,699
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Isaac Jen endowment fund and Media Reach Fund.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Permanently restricted endowment funds.				

**Back to God Ministries International
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	3,650	\$	3,663
% of Total Income		38.7%		39.1%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	3,802	\$	3,823
Estate Gifts	\$	1,578	\$	1,254
Total Gift Income		5,380		5,077
% of Total Income		57.0%		54.2%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants-Animation	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	403	\$	624
Total Other Income		403		624
% of Total Income		4.3%		6.7%
TOTAL INCOME		9,433		9,364
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
English	\$	2,182	\$	2,210
FTEs		11		12
International	\$	4,113	\$	4,239
FTEs		14		15
Education	\$	104	\$	120
FTEs		2		2
Total Program Service \$	\$	6,399	\$	6,569
Total Program Service FTEs		27		29
% of Total \$		71.8%		70.0%
% of Total FTEs		73.0%		74.4%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	948	\$	1,044
FTEs		4		4
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	1,566	\$	1,769
FTEs		6		6
Total Support Service \$		2,514		2,813
Total Support Service FTEs		10		10
% of Total \$		28.2%		30.0%
% of Total FTEs		27.0%		25.6%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	8,912	\$	9,382
TOTAL FTEs		37		39
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	521	\$	(18)

Calvin College
Balance Sheet (000s)

	-----June 30, 2011-----				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 1,653	-	-	-	1,653
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	24,194	-	-	-	24,194
Inventory	624	-	-	-	624
Prepays & Advances	1,775	-	-	-	1,775
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	17,469	-	6,950	19,961	44,380
Equities	48,980	-	19,486	55,967	124,433
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	5,411	-	2,153	6,183	13,747
PP & E	235,132	-	-	-	235,132
Other	1,884	-	-	-	1,884
Total Assets	337,122	-	28,589	82,111	447,822
Accounts Payable	3,552	-	-	-	3,552
Notes/Loans Payable	124,036	-	-	-	124,036
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	6,404	-	-	-	6,404
Deferred Income	1,430	-	-	-	1,430
Other	39,750	-	-	-	39,750
Total Liabilities	175,172	-	-	-	175,172
Net Assets	161,950	-	28,589	82,111	272,650
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					
	Over 1,168 accounts for instruction, scholarships, grants, research, public service, student services, etc., funded by outside sources.				
	Endowed gifts.				

Calvin College
Income and Expenses (000s)

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	2,693	\$	2,624
% of Total Income		2.2%		2.1%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share				
Estate Gifts	\$	2,702	\$	2,914
Total Gift Income	\$	7	\$	20
% of Total Income		2.2%		2.4%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	115,093	\$	115,870
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	2,734	\$	2,923
Total Other Income		117,827		118,793
% of Total Income		95.6%		95.5%
TOTAL INCOME		123,229		124,351
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Education	\$	103,834	\$	104,590
FTEs		594		606
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	103,834	\$	104,590
Total Program Service FTEs		594		606
% of Total \$		85.3%		84.9%
% of Total FTEs		76.3%		76.6%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	7,542	\$	7,466
FTEs		72		71
Plant Operations	\$	7,357	\$	8,073
FTEs		76		74
Fund-raising	\$	2,944	\$	3,020
FTEs		36		40
Total Support Service \$		17,843		18,559
Total Support Service FTEs		184		185
% of Total \$		14.7%		15.1%
% of Total FTEs		23.7%		23.4%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	121,677	\$	123,149

**Calvin Theological Seminary
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	-----June 30, 2011-----				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 707	-	185	-	892
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	-	4,076	-	4,076
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	13	-	-	-	13
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	551	-	551
Equities	-	-	1,166	-	1,166
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	11,581	-	-	-	11,581
Other	1,995	-	16,146	14,630	32,771
Total Assets	14,296	-	22,124	14,630	51,050
Accounts Payable	373	-	2,397	-	2,770
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	292	-	292
Capital Leases	37	-	-	-	37
Annuities Payable	-	-	197	-	197
Deferred Income	56	-	-	-	56
Other	232	-	-	-	232
Total Liabilities	698	-	2,886	-	3,584
Net Assets	\$ 13,598	-	19,238	14,630	47,466
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.	Due to and from Endowment \$29,332M, Annuity and Trust funds \$239M shown as "other"				
Note 2: List details of designations.	Accounts payable: Early retirement and post retirement liabilities. Notes/Loans Payable: Net student loan receivables and liabilities.				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Donor designated, program, scholarship, grants and construction pledges.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Calvin Theological Seminary
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	2,992	\$	2,945
% of Total Income		47.5%		42.8%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	706	\$	711
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	200
Total Gift Income		706		911
% of Total Income		11.2%		13.2%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	1,851	\$	2,161
Grants	\$	725	\$	829
Miscellaneous	\$	31	\$	36
Total Other Income		2,607		3,026
% of Total Income		41.3%		44.0%
TOTAL INCOME		6,305		6,882
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Instructional	\$	2,654	\$	2,587
FTEs		29		29
Public Service	\$	59	\$	72
FTEs		1		1
Academic Support	\$	927	\$	1,080
FTEs		4		4
Student Services	\$	520	\$	496
FTEs		4		4
Student Aid	\$	268	\$	346
FTEs		2		2
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	4,428	\$	4,581
Total Program Service FTEs		40		40
% of Total \$		71.1%		67.1%
% of Total FTEs		76.9%		72.7%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	922	\$	1,252
FTEs		7		9
Plant Operations	\$	446	\$	499
FTEs		1		2
Fund-raising	\$	431	\$	495
FTEs		4		4
Total Support Service \$		1,799		2,246
Total Support Service FTEs		12		15
% of Total \$		28.9%		32.9%
% of Total FTEs		23.1%		27.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	6,227	\$	6,827
TOTAL FTEs		52		55
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	78	\$	55

Consolidated Group Insurance - U.S.
Balance Sheet (000s)

	December 31, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 94	-	-	-	94
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	684	-	-	-	684
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	442	-	-	-	442
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	2,067	-	-	-	2,067
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	3,287	-	-	-	3,287
Accounts Payable	45	-	-	-	45
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	585	-	-	-	585
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	630	-	-	-	630
Net Assets	\$ 2,657	-	-	-	2,657
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Consolidated Group Insurance - U.S.
Changes in Net Assets (000s)**

		2010 Actual		2011 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		-		-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%
Other Income:				
Participant Premiums	\$	10,382	\$	10,528
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	168	\$	74
Total Other Income		10,550		10,602
% of Total Income		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS		10,550		10,602
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Claims Expense	\$	10,359	\$	8,669
FTEs		-		-
Insurance Premiums	\$	855	\$	1,482
FTEs		-		-
TPA & PPO Fees	\$	550	\$	448
FTEs		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	11,764	\$	10,599
Total Program Service FTEs		-		-
% of Total \$		97.5%		97.2%
% of Total FTEs		0.0%		0.0%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	298	\$	309
FTEs		3		3
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Support Service \$		298		309
Total Support Service FTEs		3		3
% of Total \$		4.3%		4.3%
% of Total FTEs		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$	12,062	\$	10,908
TOTAL FTEs		3		3
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$	(1,512)	\$	(306)

Employees' Retirement Plan - Canada (in Canadian \$)
Balance Sheet (000s)

	December 31, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 160	-	-	-	160
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	336	-	-	-	336
Equities	2,286	-	-	-	2,286
GICs / Stable Asset Fund	204	-	-	-	204
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	2,986	-	-	-	2,986
Accounts Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Forfeitures Due Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	-	-	-	-	-
Net Assets	\$ 2,986	-	-	-	2,986
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

Employees' Retirement Plan - Canada (in Canadian \$)
Changes in Net Assets (000s)

		2010 Actual	2011 Actual
ADDITIONS:			
Ministry Share	\$	- \$	-
% of Total Income		0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:			
Above Ministry Share	\$	- \$	-
Estate Gifts	\$	- \$	-
Total Gift Income		-	-
% of Total Income		0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Employer Contributions	\$	196 \$	310
Participant Contributions	\$	21 \$	27
Miscellaneous	\$	261 \$	(92)
Total Other Income		478	245
% of Total Income		100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS		478	245
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Distributions	\$	340 \$	250
FTEs		-	-
	\$	- \$	-
FTEs		-	-
	\$	- \$	-
FTEs		-	-
	\$	- \$	-
FTEs		-	-
	\$	- \$	-
FTEs		-	-
	\$	- \$	-
FTEs		-	-
Total Program Service \$	\$	340 \$	250
Total Program Service FTEs		-	-
% of Total \$		99.4%	99.2%
% of Total FTEs			
Support Services:			
Management & General	\$	2 \$	2
FTEs		-	-
Plant Operations	\$	- \$	-
FTEs		-	-
Fund-raising	\$	- \$	-
FTEs		-	-
Total Support Service \$		2	2
Total Support Service FTEs		-	-
% of Total \$		0.6%	0.8%
% of Total FTEs			
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$	342 \$	252
TOTAL FTEs		-	-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$	136 \$	(7)

Employees' Savings Plan United States
Balance Sheet (000s)

	December 31, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ -	-	-	-	-
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	4,550		-	-	4,550
Equities	14,242		-	-	14,242
GICs / Stable Asset Fund	2,813		-	-	2,813
Property (nonoperating)			-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	21,605	-	-	-	21,605
Accounts Payable	22	-	-	-	22
Forfeitures Due Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable		-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	22	-	-	-	22
Net Assets	\$ 21,583	-	-	-	21,583
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

Employees' Savings Plan United States
Changes in Net Assets (000s)

		2010 Actual	2011 Actual
ADDITIONS:			
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$ -
% of Total Income		0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:			
Above Ministry Share	\$	-	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$ -
Total Gift Income		-	-
% of Total Income		0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Contributions	\$	1,451	\$ 1,857
Grants	\$	-	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$	2,152	\$ (375)
Total Other Income		3,603	1,482
% of Total Income		100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL ADDITIONS		3,603	1,482
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Distributions	\$	591	\$ 1,525
FTEs		-	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Total Program Service \$	\$	591	\$ 1,525
Total Program Service FTEs		-	-
% of Total \$		82.4%	92.5%
% of Total FTEs		0.0%	0.0%
Support Services:			
Management & General	\$	126	\$ 124
FTEs		1	1
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Total Support Service \$		126	124
Total Support Service FTEs		1	1
% of Total \$		17.6%	7.5%
% of Total FTEs		100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$	717	\$ 1,649
TOTAL FTEs		1	1
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$	2,886	\$ (167)

Faith Alive Christian Resources
Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 252	-	24	-	276
CDs, Time Deposits		-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	406	-	-	-	406
Inventory	1,837	-	-	-	1,837
Prepays & Advances	46	-	-	-	46
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	-	-	-
Equities	102	1,500	-	-	1,602
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	294	-	-	-	294
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	2,937	1,500	24	-	4,461
Accounts Payable	680	-	-	-	680
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	46	-	-	-	46
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	726	-	-	-	726
Net Assets	\$ 2,211	1,500	24	-	3,735
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.	Funds for new curriculum development cost.				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Leadership project.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Faith Alive Christian Resources
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	1,024	\$	1,035
% of Total Income		18.7%		20.3%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	357	\$	300
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		357		300
% of Total Income		6.5%		5.9%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	3,503	\$	3,204
Grants	\$	249	\$	212
Miscellaneous	\$	349	\$	336
Total Other Income		4,101		3,752
% of Total Income		74.8%		73.8%
TOTAL INCOME		5,482		5,087
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Banner	\$	1,289	\$	1,275
FTEs		4		4
Education	\$	3,149	\$	3,433
FTEs		19		19
World Literature	\$	364	\$	415
FTEs		3		3
Teacher Training	\$	145	\$	145
FTEs		1		1
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
	\$	-	\$	-
Total Program Service \$	\$	4,947	\$	5,268
Total Program Service FTEs		26		26
% of Total \$		86.0%		87.2%
% of Total FTEs		92.9%		92.9%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	808	\$	773
FTEs		2		2
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Support Service \$		808		773
Total Support Service FTEs		2		2
% of Total \$		14.0%		12.8%
% of Total FTEs		7.1%		7.1%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	5,755	\$	6,041
TOTAL FTEs		28		28
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	(273)	\$	(954)

**Home Missions
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	June 30, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 105	857	64	-	1,026
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities			-		-
Receivables & Advances	597	4	-	-	601
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	646	-	-	646
Equities	43	373	542	150	1,108
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	26	-	-	-	26
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	771	1,880	606	150	3,407
Accounts Payable	387	-	-	-	387
Notes/Loans Payable	24	-	-	-	24
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	220	-	-	-	220
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	631	-	-	-	631
Net Assets	\$ 140	1,880	606	150	2,776
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.	Mission Trg Fund: \$401; Hawaii: \$1,475				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	NA Trng: 39; Can Legacy: \$55; Short term loan: \$516; Other: 24				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Emerging Leader Trust: \$150				

**Home Missions
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	3,683	\$	3,709
% of Total Income		62.4%		65.3%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	1,360	\$	1,320
Estate Gifts	\$	195	\$	258
Total Gift Income		1,555		1,578
% of Total Income		26.3%		27.8%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	119	\$	112
Miscellaneous	\$	547	\$	282
Total Other Income		666		394
% of Total Income		11.3%		6.9%
TOTAL INCOME		5,904		5,681
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Ministry Teams	\$	5,424	\$	4,841
FTEs		26		26
Ministry Devel & Planning	\$	700	\$	563
FTEs		5		5
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Total Program Service \$	\$	6,124	\$	5,404
Total Program Service FTEs		31		31
% of Total \$		79.0%		79.8%
% of Total FTEs		83.8%		83.8%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	730	\$	734
FTEs		2		2
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	897	\$	636
FTEs		4		4
Total Support Service \$		1,627		1,370
Total Support Service FTEs		6		6
% of Total \$		21.0%		20.2%
% of Total FTEs		16.2%		16.2%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	7,751	\$	6,774
TOTAL FTEs		37		37
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	(1,847)	\$	(1,093)

Loan Fund
Balance Sheet (000s)

	-----June 30, 2011-----				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 8,579	-	-	-	8,579
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	23,541	-	-	-	23,541
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	-	-	-	-	-
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	32,120	-	-	-	32,120
Accounts Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Notes/Loans Payable	25,579	-	-	-	25,579
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	25,579	-	-	-	25,579
Net Assets	\$ 6,541	-	-	-	6,541
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.					
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

Loan Fund
Income and Expenses (000s)

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual	Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$ -
% of Total Income		0.0%	0.0%
Other Gift Income:			
Above Ministry Share	\$	-	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$ -
Total Gift Income		-	-
% of Total Income		0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:			
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$ -
Grants	\$	-	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$	1,598	\$ 1,282
Total Other Income		1,598	1,282
% of Total Income		100.0%	100.0%
TOTAL INCOME		1,598	1,282
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Loan Interest	\$	972	\$ 681
FTEs		1	1
Provision for loan losses	\$	250	\$ -
FTEs		1	1
	\$	-	\$ -
		-	-
	\$	-	\$ -
		-	-
	\$	-	\$ -
		-	-
	\$	-	\$ -
		-	-
Total Program Service \$	\$	1,222	\$ 681
Total Program Service FTEs		1	1
% of Total \$		82.2%	70.9%
% of Total FTEs		50.0%	50.0%
Support Services:			
Management & General	\$	264	\$ 280
FTEs		1	1
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Total Support Service \$		264	280
Total Support Service FTEs		1	1
% of Total \$		17.8%	29.1%
% of Total FTEs		50.0%	50.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	1,486	\$ 961
TOTAL FTEs		2	2
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	112	\$ 321

Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - Canada
Balance Sheet (000s) in Canadian \$

	-----December 31, 2011-----				
	Pension	S.A.F			Total
Cash	\$ 2,840	316	-	-	3,156
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	86	1	-	-	87
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	7,197	-	-	-	7,197
Equities	22,061	-	-	-	22,061
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	32,184	317	-	-	32,501
Accounts Payable	87	-	-	-	87
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	87	-	-	-	87
Net Assets	\$ 32,097	317	-	-	32,414
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations					
Note 3: List details of restrictions					
Note 4: List details of restrictions					

Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - Canada
Changes in Net Assets (000s) in Canadian \$

		MPF 2010 Actual		MPF 2011 Actual		SAF 2010 Actual		SAF 2011 Actual
ADDITIONS:								
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-	\$	39	\$	29
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%		95.1%		90.6%
Other Gift Income:								
Above Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		-		-		-		-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%
Other Income:								
Participant Assessments	\$	2,186	\$	4,079	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	2,489	\$	(730)	\$	2	\$	3
Total Other Income		4,675		3,349		2		3
% of Total Income		100.0%		100.0%		4.9%		9.4%
TOTAL ADDITIONS		4,675		3,349		41		32
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):								
Program Services:								
Distributions	\$	2,254	\$	2,318	\$	8	\$	14
FTEs		-		-		-		-
FTEs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
Total Program Service \$	\$	2,254	\$	2,318	\$	8	\$	14
Total Program Service FTEs		-		-		-		-
% of Total \$		81.1%		81.8%		100.0%		100.0%
% of Total FTEs		0.0%		0.0%				
Support Services:								
Management & General	\$	526	\$	517	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		1		1		-		-
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-		-		-
Total Support Service \$		526		517		-		-
Total Support Service FTEs		1		1		-		-
% of Total \$		18.9%		18.2%		0.0%		0.0%
% of Total FTEs		100.0%		100.0%				
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$	2,780	\$	2,835	\$	8	\$	14
TOTAL FTEs		1		1		-		-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$	1,895	\$	514	\$	33	\$	18

Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - United States
Balance Sheet (000s)

	-----December 31, 2011-----			
	Pension	S.A.F		Total
Cash	\$ 2,313	63	-	2,376
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	209	-	-	209
Inventory	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	-	-	-	-
Investments (note 1):				
Bonds	12,559	-	-	12,559
Equities	63,887	-	-	63,887
Diversified / Alternative	8,634	-	-	8,634
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-
PP & E	149	-	-	149
Other	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	87,751	63	-	87,814
Accounts Payable	64	7	-	71
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	64	7	-	71
Net Assets	\$ 87,687	56	-	87,743
Footnotes:				
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.				
Note 2: List details of designations.				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.				

Ministers' Pension Fund and Special Assistance Fund - United States
Changes in Net Assets (000s)

	MPF 2010 Actual	MPF 2011 Actual	SAF 2010 Actual	SAF 2011 Actual
ADDITIONS:				
Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 78	\$ 33
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	98.7%	97.1%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Estate Gifts	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Total Gift Income	-	-	-	-
% of Total Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Income:				
Participant Assessments	\$ 4,860	\$ 5,045	\$ -	\$ -
Grants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$ 10,381	\$ 1,185	\$ 1	\$ 1
Total Other Income	15,241	6,230	1	1
% of Total Income	100.0%	100.0%	1.3%	2.9%
TOTAL ADDITIONS	15,241	6,230	79	34
DEDUCTIONS (FTE = Full-Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Distributions	\$ 7,977	\$ 8,994	\$ 124	\$ 135
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Total Program Service \$	\$ 7,977	\$ 8,994	\$ 124	\$ 135
Total Program Service FTEs	-	-	-	-
% of Total \$	89.8%	89.2%	100.0%	100.0%
% of Total FTEs	0.0%	0.0%		
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$ 909	\$ 1,090	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	2	2	-	-
Plant Operations	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Fund-raising	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
FTEs	-	-	-	-
Total Support Service \$	909	1,090	-	-
Total Support Service FTEs	2	2	-	-
% of Total \$	10.2%	10.8%	0.0%	0.0%
% of Total FTEs	100.0%	100.0%		
TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	\$ 8,886	\$ 10,084	\$ 124	\$ 135
TOTAL FTEs	2	2	-	-
NET ADDITIONS / (DEDUCTIONS)	\$ 6,355	\$ (3,854)	\$ (45)	\$ (101)

INCLUDED IN DENOMINATIONAL SERVICES

Specialized Ministries
Income and Expenses (000s)

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	2,664	\$	2,394
% of Total Income		80.6%		74.0%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	463	\$	543
Estate Gifts	\$	5	\$	13
Total Gift Income		468		556
% of Total Income		14.2%		17.2%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	163	\$	208
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Miscellaneous	\$	12	\$	77
Total Other Income		175		285
% of Total Income		5.3%		8.8%
TOTAL INCOME		3,307		3,235
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Chaplaincy Services	\$	223	\$	219
FTEs		1		1
Race Relations	\$	418	\$	453
FTEs		3		3
Pastor-Church Relations	\$	533	\$	503
FTEs		3		3
Safe Church Ministry	\$	184	\$	230
FTEs		1		1
Disability Concerns	\$	204	\$	244
FTEs		2		2
Social & Restorative Justice	\$	476	\$	445
FTEs		4		4
Ministries in Canada	\$	997	\$	1,028
FTEs		4		4
Total Program Service \$	\$	3,035	\$	3,122
Total Program Service FTEs		18		18
% of Total \$		98.7%		98.5%
% of Total FTEs		94.7%		94.7%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	4	\$	10
FTEs		-		-
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$	-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising	\$	37	\$	37
FTEs		1		1
Total Support Service \$		41		47
Total Support Service FTEs		1		1
% of Total \$		1.3%		1.5%
% of Total FTEs		5.3%		5.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	3,076	\$	3,169
TOTAL FTEs		19		19
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	231	\$	66

**Network, Sustaining Excellence, Volunteer Services
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	815	\$	969
% of Total Income				
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		-		-
% of Total Income				
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	-	\$	7
Miscellaneous	\$	234	\$	270
Total Other Income		234		277
% of Total Income				
TOTAL INCOME		1,049		1,246
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Network for Congregations	\$	285	\$	381
FTEs		1		1
Sust. Pastoral Excellence	\$	291	\$	302
FTEs		1		1
Sust. Congregational Excel.	\$	530	\$	605
FTEs		1		1
Volunteer Services	\$	234	\$	253
FTEs		3		3
Total Program Service \$	\$	1,340	\$	1,541
Total Program Service FTEs		6		6
% of Total \$		100.0%		100.0%
% of Total FTEs		100.0%		100.0%
Support Services:				
Management & General				
FTEs				
Plant Operations				
FTEs				
Fund-raising				
FTEs				
Total Support Service \$		-		-
Total Support Service FTEs		-		-
% of Total \$				
% of Total FTEs				
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	1,340	\$	1,541
TOTAL FTEs		6		6
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	(291)	\$	(295)

Synodical Administrative Services
Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 3,906	-	670	-	4,576
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	1,710	-	-	-	1,710
Inventory	204	-	-	-	204
Prepays & Advances	79	-	-	-	79
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	22,985	-	-	-	22,985
Equities	-	-	-	-	-
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	10,006	-	-	-	10,006
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	38,890	-	670	-	39,560
Accounts Payable	6,138	-	-	-	6,138
Notes/Loans Payable	21,775	-	-	-	21,775
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	27,913	-	-	-	27,913
Net Assets	\$ 10,977	-	670	-	11,647
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property currently in use.	Canadian Cash Concentration and Netting for Interest Program.				
Note 2: List details of designations.					
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Includes: \$395,000 Leadership Exchange, \$114,000 of Lilly SPE2 grant, \$72,000 of AOYC and \$89,000 other.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.					

**Synodical Administrative Services
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	2,899	\$	3,265
% of Total Income		72.6%		82.3%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	24	\$	22
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		24		22
% of Total Income		0.6%		0.6%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Services & Misc	\$	1,068	\$	680
Total Other Income		1,068		680
% of Total Income		26.8%		17.1%
TOTAL INCOME		3,991		3,967
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Synodical Services & Grants	\$	1,370	\$	1,420
FTEs		5		5
Communications	\$	457	\$	505
FTEs		3		3
CRCPlan	\$	4	\$	8
FTEs		-		-
Leadership Exchange	\$	143	\$	197
FTEs		1		1
Total Program Service \$				
	\$	1,974	\$	2,130
Total Program Service FTEs				
		9		9
% of Total \$				
		62.8%		57.7%
% of Total FTEs				
		60.0%		60.0%
Support Services:				
Management & General	\$	871	\$	943
FTEs		4		4
D.D.M.	\$	203	\$	219
FTEs		1		1
Fund-raising (Foundation)	\$	95	\$	402
FTEs		1		1
Total Support Service \$		1,169		1,564
Total Support Service FTEs		6		6
% of Total \$				
		37.2%		42.3%
% of Total FTEs				
		40.0%		40.0%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	3,143	\$	3,694
TOTAL FTEs		15		15
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	848	\$	273

**Synodical Administrative Services
(Agency Services)
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
Estate Gifts	\$	-	\$	-
Total Gift Income		-		-
% of Total Income		0.0%		0.0%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	3,332	\$	3,765
Grants	\$	-	\$	-
Services & Misc	\$	5,725	\$	5,680
Total Other Income		9,057		9,445
% of Total Income		100.0%		100.0%
TOTAL INCOME		9,057		9,445
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Advancement	\$	502	\$	701
FTEs		9		9
Finance & Payroll	\$	2,003	\$	2,042
FTEs		23		23
IT and Phones	\$	1,491	\$	1,314
FTEs		9		9
Human Resources	\$	394	\$	315
FTEs		3		3
Coordinated Services	\$	227	\$	261
FTEs		2		2
Proservices	\$	3,332	\$	3,693
FTEs		15		15
Total Program Service \$	\$	7,949	\$	8,326
Total Program Service FTEs		61		61
% of Total \$		87.8%		88.2%
% of Total FTEs		95.3%		95.3%
Support Services:				
Management & General				
FTEs				
Plant Operations/Debt Serv.	\$	1,108	\$	1,119
FTEs		3		3
Fund-raising (Foundation)				
FTEs				
Total Support Service \$		1,108		1,119
Total Support Service FTEs		3		3
% of Total \$		12.2%		11.8%
% of Total FTEs		4.7%		4.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	9,057	\$	9,445
TOTAL FTEs		64		64
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	-	\$	-

**World Missions
Balance Sheet (000s)**

	June 30, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 684	518	280	-	1,482
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	435	435
Receivables & Advances	1,306	5	1	3	1,315
Inventory	11	-	-	-	11
Prepays & Advances	10	-	-	-	10
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	388	1,091	179	322	1,980
Equities	387	1,091	179	322	1,979
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	-	-	-	-	-
PP & E	500	-	-	-	500
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Assets	3,286	2,705	639	1,082	7,712
Accounts Payable	691	187	-	-	878
Notes/Loans Payable	651	-	-	-	651
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	185	-	-	-	185
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	1,418	-	-	-	1,418
Total Liabilities	2,945	187	-	-	3,132
Net Assets	\$ 341	2,518	639	1,082	4,580
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.	Board Designated Reserve \$1,500 - Legacy fund \$99 - Endowment/annuities \$165 - Japan note \$475, Other \$576				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Restricted Gifts, missionary support and program support.				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Endowments.				

**World Missions
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual	Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:			
Ministry Share	\$	4,931	\$ 4,982
% of Total Income		36.0%	37.1%
Other Gift Income:			
Above Ministry Share	\$	6,794	\$ 6,905
Estate Gifts	\$	655	\$ 653
Total Gift Income		7,449	7,558
% of Total Income		54.4%	56.3%
Other Income:			
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$ -
Grants	\$	-	\$ -
Miscellaneous	\$	1,323	\$ 885
Total Other Income		1,323	885
% of Total Income		9.7%	6.6%
TOTAL INCOME		13,703	13,425
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):			
Program Services:			
Africa	\$	3,584	\$ 3,602
FTEs		29	23
Eurasia	\$	2,452	\$ 2,611
FTEs		24	16
Latin America	\$	3,717	\$ 3,968
FTEs		27	22
Global/other Int'l program	\$	-	\$ 1,154
FTEs		-	19
Education	\$	930	\$ -
FTEs		8	-
	\$	-	\$ -
		-	-
Total Program Service \$	\$	10,683	\$ 11,335
Total Program Service FTEs		88	80
% of Total \$		84.1%	84.5%
% of Total FTEs		85.4%	82.5%
Support Services:			
Management & General	\$	839	\$ 879
FTEs		5	5
Plant Operations	\$	-	\$ -
FTEs		-	-
Fund-raising	\$	1,185	\$ 1,196
FTEs		10	12
Total Support Service \$		2,024	2,075
Total Support Service FTEs		15	17
% of Total \$		15.9%	15.5%
% of Total FTEs		14.6%	17.5%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$	12,707	\$ 13,410
TOTAL FTEs		103	97
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)	\$	996	\$ 15

Christian Reformed World Relief Committee
Balance Sheet (000s)

	June 30, 2011				
	Unrestr.	(note 2) Ag. Desig.	(note 3) Temp. Restr.	(note 4) Perm. Restr.	Total
Cash	\$ 1,280	740	11,480	-	13,500
CDs, Time Deposits	-	-	-	-	-
Marketable Securities	-	-	-	-	-
Receivables & Advances	1,877	2,000	-	-	3,877
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-
Prepays & Advances	1,337	-	-	-	1,337
Investments (note 1):					
Bonds	24	-	-	-	24
Equities	362	2,101	1,558	23	4,044
Partnerships	-	-	-	-	-
Property (nonoperating)	34	-	-	-	34
PP & E	255	-	113	-	368
Other		-	-	-	-
Total Assets	5,169	4,841	13,151	23	23,184
Accounts Payable	1,390	-	-	-	1,390
Notes/Loans Payable	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Leases	-	-	-	-	-
Annuities Payable	273	-	-	-	273
Deferred Income	-	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
Total Liabilities	1,663	-	-	-	1,663
Net Assets	\$ 3,506	4,841	13,151	23	21,521
Footnotes:					
Note 1: List details of property not currently in use.					
Note 2: List details of designations.	7-year term endowments as stipulated by board = \$3,394 Disaster relief gifts for specific sites = \$1,447				
Note 3: List details of restrictions.	Mission home = \$113; Purpose-restricted gifts = \$12,370; 7-year term endowments as stipulated by donors = \$668				
Note 4: List details of restrictions.	Pure endowments = \$23.				

**Christian Reformed World Relief Committee
Income and Expenses (000s)**

		Fiscal 09-10 Actual		Fiscal 10-11 Actual
INCOME:				
Ministry Share	\$	-	\$	-
% of Total Income		-		-
Other Gift Income:				
Above Ministry Share	\$	23,536	\$	20,298
Estate Gifts	\$	869	\$	1,569
Total Gift Income		24,405		21,867
% of Total Income		62.0%		55.4%
Other Income:				
Tuition & Sales	\$	-	\$	-
Grants	\$	14,440	\$	16,892
Miscellaneous	\$	508	\$	734
Total Other Income		14,948		17,626
% of Total Income		38.0%		44.6%
TOTAL INCOME		39,353		39,493
EXPENSES (FTE = Full Time Employee):				
Program Services:				
Overseas programs	\$	12,441	\$	10,287
FTEs		30		28
North America programs	\$	1,350	\$	1,232
FTEs		10		9
Disaster relief programs	\$	1,358	\$	1,384
FTEs		19		16
Above-budget relief costs	\$	12,556	\$	21,617
FTEs		-		-
Education	\$	1,218	\$	1,064
FTEs		9		6
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
	\$	-	\$	-
		-		-
Total Program Service \$		28,923		35,584
Total Program Service FTEs		68		59
% of Total \$		89.0%		90.6%
% of Total FTEs		72.3%		78.7%
Support Services:				
Management & General		1,716		1,737
FTEs		6		5
Plant Operations		-		-
FTEs		-		-
Fund-raising		1,855		1,937
FTEs		20		11
Total Support Service \$		3,571		3,674
Total Support Service FTEs		26		16
% of Total \$		11.0%		9.4%
% of Total FTEs		27.7%		21.3%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES		32,494		39,258
TOTAL FTEs		94		75
NET INCOME / (EXPENSE)		6,859		235

REPORT OF AGENCIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND MINISTRIES

Introduction

Each year the Board of Trustees submits a *unified* report to synod composed of individual parts provided by the agencies, educational institutions, and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. The individual reports appear in alphabetical order by agency, educational institution, or ministry name. Supplementary reports may be provided, if needed, at the time synod convenes.

Writing these reports is an exercise of accountability that is appropriate in our life together as a denomination. Much of what is written is provided as information for synod. Some of the material provides a background for decisions that synod will be asked to make. In either case, these reports are the story of how God is blessing our ministry through the agencies of the Christian Reformed Church. As you read the material, we invite you to join us in thanksgiving for wonderful ministry opportunities.

Joel R. Boot
Executive Director of the CRCNA

I. Introduction

Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) is the media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. BTGMI operates with the following mandate:

The mission of Back to God Ministries International is to lead the church into international media witness through media programming and related activities that communicate the Reformed faith in response to the need for conversion, discipleship, and cultural transformation.

Using a variety of media tools that effectively communicate the message of God's redemptive work within specific cultural contexts, Back to God Ministries International continues to fulfill its mission—to evangelize and disciple every person within media reach. Building strong local ministry partnerships, our goal is kingdom transformation—every aspect of personal and community life lived under the lordship of our risen and ruling Savior!

II. Ministries of Back to God Ministries International

Through media, Back to God Ministries International proclaims the story of God's unfailing love worldwide. Seeking to be fluent within the cultures where its voice is heard, BTGMI employs ministry leaders who broadcast in their native languages. We are blessed to work with gifted leaders who provide direction in the production of culturally relevant programs and related ministry in order to present Jesus Christ and help people grow in faith.

The work of BTGMI is empowered by a vision of building the church by communicating the life-embracing story of God's redemptive work. Operating in ten major world languages, in the past year BTGMI has brought the good news of Christ to people in at least 189 countries via radio, television, print and digital media, the Internet, and telephone messaging. During 2011 BTGMI recorded more than 16 million contacts from people whose lives had been touched through our media ministry. Networks of prayer partners pray regularly for those who respond to our media outreach. Staff and more than 800 trained volunteers worldwide offer discipleship, spiritual guidance, and prayer, and they help connect seekers to local churches. All ten major language media teams explored ways to collaborate with each other and with local mission partners to increase effective outreach among seekers yearning to believe and believers seeking to grow.

A comprehensive website, BackToGod.net, helps the church and individuals engage in media witness worldwide and provides information and links to all ten language ministries.

In October 2011 at Back to God Ministries International, we lost our visionary leader, Rev. Bob Heerspink, to pancreatic cancer. Thanks to strong leadership teams and the interim direction of Rev. Jimmy Tai-On Lin, media ministry outreach remained consistent. At the time of this writing, the Board of Back to God Ministries International is searching for a new director candidate to present to Synod 2012 for appointment.

A. Arabic ministry

Back to God Ministries International maintains a cooperative ministry with Words of Hope (the media ministry of the Reformed Church in

America) and Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) for electronic media ministry to Arabic-speaking people. The joint ministry maintains production studios and discipleship centers in Larnaca, Cyprus; Cairo, Egypt; and Beirut, Lebanon. Our partnership with MERF allows BTGMI to pursue broadcasting in the context of holistic mission. (MERF also trains church leaders, supports church plants, and provides relief support.) MERF director Rev. Victor Atallah provides leadership for the BTGMI Arabic broadcast ministry.

Civil upheaval in the Middle East this past year has created challenges for our Arabic media team but has also opened up new avenues for ministry as people there have become more open to spiritual alternatives. We capitalized on the heightened use of social media and mobile phone-based communications by young people, creating opportunities for sharing the gospel through text messaging. We also added a daily short-wave broadcast to the Arabian Gulf region and North Africa. We continue to move forward with the development of social media ministry strategies that allow us to converse one-on-one with listeners interested in learning more about the Christian faith.

B. Chinese ministry

China is on the verge of having more Internet users than any other country on earth. The Chinese ministry, led by Rev. Jimmy Tai-On Lin and his media team, provides programming and discipleship through eight programs and six coordinating websites that give people in China access to the gospel.

Social media ministry has made a significant impact in our ability to reach people in China. The number of followers on two new Facebook pages, as well as other social media sites, grew exponentially over the past year, increasing traffic on our ministry websites. We launched three new blog sites, specifically to reach out with the gospel to nonbelievers. Through these social media sites alone, more than 100,000 people have daily access to God's Word. We also continue to provide discipleship materials inside mainland China. We produced a special sing-along DVD for children as a tool for introducing them and their parents to biblical songs and stories. Pray that doors in China will remain open so that more Chinese people will come to know Christ.

C. English ministry

Rev. Steven Koster gives leadership to BTGMI English-language outreach (ReFrame Media). He and his media team produce nine unique ministries designed to reach a growing and diverse audience of various ages and at various steps in their faith journey—in North America and around the world (see also ReFrame-Media.com). All of these resources are available to assist churches and individuals in their own outreach.

1. *Family Fire*—A new Facebook-based ministry to strengthen families was launched in 2011. Instructional and inspirational posts and conversations lead people to [Family Fire.com](http://FamilyFire.com), a website that provides resources to explore God's design for marriage, parenting, and other relationships. The *Family Fire* team also offers retreats and teaching events.
2. *Church Juice*—a web-based ministry to connect with congregational media volunteers. The goal of this ministry is to empower local churches to use media effectively to minister within their congregations and to reach out

to their communities. Several workshops for pastors and church leaders were presented in Canada and the United States. For information about how *Church Juice* can assist your congregation, visit ChurchJuice.com.

3. *Today*—daily devotions that provide both evangelistic and discipleship content. BTGMI has produced the *Today* devotional booklet for more than 60 years. We continue to print and distribute 233,000 bimonthly devotional booklets, but we have increased the more cost-effective electronic distribution of *Today* through email, podcast at ThisIsToday.net, Facebook, and RSS feed. In 2011 we launched *Today* apps for smart phones, and in the first six months app readers viewed the devotional entries more than 923,000 times, shared them with nearly 8,000 others, and clicked more than 40,000 “likes.” Churches can also place an automatic daily link from ThisIsToday.net to their own websites.
4. *Think Christian*—a collaborative blog that seeks to engage people in conversations about the intersection of the Christian faith and culture. A team of writers posts articles to guide a discussion that helps visitors “think Christian” from a Reformed perspective in their daily lives. The website, ThinkChristian.net, receives worldwide traffic, with a large number of visitors coming from Great Britain and Australia.
5. *Groundwork*—a half-hour audio program that proclaims the Christian faith, produced in collaboration with ReFrame Media and Words of Hope (RCA). *Groundwork* explores Scripture in depth from a Reformed perspective. Rev. David Bast (Words of Hope) continues as host with a variety of guest speakers, following the death of former co-host Rev. Bob Heerspink (BTGMI) in October 2011. An interactive website, GroundworkOnline.com, and a Facebook page for listeners invite comments and prayer requests. We’ve had contact with people in at least 105 countries.
6. *Spotlight*—a simplified English program that uses a limited vocabulary, basic grammar, and a slowed delivery rate to target an international audience of those who wish to learn the English language. BTGMI continues to partner with Words of Hope and HCJB Global in the production of *Spotlight*. In addition to radio broadcasting, listeners increasingly are connecting to the program through the *Spotlight* website, SpotlightRadio.net. Several areas of significant traffic are in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia. More than 50 *Spotlight* English Clubs have been started in 21 countries. Churches with a heart for reaching out to international neighbors may contact rbasselin@crcna.org for information about establishing *Spotlight* English Clubs. We offer practical tools to help teach English language learners, serving as a bridge for interacting with immigrants in their local communities.
7. *Walk the Way*—a daily one-minute audio and companion video conversation that challenges people to explore how God matters to our walk of faith. This program is designed to engage younger adults in thinking through the implications and claims of the gospel of Christ. *Walk the Way* is carried on more than 660 media outlets throughout North America. Its Facebook page has more than 18,000 fans. This growth has resulted in a significant increase in visits to the website, WalkTheWay.net.

8. *Kids Corner*—an audio program now heard on approximately 440 stations in North America and through the Internet at KidsCorner.net. *Kids Corner* is a significant outreach to children, who can listen to programs and request music CDs, bookmarks, and other kid-friendly disciple-making tools. A special section on the website offers resources to help parents with their children's spiritual growth. Families and church education leaders are encouraged to send for information about our children's Bible study correspondence program, a tool for helping children become life-long disciples of Jesus.
9. *Under the Radar*—a music-based program that combines the best “undiscovered” and underplayed music from Christian artists, along with interviews and stories, in order to share the gospel. The program airs on 150 broadcast outlets, providing a unique niche in Christian programming. Its Facebook page has nearly 14,000 fans, many of whom actively carry on conversations about the impact of this program on their lives.

D. *French ministry*

French ministry is primarily carried out in Africa, Haiti, and parts of Europe where the population includes French-speaking immigrants from Africa. Rev. Paul Mpindi, a native of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, gives leadership to this ministry, along with a team of indigenous staff members and more than 225 international volunteers. Joining Rev. Mpindi in radio programming is his wife, Mrs. Charlotte Mpindi, who hosts a popular program devoted to a biblical perspective on women's issues pertinent to the African context.

Working with local churches in Africa over the past year, we provided pastoral training for 1,330 leaders. This brings the total to 21,400 of those trained through our French ministry leadership seminars since this training began in 2004. Through partnerships in Haiti we were able to transform space into a new recording studio in order to record translations of our French program in Creole, the “heart” language of most Haitian people. We are exploring additional ministry partnerships for more effective outreach and discipleship. We continue to evaluate the viability of video delivery, including posting Rev. Paul Mpindi's messages on YouTube.

E. *Ministry in Hindi and related languages*

Back to God Ministries International partners with Words of Hope and Good Books Ministries in northern India and in the Himalayan region. Under the leadership of Mr. Stephen Paul, broadcasts in the Hindi language are translated into four local languages, reaching remote villages and places that are otherwise closed to the gospel. We distribute Bible study correspondence materials and produce a family magazine with daily devotions to help disciple listeners who contact our media mission teams. In addition, we provide leadership training for production and discipleship staff in the region.

Producers in all five local Indian languages have made it a priority to visit with listeners in remote villages, establishing listener communities in 50 locations. One of these groups meets in the Jammu region of northern India, where there are no churches. As listeners invite their friends and neighbors to join the group to hear and discuss the program, the number of those who accept Christ as Savior is growing. Pray for these groups of listeners, that

our media ministry may provide much needed spiritual nourishment to help them grow in the knowledge of God's Word.

F. Indonesian ministry

BTGMI works in partnership with the Indonesian Christian Church, an established denomination of 300,000 believers committed to the Reformed faith. Rev. Untung Ongkowidjaya leads a team that produces six radio programs, publishes five devotional booklets bimonthly (targeting different age groups), and maintains an active Internet ministry. Two television programs, *Evergreen House* for children and *Gema Kasih Indonesia* for adults, are broadcast on key stations in Indonesia and Papua.

Through various training seminars throughout Indonesia and nearby locations, we provided leadership development that enabled us to increase the number of listener communities from 142 to 160. We also hired a second listener community coordinator to oversee and further develop this growing ministry. In partnership with the Timothy Leadership Training Institute, 71 Christian leaders, some of whom are former Muslims, were equipped to provide training for others in remote areas of the country. Our Indonesian media team and Global Coffee Break leaders, in partnership with Christian Reformed World Missions, Home Missions, and Faith Alive Christian Resources, provided training and resources to help launch this Bible study ministry in Indonesia. We are also exploring partnership opportunities with other ministries for greater outreach in tribal languages.

G. Japanese ministry

Rev. Masao Yamashita gives leadership to the Japanese media ministry. All seven audio programs are broadcast on the Internet, and one is available by cell phone delivery. Highly advanced mobile device technology provided more than 1.1 million audio or text downloads of our Japanese evangelism and discipleship resources. The Japanese ministry has developed and hosts an active website that offers the opportunity for Internet users to engage staff in online social networking conversations. Several annual events are held to allow isolated listeners to gather for face-to-face encouragement and Bible instruction.

Following the March 2011 earthquake in Japan, BTGMI began broadcasting a new program, *Words of Hope*, in cooperation with the Reformed Church in Japan. Response has been encouraging. Nobuhiro, one listener from the devastated area of northern Japan, told our Japanese staff that the program encouraged him to begin attending a partner church in the area. We continue to look for more ways to partner with the Reformed Church in Japan in outreach to the people of Japan.

H. Portuguese ministry

Ministry leader Rev. Hernandes Lopes brings a wealth of theological and media experience to our Portuguese outreach. He continues to host the TV program *Verdade e Vida* (*Truth and Life*) and provides leadership for BTGMI radio, television, telephone, print, and Internet ministry in Brazil. Using funds from the sale of our old building in Brazil, we've made significant progress in furnishing our new ministry center with high-definition production equipment. In partnership with Mackenzie Presbyterian University and the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, we expanded the number of video/

TV programs. We also recorded 365 new *Disquepaz* devotional messages and increased to 244 the number of churches who partner with us in this unique telephone ministry.

Our goal is to develop several new video programs for television and web broadcasting, including a new weekly discipleship program recorded with a live audience. We also continue to reach out to the local churches in order to increase ministry partnership opportunities such as *Disquepaz*. Local churches also partner with us to distribute a special Christmas/Advent devotional booklet; in 2011 we circulated a record 914,000 copies, an increase of nearly 200,000 from the previous year.

I. Russian ministry

Rev. Sergei Sosedkin gives leadership to the Russian media ministry. Rev. Sosedkin divides his time between North America and Russia, where he is able to engage in live radio broadcasting as well as personal contact with listeners who respond to this ministry. The Russian ministry has three primary delivery sources: radio broadcasting, Internet, and print media, conducted in collaboration with several Russian Christian periodicals. Short-wave broadcasting of Rev. Sosedkin's program covers all of Russia and Russian-speaking countries in Eastern Europe, with live call-in programs occurring weekly in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

BTGMI's Russian ministry staff is located in both St. Petersburg and Moscow, with some discipleship work carried out in St. Petersburg in cooperation with Christian Reformed World Missions. Rev. Sosedkin and his Russian staff have also established an excellent working relationship with St. Petersburg Christian University, often conducting classes there in the effective use of media in church settings. The Internet site not only ministers to people within the country of Russia but increasingly is becoming a point of contact with Russian speakers around the world.

We continue to partner with a Christian blogger who writes for our Russian website, reaching a younger audience with the gospel's transforming message. Responses to the ministry blogs on our website have increased. In collaboration with an online broadcast team, we helped produce a new live broadcast specifically designed to reach atheists and nonbelievers. A marketing strategy to reach cell phone users resulted in a significant increase (from 200 to 500) in the number of subscribers to our devotional text messages. We are exploring expanded ministry opportunities in Ukraine, including the possibility of online video programming.

J. Spanish ministry

Rev. Guillermo Serrano gives leadership to the Spanish-language ministry. Our broadcast ministry reaches Central and South America, as well as Spain. In addition, broadcasts within North America reach Spanish-speaking populations north of the Mexican border. We also produce *Cada Dia*, a daily devotional guide available online and in print. BTGMI Spanish media programs are produced and distributed from the ministry center in Campinas, Brazil. Staff and volunteers in six countries provide follow-up and discipleship with those who respond to our ministry.

The number of TV stations carrying our program increased from 150 to 235 over the past year as a result of our media seminars, which grow relationships between our staff and Latin American media outlets. In addition,

Rev. Serrano spent three months in South America to establish closer connections with local churches and ministries. We produced 52 episodes of a new two-minute video program for web and television distribution. This program, *En Perspectiva (Perspectives)*, discusses various aspects of life and current social issues.

As access to the Internet and social media increases in Latin America, we are developing a strategy to improve our Spanish web-based outreach.

K. Korean ministry

Back to God Ministries International continues to partner with the Korean Council of CRC churches to produce a bilingual Korean-English *Today*. Initiated in 2008, production has grown from 7,000 to 10,000. The Korean-English *Today* not only nurtures Korean-speaking members of the Christian Reformed Church but is an effective evangelism tool in North America and beyond.

L. Cooperative organizations

Back to God Ministries International cannot carry out its mission unilaterally. We are blessed with a wonderful network of global partners. Our connections reach from Presbyterian churches in Brazil to house churches in China, from Christian churches in Indonesia to evangelical congregations in Russia, from the Church of North India to small fellowship groups in Africa. Strong partnerships create synergy for mission and allow resources to be invested wisely. Organizations with whom BTGMI works cooperatively include

- Christian Reformed World Missions—joint ministry in Haiti, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, Mexico, El Salvador, and Nigeria.
- Korean Council—publication of Korean-English *Today* devotions.
- Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed congregations—media outreach assistance for new church plants, as well as established congregations who wish to use electronic media for ministry and engage with Global Coffee Break.
- CRWRC—diaconal training for Listener Community leaders in Indonesia.
- CRC Proservices—publication of selected materials.
- Words of Hope—partnership in the production of two English programs: *Spotlight* and *Groundwork*; additional partnerships in Indonesian, Hindi, and Arabic ministries.
- HCJB Global—also a partner in the *Spotlight* ministry.
- Middle East Reformed Fellowship—media outreach to the Arabic-speaking world.
- Timothy Leadership Training Institute—leadership training in Indonesia and other potential ministry sites.
- Reformed denominations worldwide—major joint-ministry partnerships in Japan (Reformed Church in Japan), Brazil (Presbyterian Church of Brazil), and Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church).
- Crossroad Bible Institute—discipleship ministry through a Bible study correspondence program.

III. The Back to God Ministries International board

A. *Function*

Back to God Ministries International is governed by a regionally representative board that meets three times a year to set policy and to evaluate the work of the staff.

B. *Officers of the board*

The board officers of BTGMI are Rev. Bruce Persenaire, president; Rev. Gerrit Bomhof, vice president; Mrs. Carol Woltjer, secretary; and Mr. Harry Boessenkoel, treasurer.

C. *Board member nominees*

Rev. Ed Visser (Region 3) is completing a first term on the board and is eligible for reappointment. The board recommends that synod ratify Rev. Visser for a second three-year term.

The board of BTGMI, by way of exception, asks that the term of Rev. Bruce Persenaire (Region 6) be extended one year (through June 30, 2013).

Ground: This would provide continuity to the ministry during the transition time to the new director.

The following slates of nominees from geographical regions were presented in the spring of 2012 to the respective classes for a vote. Synod will be asked to ratify the results of the elections.

Region 10

Mr. Wayne Brower, a member of Harderwyk Ministries CRC in Holland, Michigan, has served as an elder and on the congregation's worship leadership team. Mr. Brower is semi-retired from Herman Miller, Inc., where he works in leadership in the areas of IT security, disaster recovery, and compliance activities. He has served on various boards and committees. Presently he serves on the personnel committee at Harderwyk CRC, volunteers as a Kids Hope mentor, and serves as a consultant for LOVE, INC. in Hamilton, Michigan.

Mr. Michael DeKuiper, a member of Second CRC in Fremont, Michigan, has served as elder and deacon several times, as well as on various committees within the church. He is active in the insurance business and owns his own insurance agency. Mr. DeKuiper has served on various boards in the Fremont area.

Region 11

Ms. Mary Kortman, a member of South Grandville CRC in Grandville, Michigan, is a part-time worship director at the church and also works part-time as a nurse. She has participated in several international mission trips. Ms. Kortman serves on Classis Grandville's church development committee, worship planning committee, and faith formation committee.

Ms. Julie Voskuil, a member of LaGrave CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a professor at Calvin College in the accounting department. She has volunteered as a Sunday school teacher, a youth group leader, and a GEMS counselor. While living in France, Ms. Voskuil served in church leadership and as a Bible Study Fellowship leader. She has served on various boards; most recently she served on the board for the Van Lunen Center for executive

management in Christian Schools. Ms. Voskuil just finished a term as a senator on the Calvin College Faculty Senate.

The following single nominee from a geographical region has been presented to the respective classes for a vote. Synod will be asked to ratify this election.

Region 12

Rev. Joel Vande Werken is the pastor of Sussex CRC in Sussex, New Jersey. He is starting his second term as the stated clerk for Classis Hudson. He has a heart for missions and has done some short-term mission work in Hungary.

D. Salary disclosure

The following information is provided to synod as requested:

Job level	Number of positions	Compensation quartile (includes housing allowance)
16	6	1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th
15	1	4th

IV. Recommendations

A. That Rev. Bruce Persenaire, president, and Rev. Jimmy Tai-On Lin, interim director of Back to God Ministries International, be given the privilege of the floor when BTGMI matters are discussed.

B. That synod by way of the ballot ratify the election and reelection of board members from the slates of nominees presented.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Back to God Ministries International
Jimmy Tai-On Lin, interim director

I. Introduction

This report reflects information derived from, and actions taken at, the October 2011 and February 2012 meetings, as well as a special January 2012 meeting, of the Calvin College Board of Trustees.

Board officers elected for 2011-2012 are Mr. Scott Spoelhof, chair; Ms. Michelle VanDyke, vice-chair; Mr. Roger N. Brummel, secretary; Ms. Darlene K. Meyering, assistant secretary (executive associate to the president); and Dr. Henry DeVries, treasurer (vice president for administration, finance and information services). Ms. Thelma Venema served as secretary until February 2012, at which time she resigned from the board due to health issues.

II. General college matters

The October 2011 meeting included the appointments of trustees to board standing committees for each division of the college, as well as appointments to the executive committee and to six college standing committees. Members also received a progress report from members of the Presidential Search Committee.

The additional special board meeting in January 2012 was spent in interviews with Dr. Michael Le Roy, provost and executive vice president at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, as candidate for the presidency of Calvin College. Following the interviews, the board met in executive session and subsequently approved Dr. Le Roy as their choice to be the next president of the college. He will be interviewed for ratification of the appointment by Synod 2012 in June, held at Redeemer University College.

The February 2012 meeting was spent conducting twenty-two faculty interviews for reappointment or for tenure and hearing committee reports, as well as reports and discussions on the college documents, the Reformed Identity and Mission Task Force, and the formation of the Inaugural Steering Committee. The board also attended the annual Faculty Awards Dinner for the presentation of the President's Award for Exemplary Teaching and four additional faculty awards. Rev. Darren Roorda of the CRCNA Board of Trustees attended the board meetings as an observer, and John Bolt, CRCNA director of finance, offered a report and discussion on ministry shares.

III. Faculty**A. Faculty interviews**

Twenty-two faculty interviews were the highlight of the February 2012 meeting. Nine of them were for reappointment with tenure (see Recommendations) and thirteen for two- or three-year regular reappointments.

B. Presidential Award for Exemplary Teaching

Dr. Lawrence L. Louters, professor of biochemistry, was presented the twentieth annual Presidential Award for Exemplary Teaching. This award is given to a tenured professor whose Christian commitment is readily apparent in exemplary teaching in the classroom. In addition, a cash award is provided for educational opportunities and life experiences that will enrich the recipient's teaching and scholarship.

Four additional teaching awards were also presented at the dinner: the Award for Innovative Teaching to David Smith (Germanic languages); the Award for Student-Faculty Research to S. Kumar Sinniah (chemistry); the Award for Community-Based Teaching to Bob Eames (business); and the *From Every Nation* Award for Excellence in Teaching to Brian Ingrassia (English). In addition, this year for the first time the Award for Collaborative Change was awarded to Gail Heffner (community engagement), Matt Heun (engineering), Clarence Joldersma (education), and David Warners (biology), for their leadership in cultivating a culture of sustainability at Calvin.

IV. Election of college trustees

A. Regional trustees

Region 10

The second term for Mr. Roger Brummel expires in 2012. The Trusteeship Committee has received nominations from the classes and presents the following slate of names to the classes in the region for a vote to name the trustee to be presented to Synod 2012 for ratification.

Mr. Robert Scott Boot, B.A., Calvin College

Mr. R. Scott Boot is a member of Westwood CRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he has served terms as a deacon and elder and as president of council. He has also served on the board of the Kalamazoo Christian Schools. Mr. Boot is the owner/president of Boot-Haan Insurance Agency, and he has recently completed a three-year term on the Calvin College Alumni Association board. He and his wife are strong supporters of Calvin College and are active members of Westwood CRC. They are both graduates of Calvin College and have been key partners in West Michigan, hosting numerous Calvin music ensembles and speakers in the Kalamazoo area and beyond. The Boots also have spearheaded alumni events in Florida with their extended family in the Naples area.

Ms. Marjorie Hage Hoogeboom, B.A., Calvin College; B.S. Math and Computer Science, Purdue University

Ms. Hoogeboom serves as cofounder, vice president, and director of Rainbow Associates Management and Consultant Services in Holland, Michigan. She is also vice president and director of the Rainbow Foundation, a family philanthropic foundation. Her previous work experience was with the Upjohn Company in Kalamazoo and in Southfield, Michigan. She also worked for four years at Mead Johnson and Company, and for ten years at General Electric Research and Development Center. Ms. Hoogeboom and her husband are supporters of Calvin College, and she has served on the Calvin Alumni Association board. She is a graduate of Calvin College and is an active member of Harderwyk CRC in Holland, Michigan. Her community, college, and church service are evident in a list too long to recount, and she completed her work as a member of Calvin's Presidential Search Committee in January 2012.

Region 11

The second term for Mr. Craig B. Klammer expires in 2012. The Trusteeship Committee has received nominations from the classes and presents the following slate of names to the classes in the region for a vote to name the trustee to be presented to Synod 2012 for ratification.

Mr. Thomas A. Geelhood, B.A., Calvin College; J.D., University of Michigan

Mr. Geelhood is an attorney specializing in social security disability law. He is a graduate of Calvin College. His previous board service includes six years on the board of CRWRC and three years on the Calvin Alumni Association board. Mr. Geelhood is a member of Sherman Street CRC, where he is currently chairing the Pastor Evaluation Committee. He has been an elder and chair of the Sherman Street CRC administrative council and served on the Pastor Search Committee. As a Japanese-American, he has a perspective and heart for diversity and for Calvin's international reach. His time on the Calvin Alumni board has made him aware of the challenges and opportunities currently faced by Calvin College as a private Christian institution.

Ms. Wendy Granger Hofman, B.A., Calvin College

Ms. Hofman is a creative and organized member of River Terrace CRC in Lansing, Michigan. She worked for years as the choir director at River Terrace and significantly enhanced the church choral program. She served as the music teacher at Lansing Christian School, building the music programs significantly. She currently serves as the principal of Lansing Christian School, where her organizational leadership has greatly enhanced the school community. As a school administrator, Ms. Granger has the ability to ask the right questions and to focus on the core mission of an organization.

The Calvin College Board of Trustees recommends the following trustees eligible for a second three-year term:

Dr. Laurens Vandergrift (Region 1)
Mr. Dale H. Venhuizen (Region 5)
Mr. William J. Katt (Region 9)
Mr. David VanRandwyk (Region 10)
Rev. Dr. Randall D. Engle (Region 11)

B. Alumni trustees

The first term for Ms. Ruth M. Palma expires in 2012. She is eligible for a second term. The Trusteeship Committee recommends her for a second term to be ratified by Synod 2012.

C. At-large trustees

The first term for Mr. Bradley Haverkamp expires in 2012. He is eligible for a second term. The Trusteeship Committee recommends him for a second term to be ratified by Synod 2012.

The second term for Mr. Scott A. Spoelhof expires in 2012. He is eligible for a third term and is being recommended to synod for ratification.

The third term for Rev. Harry W. Lew expires in 2012. He is not eligible for reelection. In addition, Ms. Thelma Venema resigned from the board in February 2012. The Trusteeship Committee will select nominees at the May 2012 meeting to be brought forth for the at-large trustee positions for appointment by Synod 2012.

V. Finance

The board proposed the tuition and room and board rates for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013. The proposal contains an increase of 4.5 percent in the tuition rate, an increase of 4 percent in the room and board rate, and an increase of approximately \$5 million in financial aid compared to 2012-2013.

	2011/2012	2012/2013	Increase
Tuition	\$25,340	\$26,480	\$1,140
Required fees	225	225	—
Room & board (21)	8,760	9,110	350
TOTAL	\$34,325	\$35,815	\$1,490

Note: The final 2012-2013 budget will be adopted at the May board meeting when the fall enrollment numbers are more certain.

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the chair of the board, Mr. Scott A. Spoelhof, and to the president of the college, Dr. Gaylen J. Byker, when matters pertaining to education are present.

B. That synod 2012 ratify the appointment of Dr. Michael K. Le Roy as the ninth president of Calvin College.

C. That synod ratify the following reappointments with tenure (*italics indicate promotion to that rank*):

1. Albert J. Boerema, Ph.D., *professor of education*
2. Crystal N. Bruxvoort, Ph.D., *associate professor of chemistry and science education*
3. Robert H. Eames, M.B.A., *professor of business*
4. Tiffany J. Engle, D.M.A., *associate professor of music*
5. Lewis S. Klatt, Ph.D., *associate professor of English*
6. Robert P. Schoone-Jongen, Ph.D., *associate professor of history*
7. Anding Shen, Ph.D., *associate professor of biology*
8. Timothy H. Steele, Ph.D., *associate professor of music*
9. Joel H. Westra, Ph.D., *associate professor of political science*

D. That synod by way of ballot elect new members, reappoint for subsequent terms, and ratify the results of elections held in classes for membership on the Calvin College Board of Trustees.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin College Board of Trustees
Roger N. Brummel, secretary

Appendix

Curriculum Vitae

Michael K. Le Roy

Personal Information

Married: Andrea Nelson Le Roy (B.A., Taylor University; M.Ed., Vanderbilt University)

Children: Dana, Hannah, and Astrid

Professional biography

Dr. Michael K. Le Roy serves as provost and executive vice president of academic affairs and also holds an appointment of professor of political science at Whitworth University. Dr. Le Roy joined the Whitworth faculty in 2002, after serving as department chair and associate professor of political science and international relations at Wheaton College. He was appointed vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty in 2005 and was promoted to the executive vice presidency in 2010.

After earning his undergraduate degree from Whitworth College, cum laude, with majors in international studies and peace studies, he went on to earn his Ph.D. in political science, summa cum laude, from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. While completing his doctoral research, Dr. Le Roy was a Fulbright Scholar at Gothenburg University, Sweden, and the American-Scandinavian Foundation Fellow. Upon completion of his Scandinavian research on civil society, Le Roy returned to the United States to take a visiting faculty appointment at the College of William and Mary. In 1994 he was recruited to the department of political science at Wheaton College, where he served as a faculty member until 2002. During his tenure at Wheaton, Dr. Le Roy earned the Faculty Achievement Award for Excellence in Teaching and the Excellence in Teaching Award granted by the American Political Science Association. In 1998, Dr. Le Roy was appointed department chair. He developed a new major in international relations and led the Wheaton in Europe program.

In 2002, Dr. Le Roy returned to his alma mater as a professor of political science and provided collaborative leadership for interdisciplinary teams of faculty in two programs: Whitworth's capstone program, integrating ethics, public policy, culture, and Christian worldview perspective; and Whitworth's long-standing Central America Study Program, of which Dr. Le Roy was an alumnus. In 2005 he was appointed vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty. As vice president of academic affairs, he has led the rapid transformation of the academic program. In 2005 he led a faculty team in the design of the Ernst F. Lied Center for the Visual Arts (completed in 2007). After an assessment of the academic program, Dr. Le Roy provided the vision and leadership to reinvigorate research and teaching in the sciences, which included the development of a summer research program, substantial increases in internal and external research funding, and the planning and design for the 63,000-square-foot Robinson Science Hall (completed in 2011). In 2006 he collaborated with the faculty to revise, clarify, and improve the university's promotion and tenure standards. He also expanded faculty

development support and reduced adjunct dependence in the university from 24 percent of credit hours generated to 11 percent; he also established and raised support for Whitworth's faith and learning program, Vocation of the Christian Professor. In 2010 Dr. Le Roy completed a collaborative initiative to open Whitworth University's first international education center in San Rafael de Heredia, Costa Rica. During his leadership tenure, he has also initiated several important program developments and changes. During Dr. Le Roy's tenure, the academic division has substantially increased revenue in graduate and continuing studies programming and returned budget surpluses to the university each year. The 2011 Higher Education Research Institute Survey of Whitworth faculty indicates that 93.8 percent of faculty believe the "administrators consider faculty concerns when making policy," compared to 77.2 percent of private institutional peers. All other indicators of faculty/administrative collaboration in this survey indicate a similarly strong pattern of faculty-administrative collaboration and transparency (thematic report available upon request). With the arrival of President Beck Taylor in 2010, Dr. Le Roy was promoted to executive vice president of academic affairs and serves the president as chief-administrator-in-charge during presidential absences. Over the past year, Dr. Le Roy has developed a strong partnership with the new president and played a central role in the development of the academic vision in Whitworth University's strategic plan, Whitworth 2021, *Courage at the Crossroads*.

As a scholar, Dr. Le Roy has published refereed journal articles, four editions of his textbook *Comparative Politics: An Introduction Using MicroCase*, and four editions of *Research Methods in Political Science*. In addition to these successful texts, he has published several data archives and multimedia educational resources used with the MicroCase data analysis package frequently used in political science. Dr. Le Roy is a frequent commentator and analyst on international and national politics on regional television and radio. He has also been an active participant and leader in several community and professional associations. He served as a board member for the Spokane Intercollegiate Research and Technology Institute and the board of the WSU College of Nursing. He is an active member of the Council for Independent Colleges (CIC) and the American Council on Education (ACE) and has served as the leader for the CIC's New Chief Academic Officer (CAO) training program and as a facilitator for the ACE's new CAO Institute.

Dr. Le Roy lives in the Spokane area with his wife of 22 years, Andrea, and his son, Dana, and daughters, Hannah and Astrid. He and Andrea are both ordained elders and members of Colbert Presbyterian Church (PCUSA).

Administrative appointments and select accomplishments

Whitworth University

Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty 2010-present¹

- Received a vote of commendation and gratitude from the Academic Affairs Committee of Whitworth's Board of Trustees for successful completion of the 2005-2010 strategic plan.

¹ Title was changed from Executive Vice President and Dean of Faculty to Provost and Executive Vice President in October 2011.

- Provided academic leadership and vision for the strategic planning process, Whitworth 2021: Courage at the Crossroads.
- Led the institution on a three-year process to establish Whitworth's Costa Rica Center, which opened in the fall of the 2010-11 academic year.
- Received the results of the 2011 Higher Education Research Institute Survey of Whitworth faculty, indicating very high job satisfaction and strong, positive faculty-administrative trust, collaboration, transparency, and confidence: 93.8 percent of faculty believe the "administrators consider faculty concerns when making policy," compared to 77.2 percent of private institutional peers (thematic peer report available upon request).
- Selected for the second year as speaker and facilitator of the American Council on Education's Chief Academic Officer Institute.
- Keynote speaker for the Council of Independent Colleges department chair's workshop.
- Served as the Council of Independent Colleges New Chief Academic Officer Workshop Director for the third year in a row in November 2010.
- Developed university-wide consensus around Whitworth's Core Values Statement to complement Whitworth's mission statement.

Vice President, Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty 2005-2010

- Provide leadership for Whitworth's Technology Strategy Group to leverage opportunities to keep pace with technological change in pedagogy, research, administration, information resources, and the marketing and communications of Whitworth University.
- Selected by the Board of Trustees to serve on the Presidential Search Committee to recommend Whitworth University's 18th president.
- Made the case to hire a cabinet-level assistant vice president for diversity and intercultural relations to oversee the transformation of the multicultural competencies of students, faculty, and staff.
- Provided oversight for Whitworth's successful Division III athletics program, which has emphasized character development and academic and athletic excellence. The program has won the conference all-sports trophy four of the past six years, produced numerous coaches of the year, and has broad support across campus.
- Facilitated the revision of the post-tenure review process for faculty.
- Raised funds for a \$1 million endowment and secured a \$2.7 million parcel of land to establish an environmental studies center north of Spokane, Washington.
- Met faculty salary goal in 2010 that resulted in significant net gains in salary compared to Whitworth university peer group.
- Established and led the Tammy R. Reid Writing Summer Writing Retreat to support faculty scholarship productivity and build community and support around individual faculty scholarship.
- Made the case for a major strategic initiative to improve research, teaching, and facilities in biology, chemistry, and physics, which included the establishment of a research endowment and the construction of the \$33 million Robinson Science Hall dedicated to the advancement of biology and chemistry.
- Led the successful Northwest Commission for Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) re-accreditation effort for Whitworth in 2008.

- Collaborated with the Institutional Advancement office to raise \$4 million in gifts to support faculty faith and learning, science research, and a foundation grant for the new science building.
- Collaborated with faculty governance leadership to strengthen university-wide assessment and oversight of the process for continuous improvement of the Whitworth curriculum.
- Provided leadership for the vision, design, and construction of the \$6 million Lied Center for the Visual Arts.
- Provided leadership to open a downtown campus in Spokane's university district.
- More than doubled university revenue in graduate and adult degree programs that have a strong regional reputation for quality and focus on student growth and development.
- Established a successful master's program in theology and a new department of health sciences.
- Instituted and developed a summer faculty development program, Vocation of the Christian Professor, to support the integration of faith and learning.
- Collaborated with the Faculty Research and Development Committee to develop the Spokane Intercollegiate Research Conference with Gonzaga University, Eastern Washington University, and Washington State University. Every Whitworth academic department now participates in the annual conference.
- Collaborated with faculty on a major revision of Whitworth's promotion and tenure standards and process, which resulted in higher standards, improved clarity of expectations, and increased rewards for high performance. A 2011 HERI faculty survey indicates that 79.6 percent of Whitworth faculty consider the criteria for promotion and tenure to be clear, compared to 72.1 percent of Whitworth's peer group.

Director, Central America Study Program, Whitworth University 2002-2011

- Assumed leadership for Whitworth's 25-year-old program of intensive study of politics, economics, development, gender, and ecology in the five primary countries of Central America.
- Transformed the curriculum and instructional approach to experiential learning to include ethnographic methods with experiential immersion to enhance the academic rigor of the CASP program.
- Academic program planning, budget oversight, budget planning, curriculum, assessment, and staffing in collaboration with a team of faculty in alternating years.

Director, Core 350

2003-2005

- Directed Whitworth's revised interdisciplinary junior/senior course required of all students to assist in student understanding of the relationships among worldview, ethics, and public policy.
- Academic program planning and assessment, faculty team leadership, budget oversight, and staffing in collaboration with a ten-member faculty team.

Wheaton College

Chair, Department of Politics and International Relations 1998-2002

- Responsibility for curriculum, assessment, faculty development, faculty evaluation, internship, and international program innovation in Wheaton's department of Politics and International Relations.
- Developed a new major in international relations.
- Doubled the number of majors in political science and international relations in a four-year period.

Director, Wheaton in Europe Program, Regents College, London 1994-2000

- Assumed leadership for Wheaton's program of intensive study of politics and economics in ten European countries during the summer.
- Academic program planning, budget oversight, budget planning, curriculum, assessment, and staffing in collaboration with a team of faculty.

Academic Appointments

Professor, Department of Political Science, Whitworth

University, Spokane, Wash. (tenure granted, 2004) 2002-present

Associate Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill. (tenure granted, 1999) 1999-2002

Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill. 1994-1999

Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Government and International Relations, The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va. 1993-1994

Fellow of Research and Teaching, Göteborgs universitet, Göteborg, Sweden. Supported by a one-year Fulbright Grant and a subsequent year by the American-Scandinavian Foundation 1992-1993

Education

I.E.M. Harvard University, Harvard Graduate School of Education, July 2011

Ph.D. Vanderbilt University, Political Science, Comparative Politics and International Relations, summa cum laude, March 1994

B.A. Whitworth College, International Studies and Peace Studies, cum laude, May 1989

Selected honors and distinctions

American Council on Education, New CAO Institute Speaker, Facilitator 2009-present

Council of Independent Colleges, New CAO Seminar Leader 2008-2010

Board Member, Spokane Technology Incubator (SIRTI) 2005-2011

Excellence in Teaching Award, Pi Sigma Alpha, American Political Science Association 2000

Faculty Achievement Award for Excellence in Teaching, Wheaton College 1999

Aldeen Research Grant, Wheaton College 1999

Aldeen Research Grant, Wheaton College 1997

American-Scandinavian Foundation Fellow 1993

Fulbright Honors Seminar on the "Germany in the New Europe" 1993

Swedish Fulbright Representative to the Honors Seminar: "The European Community and NATO in the 1990s"	1993
Fulbright Grant for Graduate Research in Sweden, Göteborgs universitet	1992-1993

Books, published data archives, other media

Michael K. Le Roy, 2011 *Global Dataset*, MicroCase Curriculum Plan (Belmont, Calif.: Cengage, 2011-12).

Michael K. Le Roy, 2008 *General Social Survey*, MicroCase Curriculum Plan (Belmont, Calif.: Cengage, 2011-12).

Michael K. Le Roy, 2008 *National Election Study*, MicroCase Curriculum Plan (Belmont, Calif.: Cengage, 2011-12).

Michael K. Le Roy, *Research Methods in Political Science* (Belmont, Calif.: Cengage, 7th ed., 2008, 8th ed., 2012).

Michael K. Le Roy, *Introduction to Comparative Politics* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1st ed., 1999; 2nd ed., 2002; 3rd ed., April 2004; 4th ed., Oct. 2006).

Michael K. Le Roy, 2003-2004 *Pew Global Attitudes Data Archive*, MicroCase Curriculum Plan (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/MicroCase, 2006-2007).

Michael K. Le Roy, 1999-2002 *World Values Data Archive*, MicroCase Curriculum Plan (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/MicroCase, 2005-2006).

Michael K. Le Roy and Michael Corbett, *Research Methods in Political Science* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 5th ed., 2003; 6th ed., Nov. 2005). Editions 1-4 by Michael Corbett only.

Charles Hauss, Michael K. Le Roy, Ken Wedding, *Comparative Politics Interactive CD-ROM* (Belmont, Calif.: 1st Edition, 2003).

Michael K. Le Roy, 1995-1997 *World Values Data Archive*, MicroCase Curriculum Plan, (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/MicroCase, 2001).

Articles and book chapters

Michael K. Le Roy, "From World Views to Research Programs" in *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science*, ed. Thomas W. Heilke, et al. (New York: Lexington, 2001).

Michael K. Le Roy and Sara De Master, "Xenophobia and the European Union," *Comparative Politics* (Summer 2000).

Michael K. Le Roy, "Books & Culture Corner: Tony Blair's Devolution Revolution," *Christianity Online* (Jan. 17, 2000). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/103/18.0.html>

Michael K. Le Roy, "New Tools for WebCT Users," *WebCT Online*. October 2000. <http://www.webct.com/OTL/ViewContent?contentID=2474395>

Michael K. Le Roy, "Brief on Blair," *Books and Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (July/Aug. 1997).

Michael K. Le Roy, "An American Angle on Blair," *Christianity* (August 1997), pp. 18-19.

M. Donald Hancock and Michael K. Le Roy, "Scandinavia: The Reluctant Europeans," in *European Identities* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996).

Michael K. Le Roy, "Participation, Size, and Democracy: Bridging the Gap between Citizens and the Swedish State," *Comparative Politics* (April 1995).

Select conference papers and invited presentations

- Michael K. Le Roy, "The Harried Higher Education Executive: Managing Time and Technology." Seton Hill College, Seton Hill, Pennsylvania, May 2011.
- New Chief Academic Officer Workshop Leader, Council of Independent Colleges, Chief Academic Officer Institute, Williamsburg, Virginia, November 2010.
- New Chief Academic Officer Workshop Facilitator, American Council on Education, Chief Academic Officer Institute, Oakland, California, August 2010.
- New Chief Academic Officer Workshop Leader, Council of Independent Colleges, Chief Academic Officer Institute, Santa Fe, New Mexico, November 2009.
- New Chief Academic Officer Workshop Facilitator, American Council on Education, Chief Academic Officer Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 2009.
- New Chief Academic Officer Workshop Leader, Council of Independent Colleges, Chief Academic Officer Institute, Seattle, Washington, November 2008.
- Michael K. Le Roy, "What Drives Your Campus? Using Facilities Performance Metrics to Increase Your Competitive Advantage," Council of Independent Colleges, Chief Academic Officer Institute, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November 2007.
- Michael K. Le Roy, "Using MicroCase in Political Science Teaching," On-Line Seminar by Wadsworth-Thomson Learning, Published on-line in July 2004.
- Michael K. Le Roy, "Bringing ICPSR Data to the Masses"; Principal Presenter, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research Workshop, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, October 1999, 2001.
- Michael K. Le Roy, "Using MicroCase in Comparative Politics," American Political Science Association Meeting, September 2000.
- Michael K. Le Roy, "Integrating Social Scientific Analysis in the Classroom"; Principal Presenter, MicroCase Workshop, Seattle, Washington, July 11-15, 1999.
- Michael K. Le Roy, "Religion and Civil Society: A Comparison of Approaches," Calvin Conference on Religion, Social Capital, and Democratic Life, October 16-17, 1998.
- Michael K. Le Roy, "From World Views to Research Programs," American Political Science Association, August 1998.
- Michael K. Le Roy and Sara DeMaster, "Xenophobia and National Identity: Explaining Tenuous Support for the European Union," American Political Science Association, August 1997.
- Michael K. Le Roy and Marjory Winn, "Women's Representation in the U.K. and Sweden," American Political Science Association, August 1997.
- Michael K. Le Roy, Chair, "Panel on International Political Economy," Illinois Political Science Association, October 1997.
- Michael K. Le Roy and Jeff Walz, "Teaching Research Methods to Undergraduates," American Political Science Association, August 1996.
- Michael K. Le Roy, Ethics and Public Policy Center, "Rendering Unto Caesar," Washington, D.C., Summer 1996. Remarks Published in Michael

Cromartie (ed.), *Caesar's Coin Revisited: Christians and the Limits of Government* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 179-180.

Michael K. Le Roy, "A Reassessment of the Role of Religion in West European Politics," American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, August 1995.

Michael K. Le Roy, "Political Culture and Civil Society," Western Political Science Meeting, March 1992.

Michael K. Le Roy, "Social Attitudes and the Welfare State," Midwest Political Science Meeting, April 1992.

The Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees presents its report to Synod 2012 with gratitude to God for his provision this past year. The Seminary has experienced God's faithfulness and looks toward the future with hope and anticipation.

I. Board of Trustees

The board met in plenary sessions in October 2011 and via conference call in February 2012 with anticipation of additional meetings in April 2012 and May 2012.

The board officers are Rev. Paul R. De Vries, chair; Dr. Byron Noordewier, vice-chair; and Ms. Susan Keesen, secretary.

The board recommends that synod reappoint trustee Mr. Hank Vander Laan (Region 4) and Rev. William S. Wilton (Region 5), who have completed one term of service and are eligible for a second three-year term.

Completing their terms on the board are Dr. John Ratmeyer (Region 7), Rev. Greg Dyk (Region 8), Dr. Byron Noordewier (Region 8), and Ms. Doris Rikkers (Region 11). We are grateful for their wise and generous service to the seminary. The following nominees were submitted to classes in their respective regions for voting at the spring meetings. The results of those elections will be presented for ratification to Synod 2012.

Region 7

Rev. John W. Dykhuis is the pastor of Fellowship CRC in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and has served in that ministry since 1991. He has experience as a synodical deputy and has served on the classical interim committee for Classis Red Mesa. Rev. Dykhuis is a graduate of Calvin College (B.A.) and Calvin Theological Seminary (M. Div.) and has completed a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Rev. Joel Schreurs is the pastor of First CRC of Denver, Colorado, and has served that ministry since 2006. He has experience as a member and current chair of the Classis Rocky Mountain interim committee. Rev. Schreurs is a graduate of Dordt College (B.A.) and Calvin Theological Seminary (M.Div.).

Region 8

Rev. Timothy J. Ouwinga is the pastor of Pipestone CRC in Pipestone, Minnesota. He is a graduate of Calvin College (B.A.) and Calvin Theological Seminary (M. Div.). Rev. Ouwinga has served on the Dordt College board and also on the Dordt Presidential Search Committee. He currently serves on the classical Home Missions committee.

Rev. David J. Prince is the pastor of Platte CRC in Platte, South Dakota. He is a graduate of Calvin College (B.A.) and Calvin Theological Seminary (M. Div.). Between graduation from Calvin College and admission to Calvin Seminary, he had a career in sales, fund-raising, and counseling. He also served as a deacon at Fuller Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, during that time period. He currently serves on the Classis Iakota Ministry Leadership Team.

Regional at-large

According to CTS board membership bylaw modifications approved by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA in 2011, for regions in which there is more than one representative, the second candidate from that region may be recruited by the Seminary board as a single nominee for the position of regional at-large member. As the board's work expands and as needs for persons with specific skill sets are identified, it has become increasingly difficult to fill those requirements by way of the normal classical nomination structure. The new bylaws allow the Seminary board to fill board positions by recruiting persons who can fill those requirements from regions that are normally represented by two board members.

The board recommends the following single nominee for the position of regional at-large member from Region 11:

Region 11

Mrs. Teresa Renkema is a professor of intercultural communications at Kuyper College, where she teaches communications courses and directs the Teaching English as a Second Language certificate. She and her husband have served the Christian Reformed Church in Puerto Rico and Honduras (for Christian Reformed World Missions), as well as at Calvary CRC in Lowell, Michigan; Borculo CRC in Zeeland, Michigan; and, presently, Cutlerville East CRC in Cutlerville, Michigan. Mrs. Renkema has served on the Interdenominational Relations Committee and chaired the synodical study committee on the Migration of Workers. She brings a breadth of missionary and cross-cultural experience that is vital to the church and to the training of upcoming generations of leaders. In addition, her background at a supportive, sister educational institution is helpful to the continued conversation of how an academic institution serves the church and the wider world.

In addition, the board anticipates presenting a nominee by way of the spring supplement for the position of regional at-large member from Region 8.

II. Administration

The seminary administration includes Rev. Julius T. Medenblik, president; Mr. Jim Luyk, chief financial officer; Dr. Ronald J. Feenstra, dean of academic programs; and Dr. Lyle D. Bierma, dean of the faculty. Dr. Ronald J. Feenstra also serves as the director of the Ph.D. program, and Dr. Lyle Bierma also serves as assessment director. Other persons involved in key administrative positions are Rev. Alvern Gelder, interim director of mentored ministries; Mr. Robert Knorr, director of development; and Rev. Richard E. Sytsma as dean of students, director of alumni relations, and international student advisor.

III. Faculty

The seminary's faculty members continue to serve the church in numerous ways. Although teaching and preparing students for various forms of ministry continue to be central to their work, members of the faculty also provide education and counsel to many local congregations and broader assemblies, preach regularly, publish scholarly books and articles, attend significant conferences, and in various ways seek to stay attuned to developments in ministries in the Christian Reformed Church and the church of Christ worldwide.

IV. Program highlights

Rev. Medenblik began his term as president on August 1, 2011. An early highlight for our community was the inauguration of Rev. Medenblik on October 15, 2011, as the seventh president of Calvin Theological Seminary. The theme of the service and surrounding activities was “Called to Serve.” The seminary community and guests gave thanks to God for his faithfulness from generation to generation through the seminary’s 135 years of ministry, and were challenged about what it means to serve each other as we serve our Lord and Savior. Our newly inaugurated president washed the feet of a board member, a faculty member, a staff member, and a student, making a memorable moment for many who attended.

The seminary was blessed with a number of key appointments during this past year of transition. We gave thanks to Mr. Phil Vanden Berge for his seventeen years of service as chief financial officer, and we welcomed Mr. Jim Luyk to take up that key role and responsibility. Other new persons at the seminary include Mr. Jim Farman in building and grounds, Ms. Carolyn DeNeut as executive associate to the president and chief financial officer, Rev. Alvern Gelder as interim director of mentored ministries, and Mr. Tom VanKeulen as IT systems integration and development specialist.

We were particularly blessed to receive a major gift of \$1.5 million for distance education at CTS in 2011. As a result of that commitment and provision, we were able to also add Rev. Peter Y. Choi as director of distance education and Mr. Nathan Bierma as educational technologist. Calvin Theological Seminary looks forward to welcoming its first online Master of Divinity cohort in the fall of 2012. This small group will be able to complete the Master of Divinity degree over a five-year period, while remaining where they are currently live and minister. We invite continued prayer for this program, for the students involved in it, and for the opportunity to serve the church in this manner.

The Seminary has also been blessed with the formation of a new institute. Just as the Center for Excellence in Preaching continues to serve the church, CTS formed an Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal, led by Professor Carl J. Bosma, which has already been a catalyst for conversations related to church planting and renewal.

One of the other items to note is that in fall 2011 CTS held its first course in a prison. Dr. John M. Rottman taught “Pastoral Care as Dying and Rising in Christ” to students in residence at CTS and at Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan. We give thanks for this open door of ministry and for the potential for additional training and teaching in this unique context.

At the time of the writing of this report, Calvin Theological Seminary had declared openings and was seeking persons to fill the positions of dean of students/international advisor, director of mentored ministries, and professor of missiology. At the time of synod, additional information will be provided regarding the progress of these searches.

The board of CTS is grateful for strong enrollment numbers this past year, with 83 new students, including 36 M.Div. students. (This number does not include 25 new EPMC students.)

In addition, we are grateful for partnerships with congregations and pastors in the training of our students. Eleven of our 18 Mentored Ministries Group leaders this year are area pastors: Rev. Michael F. Abma, Rev. Daniel

R. Ackerman, Rev. Ruth Boven, Rev. Erika Dekker, Rev. Lynn Barger Elliott, Rev. Donald J. Klop, Rev. Daniel B. Mouw, Rev. William J. Renkema, Rev. David A. Struyk, Rev. Elizabeth A. VanderHaagen, and Rev. Gilbert Varela. (Seven of our Mentored Ministries Group leaders are faculty members at CTS.) In addition, all M.Div. and M.A. students have a vocational mentor—another close tie with congregations and ministry leaders.

The January 2012 interim included trips to Honduras for a J-term course led by Dr. Mariano Avila and titled “A Biblical Perspective on Shalom and Its Meaning for Contemporary Holistic Ministry,” and to Granite Springs, California, for a J-term course led by Rev. Kevin J. Adams and titled “Gospel Preaching in a Mission Context.” In addition, Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima led a biblical study tour of Turkey and Greece in January 2012 and an early spring tour focusing on Paul’s missionary journeys in Greece.

The board is grateful to pastors and others for recommending great students for Facing Your Future. This past summer 35 high school students experienced theological education at CTS and ministry in Austin, Texas; Tualatin, Oregon; and Toronto, Ontario.

In 2011 congregations collected special offerings of over \$101,000 to support Facing Your Future and the Ministry Incentive Plan (a revolving student loan fund). Praise the Lord!

The Center for Excellence in Preaching (CEP) website continues to be a key and growing resource for thousands of pastors who visit the site regularly to help them plan sermon series, find preaching ideas for specific texts and topics, listen to audio/podcast sermons, and read the shared wisdom from fellow pastors who contribute to the website, located at www.calvin-seminary.edu.

V. Students 2011-2012

The composition of the seminary’s student body indicates a growing national and ethnic diversity. The following statistics suggest the impact the seminary is having beyond the Christian Reformed Church:

Christian Reformed students: 157

Non-Christian Reformed students: 153

International students (other than Canadian): 93

Programs:

M.Div.: 130

M.A.: 26

M.T.S.: 13

Th.M.: 53

Ph.D.: 37

* EPMC: 25

Male students: 253

Female students: 57

* Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy

VI. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Paul R. De Vries, chair, and Rev. Julius T. Medenblik, president, when seminary matters are presented.

B. That synod by way of the ballot ratify the election and reelection of trustees from the slates of nominees presented.

C. That Synod 2012 acknowledge with gratitude to God the years of faithful service of Rev. Richard E. Sytsma, and take note that the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees has conferred upon him the title of Dean of Students, emeritus, effective upon completion of his tenure as dean of students/international student advisor.

D. That synod approve two offerings for Calvin Theological Seminary (the Facing Your Future program and Distance Education).

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees
Susan Keesen, secretary

I. Introduction

A. *Our mandate*

Home Missions shall give leadership to the CRC in its task of bringing the gospel to the people of Canada and the United States, drawing them into fellowship with Christ and his church. This mandate has these aspects:

1. Encourage and assist churches, classes, and regions in the work of developing and sustaining missional churches.
2. Initiate, support, and guide church planting and development in cooperation with local churches, classes, and regions.
3. Initiate, support, and guide educational ministries in cooperation with local churches and classes.

(Home Missions Order, Article 2; June 2, 2008)

B. *Our mission and core values*

Our mission is to transform individuals and communities by catalyzing and cultivating gospel movements.

The core values of Christian Reformed Home Missions are

- *Missional focus*: Giving priority to gospel practices that measurably impact communities.
- *Collaborative leadership*: Assuming a posture of mentorship that walks alongside partners to coach, encourage, and develop.
- *Intentional reconciliation*: Working for diversity, justice, and unity.
- *Kingdom-building partnerships*: Forming bridges among local, regional, interagency, and ecumenical partners.
- *Expectant prayer*: Discerning God's leading in all our activities.
- *Intergenerational engagement*: Employing particularly next-generation leadership and learning from the *edges* of ministry.

C. *Defining our reality, listening to God*

1. A North American crisis

We are living in a time of post-Christian, secular culture in North America. Many churches and congregational leaders are dealing with deep anxiety, confusion, and fear of an uncertain future due to steady decline and slow growth. Younger generations are leaving the church. Added to that are great forces of change, such as globalization, rapid technological change, postmodernism, and a loss of confidence in primary social structures.

It's a new world, where our traditional ways of being and doing church beg some hard questions about our identity. In short, it's a time of great crisis.

2. Abundant opportunities

But this time of crisis also brings great opportunities. The CRC has been blessed richly with so many "buried treasures" that could be offered as gifts of Christ to both the wider body of Christ and the hurting world. Our congregations are filled with people deeply dedicated and devoted to the causes of Christ's kingdom. The resources of people, finance, talents,

knowledge, and practices through institutions, mission agencies, and ministries abound.

3. Asking the right questions

What is God up to in the neighborhoods where God has placed our 1,084 congregations? These are the places God has sent us by his sovereign and providential will. If we believe that with all of our heart, each congregation must ask who they are and what they are called by God to do in these local communities.

Home Missions has a potential to become an encouraging voice and presence to speak the truth in love by *catalyzing and cultivating* an environment where people hear and follow the Spirit of Christ, who is always on the move into the world of the lost, the least, and the last.

The core issues for CRHM for the next chapter of our journey are questions such as *How can we become a mission agency of godly leaders that discern God's will for our churches and God's people?* The issue of discernment is of priority because at the end of the day it is not about what we want, but what God wants and wills.

God has provided the CRC and Home Missions with many gifted leaders and resources. In this wonderful family of God, with a rich heritage of Reformed, Dutch, pietistic traditions, increasingly becoming multiethnic, we have an incredible opportunity to be Christ's light and dying seed for the sake of the glorious gospel and for the hurting world. If we can learn and relearn to become a prophetic voice for God's mission in the world (mission conscience), serve with a humble servant attitude (a posture of coming alongside), and lead with bold confidence (mission catalyst), we can become useful (mission resource) for what God might want to accomplish in and through the CRC in such a time as this.

4. Keeping our mission front and center

Moving ahead and leaning on God, Home Missions will continue to keep its mission front and center: "CRHM exists to transform individuals and communities by catalyzing and cultivating gospel movements." We are investing our energy into pastoral leaders of congregations for the purpose of cultivating an environment where missional imagination can be released so that people discover for themselves the pathway to participate in God's mission for North America, right from their neighborhood.

Home Missions will continue to focus on three main strategic priorities: multiply new churches and campus ministries, cultivate diverse missional leaders, and help churches discover their place in God's mission.

As we move into implementing these priorities, we aim to focus on three of our six core values for the next phase of the execution strategy: expectant prayer, missional focus, and collaborative leadership.

a. Strategic goals – expectant prayer

- Cultivate a corporate culture of prayer and spiritual discernment
- Catalyze grassroots prayer movement
- Model spiritual disciplines as a means toward forming a missional order

- b. Strategic goals – missional focus
 - Cultivate mission-shaped imagination
 - Catalyze grassroots gospel movements
 - Launch missional projects
- c. Strategic goals – collaborative leadership
 - Cultivate diverse missional leaders
 - Collaborate with CRC agencies, the RCA, and other networks and ministries

II. Ministries of Christian Reformed Home Missions

A. *A new ministry multiplication*

1. Church planting and development

The Home Missions Binational Church Planting Development and Leadership Team offers visioning, resourcing, and connecting to local churches, classes, and regions to establish and develop church planting movements. We come alongside churches and classes as a partner in establishing a church planting movement culture.

Home Missions serves as a catalyst to assist local churches to **plant 300 new churches and 10 campus ministries** in North America in the next 10 years. These churches, ranging from rural to suburban to urban locations, often include multiethnic settings and cross socioeconomic lines.

As we seek to help start these new ministries in partnership with regions, churches, and other agencies and denominations like the RCA, we are engaged in

- development of and coaching for clusters.
- identifying, assessing, coaching, and encouraging diverse missional leaders.
- spiritual empowerment for the mission.
- maintaining an apostolic edge.
- partnering in transformational networks, clusters, and Leadership Development Networks.
- increased collaboration with the Reformed Church in America.

Since February 2011 the CRC has collaborated with the Reformed Church in America on the Church Multiplication Initiative, supported by a generous grant from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation. Building on the gifts and strengths of both denominations, the Church Multiplication Initiative has a goal of expanding the Reformed witness in North America through new church starts and existing church renewal, new mission initiatives, leadership development, and an overall focus on God's mission. This vision is currently taking place through four Kingdom Enterprise Zones—located in Wyoming, Michigan; Sacramento-San Francisco, California; Tucson-Phoenix, Arizona; and Florida. Each of the zones has brought its own flavor of ministry. There is also joint funding on the ground, and exploration for added support for these initiatives is taking place. For a full report on the Church Multiplication Initiative, please see Appendix to this report.

2. Campus Ministry

- a. Denominational campus ministries are placed at the gateways of leadership in our culture. They call college students, our future leaders, to consider God's mission in their pursuits and to seek the nurture of God's church.

The Christian Reformed Church is involved in campus ministry on campuses in Canada and the United States. As of January 2012, thirty-four campus ministries receive financial and other support. They are

Areopagus (Iowa State)	University of California-Berkeley
Brock University	University of Guelph
Chicago State University (Black)	University of Illinois
Campus Directions	University of Iowa
Dalhousie University	University of Michigan
Fanshawe College	University of New Mexico
Ferris State University	University of Northern British Columbia
Grand Valley State University	University of British Columbia (Okanagan)
Iowa State University (Korean)	University of Toronto
Kwantlen Polytechnic University (BC)	University of Washington
Loyola University (Chicago)	University of Waterloo
McMaster University	University of Western Ontario
Michigan State University	University of Wisconsin
Stony Brook Campus Ministry	Western Michigan University
Queen's University	Wilfred Laurier University
University of Alberta	William Paterson University
University of Calgary	York University

Campus ministry foundational documents, a current list of campus ministry locations, and a list of the personnel serving in those locations can be found at www.crcna.org/pages/crhm_campusministry.cfm.

Typical campus ministry activities include Bible studies; worship and/or teaching events; film, book, and other small group discussions; Eucharist; social activities; leadership formation; special lectures and off-campus retreats; and student worship services.

Campus ministries are not only given financial support; they are also resourced through visioning, coaching, and leadership from Home Missions.

- b. Educational mission leadership

With the support of the Kenneth and Jean Baker Emerging Leaders Scholarship Fund, Home Missions is able to provide the Emerging Leaders program, designed to develop future leaders. This year, thirteen student leaders received part-time funding to assist campus pastors in leadership and other activities for a campus ministry.

Home Missions also works closely with the Christian Reformed Campus Ministry Association to offer annual campus ministry conferences, regional gatherings, and other events.

- c. Educational mission support for Red Mesa schools

Home Missions assists the Red Mesa Christian Schools Association. The association fosters mutually beneficial programs of support (internal and external staff development and donor development) for all of the Red Mesa schools.

B. Ministry to and with the local church: Home Missions' regional and ethnic teams

Every day, Home Missions' regional teams and ethnic leaders are making a positive impact on thousands of people and many churches. But God is sometimes at work in ways not seen, as in the phone calls and coffee cup conversations regional leaders have with pastors and ministry leaders who need a timely shot of encouragement, fresh direction, or someone to pray with.

Through Home Missions' seven regional teams, the regional leaders, along with classis leaders and ministry partners, come alongside pastors and other leaders to talk through and pray through healthy ministry ideas that prompt new ways to bring the gospel into their communities.

The current Home Missions regional leaders are

- Mr. Drew Angus, Eastern U.S.
- Rev. Ben Becksvoort, Great Lakes
- Rev. Martin Contant, Western Canada
- Rev. Jerry Holleman, West Central U.S.
- Rev. Peter Kelder, Central U.S.
- Mr. Arlan VandenBos, interim director, West Coast
- Rev. Adrian Van Giessen, Eastern Canada

Recognizing the vastly expanding cultural realities across North America, the Home Missions Ethnic Ministry Council reflects Home Missions' intentionality to work interculturally with various groups of people so that the whole gospel comes to all people in all contexts. Home Missions' four ethnic leaders and advisers provide valuable leadership in championing the need to integrate ethnic ministries in regions and classes. They also have a lead voice in deploying new ethnic leaders, as well as authorizing funding for new ethnic ministries. The current Home Missions ethnic leaders are Rev. Stanley Jim, Native American Ministries; Rev. Robert Price, Black Ministries; Rev. Javier Torres, Hispanic Ministries adviser; and Rev. Tong Park, Korean Ministries.

Specialists on the regional teams give leadership to small group development, spiritual formation and prayer, and leadership development. Capacity to serve the churches and classes of the regions has increased significantly as regional leaders and teams experience the synergy of teamwork.

Home Missions' regional leaders and goal specialists work closely with existing Christian Reformed congregations and classes who want to discover their place in God's mission, to grow new disciples, and to grow leaders and start new churches. To do that, Home Missions

- develops a menu of resources to assess churches and leaders.
- coaches congregations and leaders.
- brings leaders together in missional clusters and peer learning groups.
- provides input on healthy expansion.
- grows disciples through small groups and missional communities.

Our goal is to see **300 churches in North America** go through the important process of self-assessment to discern their place in God's local and global mission in the next 10 years.

C. *Clusters*

A key strategy is our development of *clusters*—local groups of ministry leaders intentionally connecting with each other for the growth of the mission. Usually based in geographic regions, clusters are environments in which ministries and leaders gather to live and work out the gospel’s mission calling in their context. Frequently, often monthly, pastors and leaders in each cluster meet together to pray, to support each other, and to talk about ways to share resources that will make a joint impact on their communities.

There are currently twelve active clusters throughout North America, with others in various stages of formation.

The chart below shows how grants are allocated in Ministry Year (MY) 2012:

Church planting	
New churches	<u>1,103,466</u>
Subtotal	\$1,103,466
Mission-shaped churches	
Mission-shaped smaller churches	53,630
Subtotal	\$53,630
Heritage churches	
Heritage	<u>14,330</u>
Subtotal	\$14,330
Leadership	
Leadership Development Networks	48,880
Subtotal	\$48,880
Educational Mission	
New Mexico schools	150,000
Campus ministry grants	375,480
Emerging leadership initiative	<u>28,000</u>
Subtotal	\$553,480
Total grant budget amount	\$1,773,786

D. *Home Missions’ collaborative efforts*

Home Missions is working closely in collaboration with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) on the Church Multiplication Initiative, an innovative church-planting movement in which people spread the gospel by meeting people where they live.

As part of the initiative, the two denominations have selected four test areas called Kingdom Enterprise Zones, where a combination of leadership, resources, and opportunity provide a laboratory of learning. The four areas are in Florida, Arizona, California, and West Michigan.

Home Missions is also engaged in a partnership with other agencies in a Global Coffee Break movement. Significant interest is being shown in various countries around the world in this method of Bible study as a key form of discipleship in their context.

Home Missions partners with Calvin Theological Seminary to support ministry internships on campuses. Calvin College partners with Home Missions’ campus ministry to cosponsor an annual academic and mission-focused lecture tour on major university campuses throughout North America.

Home Missions also partners with Calvin Theological Seminary and Kuyper College to offer an online education program to bring accredited education to mission students. Home Missions supports Dr. Gary Teja in directing this program.

Home Missions also partners with MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) International, National Coalition of Men's Ministries, the denominational Prayer Leaders Network, and the Classical Renewal Ministries Team to assist efforts in prayer, small groups, and evangelism.

In addition, Home Missions is actively partnering with CRWRC in the regional ministry teams, as well as with Christian Reformed World Missions in communications and fundraising efforts in North America.

E. Stories to share

1. New churches – Eighth Street Community Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The corner of 8th Street and Butler was a dark place for Anthony, a Philadelphia man in his mid sixties. It is the place where the former drug addict spent many years dealing drugs—"the drug capital of the world," he calls it. But God's light also fills that corner. Nearby is Eighth Street Community Church, a Home Missions-supported ministry where Anthony met Jesus. Now Anthony prays every day. "I'm blessed to wake up every morning," he says. "God is truly good."

2. Diverse missional leaders – Richmond, British Columbia

There's a reason Sam Lee is so passionate about reaching young people with the gospel. "I came to faith when I was a student at Dalhousie University," he says. "Just like it was for me, university is a time when most students ask a lot of big questions about life, about God."

Lee now leads a new part-time Home Missions-supported campus ministry at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Richmond, B.C. The campus ministry started when Sam was leading a small group for young people at The Tapestry, a Richmond church plant started with help from Home Missions.

3. Existing churches – Napa, California

Several years ago, things looked bleak for Valley Community CRC, located in northern California's affluent Napa Valley community. Membership had dwindled, and the church considered shutting its doors. However, the church has been reborn and restarted with help from Home Missions. The renewed congregation is now growing and offers Bible studies, a pain support group, a 20-something group, and a community garden. "This church is a miracle," says pastor Dave Buurma. "But if we really want to see God work in a huge way, we need people to pray for this ministry."

F. CRC evangelizing growth

Numerical growth is one measure of mission effectiveness. By God's grace, the Christian Reformed Church added 3,036 persons through evangelism in 2011.

The reported membership of the Christian Reformed Church totals 251,727 (*Yearbook 2012*, p. 147), compared to 255,706 last year, despite the fact that member additions (10,419 persons) were 1,825 more than reported

member decline (8,594 persons). Factors other than members added or lost also affect the total membership number. For example, not all congregations report their membership numbers.

G. *New ministry development*

The CRC goal of increasing our capacity to plant churches (currently twenty-five a year) is in response to the potential harvest in North America. These new churches need our prayers of intercession—prayers that the Lord would send laborers to the harvest field. From a denominational perspective, ten to twenty new churches are needed annually to offset the loss created by congregational merges, closures, and departures. From a kingdom perspective, adding twenty to thirty new churches annually would aid in engaging the massive challenge to reach the more than 200 million unchurched and under-churched people in Canada and the United States.

In ministry year 2012, Home Missions partnered with local classes and parent churches to establish twenty-four new churches, four campus ministries, and one summer internship.

New work: Ministry year 2012

Location		Ministry	Ministry leader	Start date
Ames	IA	Areopagus Campus Ministry	Justin Struik	2011
Ann Arbor	MI	Grace Reformed Residency	Ryan Wallace	2012
Austin	TX	The Springs	Richard Villarreal	2011
Bradenton	FL	The Living Well	Don Ridder	2011
Chicago	IL	Restore All Ministries	Glen McCarthy	2012
Corvallis	OR	RE:new	Josh VanTil	2011
Deerfield	IL	Love Korean Church	Paul Park	2011
Delhi	CA	Church of the Savior	Zeke Nelson	2011
Edgerton	MN	SW MN Hispanic Ministry	Aaron Gonzalez	2011
Holland	MI	Korean Church Plant	John Kim	2011
Lacey	WA	Square Inch Church	Jason DeVries	2011
Milton	ON	New Church	John Bouwers	2011
Orlando	FL	Haitian CRC	Obelto Cherubin	2011
Phoenix	AZ	Orangewood CRC Hispanic	Ramon Correa	2012
Seattle	WA	Univ. of WA Campus Ministry	Geoff VanDragt	2012
Spring	TX	New Life Residency	Eric Schlukebir	2011
Stony Brook	NY	Stony Brook Campus Ministry	Sooyoul Cha	2011
Tucson	AZ	The Gathering Place	Jimmy Hildenbrandt	2011
Watertown	SD	Hope for Life Community	Carl Van Voorst	2011
Winter Garden	FL	WestRiver Gathering	Charles Woodward	2012
Wyckoff	NJ	Restore	Jeremy Mulder	2012

III. Recruitment and training

The goal of Home Missions is to identify and train forty diverse missional leaders each year, many of whom will be ready to take point leadership in new and established churches and campus ministries. One way we are making this happen is through Leadership Development Networks (LDNs) across North America. The LDNs are in-ministry training programs of approximately three to four years in duration, available in Spanish and English.

Home Missions currently funds grants to seven LDNs in the following locations:

Ministry	Location		Leader
Pine Tree	Pittsfield	ME	Bill Johnson
Seacoast	North Hampton	NH	Brent Averill
Midwest	Sioux Falls	SD	Jim Hoogeveen
Logos	Long Beach	CA	Vacant
Puget Sound	Puget Sound	WA	Ben Katt
S. Calif. Training Program	Moreno Valley	CA	Al Breems
Sierra	Sacramento	CA	Paul VanderKlay

IV. Board matters

A. Board membership

The Board of Home Missions is mandated by synod to guide and carry out the domestic mission of the CRCNA. The board includes twelve regionally based members (matching CRCNA regions), with the primary functions of governance and strategic direction. Seven at-large board members balance expertise, gender, racial diversity, and clergy or nonclergy requirements set by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA.

Two board members are completing their first terms and are eligible for reappointment to a second three-year term: Rev. Harvey Roosma (Region 1) and Rev. John Van Sloten (Region 2).

The following slates of nominees from the respective regions were submitted to the classes for vote, and the results are being forwarded to synod for ratification of a three-year term:

Region 4

Mr. Gerald Klein-Geltink from Lucknow, Ontario, is a general contractor and has served on boards for educational institutions and on building and finance committees, has been a deacon and an elder, and has been a delegate to synod. He would be pleased to serve at the denominational level.

Ms. Beth Fellingner has served in various ministries: as an associate pastor at a new church plant in London, Ontario; as a director of youth and outreach at Oakridge Presbyterian Church; as director of Youth Alpha Canada; and as director of Family and Children's Ministries at Oakridge Presbyterian Church in London, Ontario. In 2010 she became a ministry associate in the CRC and assumed the role of lead pastor of a new church plant, Destination Church, in St. Thomas, Ontario.

Region 5

Pastor Gerry Muller is pastor of Iglesia Evangelica CRC in Sunnyside, Washington. He has a passion for evangelism and cultural diversity within the CRC.

Rev. George Den Oudsten is pastor at Gallatin Gateway CRC in Bozeman, Montana. He has an interest in missions and is very interested in serving in this area.

Region 9

Mr. Bruce Frens from Frankfort, Illinois, is a member of Orland Park CRC. He recently retired from the role of executive director of Chicago Christian Counseling Center, of which he was also the founder. He has a master's degree in counseling. Mr. Frens has served as elder in various churches and on school boards.

Mr. Bruce McMurry from Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, is a retired school administrator with a Ph.D. in educational administration. He completed the LDN program in Classis Wisconsin and recently was given a license to exhort. He is a member of Faith Community CRC and has served as an elder and a deacon and on various community boards.

B. Board officers for 2011-2012

The officers of the board of Home Missions are Mr. James Jones, president; Rev. John Van Sloten, vice president; Ms. Beth Fylstra, secretary; Mr. Harley Verbeek, treasurer; and Mr. Don Muilenburg, vice all.

C. Salary disclosure

Executive persons are being paid within the approved salary ranges.

Job level	Number of positions	Compensation quartile (Includes housing allowance)
18	1	1st
17	1	3rd
15	11	1st, 2nd, and 3rd

D. Financial gifts

Home Missions’ revenues from ministry share rose 0.7 percent (\$26,000), totaling \$3,709,000. Above-ministry-share gifts (non-estate) decreased 2.9 percent to \$1,320,000, and estate gifts experienced an increase of \$258,000 (32.3%). Conference and registration fees dropped 9.1 percent to \$211,000. A decrease in investment earnings in the amount of \$251,000 further affected our income picture. Overall, total revenue was down \$223,000 (3.8%). Fortunately, Home Missions had reserves to absorb that shortfall for the year. Home Missions is extremely thankful for the support of all ministry partners this year, including individuals and congregations, and offers thanks to God for them and their faithfulness to Home Missions

Home Missions launched a new program, MISSION:Possible, that gives donors a higher level of connectivity through Home Missions to individual ministries. For more information, visit www.crcna.org/pages/crhm_donate_2.cfm.

E. Personnel

Rev. Moses Chung began serving as director of Christian Reformed Home Missions in April 2011. He provides leadership for the agency and reports to Rev. Joel R. Boot, executive director of the CRC, as well as to the Home Missions board.

A new director of advancement, Mr. Nate Vander Stelt, also started in April 2011. Nate brings a wide range of experience and expertise in fundraising and development to this position.

Mr. Ben Van Houten continues as senior writer of Home Missions, Ms. Laura Posthumus serves as advancement liaison, and Mr. Scott Meekhof is our e-communications coordinator.

Rev. Larry Doornbos started as the new leader of the Church Planting and Development Leadership Team in May 2011.

Mr. Ben Vandezande, director of ministry teams, will retire on June 30, 2012.

F. Communications

Home Missions communicates to its many audiences (classes, congregants, different levels of donors) through numerous communications tools.

Home Missions' website (www.crhm.org) provides resources and equips churches through print and electronic publications, sharing communications and resources from regional and ethnic teams as well. Several publications, such as newsletters and fundraising letters and other materials, are sent to churches, individuals, and staff by way of email. The website is also used to convey news, prayer needs, and other information. The site is updated weekly with news stories, resources, and other information.

Worship bulletins and related material in English and Spanish are available to the churches for Easter and Reformation Day, when many churches receive an offering for Home Missions. Three *On a Mission* newsletters, a year-end brochure for donors, and other promotional materials were published. Home Missions used the "Church at Work" pages of *The Banner* to communicate monthly stories of God's mission work throughout North America. In addition, biweekly ministry stories are posted to www.crcna.org and distributed through the *CRC News* newsletter. Material for the Prayer Guide and for bulletin announcements is also provided.

Home Missions continued its close collaboration with World Missions this year, working together on two campaigns for churches. The first, "Pray to the Lord of the Harvest," was a 28-day prayer initiative in January 2012, which included daily prayer requests printed on bookmarks for all churches. The second, "Something 2 Share," is an Easter-to-Pentecost campaign that includes videos, bulletin covers, litanies, children's worship materials, and other resources.

V. Recommendations

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. James Jones, board president; and Rev. Moses Chung, Home Missions director, when matters pertaining to Home Missions are discussed.
- B. That synod by way of the ballot ratify the election of board members for a three-year term.
- C. That synod encourage all Christian Reformed churches to recognize Easter Sunday and Reformation Day Sunday as significant opportunities to receive an offering for Christian Reformed Home Missions.

Home Missions considers it both a challenge and a privilege to join in God's mission with Christian Reformed congregations, ministry agencies, and schools.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Christian Reformed Home Missions
Moses Chung, director

Appendix

Church Multiplication Initiative

I. Introduction

With a common faith, a common commitment to God's mission, and a common heritage, an increasingly collaborative vision is growing that is expanding the Reformed witness in North America. This vision is taking the gifts and strengths of two denominations, the CRC and the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and bringing them together for greater effectiveness. This vision is fueling a movement of Christ's followers who are actively engaging in making disciples and bringing God's transforming love into cities, towns, and villages throughout North America. This vision is called the *Church Multiplication Initiative*.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America: Expanding the Reformed Witness through a Collaborative and Sustainable Church Multiplication and Development Movement: CRCNA/Expanding the Reformed Witness/RCA

The Church Multiplication Initiative launched in February 2011. The first 18 months of the initiative are being generously underwritten by a grant from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation. The CRC and the RCA have also invested time, staff, and resources to make this effort successful.

II. Collaborative efforts

The Church Multiplication Initiative joins a number of collaborative efforts already in progress between the CRC and the RCA.

A. Kingdom Enterprise Zones

Imagine a place of creativity, focus on God's mission, new mission initiatives, new church starts, and renewal of existing churches. That is what a Kingdom Enterprise Zone (KEZ) is. During this first phase of the Church Multiplication Initiative there are four KEZs. Each zone has brought its own flavor of ministry.

- The Wyoming, Michigan, zone is working to build OneWyoming. Their tag line is "Collaborating with many people to build One Wyoming." The team in Wyoming is working toward this goal by gathering community leaders together to determine the best places to bring the transformative work of the gospel to that city. They are also planting both CRC and RCA churches in this city that has changed much in the past fifty years. With an emphasis on prayer and cooperation, One Wyoming is bringing hope to the city.
- The Sacramento-San Francisco, California, zone is creatively bringing together people to build the many parts of a network that transforms their communities. These parts include a faith and work initiative, a gathering to look at campus ministry, and internships to grow future leaders. Sacramento-San Francisco is also working in cooperation with City Church of San Francisco and the Newbigin House of Studies to build a reproducible church planting system for their region.

- The Tucson-Phoenix, Arizona, zone is pursuing the training and supporting of leaders. A Hispanic training center is in place that currently serves thirty students at two different locations. This zone also initiated a coaching system that is being used in other Enterprise Zones. Area CRC and RCA churches have given strong support to the Enterprise Zone and have felt a wind of revival, both in existing churches and in new churches that are being planted.
- The Florida Enterprise Zone is connecting with Calvin Theological Seminary by sponsoring Logos Training and using smart classrooms that allow a professor in Grand Rapids to teach students in Florida. One of the important parts of the Florida Enterprise Zone is the building of relationship between the CRC and the RCA. This has led to gatherings for church leadership to be with each other and learn from each other. This zone expects to plant a number of churches in the upcoming months as they join with existing churches in bringing the transforming gospel to Florida.

B. Apprentice Kingdom Enterprise Zones

The vision, work, and possibilities that have come from KEZs are being noticed by others in both the RCA and the CRC. The result is requests from other regions to be part of the Church Multiplication Initiative. The response to these requests has been the establishment of Apprentice Kingdom Enterprise Zones. These zones are given initial funding for leadership. Key leaders within the zones are also brought together to learn more about the Church Multiplication Initiative, along with its values and goals. Presently there are apprentice zones in Detroit, Michigan; Southwestern Michigan; and Whatcom County, Washington.

C. Other collaborative efforts in multiplication

The Church Multiplication Team of the RCA and the Church Planting and Development Team of the CRC are collaborating on a number of events and initiatives, including

- Thrive: A bootcamp for new church planters. Thrive prepares and builds planters to bring the transforming Reformed witness to their communities.
- Church Planter Assessment: Before a person becomes a church planter, he/she is assessed in terms of gifts, abilities, and calling. The CRC and RCA are building a joint church planter assessment process.
- Parenting Church Gatherings: These events help leaders envision churches planting churches in the healthiest possible way for new churches to begin. The CRC and RCA have sponsored joint parenting church conferences in conjunction with Movement Day in New York City and the Exponential Church Planting Conference in Orlando, Florida.

D. Church multiplication leadership

Each KEZ is led by part-time pastoral leadership. These leaders gather and work with a team to further the mission of that zone. Each zone leader has been coached by Gary Reinecke of Infocus Coaching so that their leadership can make a maximum impact.

1. The zone leaders are

- Wyoming KEZ—Rev. Randy Weener (RCA) and Rev. Tom Swieringa (CRC)
- Sacramento-San Francisco KEZ—Rev. Paul VanderKlay (CRC)
- Tucson-Phoenix KEZ—Rev. Richard Caballero (RCA) and Rev. Harry Weidenaar (CRC)
- Florida KEZ—Rev. Ben Ingebretsen (RCA) and Rev. Stan Workman (CRC)

2. Implementation team

The implementation team is responsible for the direct execution of the Kingdom Enterprise Zones pilot program and provides ongoing assessment and management of the matching grant and fund allocation process. The implementation team has met every other week since February 2011. The team has also gathered at other times to assess the work of the KEZs and to discover what is being learned through this collaborative effort to expand the Reformed witness.

The implementation team is made up of church multiplication leaders from the RCA and the CRC. It includes the Coordinator for Church Multiplication from the RCA and the Church Planting and Development Team Leader from the CRC.

3. Leadership team

This leadership team initiates strategic conversations, envisions effective strategies, and looks for ways to build collaboration between the CRC and the RCA in this multiplication effort. The leadership team also provides overall project supervision, reporting, and accountability. The leadership team includes the presidents of Calvin Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary, the heads of both denominational offices, the directors of the RCA Congregational Missions and CRC Home Missions, and the directors of development and advancement.

E. Lessons learned

As the pilot phase of the Church Multiplication Initiative draws to a close (June 30, 2012), much has been learned about working together as denominations in the area of multiplication.

- Better Together: One of the phrases heard often is that “we are better together.” The leadership teams have learned from each other in multiple areas. Both denominations have discovered the usefulness of “holding up a mirror” in order to see our strengths, weaknesses, and where we can learn from each other; to grasp creative new opportunities; and to find courage to tackle deep changes. The mirror comes in the form of the other denomination and its practices, life, and work.
- Accomplishments: When two denominations come together with the common goal of multiplication and are given freedom to pursue that goal and resources, much can be accomplished within a tight time frame.
- Joining In: When enterprise zones begin to get traction, other RCA and CRC congregations desire to join in the excitement and vision.

- Missional Excitement: As churches band together, existing churches feel the overflow of missional excitement in both zones and clusters. This missional excitement is bringing hope and renewal to existing churches. One recent gathering related to a place that is applying to be an apprentice zone brought this comment: “As the six planters shared stories, especially around the theme of discipleship, the leaders of established churches were devouring the insights and learnings—and there was so much mission awareness excitement in the room that I was almost afraid the place would spontaneously combust.”
- Kingdom Enterprise Zone Success: Factors that contributed to creating an environment for success include ease of relationship building, strong leadership, and serving with a heart for God’s mission.
- Kingdom Enterprise Zone Strength: Zones in which the two denominations had a perceived near-equal strength operated more easily. Being on an equal playing field also facilitated the discovery and embrace of complementary strengths.

F. Moving forward

The Church Multiplication Initiative continues its work to *Expand the Reformed Witness in North America*. In the coming months we will continue to collaborate in our multiplication efforts and learn from each other. At the end of the pilot phase we also hope to devote some extended time to gathering more lessons learned from this time of working together. This learning will be very valuable both for future church planting and for future collaboration between the CRC and the RCA.

The Church Multiplication Initiative teams also believe it is important for more parts of our two denominations to join in this conversation about how better to collaborate. It is our hope that the CRC Synod 2012 will open the way for this continuing dialogue and to continue the work of the Church Multiplication Initiative to *Expand the Reformed Witness in North America*.

I. Introduction

Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) supports and unites a diverse family of Christian Reformed congregations in international missions to witness globally to the good news of God's kingdom. We encourage Christian Reformed participation in Spirit-led mission with churches and other organizations around the world so that together we can proclaim the gospel to more and more people who have not heard it, healthy churches can emerge, and the kingdom of God will advance.

II. Ministries of Christian Reformed World Missions

A. Ministry that by God's grace and power is transforming lives and communities worldwide

Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) has more than 200 missionaries serving in over 20 countries, and through partnerships our work extends to more than 40 countries. We focus our efforts around the world on

- multiplying believers and churches
- equipping and connecting leaders
- reaching teachers and students with a biblical worldview
- strengthening churches and organizations

We give thanks for what the Lord has accomplished through World Missions missionaries and partners in the past year and look forward to what he will bring about in the coming year. Following are some highlights:

- The Spirit has moved more than 11,500 people to commit their lives to Christ.
- Over 160 new worshiping communities were established.
- Over 2,000 people participated in CRWM-related formal pastoral and theological training.
- Over 16,200 people participated in CRWM-related non-formal leader development programs.
- Thirteen new missionaries were appointed by CRWM and are serving in countries that include Costa Rica, Honduras, Lithuania, Nicaragua, Nigeria, and Uganda.
- Seventy-three teachers and administrators served in international schools through World Missions.
- One hundred and sixty-one volunteers served through CRWM in various countries.

B. Ministry to and with local congregations

CRWM's Missions Education and Engagement Team helps Christian Reformed congregations fulfill the Great Commission. Through resources, educational events, and consultation, the team assists local church leaders in stimulating a deeper vision for and involvement in missions. A description of itsr services and many of the resources are available on the website: crwm.org/meet. Through this process emerge churches that are focused, intentional, and excited about their response to God's plan for the world and about the work of the church.

C. Collaborative efforts

CRWM works with other ministries of the Christian Reformed Church to extend and expand the impact of our ministries beyond the sum of our individual efforts. A few examples of such efforts include

- working with Christian Reformed Home Missions, Faith Alive Christian Resources, and Back to God Ministries International on a global expansion of the long-standing Coffee Break ministry of Home Missions and Faith Alive.
- working with the Christian Reformed Church in Haiti and other partners as Sous Espwa (Source of Hope); with CRWRC and Back to God Ministries International in congregational, Christian day school, and community ministries; and following up on responses to the French-language radio broadcasting of Back to God Ministries International.
- partnering with Calvin College in Calvin's program in China.
- formation of a joint leadership team with Christian Reformed Home Missions to nurture a joint vision and coordinated strategy with a shared global missions focus.

Strengthening seminaries and other formal theological schools remains a high priority for CRWM. To meet the need of training this very large group of people, CRWM participates in Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLTI). Working with TLTI enables us to nurture biblically trained leaders to serve new believers and their congregations. This sort of collaboration results in more effective and longer lasting ministry.

D. Recognition of service

Each year, World Missions recognizes missionary employees and office staff who are celebrating significant anniversaries of service. In December 2011, World Missions honored the following for their years of service to the Lord through World Missions.

Years of service	Name	Location
5 years	Philip & Stephanie Beck	Nigeria Mwaya & Munyiva Wa Kitavi Pastorate, East & South Africa Regional Director
10 years	Lorraine Woodward	Adm. Asst., CRWM Office-Grand Rapids
15 years	Steven & Kimberley Holtrop	Nicaragua
	Trish DeJong	Missions Resource Consultant, CRWM Office-Canada
20 years	Patricia Fisher	Travel Coordinator, CRWM Office-Grand Rapids
30 years	Scott & Marcia Geurink	Mexico
	Daniel & Jeananne Kuiper	Pastorate, Mexico

E. Sharing stories

The following stories convey some of the ways in which God has used his servants over the past year.

1. Multiplying believers and churches

a. Africa: God gathers a family of believers—West Africa

PT, a Fulani man living in West Africa, once lived to drink. But his life changed dramatically several years ago when he was introduced to the truth of Jesus through dreams and visions. PT committed to a new way of life—a life focused on following Jesus.

Since he became a believer, PT has prayed for his family members to make the same decision. He has taken them to church and led special family worship times, hoping they would be drawn to the One he served. In June, PT's wife and two young children were baptized as new believers.

"It's been good to see Jesus change her over the last few years from a wayward wife, with more loyalty to her own mother and family than to her husband, into a more mature young woman who pitches in to the marriage and Christian family that is developing in their home-
stead," says a CRWM missionary living in the area. "We asked people to pray to bring us families so we wouldn't just have a church of individuals plucked out of their social fabric. The baptism of PT's wife and their children are thrilling answers to those prayers."

Several of PT's other family members—his mother, uncle, and two sons through a previous marriage—have also become believers or seem close to doing so. Praise God for his transforming hand at work in their lives.

b. Asia: Never too elderly—Japan

Masasui Sakai, an 88-year-old Japanese man, went to church with his mother as a child and attended Sunday school. His mother was a faithful Christian and hoped her son might follow along the same path.

As the years passed and pressure intensified to worship the Japanese emperor, Masasui found it difficult to express and hold on to his faith. He married a miko, a virgin consecrated to the gods to serve at Shinto shrines, and fell away from the church for over fifty years.

Then, several years ago, Masasui started coming to the Misato Reformed Church in Japan. He put his trust in Christ and began being mentored in his faith by the church's pastor. "After he came back to church, Masasui's lifestyle changed and he was filled with joy all the time," say Ken and Jeannie Lee, missionaries serving with Christian Reformed World Missions in Japan.

On June 19, Masasui was baptized as a believer and a new member of God's family. For Ken Lee, Masasui's baptism was a reminder that God "never forgets about his chosen ones."

Masasui's wife has seen the changes in her husband. Now she's asking her own questions about Jesus. Pray for her eyes to be opened to the truth of the gospel.

2. Equipping and connecting leaders

a. East Africa: Timothy Leadership Training spurs deeper discipleship—Zambia

One December Sunday, Pastor Moyo's son came home from Sunday school and shared with his father how Jesus had entered his heart. Pastor Moyo rejoiced at what he heard. His son had made the most important decision of his life, and the training he was doing with Sunday school teachers was making a visible impact.

Pastor Moyo is a youth coordinator at Praise Congregation of the Reformed Church of Zambia. But he's also a participant in Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) workshops to enhance his leadership skills.

As part of his own TLT training, Pastor Moyo committed to using what he learned by teaching the material to others.

He led 65 Sunday school teachers through the TLT module on pastoral care. The teachers eagerly studied Bible passages and listened and discussed with each other how to show God's love to the children under their care. They realized that, as the church members who are often closest to children, they have a unique opportunity and responsibility to witness to children and give them their time and interest. Now congregations in the Reformed Church of Zambia and churches in other denominations are asking for similar training. In response, Pastor Moyo plans to train 200 teachers this year.

"TLT was an eye opener and gave me a new approach to ministry," says Pastor Moyo. "It has given me the opportunity to share ideas and has built my capacity as a leader to do effective ministry."

b. Latin America: Living beyond oneself—Nicaragua

"The Nehemiah Center has been investing in the lives of leaders, pastors, business people, and teachers for years," says Steve Holtrop, a CRWM missionary in Nicaragua. Now leaders who were once mentored themselves are mentoring others.

Trinidad, a psychologist in Leon, Nicaragua, used to be reluctant to get involved in her community. Her perspective changed as she started coming to the Nehemiah Center's training sessions on domestic violence prevention, HIV and AIDS, urban and rural community development, and more. She realized she needed to share what she knew with others.

Today Trinidad is the "go-to-person" for people in her neighborhood who are in trouble. She counsels people for free, helping suicidal youth, women who are abused in their homes, and couples seeking marriage counseling. She trains women and youth on HIV and AIDS prevention and connects people to available services and help. She has also begun a cell group for street youth in her neighborhood.

"While she has a lot of skills," says Steve, "it seems her biggest skill is her willingness and ability to connect with people on a deep level."

Now others are following Trinidad's example in caring for others. Several youth recently collected clothes and food to deliver to an area poorer than their own. Step by step, people are seeing and doing what they can to serve others.

3. Strengthening churches and organizations

a. Asia: A heart for the Bangladeshi church—Bangladesh

Champa Barmon is a librarian at the College of Christian Theology Bangladesh (CCTB). She's the second eldest of six children and comes from northwest Bangladesh. Her father and his family converted to Christianity from Hinduism in the late 1970s, just before Champa was born. Since her father, who became a pastor, recently died, Champa's income is crucial to supporting her mother and two younger siblings. Champa is among a growing number of women who work outside the home in Bangladesh.

After finishing high school, Champa found a job and continued with her schooling to get a master's degree in social sciences. She also studied diploma level courses through CCTB's Theological Education by Extension (TEE) program. During her TEE studies, she came to the CCTB campus several times for seminars and liked what she experienced. "I saw that it was a good place for training Christian leaders and felt that I wanted to work there," she says.

Champa doesn't work at CCTB just for the money. She has a heart for training Christian leaders in the church. Champa wants to see Bangladeshi Christians take a greater role in training their youth, teaching others about Jesus, and supporting each other.

"Someone needs to take responsibility [to keep the church alive]," Champa says. She believes in the potential of local leaders and sees the need for better training. She is saddened when she goes home and sees "many churches without pastors and people turning back to the Hindu religion," she says.

"When foreigners were working [with us], it was good—it was a happy community and there were many seminars and training workshops to help people understand the Bible and follow Jesus." But the church doesn't have enough leaders to continue the training. "We cannot depend only on the foreigner," says Champa, "but need to be self-supported in our faith and church growth."

Though she is still not certain how God is going to use her, Champa wants to help develop leaders for the church. That is why she is a great asset to CCTB. Champa not only does well at her job but also seeks ways to be involved outside of the library. Last year she participated in a Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) module. This year she is participating in the second TLT module, along with CCTB bachelor of theology students. She is also facilitating a module for the wives of bachelor of theology students who live on campus.

Champa is meticulous and energetic about her job. But more than that, she has caught the vision of CCTB to "equip servant leaders and scholar saints" for the church in Bangladesh.

b. Europe: Ukraine Church blooms from the inside out—Ukraine

George de Vuyst began leading Ukraine's first Timothy Leadership Training (TLT) group over a year ago as part of his own TLT action plan. He started with nine people from the Mukachevo Christian Reformed Church, but the training has since touched the entire congregation of 50.

During the first TLT workshop, the nine TLT participants focused on pastoral care and committed to making regular visits. They visited church members, regular attendees, former members, and casual attendees who had stopped attending church. People began feeling more connected to the church. Several people who had faded away from the church or had casually attended began coming back. Soon church membership had risen over 30 percent.

Similar church-wide changes happened after the group studied TLT's Christian Stewardship material. People realized they had much to offer the church. They began giving of what they had—time, money,

and/or talents. But the most telling change is what has happened within the church members.

"We've witnessed a deeper sense of responsibility and commitment by church members," says George. The church has had land for a building for over a year, but no funds to build a church. As the church members learned about stewardship, they realized they could raise funds for a building by being good stewards of what God had given them. "With the average wage at \$200 a month, the prospect of ever building a church on their own seems impossible. Nevertheless, church members have recognized their responsibility to do whatever they can."

One couple has offered the church a quarter acre of land to grow and sell potatoes. Every week, four to six people go out in the evenings to weed the potato field. Another member has started making and selling greeting cards to raise funds for the church. Then there's the group of women who meet weekly to make beaded jewelry to sell.

The church has also created a community garden on its unused church property. The garden has sparked richer fellowship within the church. As they tend the vegetables together, people learn more about each other. Meanwhile, because the members can now buy vegetables at a lower cost, they have more funds to support other causes.

"We hope to report on a great [potato] crop and lots of funds raised, but already relationships are being deepened," says George. "People are taking pride in their work for God [and] using the gifts of land that he has provided—a great 'crop' already."

4. Reaching teachers and students with a biblical worldview

a. Latin America: A new outlook on life—Costa Rica

Students at UNELA (the Evangelical University of the Americas, as it's known in English), are capturing what it means to live for Christ. Through classes centered on a biblical worldview, students are discovering how their faith intertwines with all that they do.

Tom Soerens is a CRWM missionary who teaches at UNELA. From May through August 2011, Tom taught a course on Christian worldview and philosophy to master's level students specializing in missions or family counseling.

"One of my students is a pastoral leader in a local megachurch who is now, in a sense, reliving past college days as a Christian in a secular university," says Tom. "Back then as a young Christian woman she stood valiantly for the faith, but with few resources for challenging the humanistic philosophy from which the attacks were coming. This course helps her to see now the depth of Christian thinking that can be brought to bear on philosophers who acknowledge no god."

One of Tom's other students is a Christian professor working in a local secular university. He is also a member of a small Christian political party in Costa Rica. As such, the student has a great interest in how faith is worked out in the political scene. He has chosen to write a special paper that "will involve a critique of contemporary political thought so that a new take on politics from within a Christian

worldview can be set over against the prevailing vision for political life in Costa Rica,” Tom explains.

Tom’s students have caught the vision for a biblical worldview. Now they’re casting it out so that others will see life through similar lenses.

b. West Africa: Pursuing Christ-centered learning—Nigeria

Olusola Bankole, an administrator for a private school in Nigeria, is deeply passionate about Christian education.

“From every workshop she attends and every conversation I have with her, she is able to articulate something that she has learned and apply it in her school,” says Sheila Dykstra, Christian Reformed World Missions’ education specialist in West Africa.

Olusola recently learned that students are God’s imagebearers and that teachers need to consciously deal with them in ways that build them up. As she thought about it some more, she realized that she needed to show the same respect to her staff.

She used to publicly address problems with her staff members in meetings. But after the training, she and the school’s principal decided they needed to meet one-on-one with teachers to discuss problems that arose.

“If I am to expect my teachers to treat their students as imagebearers of God, then I need to model this myself in how I deal with them,” Olusola says.

The new strategy has served the staff well. The teachers have seen that they are appreciated and respected. Now they can in turn show the same caring attitude to their students.

Training administrators and teachers on teaching from a Christian perspective is not without challenges. But with God’s prompting, teachers like Olusola are discovering and practicing what it means to offer a truly Christ-centered education.

III. Placement, learning, and care

A. *Placement*

CRWM’s Placement, Learning, and Care (PLC) department connects members of the CRC with mission opportunities around the world. Currently these opportunities include career appointments, short-term assignments, and positions with partner organizations. Partner missionaries are appointed for one year at a time and usually serve in teaching positions.

Through our partnership with Calvin Theological Seminary we provide cross-cultural internships for several seminary students each summer. These internships place seminarians alongside our career missionaries and their national ministry partners and provide a valuable learning experience to students with an interest in missions.

We also work with Youth Unlimited (YU) to engage the youth of the CRC in missions. We participate in YU’s biennial convention for high school students, and we work together to promote opportunities for young people.

B. *Learning*

The orientation program for our missionaries has been revamped. To better serve career missionaries, we outsource part of their training to organizations that specialize in missionary orientation and debriefing. This provides a more professional and comprehensive orientation that better meets the needs of our career missionaries.

CRWM-specific orientation in Grand Rapids for career, volunteer, and partner missionaries has also been updated, with a focus on CRWM-specific issues, as well as orienting new missionaries to the role of CRWM personnel. Session topics include conflict management, spiritual self-care, relationship issues, support-raising and finance, technology and communication, diversity and anti-racism, and other topics relevant to cross-cultural living.

In November 2011, CRWM hired Ms. Lisa Sochacki of ServiceLink as full-time volunteer coordinator. For the past two years CRWM has worked closely with ServiceLink in recruitment, placement, and orientation of all World Missions volunteers. ServiceLink will still be involved in the areas of promotion and recruitment, but Ms. Sochacki will provide oversight for all the logistics of volunteer management.

C. *Care*

The care component of PLC's ministry includes logistical assistance (travel, visas, car rentals, and many other practical services), as well as pastoral and medical consultancy and support. CRWM maintains eight duplex units in Grand Rapids that are made available to missionaries on home service and to other visitors on the basis of availability. Pastoral and medical services are provided by retired volunteers with expertise in these areas.

IV. Board matters

A. *CRWM new board nominations*

Region 1

Ms. *Jenny Siebring-deGroot* has been a member of Willoughby CRC, Langley, British Columbia, for many years. She has a bachelor of arts degree in education from Dordt College and currently works as assistant principal/teacher librarian at Langley Christian Elementary School. Ms. Siebring-deGroot has been a local *Banner* correspondent for the past six years. She and her husband have also been significantly involved in the local Classes B.C. North-East and B.C. South-West and in the Sierra Leone initiative. They have taught overseas in Sierra Leone twice and in South Africa twice, one of those times for a six-month period. Ms. Siebring-deGroot has been involved in visual arts ministry, children's ministry, and a teen outreach ministry in her home church. She serves on a community film board and on numerous school committees.

Ms. *Joanne Kleywegt* is a member of Alberni Valley CRC, Port Alberni, British Columbia, and has served as a Sunday school teacher, youth group president/secretary, GEMS coordinator, small group and Coffee Break leader, youth support team assistant (working with the youth leader), and elder. As a registered nurse with a CNA psychiatric nurse specialty—at Vancouver Island Health Authority—she works as a nurse at Mental Health and Addictions Services and is a B.C. Nurses Union steward. Currently Ms. Kleywegt is worship committee chair and a music team leader. She has had experience

as a Young Calvinist Federation board member (Vancouver Island League), volunteer service coordinator, and B.C. Leadership Development Network graduate. Ms. Kleywegt has a passion for working closely with people and has felt the call to participate in a vision/mission trip to Guatemala City in March 2012. The goal of this trip is to learn more about missions and how one can consider working in this area locally.

Region 5

Ms. Kathy Eekhoff is a member of Manhattan CRC, Montana, and a graduate of Dordt College with a bachelor of arts degree in education. She has served on the Faith Alive Christian Resources board, is currently serving on the Dordt College Alumni Board, and serves on many church and Christian school committees. As her church's administrative assistant, she works closely with the council and the administration. Currently Ms. Eekhoff also serves as a substitute teacher, and she is the office manager and co-owner of Eagle Exteriors, a construction and design business. She has served with Disaster Response Services in connection with the Cambodian Church in Salt Lake City, Utah, and she recently served as a SERVE team leader in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Rev. Bomsu Kim is a pastor at Seattle Dream Church, an emerging church in Mill Creek, Washington. Besides being a full-time pastor, he reaches out to foreign students through his English education company. He is also a Coffee Break Korean leadership trainer. Rev. Kim was born in Korea and moved to the United States in 2000. He sees his family as tent-making missionaries in Seattle, Washington. Rev. Kim has a heart for outreach and knowledge of World Missions, particularly as it relates to Korea.

Region 8

Ms. Dee Kramer is a member of Calvary CRC in Orange City, Iowa. She has had a lifelong interest in CR World Missions and is keenly interested in its mission. Ms. Kramer is a retired library media specialist who recently authored two children's books highlighting global issues and extreme poverty. She gives school and library book talks. Ms. Kramer has served on the Bible League Thrift Store board, on the Orange City Christian School Respect Policy Committee, and on library and church committees.

Rev. Roger W. Sparks is a pastor at Luverne CRC, Luverne, Minnesota. He has a bachelor of arts degree from Dordt College and a master of divinity degree from Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He previously served on the Christian Reformed World Missions board from 2000 to 2006 as an alternate for Region 8. Rev. Sparks has also served on the Board of Trustees of Mid-America Reformed Seminary and the Board of R.I.T.E, which maintains a seminary in Ukraine. Currently he serves on the classical ministerial leadership team and has a firsthand acquaintance with The Luke Society, as two of its leaders attend his church. Rev. Sparks has served pastorates in Medicine Hat, Alberta, and Rock Valley, Iowa. He has chaired council/consistory meetings for twenty-five years. He is deeply committed to promoting missions and keeping his church informed about missions, and he has been engaged in short-term missions in Ukraine and in Cary, Mississippi.

Region 10

Rev. John C. Hutt is a member of Providence CRC, Holland, Michigan, and is a minister of the Word. Currently he does pastoral care and counseling at

Providence CRC. He served as a missionary in Argentina for eleven years and then pastored the Spanish CRC in Holland, Michigan, for another sixteen years. He has a heart for missions and wants to see people’s lives changed by the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Rev. Hutt has served several terms on the CRWM board in the past. He has served on the classical mission committee, as well as on the Holland Human Relations Committee. Currently Rev. Hutt serves on the Mission Focused Team of Classis Holland. As a pastor, he has served on council either as chair or as an ex-officio member.

Rev. Ronald J. Meyer is a pastor at Lamont CRC, Lamont, Michigan. He is currently serving as stated clerk of Classis Zeeland (with thirteen years in this position), as a member of the classical interim team and the classical finance committee, and as president of the Lamont Civic Association. Rev. Meyer has previously served on the Reformed Bible College board, the student fund committee, the Home Missions committee, the Youth Ministries Committee, the local Rotary (eight years), and local ministerial associations. He has also served as a church visitor and has completed two terms on the CRWM Board (1998-2004), including time as secretary and president.

B. The following nominees are being recommended for ratification to a second three-year term: Rev. Jacob Boer (Region 3), Rev. Thomas Oosterhuis (Canada at-large), and Rev. Joseph Kamphuis (U.S.A. at-large).

C. *Salary information*

Job level	Number of positions	Compensation quartile (includes housing allowance)
18	1	4th
17	1	3rd
16	2	2nd and 3rd

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the president of Christian Reformed World Missions-Canada, Rev. Edward Jager; the president of Christian Reformed World Missions-U.S.A., Rev. Joseph Kamphuis; and the director of Christian Reformed World Missions, Dr. Gary J. Bekker, the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to CRWM are addressed.

B. That synod elect by way of the ballot those slates of nominees presented for election or for ratification to the board of Christian Reformed World Missions.

C. That synod, along with the Board of Trustees, encourage all Christian Reformed churches to recognize Pentecost Sunday as a significant opportunity to pray for and to take an offering for Christian Reformed World Missions.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Christian Reformed World Missions
Gary J. Bekker, director

I. Introduction

During those long car rides with kids, it seems there's no end to asking, "Are we there yet?" When it comes to CRWRC's response to disaster and hunger in the name of our Savior, "Are we there yet?" is a fair and frequent question.

Starting in 1962, CRWRC's mission has been and continues to be to "reach out in God's name to people, both in North America and around the world, who struggle with poverty, hunger, disaster, and injustice, to help them find lasting ways to improve their lives." There are three main aspects to this ministry: community development, disaster response and rehabilitation, and justice education in North America and around the world.

Fifty years into this ministry, we have much to celebrate. Through the support of individuals and churches from within the Christian Reformed Church and beyond, CRWRC has been blessed to be able to minister in 87 countries over the past 50 years. In many of these countries, CRWRC has been able to walk alongside local churches and partners until they were able to "graduate" into self-sustaining ministries. Today CRWRC is partnering with 84 local churches and organizations in 4,522 communities. Are we there yet? No, but through God's grace we've come quite far.

Since 1979, CRWRC has been helping members of the CRC learn about global issues and become involved in responses. Many CRCs in North America participate in CRWRC's World Hunger Campaign and World Hunger Sunday each November. Today there are a number of adults who remember learning about the needs in this world as children and filling their orange Peter Fish banks with their own dollars and coins. Those adults are now carrying out the same tradition with their own children. Are we there yet? No, but through God's grace we have inspired a global approach to compassion and generosity that is being passed down through generations.

When CRWRC started in 1962, it was intended to provide a way for CRC congregations and deacons to work together to respond to large, international needs. Fifty years later, CRWRC is now involved in the international leadership teams of a number of interdenominational Christian alliances to address poverty and disaster. These networks, coalitions, and organizations help multiply CRC resources for greater impact. They include ACCORD, Action by Churches Together, the Alliance to End Hunger, the Canadian Christian Relief and Development Association, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Canadian Council of Christian Charities, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, the Foods Resource Bank, the Integral Alliance, Micah Challenge-U.S. and -Canada, the Micah Network, and the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. CRWRC also is a member of the Barnabas Foundation, Christian Stewardship Services, Canadian Churches in Action, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, the Christian Community Development Association, Communities First Association, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, InterAction, the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, the Ontario Council for International Cooperation, and the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation.

We aren't "there" yet, and most likely we will not be until Christ comes again. The world will always need a strong, Christian presence to be there to

respond to situations of disaster, injustice, poverty, and uncertainty. CRWRC is blessed to have played a part in this important ministry for 50 years, and we humbly look forward to continuing this outreach in the years to come. We also cherish your support. CRWRC does not receive ministry shares and instead relies on the donations of individuals and church offerings in order to carry out its ministry. We also rely on your prayers. Pray for justice in the many places where evil is both pervasive and prevalent. Pray for safety for our staff and volunteers who work around the world, often in situations of insecurity. Pray for CRWRC's partners as they develop their leadership abilities and resources to move their communities into a better future. And pray for all communities that aren't "there" yet, that we may all do what we can to help each other, recognize our gifts, and work together to achieve the potential that God has given us.

II. Ministries of CRWRC

A. International community transformation

CRWRC's core ministry has involved developing communities through 3,373 volunteers, 87 staff, 84 partner organizations, and the generosity of thousands of individuals, families, and churches over the past year. The result? CRWRC's life-changing programs reached more than 1.6 million people living with poverty and loss. What an amazing testimony this is to the One who commands us to love our neighbors and care for his children all over the world!

CRWRC's community development programs address the needs of people living in poverty by first assessing their assets and then building on them. In 4,522 communities, CRWRC confronts people's greatest needs first—whether those are for better health, increased nutrition, good hygiene, improved agricultural practices, literacy, civil rights training, leadership development, savings and loan groups, animal husbandry, or spiritual growth. By working through our 84 Christian partners, CRWRC builds a strong, enduring presence at the community level, while increasing those partners' capacities for both neighborhood outreach and organizational management. Through this holistic strategy that is integrated into participants' daily lives, CRWRC helps entire communities lift themselves out of poverty.

B. HIV and AIDS response

CRWRC is working to stop the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS in 14 countries. This includes working with our partner churches and organizations to care for orphans and at-risk children, ministering to those who are sick or dying, and educating people about abstinence, behavior change, and faithfulness. Through your support, more than 78,858 people whose lives have been affected by HIV and AIDS were involved in life-changing projects in 2011. This included youth who participated in youth groups for support and accountability; men and women who improved their livelihoods through income-generating activities; and families that improved their health and nutrition through food security projects. CRWRC also worked with churches worldwide to reduce the stigma and discrimination that face those living with this disease.

C. Church-based community transformation

1. In the United States

The CRWRC Connections program links CRC congregations to CRWRC's work through church and ministry partnerships, congregational and worship resources, the 16:15 training program, and the Champion Network. In addition, CRWRC is a charter and funding partner of the Communities First Association (CFA), created in 2009 to contract CRWRC's development work in North America by building a community development movement among CRC and non-CRC churches and organizations.

2. In Canada

CRWRC's Connections team links CRC individuals and congregations to CRWRC's work. This cooperative effort is supported by the deacons of the Christian Reformed Church and by passionate individuals called "CRWRC Champions." Through these committed individuals in Canada and the United States, churches are encouraged to partner with CRWRC staff and programs, learn about global poverty and hunger, and support CRWRC's ministry with their prayers and financial gifts.

In addition, CRWRC-Canada encourages congregations to consider sponsoring newly arrived refugee families. CRWRC is one of only a handful of refugee sponsorship agreement holders with the Canadian government. Last year 40 families were welcomed to Canada under CRWRC's auspices.

D. Justice education and advocacy

1. In North America

CRWRC's Connections team has a goal to engage congregations in Bible-based, justice-related activities. The Congregational Justice Mobilization (CJM) program is the response to that goal: it is a fully collaborative effort between CRWRC and the CRC Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action. Rev. Kris Van Engen leads the program in the United States and also supports Mr. Steve VandeHoef, who leads the program in Canada. The CJM program targets congregations and campuses and tracks involvement at two levels: a basic justice group is a congregation or campus that has participated in CJM programming, consulted with CJM, hosted a CJM speaker, or partnered with the CJM program to do advocacy 1-3 times; and an advanced justice group is a congregation or campus that has engaged with the CJM program 4 or more times. Last year there were 126 basic justice groups and 29 advanced justice groups.

2. Around the world

Biblical justice-building is an integral value in CRWRC's global ministry as we challenge the systems and structures that keep people in poverty. In 2010 CRWRC remained focused on issue-specific programming, such as peace building in areas where religious, tribal, and ethnic conflicts can undermine the progress of other community development programs.

The people who live in the Moro-moro area of South Sumatra are a great example. This community is almost entirely made up of transmigrants who came from Java during the 1970s. At the time, the Indonesian

government guaranteed each family two hectares of farm land to entice them to move from densely populated Java. When they arrived, however, they discovered that much of the farmland was not suitable for growing rice. Consequently, the transmigrants were forced to “clear forest” in order to gain land that was suitable for farming.

Unfortunately, the migrant farmers did not have land titles to their farmable land. Four decades later, after the cleared land was developed into well-managed farmland for growing rice, a large corporation came in and acquired the land with title from the Indonesian government. The source of these people’s livelihoods was at stake.

CRWRC Indonesia and its primary partner for church and community development, P3H, had been training and developing key leaders to become “agents of peace.” This included training Oki, a well-respected Muslim community leader from the Moro-moro area.

Following this recent land situation, Oki played an invaluable part in helping the people of Moro-moro organize themselves and act without violence. CRWRC and its partners have also promoted interfaith, community-based activities and dialogue to promote peace in the area. They have provided training to the people of Moro-moro to help them advocate for themselves to gain title to their land and their official identity as Indonesian citizens. With support from CRWRC, participants have also increased the awareness of the problems in Moro-moro at both a national and an international level.

E. Service Learning

CRWRC’s Service Learning staff is proud to announce its new ministry name—the CRWRC Global Volunteer Program!

The Global Volunteer Program is positioned to better fit our intern and volunteer audiences today. We’re excited about the new opportunities this name change can bring, including greater appeal to young people and those with a heart for Christian missions and service from both the United States and Canada.

The Global Volunteer Program creates collaborative learning opportunities between North Americans and local communities in the countries where we work. It is exciting to witness how God uses these opportunities to build relationships and encourage everyone involved.

Last year, CRWRC’s Global Volunteer Program matched 245 non-disaster volunteers with opportunities to serve, learn, and grow. These volunteers contributed 25,138 hours of service. This included 13 people who volunteered or interned in CRWRC’s home offices, 196 people who were part of international work teams, 36 people who completed an international internship, and 6 congregations that participated in church-to-church “look, listen, and learn” trips. In total, these volunteers donated 25,138 hours of their time to CRWRC’s ministry. That’s roughly the equivalent of 12 full-time employees for one year.

This past year the volunteer program piloted two opportunities that were designed to build the capacity of people in international communities alongside the volunteers. As a result, volunteers in Bangladesh and Cambodia worked alongside a local counterpart as they researched current knowledge and provided training to partner staff in the areas of food security and health.

F. Disaster Response

1. International disaster response

The natural and human disasters that occurred in 2011 were numerous and their sources diverse. The causes of these disasters ranged from conflict, chronic food insecurity, and drought to earthquakes, floods, and storms. CRWRC was and continues to be active in response to many disasters, including the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the Pakistan floods of 2010 and 2011, the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami, and the 2011 East Africa drought.

CRWRC's response spans immediate disaster response (providing emergency food, water, shelter, and access to medical care and counseling), as well as rehabilitation activities such as distributing seed, tools, and livestock to enhance peoples' livelihoods. In the 30 countries where CRWRC provided relief in 2011, nearly one-half of the beneficiaries (46%) live in Asia and nearly one-third (32%) in sub-Saharan Africa. In all, CRWRC's International Disaster Response projects reached nearly 776,000 people last year.

In Haiti, CRWRC is continuing its response to the January 12, 2010, earthquake. CRWRC has concentrated its efforts in Léogâne, near the earthquake's epicenter. The multi-faceted ministry has included tarp distribution, food assistance, hygiene supplies, psycho-social counseling, latrines, wells, and the construction of thousands of homes. A three-year livelihood project began in January 2011. As of December 2011, 2,500 wood-framed, earthquake-resistant houses have been constructed. The goal of building 3,150 homes should be achieved by June 2012.

In Pakistan, CRWRC responded to the heavy rainfall and monsoon flooding in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces in July 2010 by partnering with a local organization called the Interfaith League Against Poverty (I-LAP). Phase one of the response included the provision of food assistance, tents, water, medical supplies, kitchen supplies, hygiene kits, and stoves to people in need. In phase two, CRWRC and I-LAP continued food aid at half-ration, along with winter coats and blankets. Phase three involves livelihood restoration programs, home repairs, and the construction of new, flood-resistant housing. In addition to this ongoing response to the 2010 flood, CRWRC is also responding to the summer 2011 flooding in the Sindh province of Pakistan caused by melting snow in the Himalayas and heavy monsoon rains. Together with I-LAP, CRWRC provided hygiene kits, mosquito nets, kitchen kits, and stoves to 365 families. CRWRC is also providing three months of food aid to 5,000 households through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

In Japan, an earthquake and tsunami caused extensive damage in March 2011. CRWRC worked closely with Christian Reformed World Missions to provide immediate food assistance and other material items to people displaced by the disaster. Psycho-spiritual care and trauma counseling were also provided. CRWRC financially supported Japan International Food for the Hungry; Christian Relief, Assistance, Support and Hope; and Church World Service. In addition, CRWRC sent three teams to assist with the mucking out of homes and repairing houses and churches. CRWRC is also establishing community centers near Sendai to provide ongoing assistance for up to two years.

In 2011, **East Africa** experienced the lowest level of rainfall it had received in 60 years. Twelve million people were affected by this crisis. CRWRC responded in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia. In Kenya, CRWRC implemented a multi-faceted response, including food assistance, long-term access to safe water, livestock feed, and veterinary services. A CRWRC disaster risk reduction specialist also worked within drought-affected communities to improve their resilience in future disasters. These efforts reached 112,000 drought-affected people. In Ethiopia, CRWRC partnered with Food for the Hungry Ethiopia (FHE) to provide nearly 22,000 people with emergency food aid for five months. Another local partnership was with the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC), where CRWRC assisted nearly 16,000 people with food rations for three months. In Somalia, CRWRC worked with World Concern to provide food vouchers to 11,000 people in Dhobley. Recipients then used those vouchers to purchase food from selected local merchants in order to stimulate the local economy.

A key aspect of CRWRC's International Disaster Response programs is the 15-member Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) alliance. Last year, CFGB reached over 2.3 million people through 108 projects totaling \$6.5 million. This includes food assistance, food security, and nutrition projects. In the 28 years since CFGB was formed in 1983, CRWRC has provided 1,100,000 metric tonnes of food aid to people in need throughout the developing world.

Another crucial component of CRWRC's International Disaster Response is our volunteer International Relief Managers (IRMs), who selflessly devote their time to managing some of CRWRC's disaster response initiatives. They are from churches across North America. The team is made up of 26 individual IRMs or 15 "units," with a unit being an individual or married couple. During 2011, 18 IRMs served in the five countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, and Pakistan.

2. Disaster Response Services (North America)

For forty years, CRWRC's Disaster Response Services (DRS) have been responding to disasters across North America. Each year, dozens of men and women spend weeks and months at a time serving as Jesus' hands and feet at disaster sites across the continent. We are grateful to each of the many volunteers and supporters who have given their time, talent, and finances to make this work possible for four decades. In the 2010-11 ministry year, 3,193 people volunteered with CRWRC as part of the DRS ministry. Combined, they gave 246,650 hours of their time to CRWRC. That is roughly the equivalent of 119 fulltime employees for one year.

One aspect of CRWRC's disaster work is Rapid Response—these volunteers are ready to go on short notice and do hard, dirty work. Last year DRS sent out six Rapid Response teams, each made up of 55 individuals. In some cases local CRC members worked alongside DRS volunteers, serving their neighbors in need and learning more about CRWRC in the process. In all, DRS Rapid Response volunteers stripped, cleaned, and sanitized or removed debris from 108 homes.

DRS also provided Needs Assessment services to disaster-affected communities in 2011. These volunteers interviewed survivors, listening

to their experiences, taking note of their hopes and dreams, and documenting their unmet needs. DRS assigned 19 needs-assessment teams to disaster-affected communities last year and reached 22,253 households.

Another service that DRS provides is Construction Estimating. Construction Estimators are trained volunteers who go into a community and assist long-term recovery groups as they determine the appropriate materials, skills, and time required for home reconstruction. Last year, five teams (ten volunteers) spent 955 hours doing construction estimation.

CRWRC's primary focus in domestic disaster response is housing reconstruction, which is accomplished by a group of about 1,800 skilled, willing volunteers who commit to spending an average of three weeks on a construction site. DRS typically makes a 12-month commitment to a hurting community and then provides volunteers with housing, tools, food, and management. In 2011, 721 DRS volunteers spent 92,072 hours rebuilding disaster-damaged homes in Slave Lake (AB), Crooked Creek (AK), Birmingham (AL), Munster (IN), Biloxi (MS), Newfoundland, and Galveston County (TX). In total, they repaired or rebuilt 103 homes.

The Groups Program is another DRS initiative that is helping communities recover from disaster. In 2011, 1,727 volunteers in the Groups Program worked 107,739 hours to help repair 441 homes. This included returning groups from congregations in Toronto and Chicago who committed to significant rebuilding projects.

III. Human resources management

CRWRC's Human Resources (HR) management function provides HR support to functional and ministry teams, including but not limited to recruitment and selection, performance management, employee relations, HR systems, and advisory support for team leaders in their region, as well as international disaster response HR responsibilities.

The HR team continues to focus on achieving gender and racial diversity. CRWRC is committed to the process of gender mainstreaming with the goal of gender equality. As part of its gender plan, CRWRC regularly tracks goals, both for the number of men and women in leadership positions, staff perception about their team's commitment to gender equality, and the participation of men and women in decision making. In our most recent survey, 83 percent of staff agreed or strongly agreed that their team was committed to CRWRC's gender policy, and 93 percent felt that men and women participated equally as decision makers. In addition, 42 percent of leadership positions (those with a job level of 14 or higher) are held by women.

Annual performance reviews are routine for all CRWRC staff. This gives staff an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments and critically review growth areas. CRWRC is thankful for all of its human resources, which are a critical avenue through which we provide for communities in need around the globe.

IV. Board matters

An important support to CRWRC's ministry is our board. The primary function of the board is to set CRWRC's vision and mission and to encourage and track the accomplishment of that vision.

The CRWRC governance structure is made up of delegates from the classes, in addition to up to 27 members at-large, who constitute the Board

of Delegates of CRWRC. The delegates are a vital communication link with classes and churches. They select seven-member national boards for both the United States and Canada. The two boards together form the fourteen-member Joint Ministry Council, which provides governance for CRWRC as a whole.

A. Board of Directors of CRWRC-Canada

Mr. Dennis Jurjens, president
Mr. Bill Van Geest, vice president
Mr. James Joosse, secretary
Mr. Ben Van Hoffen, treasurer
Mr. Francisco Angulo
Ms. Truusje Genesis
Rev. Roy M.A. Berkenbosch, pastoral adviser

B. Board of Directors of CRWRC-U.S.

Mr. Paul Wassink, president
Mr. Roy Zuidema, vice president
Ms. Carol Ackerman, secretary
Mr. Don Bouwer, treasurer
Ms. Jodi Koeman
Mr. Bill Haverkamp
Rev. Thea N. Leunk, pastoral adviser

C. CRWRC new board nominations

1. U.S. member at-large youth delegates

The board of CRWRC requests that synod appoint the following to a first term as U.S. at-large youth delegates:

Ms. Lauren B. Huisman is a member of First CRC in Hudsonville, Michigan, and a student at Calvin College. She is a social work student with a minor in international development. Ms. Huisman has participated in missions trips with her church and is eager to use her gifts to witness to others about the work of CRWRC.

Mr. Eric D. Robbert is a member of Western Springs CRC in Western Springs, Illinois, and a student at Trinity Christian College. His ministry experiences include being a youth leader at his church, serving at a Christian camp, leading Bible studies for college students, serving on the church outreach committee, and partnering with Trinity Christian College with the Children's Hunger Fund for large service projects.

2. U.S. member at-large delegates

The board of CRWRC requests that synod appoint the following to a three-year term as U.S. members at-large:

Dr. Mariano Avila was born in México City, where he served as pastor of six Presbyterian churches. He has also served in the seminary of the National Presbyterian Church as professor, academic dean, and president, and was professor of biblical studies at the Comunidad Teológica de México. He was academic dean of the Facultad Latinoamericana de Estudios Teológicos (Miami, Florida) and is a member of the Academic Council of PRODOLA, the doctoral program (Ph.D.) for professors, leaders,

and pastors in Latin America. For several years Dr. Avila was coordinator of urban ministries for community transformation and theological adviser for World Vision México. He was an advisor for the Spanish ministry of CRC Publications and has served as CRWRC's pastoral adviser. Dr. Avila is professor of New Testament and director of the Th.M. Program at Calvin Theological Seminary. He also teaches, lectures, and preaches in different seminaries and churches in the Americas and other parts of the world. Dr. Avila's rich experience in pastoral and teaching ministries, Bible translation, community transformation, and the academic world has equipped him to effectively train students for ministry.

Rev. Pedro Aviles has been the pastor at Grace and Peace Community CRC, an urban church in the near northwest side of Chicago, for twenty-three years. Rev. Aviles is the director of the Chicagoland Leadership Develop Network, raising indigenous lay leaders for ministry in the church and in the community. In addition to his pastoral experience, he has served as an interim principal of Humboldt Community Christian School and as a campus minister with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Rev. Aviles has obtained a bachelor's degree in interpersonal communications from Trinity International University and a master's degree in church ministry and leadership from North Park Seminary, and he is presently pursuing a doctoral degree in intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois.

Mr. Lyman Howell is a member of Pullman CRC in Chicago, Illinois, where he will begin serving as an elder and is currently active in the music ministry. He first learned about CRWRC while working in economic development at a church in Nairobi, Kenya. Mr. Howell later worked in the United States as a staff person with CRWRC. Currently he works in the financial services industry. Mr. Howell earned a degree in chemical engineering from Northwestern University and has a master's degree in business administration from the University of Chicago.

Dr. Joel Navarro, a member of Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids, is associate professor of music at Calvin College, where he teaches conducting and directs the Calvin College Capella, Oratorio Society, and Campus Choir. Prior to this appointment at Calvin College, he served sixteen years as an assistant professor and one-time chair of the Choral Conducting Department at the University of the Philippines College of Music. Dr. Navarro is known internationally as the former music director and conductor of the Ateneo de Manila University Glee Club. He finished a degree in mathematics before returning to complete his bachelor and master of music degrees in choral conducting at the University of the Philippines, where he also taught undergraduate and graduate courses in conducting, choral literature, chorus classes, recital, and music theory. He obtained his doctor of musical arts in conducting at Michigan State University. Dr. Navarro recently completed a sabbatical project to compile and edit a collection of new Philippine hymns and anthems in English for international publication as a sourcebook for emerging multicultural congregations in the United States and for churches in the Filipino Diaspora.

Rev. Phonh Sinbondit is pastor of New Life Lao CRC in New Brighton, Minnesota. He was born in Thailand and graduated from the Thai Teacher College. Rev. Sinbondit spent over two years in a Laos concentration camp

in the late 1970s, eventually escaping to Thailand with his wife and four children. He and his family arrived in the United States in 1981, and he worked as a plant supervisor prior to receiving training and licensure of ministry of the word from Classis Holland. In 2002 Rev. Sinbondit moved to New Brighton, Minnesota, to start a church plant. The New Life congregation is composed of Karen refugees from Burma and Laos. Rev. Sinbondit states, "From the beginning of my life journey until now and beyond, it can only be possible through the Lord Jesus Christ; I credit all to him and I am deeply grateful to the CRC that gave us the opportunity to serve for his glory."

Rev. Andrew Woja Henry has served as pastor of the Worthington CRC, Worthington, Minnesota, international ministry for over five years. Rev. Henry is from what is now known as the Republic of South Sudan, and his spouse is from Liberia.

3. Reappointment of U.S. members

The following U.S. nominees are completing their first term on the board and are being recommended for a second three-year term: Mr. Joel Verhoef (California South), Mr. Dick Van Eck (Greater Los Angeles), Mr. Michael Pluimer (Lake Superior-U.S.), Ms. Bonnie Zigterman (Northern Illinois), Mr. Tim Soerens (Pacific Northwest), and Mr. Garry Friesema (Wisconsin).

4. Canada member-at-large delegates

The board of CRWRC requests that synod appoint the following to a three-year term as Canada members at-large:

Mr. John DeGroot is a member of First CRC in Sarnia, Ontario. He currently works as the landscape architect and owner of DeGroot's Nurseries. Mr. DeGroot's involvement in his local church includes spearheading a group known as ATLAS (Anxious to Learn and Serve), which annually sends a work group to volunteer in places that include Mississippi and the Dominican Republic. He has served on many boards of both Christian and community organizations, contributing strong skills in governance and fundraising. Mr. DeGroot has traveled and visited missionaries of CRWRC in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and East Africa.

Mr. Al Hummel is a life-long member of the Nobleford CRC in Nobleford, Alberta. He works as an office manager and purchaser for Premiermix Feeds, Ltd., and owns a farm in the Lethbridge area. Mr. Hummel has been actively involved in various leadership roles in the Southern Alberta Diaconal Conference, in his church council, and in local Christian school committees and campaigns. As a young adult, he had the privilege to serve with Canadian University Service Overseas in Ghana, West Africa, for two years. This experience was a highlight of his career and spiritual life, as he saw God working through his efforts to bring the "cup of cold water" to the Bimoba people. Mr. Hummel believes that we are in the world and in our circumstances by the grace of God, and that we are given the responsibility to look after our fellow human beings by following the principles of Matthew 25:35-36.

Rev. Rita S. Klein-Geltink has been requested by the CRWRC Canada board to serve as pastoral adviser. She currently serves as pastor for the Lucknow Community CRC in Lucknow, Ontario. At the local church

level she has organized Tuesday’s Table, a weekly meal program for community members in need. She also provides chaplain services at the local hospital and nursing home, as well as participating as a member of the local ministerial association. At the classical level Rev. Klein-Geltink has served on the Classis Ministry Leadership Team, Waterloo Campus Committee, Classis Ministry Committee (vice chair), Administrative Committee, and the monthly pastors’ book club. At the denominational level she served as a delegate to Synod 2011. God has gifted Rev. Klein-Geltink with a pastor’s heart, and people readily share their joys and concerns with her. She is committed to the final authority of God’s Word and is passionate about the ministry of CRWRC. Her life experiences have fostered her gifts in leadership and encouragement.

Ms. Janet Zadoorian is a member of Woody Nook CRC in Lacombe, Alberta. She moved from Iran many years ago as a refugee fleeing persecution of Christians at the time. The Woody Nook CRC sponsored her family (husband and two children), and they settled in the area and began a business—a machine shop. Ms. Zadoorian does the bookkeeping for their business and is active in several local church programs. She teaches Sunday school, volunteers at Loaves and Fishes (an inner-city ministry in Red Deer, AB), and is being trained in Stephen Ministry.

5. Canada – new classical delegates

Mr. George Horlings is a member of Smithers CRC in Smithers, British Columbia. He runs a garden center business that is family owned and operated. Mr. Horlings’s involvement with the local church includes serving as a champion for CRWRC. He has previous experience in missions and international development, having served for four years with MCC (Mennonite Central Committee), two years with World Vision in Mozambique, and two years with World Relief Canada. Mr. Horlings tries to keep up with world affairs and development activities.

6. Reappointment of Canadian member

The following Canadian nominee is completing her first term on the board and is being recommended for a second three-year term: Ms. Trusje Genesis (Alberta South/Saskatchewan).

V. Finance

A. Salary disclosure

In accordance with synod’s mandate to report the executive levels and the percentage of midpoint, CRWRC reports the following:

Job level	Number of positions	Compensation quartile (includes housing allowance)
18	2	2nd
16	4	1st

B. Detailed financial information—Detailed financial information and budgets will be submitted to synod by way of the Agenda for Synod 2012—Financial and Business Supplement.

VI. Resource development

CRC churches and donors contributed \$21.8 million to people living in disaster and poverty through CRWRC in 2011, which was leveraged into nearly \$40 million in programming through grants, partnerships, and other collaborations. Despite the challenges of raising funds for ministry during a near-global recession, God provided for people in need through your generosity in 2011. That is amazing!

Last year, CRWRC received a total of \$39,492,373 from all sources in the United States and Canada. \$21.8 million of this funding came from our churches and individual donors. Just over \$1.58 million was received through government grants, and more than \$6.3 million came from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for emergency relief aid. CRWRC also received more than \$9 million in grants from organizations in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, and about \$733,000 from its investments.

CRWRC directed \$10.28 million of its 2010 financial resources toward core international development programs, and over \$23 million went to disaster response. More than \$1.2 million was used for community development in North America, and another \$1 million went toward constituent education.

CRWRC uses about 9 percent of its resources for general management and fundraising purposes—meaning that 91 percent or more of the money you give to CRWRC goes toward helping people who live in poverty.

VII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. Paul Wassink, president of CRWRC-U.S.; Mr. Dennis Jurjens, president of CRWRC-Canada; Mr. Andrew Ryskamp, director of CRWRC-U.S.; and Ms. Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, director of CRWRC-Canada, when CRWRC matters are discussed and need to be addressed.

B. That synod commend the work of mercy carried on by CRWRC and urge the churches to take at least four offerings per year in lieu of ministry-share support.

C. That synod by way of a ballot appoint and reappoint members for the CRWRC Board of Delegates.

D. That synod take time to praise God in celebration of CRWRC's fifty years of ministry. From 1962-2012 CRWRC has been coming alongside communities in need to share God's love and create long-term solutions to poverty. In addition, that synod recognize CRWRC's Disaster Response Services and the many volunteers who have put the love of Christ into action in serving communities affected by disasters during the past forty years.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the Finance Advisory Committee.

Christian Reformed World Relief Committee
Andrew Ryskamp, director, CRWRC-U.S.
Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, director, CRWRC-Canada

I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S., was established by Synod 1983 with a directive to assist organized Christian Reformed churches in the financing of capital improvements. The Loan Fund operates exclusively in the United States. The board of directors of the Loan Fund oversees the loan approval process, the determination of interest rates, and the setting of Loan Fund policies. The board also establishes interest rates for Investment Certificates sold—primarily to members, classes, churches, and agencies of the CRCNA.

II. Board of directors

The Loan Fund board members are eligible to serve for two three-year terms. The terms of Mr. Jon Swets and Mr. James Zoetewey expire on June 30, 2012. Mr. Swets has served for one term and has indicated his willingness to serve a second term.

The remaining members of the board of directors are Ms. Christina Bower (2013), Rev. Chad Steenwyk (2013), Ms. Andrea Karsten (2014), and Mr. Thomas Sinke (2014).

The board requests that synod reappoint Mr. Swets to a second term and appoint one board member from the following slate of nominees to serve for a three-year term:

Mr. Christopher S. Mund, CPA, is a member of Avery Street CRC, South Windsor, Connecticut, where he currently serves as deacon and finance committee chair. He is also chaplain for Transport for Christ International and is a volunteer with the Manchester, Connecticut, Council of Churches shelter and food bank. In addition, Mr. Mund is treasurer and chaplain for the Manchester Boy Scouts. Mr. Mund is a graduate of Eastern Connecticut State University and is a partner with the accounting firm Chokshi, Mund, and Raczkowski, PC, in Rocky Hill, Connecticut.

Mr. Scott K. Ritsema, CPA, is a member of Boston Square CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has served as deacon, elder, and church treasurer. He also has served as a member of the Classis Grand Rapids East committee on Christian education funding. He previously was a board member of the Inner City Christian Federation and an advisory board member of United Way of West Michigan. Mr. Ritsema is a graduate of Grand Valley State University and is employed with the accounting firm Dolinka, Van Noord, and Co. in Grand Rapids.

III. Financial operations

A. The Loan Fund is eligible to sell Investment Certificates to investors in twenty-three states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. Efforts continue to add other states with CRC populations, if the costs of state registration and legal compliance requirements are reasonable.

B. At the close of the 2011 fiscal year (June 30, 2011), a total of \$25,579,460 in interest-bearing Investment Certificates held by investors was outstanding. Interest rates vary from 1.30 percent to 5.05 percent, with a time-weighted average of 2.47 percent. The variance in interest rates reflects market conditions and the terms of the certificates at the time they were issued.

C. Since its inception in 1983, the Loan Fund has originated over 180 loans totaling nearly \$60 million to churches across the United States. As of June 30, 2011, \$23,540,717 in loans was outstanding. Loan delinquencies do occur from time to time, but they are closely monitored and are minimal. As of June 30, 2011, there were no impaired loans. The Loan Fund maintains a loan loss reserve to cover potential losses.

D. Financial operations are also reflected in the following data:

	2009	2010	2011
Cash and equivalents	\$8,743,731	\$9,390,298	\$8,579,248
Loans and interest receivable	\$28,678,662	\$25,214,336	\$23,540,717
Equipment and software, less depreciation	\$8,413	\$0	\$0
Total assets	\$37,430,806	\$34,604,634	\$32,119,965
Certificates and interest payable	\$31,322,756	\$28,384,363	\$25,579,460
Net assets	\$6,108,050	\$6,220,271	\$6,540,505
Total liabilities and net assets	\$37,430,806	\$34,604,634	\$32,119,965

E. A summary of the audited financial report as of June 30, 2011, appears in the *Agenda for Synod 2012—Financial and Business Supplement*.

IV. Sources of funding

Funds for the Loan Fund operations are derived from the following sources:

A. The sale of Investment Certificates in those states where legal approval to offer them has been obtained.

B. Gifts and bequests made to the corporation.

C. An unsecured line of credit with a bank that permits borrowing up to \$2 million. The Loan Fund currently does not have any amounts outstanding on this line of credit.

V. Staff

The Loan Fund is served by Ms. Alice M. Damsteegt, customer service specialist, and Mr. David E. Veen, director.

VI. Recommendations

A. That the Loan Fund's director or any members of the board of directors of the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S., be given the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to the Loan Fund are discussed.

B. That synod by way of the ballot reappoint Mr. Jon Swets to a second three-year term and elect one board member to the board of directors of the Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S., from the slate of nominees presented.

Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.
David E. Veen, director

I. Introduction

The mission of Faith Alive Christian Resources (Faith Alive) is “to provide resources that call people to follow Jesus Christ by helping them to understand, experience, and express the good news of God’s kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.”

The core values that we have identified for our work are the following:

- Our resources are biblical, relevant, high quality, and stewardly.
- Our resources will faithfully reflect the worldview and interpretation of Scripture articulated in the Reformed confessions.
- We will treat each other and those we serve with love and respect.
- Our organizational structure, working environment, and resources will consistently reflect an antiracist perspective.

These statements undergird our work as we attempt to develop and distribute resources that serve the Christian Reformed Church and the church of Jesus Christ worldwide. The ministry of publishing is becoming an ever-greater challenge as we work in a contemporary world that is rapidly changing, and Faith Alive must change if it is to remain a vibrant and relevant ministry to the church and the world.

The choices Faith Alive faces involve much more than adjusting this or that piece of the budget or this or that product line. We are engaging in adaptive change that is not simply an extension of the way things have always been done. This change embodies a new way of doing things. Our three-part plan for growth embodies these key strategic intents:

- Focus on our core competency of Sunday school curriculum.
- Find and develop new sources of revenue through new product development and new imprints, new distribution channels, sublicensing, and global expansion.
- Initiate cost reduction strategies designed to create long-term gains.

We are making significant strides in each area. Last year we aimed to “release two new innovative projects in fall 2011—one year ahead of schedule” (*Agenda for Synod 2011*, p. 163), and we are thankful to have released two new curricula in fall 2011: the *Dwell* curriculum for children in grades K-8 and the *We* event-based intergenerational curriculum. We also launched a new imprint (Square Inch books) and have developed some new sources of revenue, especially in World Literature Ministries. But Faith Alive still has much to accomplish.

Curriculum publishing represents more than half of Faith Alive’s ministry revenue. The curriculum market is rapidly changing. As existing curricula age, sales decline, demanding new curriculum initiatives to capture the loyalty and imagination of Reformed churches.

At the same time, Faith Alive must develop new categories and new distribution channels that can help sustain its ministry during declines in the curriculum category. Faith Alive must find and develop fresh voices, expand its distribution into retail channels, and grow its global impact.

We must do so as cost-effectively as possible, always finding ways to do more with less and continually asking how we can create elegantly simple processes that reduce costs and bring ministry to market faster.

A. *The financial challenge*

This is a challenging time for publishing. Product sales continue to lag; research shows that loyalty to the CRC and its ministries is eroding; and the economic slowdown in the United States, and particularly in the Midwest, has placed a significant strain on cash and put Faith Alive's financial position in jeopardy.

The way forward—as our board, a board-appointed financial task force, and our staff believe—is *revenue growth*. Faith Alive needs to generate more revenue to make up for declines in the past few years, while preserving as much of its cash reserve as possible.

As approved by the Faith Alive board, there are four strategic revenue pillars that Faith Alive is implementing this year. They are designed to create more sustainable revenue growth next year and beyond. These are in addition to what we are already doing globally, digitally, and with distribution.

1. Relaunch *Dwell* curriculum

Faith Alive's newest curriculum, *Dwell*, is off to a slow start. Research indicates that some customers either weren't ready to switch for economic reasons, or wanted to wait a year to study *Dwell* and hear how other churches like it before making the decision. Faith Alive will relaunch *Dwell*, using a new communication strategy focusing on the curriculum's Reformed core, its scope and sequence as a differentiator, and its differences compared to key competitors, as well as endorsements from users.

2. Aggressive incentives

As part of relaunching *Dwell*, Faith Alive will offer aggressive promotions and discounts designed to retain existing curriculum customers and attract new ones. In the past, curriculum has not needed incentives and other offers for it to sell. But since other curriculum publishers are now offering discounts, Faith Alive believes the time to do so is now.

3. Outbound sales representation

Faith Alive has a talented team of customer service representatives who serve the needs of its customers very well, taking orders, problem solving, and providing solutions to churches who call or email. Faith Alive does not, however, have an outbound sales effort, rewarded and incentivized to proactively help churches meet content needs with Faith Alive product. Faith Alive plans to hire a commission-based sales person/coach/consultant for large churches, churches in the central Great Lakes region (MI, ON, IL), and denominational partnerships (e.g., Presbyterian Church in Canada, etc.).

4. Grow our "Christian living" category

Faith Alive's Christian Living/Adult Study products are its second largest revenue-producing category. It is also less seasonal than Sunday school curriculum.

We believe these efforts have the potential to generate significant new incremental revenue next year and beyond. Even with these efforts, a

significant gap remains in our fiscal 2013 budgeted bottom line. Further support and cuts will be needed to achieve a balanced fiscal 2013 budget.

Until now, Faith Alive's board has resisted asking for additional ministry share support. But we feel it is time to request additional ministry share investment in Faith Alive's ministry. This would provide needed relief for our cash reserves, which have been used to fund new curriculum development, a major new hymnal release, and new faith formation initiatives—none of which has been funded with ministry shares to date, despite a history at Faith Alive of doing so.

In addition, Faith Alive has implemented cost-cutting and cash preservation efforts in the areas of reprints, incentives for customers who prepay for orders, focused collections on past-due accounts, and cutting operating expenses.

B. Our assurance

Thankfully, we don't walk the road alone.

We are assured by this: Faith Alive is called to this time and this place to do God's work within the limits of who we are—both as individuals and as an organization. God asks that we give our very best in the field that we have been given to work. Our call is not to someone else's field, but to our field. And with God's help, we will produce fruit. In the words of the apostle Paul,

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

(2 Cor. 3:2-3)

The following is a summary of the work, governance, and administrative developments of our ministry during the past year. We look to synod for suggestions that may help us provide better service to Christian Reformed churches so that they can enhance their ministries.

II. Faith Alive ministry

A. Periodicals Department

1. The Banner

The synodically adopted mandate for *The Banner* is "to inform readers about what is happening in the CRC, as well as in the church at large; to provide articles that edify and encourage Christian living; and to stimulate critical thinking about issues related to the Christian faith and to the culture of which Christians and the CRC are a part."

The every-household *Banner* continues to be well received by a vast majority and wide variety of CRC members. Reader financial support of the magazine has also remained very high. Annual fundraising efforts in 2011 again met with excellent results, despite a tentative economy in both Canada and the United States. The same cannot be said for advertising revenues, which have dropped significantly over the past number of years. We have stepped up our marketing efforts and hope to see a sizable increase in that area by next year.

An independent marketing survey completed in December 2009 revealed that *The Banner* continues to be widely read and enjoys a good relationship with its readers. From the many communications we continue to receive, we believe that such is still the case. However, in order to verify that, we hope to conduct another independent survey in the not-too-distant future. In the meantime, please do let us know how we are doing.

This year we have significantly expanded our online presence (www.thebanner.org) in a variety of ways. While we wish to be careful not to erode the quality of the print magazine, we have taken specific steps to communicate more effectively with a diverse audience. Here is how we have expanded the site to date:

- We have increased both the quantity and, in many cases, the length of news stories.
- We are posting fresh news stories, reviews, and features weekly.
- Readers can now provide feedback to each article online.
- The “Tuned In” section now offers more reviews and reader contributions.
- Web content is cross-linked with CRC News on the denominational homepage (www.crcna.org) and to other online sources.
- Links to recommended further reading are included where desirable.
- Photos and artwork from the print magazine now appear online as well.

We have also boosted our presence on Facebook and Twitter. In the future we hope to add a few other features to the website as well, such as

- bilingual “corners” on the site for Korean, Hispanic, and Chinese readers.
- enhanced marketing ad space that will allow more dynamic content, such as videos.

The editor of *The Banner*, Rev. Robert De Moor, continues to provide the overall leadership for the magazine on a 60 percent FTE basis. He also serves as pastor of preaching and administration for West End CRC in Edmonton, Alberta. This arrangement continues to work well.

Our features editor, Ms. Jena Vander Ploeg, bade us farewell after 20-plus years of faithful service in a number of capacities. Ms. Vander Ploeg will do freelance editing from her home. We are very grateful for her amazing contribution to our ministry, and it was very difficult to bid her farewell. However, we are grateful to welcome Ms. Judy Hardy to our staff. As our new associate editor, Ms. Hardy has taken over many of Ms. Vander Ploeg’s responsibilities, together with some additional ones, as we have restructured staff duties to some extent. The present editorial staff consists of the following persons:

Robert De Moor, editor (.6 FTE)
Judy Hardy, associate editor (1.0 FTE)
Joyce Kane, editorial assistant (.3 FTE)
Gayla Postma, news editor (.9 FTE)
Kristy Quist, Tuned In editor (.25 FTE)

Sandy Swartzentruber, copy editor (as required)
Jonathan Wilson, Web editor (.25 FTE)

It probably comes as no surprise to you that articles receiving the most reader feedback this year were those that focused on topics such as Islam, global warming, and creation and science. Editorials that received the most response were those explaining our editorial stance on how we dealt with the global warming issue and the extended editorial dealing with church structure that appeared last June. While the former met with a rather divided response, the response to the restructuring editorial was almost universally appreciative and positive.

We have also received many thoughtful reactions to our discussion throughout the year on how Synod 2012 should deal with the proposal to adopt the Belhar as a confession—both those that argued for its adoption and those that argued against it. On the whole, that discussion has been forceful but has remained respectful and constructive.

2. *Voice of the Reformed*

For a number of years, synod has helped fund *Voice of the Reformed*, a monthly periodical published by the CRC Korean Council through a ministry-share allocation to Faith Alive. The purpose of this publication is to provide a bridge between the Anglo and Korean CRC communities. Accordingly, the magazine often includes translations of articles and news stories from *The Banner*.

B. *Editorial Department*

The goal of this department is to be the first-stop resource provider for CRC and Reformed Church in America (RCA) churches and a significant resource provider for other churches in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition.

1. Curricula

a. For children

Developing and producing church-school curriculum materials (for Sunday school, catechism classes, adult small groups, and so on) continues to be the major activity of our publishing ministry.

Walk With Me, now in its seventh year, is currently performing below expectations, largely due to the economy. *Kid Connection* sales are lagging just slightly behind budget, also due to a depressed U.S. economy.

The number of new curriculum customers added each year (over 500) is slightly above the number of drops. Research shows that churches that drop our curricula do so for a variety of reasons, but primarily they state “a desire for something new and different” as the main reason for change. Other denominational publishers are experiencing similar trends. This, combined with an increasingly competitive market, will prove challenging in the coming years. Growth will come through an expansion of distribution channels (attracting and retaining new customers) and through innovation. It is not enough to create a “new and improved” curriculum. Faith Alive must reinvent curriculum by establishing a new vision of faith formation in the local church.

With two still excellent and widely-used but aging curricula, it was time for Faith Alive to develop this new vision for Sunday school curricula, as well as to provide new and innovative material for churches that maintain a healthy Sunday school ministry. So in the summer of 2011 we released two new curricula:

- *Dwell* is a new Sunday school curriculum that gives kids time and space to meet God, marvel at God’s redemption plan, and find their own place in God’s story. In a high-speed world, *Dwell* provides kids with less noise and more time to experience God. It’s a kindergarten through eighth-grade curriculum that offers kids and their leaders opportunities to worship and to wonder into God’s story as they live it out together. *Dwell* also invites families to take a more active role in nurturing their children’s faith. A devotional guide for middle-schoolers called *Dive Devotions* helps young teens grow in faith, connect with God’s people, and live out God’s story in their lives.
- *We* is a new intergenerational ministry resource. The first series, called “The Epic Story,” offers ten events that guide preschoolers through senior citizens through the whole sweep of God’s story, from Genesis to Revelation. *We* challenges churches to think about education in a new way. What happens, for example, when people of all ages gather around the same table to learn together? What happens when grandmothers have conversations with teenagers and when four-year-olds talk about their faith with thirty-somethings? What happens when we live into God’s story together, following the path of God’s mission to renew creation? *We* also includes an at-home faith nurture component that encourages families, couples, and individuals to dig into Scripture, talk together, and “do” together during the week. Other titles in the *We* series will be available soon.

b. For youth

Faith Alive’s youth curricula endeavor to teach the fundamental doctrines of our church in a way that speaks to today’s teens. We publish several resources to support this ministry:

- On the Heidelberg Catechism, we offer *Questions Worth Asking*, a two-year course with a cutting-edge pedagogy, and *HC and Me*, a two-year course that incorporates more traditional pedagogy.
- On the Belgic Confession we offer *Believe It*, which explores this important confession in an interactive, small group format.
- Several short-term courses for youth explore such topics as world religions, worship, and Bible literacy.
- Additionally, in summer 2012 Faith Alive will release a course for young adults that will be especially helpful to those preparing for public profession of faith. *Deep Down Faith* is a revised and updated edition of Neal Plantinga’s study *A Sure Thing*. It’s adaptable for individual mentoring, small group study, or classroom use.

This year we also introduced a new online series of Bible studies that will be a great resource for youth leaders. *52 Great Bible Studies for Youth* is an online series of student-led Bible studies on various topics and passages.

c. For people with intellectual disabilities

The board of Friendship Ministries, an independent ministry, continues to raise funds to support the development and marketing of resources and program support for people with intellectual disabilities. Faith Alive partners with Friendship Ministries by publishing and distributing its resources. The basic curriculum for this program is a three-year curriculum called Friendship Bible Studies. In the past year, Faith Alive and Friendship Ministries worked together to produce a revision of the highly acclaimed *Autism and Your Church*.

d. For people with visual impairments

Working with Pathways International, a ministry in Minneapolis, our staff continues to expand the list of Faith Alive resources available in Braille. A small ministry-share amount is designated for this work.

e. Training and consulting

Synod 2006 provided for some ministry-share dollars to support a Sunday school training and consulting coordinator. In December 2007 Ms. Jolanda Howe was hired by Faith Alive to facilitate training and support and to encourage networking opportunities among church educators and teachers.

Beginning in 2009 the training focus shifted from regional events to online efforts. Webinars, curriculum blogs, videos, and web meetings now allow us to connect with churches across North America to provide them with convenient and free training and support.

In 2010 Ms. Howe became more involved in broader denominational efforts to support Sunday school leaders. She currently serves as the guide for the CRC's Sunday School Network and is a candidate for credentialing as part of the pilot group for the credentialing process developed by the Staff Ministry Committee. Ms. Howe hopes that becoming credentialed in church education will allow her to help other CRC church educators and children's ministry directors through the process.

2012 will be an exciting year for Faith Alive—with the launch of two new curricula, much of the training efforts will focus on supporting churches as they use the *Dwell* or *We* curricula and on providing regional events and online support for churches that are eager for a new approach to faith nurture. Ms. Howe will also work closely with the Association of Christian Reformed Educators (ACRE) as Faith Alive continues to provide access to broader training opportunities and free resources for leadership development.

2. Adult discipleship

Believing that a growing faith among adults is a key to all faith nurture in the church, Faith Alive has produced an array of practical resources geared to the needs of adult ministry in churches today.

- Bible studies – The Infuse series expanded this year to include titles on the books of Psalms and Acts and the topic of Advent/Christmas. The Discover Your Bible series added a new study on 1 Samuel and a revised two-part study of Exodus.
- Devotions – To encourage devotional reading and prayer during Lent, we added *Forty* by Kory Plockmeyer to our expanding category of family and personal devotions.
- Square Inch – To stimulate adults to engage in the important conversations going on in the church today, we expanded our Square Inch imprint with additional titles this year: *150: Finding Your Story in the Psalms* by Kevin Adams and *Leaving Egypt: Discovering God in the Wilderness Places* by Chuck DeGroat. Additional Square Inch titles are also in development.

With the approval of the new joint translation of the Heidelberg Catechism, and with a mandate from the BOT, Faith Alive has begun a planning process with the RCA and the Presbyterian Church (USA), and with significant involvement from Back to God Ministries International, for a video-based all-church study of the Heidelberg Catechism. Current plans call for an intergenerational (high school through adult) small group study with a strong video component, as well as resources for worship, preaching, and individual study.

3. Worship resources

- a. *Reformed Worship*: This quarterly journal continues to provide churches with solid resources for their worship planning. There are approximately 3,600 subscribers, many from denominations other than the CRC. Thanks to a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, back issues of the magazine are available to the general public online. The two most recent issues are available online for subscribers only. In 2011 *RW* underwent a major redesign to give it a more contemporary look, reach out to younger readers, and refresh the magazine's online presence.
- b. New hymnal: In 2007 synod approved the development of a bi-denominational hymnbook, now titled *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, compiled in cooperation with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The editorial committee, made up of equal membership from the CRC and RCA, is now close to finalizing the list of songs and hymns for this book. An appendix to this report provides the list of songs recommended by the committee as of February 15, 2012. We recommend that Synod 2012 endorse *Lift Up Your Hearts* as an approved hymnal for the CRC. The hymnal is scheduled for release in June 2013.
Faith Alive has worked with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to produce some precursor songbooks to *Lift Up Your Hearts* called *Contemporary Songs for Worship* (2008), *Hymns for Worship* (2010), and *Global Songs for Worship* (2010).
- c. Psalms resource: In January 2012 we released the largest resource of psalms for worship ever produced in North America. Titled *Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship*, this comprehensive volume

should prove useful to a very wide variety of denominations and individuals.

- d. Children and Worship: We continue to work with Reformed Church in America staff to coordinate support for the Children and Worship program used by many of our churches.

C. *World Literature Ministries*

1. Introduction and overview

World Literature Ministries (WLM) publishes and distributes biblical Christian literature in several languages—primarily Spanish. The Spanish line of products is published under the imprint Libros Desafío. Libros Desafío has a global reputation for producing high-quality Reformed academic and theological textbooks for churches, colleges, and seminaries in Central and South America. Most of the books are translated from English books on doctrine or biblical studies and are intended for church leaders.

Mr. Jan Dijkman serves as director of WLM, and Rev. Alejandro Pimentel serves as associate editor. Ms. Elizabeth Waterfield continues to serve as marketing manager. Key publishing highlights include the following:

- a. Four new children's Bible storybooks and prayer books, two through a new partnership with Lion Publishing:
 - *Esta es mi Biblia*
 - *Viaje por la Biblia*
 - *100 Oraciones Favoritas*
 - *50 Historias Bíblicas Favoritas*
- b. A complete Spanish edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (scheduled for release in late 2012 or early 2013).

In addition, WLM has signed a publishing partnership with Andamio Publishers in Spain. Through this agreement WLM will become the exclusive distributor of Andamio titles in the Americas, giving WLM access to copublishing series like *The Bible Speaks Today* (editors John Stott and Alec Motyer) in Spanish and copublishing some new titles.

Andamio's active catalogue has over 100 titles, but their sales are inferior to those of WLM's Libros Desafío line. Most of the titles in their catalog are written by well-known Spanish authors or are Spanish translations of titles from Intervarsity Press.

Through this agreement, WLM has already sold more than 10,000 copies of books into Latin America.

2. Korean literature

Several years ago, Faith Alive transferred all publishing in the Korean language to the Korean Council. The Korean Council has moved aggressively in translating and publishing resources, most of them Bible studies from the *Discover Your Bible* series, into Korean. The council works closely with a Korean publisher, called CRC Publications, in distributing these materials in Korea. It has also formed relations with people in China to publish and distribute some of these materials in China.

The Korean Council has published other important CRC materials into Korean, such as the *Church Order and Its Supplements* and the Heidelberg Catechism.

D. Marketing and Customer Service Departments

The functions performed by the Marketing Department include promotion, public relations and communications, sales of *Banner* ads, market research and analysis, and sales forecasting.

Although our print catalog remains a key vehicle for communicating with churches about our products, the web and email have become very important in recent years as well. In fiscal 2011 web sales made up approximately 35 percent of Faith Alive orders. Other communication channels include direct mail, conferences, print and web-based advertising, publicity, order enclosures, and social media.

Faith Alive promotes its curricula to a wide variety of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, as. As indicated in the chart below, Faith Alive's publishing ministry is much broader than the Christian Reformed Church. More than half of Faith Alive's accounts and sales for English-language products are to non-CRC churches.

Denomination	Active customers	% of total	Sales	% of total
CRC	953	25%	\$874,967	44%
RCA	543	14%	286,494	14%
PCUSA	884	23%	258,127	13%
Bookstores/schools/ distributors	346	9%	270,927	14%
Other	1,140	29%	294,363	15%
Total	3,866	100%	\$1,984,878	100%

Faith Alive's customer service team continues to provide excellent service to our customers. In a recent survey, respondents gave this department a 9.02 rating on a 10-point scale for their service.

E. Personnel

The Faith Alive staff is made up of just over thirty employees. Our staff is organized into five departments and an administrative office.

The Publishing Leadership Team is a management group made up of the director, Mr. Mark Rice, and representatives from the following departments: Ms. Judy Hardy, Periodicals (*The Banner*); Rev. Leonard Vander Zee and Ms. Ruth Vander Hart, Editorial; Mr. Chad Kruizenga, Marketing; Ms. Jane Hilbrand, Customer Service/Operations; Ms. Alina Robinson, Customer Service; and Mr. Michael Dykema, Financial Services.

F. Finances

The Faith Alive Christian Resources board remains firmly committed to the goal that Faith Alive's ministry should be, as nearly as possible, financially self-supporting. However, it recognizes that projects may be undertaken (either because our board believes they are necessary or because synod requests them) that cannot be financially self-supporting. This has been traditionally true for our World Literature Ministries Department. We also receive ministry-share dollars for the every-household *Banner*. Given the trend in recent years of churches changing curriculum frequently and its impact on our financial base, the long-term finances of our ministry will be

strained. Work has already begun on a long-term financial analysis of Faith Alive, and plans are in place for the development of new curriculum, new publishing models, and increased distribution channels.

Faith Alive submits (for synod's information) reviewed financial statements for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012, and the budget for fiscal year 2013. These reports have been submitted to the denominational director of finance and administration for placement in the *Agenda for Synod 2012—Financial and Business Supplement*.

III. Board organization, membership, governance, and other administrative matters

A. Organization

A board of up to eighteen delegates, one from each CRC region, and up to six at-large delegates (three from the Reformed Church in America) elected by synod governs Faith Alive. The board ordinarily meets three times annually in September, February, and April. Each member of the board serves on one of three councils: Administrative, Editorial, or *The Banner*.

B. Officers

The officers of the Faith Alive board through June 2012 are Rev. Pieter Pereboom, president; Ms. Valerie Walker, vice-president; Ms. Wilma Wiersma, secretary; and Mr. Tom Prince, treasurer.

C. Nominations of board members

1. Regional delegates

The following slates of nominees are being presented for vote at the spring classis meetings. The results of the vote will be presented to synod for ratification.

Region 4

Ms. Deb Flaherty is a member of Talbot Street CRC in London, Ontario. She has a B.A. (Hons.) in history and an M.A. in journalism. She is an award-winning journalist of twenty-five years, winning or being a finalist in over ten Ontario newspaper awards for news features, enterprise, breaking news, and beat reporting. Ms. Flaherty currently serves as a reporter and relief assignment editor at *The London Free Press*. She has led several college-level and community seminars on reporting and public relations. She is active in her church and has served on several committees. Since 2004, Ms. Flaherty has been the church school coordinator and a member of the leadership team for children and youth. She has also served as a deacon. She is a hockey coach and a cancer survivor.

Ms. Lesli Van Milligen is a co-pastor and ministry associate at New Life CRC in Guelph, Ontario. She received her teaching certificate from Calvin College and her M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary. She has served on several boards and committees, including synodical study committees, youth ministry teams, and councils of all three churches in which she served. She has also been president of the West Chester Liberty Arts Council. She is passionate and articulate about youth ministry and is a strong advocate for Faith Alive curriculum.

Region 5

Ms. Sue Imig is a retired school teacher and an active church musician and worship planner. She is a member of Sunnyslope CRC in Salem, Oregon. Ms. Imig is very familiar with implementing Faith Alive materials in a local setting, as well as with the education theory behind the curriculum. She has previously served on the CRC Board of Publications, the Reformed Worship Editorial Council, and the Calvin Theological Seminary Board, and as a church school consultant. She has chaired or co-chaired several committees in her church, including the education, worship, and children's worship committees.

Ms. Sharon Kamp is a member of First Manhattan CRC in Manhattan, Montana. She earned her B.A. from Calvin College, as well as an M.S. in Psychology and an MFT from the University of LaVerne. A school teacher for many years, she also served on the CRC Board of Publications in the early 1990s. She currently volunteers at her church in Coffee Break and GEMS ministries and as a substitute teacher and board member at Manhattan Christian School. Ms. Kamp is described as a thoughtful, take-charge person with enthusiasm for everything she does. She is also an avid reader.

Region 7

Faith Alive recommends that a one-year extension be granted to the term of Ms. Wilma Wiersma, who is completing her second three-year term.

Ground: Five Faith Alive board delegates retired or were replaced in 2011, and another four will retire this year, including three board officers. This one-year continuation will provide a helpful balance to significant board turnover and orientation to new board delegates.

Region 12

Ms. Ana Canino-Fluit was born and raised in Puerto Rico. She is a member of Rochester CRC in Rochester, New York. Ana has a B.A. in English and history from Calvin College and an M.S. in library and information studies from Syracuse University. She is a New York State certified public and school media librarian and currently serves as a librarian and information technology teacher at Rochester Christian School (RCS). She has served on the school board at RCS and has been the enrollment committee chair. Ana is bilingual in Spanish and English and has been a Sunday school teacher at her church for the past three years.

Ground: Ms. Canino-Fluit's background and credentials fit Faith Alive's board composition requirements and would provide a desired unique perspective to the board.

At-large delegate

Mr. Jay Lanninga has been a member of Madison Square CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for twenty years, serving in many capacities during that time, including that of church treasurer and chair of two fundraising campaigns. He is married to Audrey, who serves as the director of worship and the arts at Madison Square CRC. They have two adult children and two grandchildren. Jay holds a B.A. in Economics from Calvin

College and an M.B.A. from Western Michigan University. Jay's financial career has spanned 40 years; he served as vice president of finance at Gantos and as CFO at Star Theaters, and he currently serves as CFO at Grand Rapids Christian Schools. He has also served on the Grand Rapids Christian School board of trustees and as a trustee for Christian Schools International. Jay volunteers as a tutor at Hattie Beverly Tutoring Program and as a member of the Calvin College Alumni Choir.

Ground: Mr. Lanninga's background, experience, and resultant skills and perspective uniquely complement the Faith Alive board and serve its composition requirements.

2. Delegates eligible for a second term

The following delegates are completing their first term and are eligible for a second three-year term: Ms. Ruth Peña and Ms. Sherry Kooiker.

3. RCA alternates

The following nominees are recommended as RCA alternates to the Faith Alive Board.

Ms. Carol Jones holds a bachelor's degree from Lincoln University and a M.A. in special education from Columbia University Teacher's College. Upon retirement from public education Ms. Jones completed three years in the Ministry Associate Training Program offered by the classis of California from 1998 to 2001. She has coordinated Sunday school, children and worship, VBS, and adult discipleship classes at Hope Community in Los Angeles, California, from 1986 to 2000, and she has participated in several RCA events and workshops for educators. For the past seven years her focus has been solely young children and worship and a contemplative prayer group at her church, Emmanuel Reformed.

Ms. Nakisha Zwylghuizen grew up in West Michigan and has been a lifetime member of Community Reformed Church in Zeeland. Ms. Zwylghuizen graduated from Hope College in 2004 with a degree in social work. She also has a master's degree in social work from Western Michigan University. Ms. Zwylghuizen has been working as the children's director at Community Reformed since February 2005. Community Reformed has about 800 worshipers each week and has 1,636 communicant members. She enjoys networking to find new resources, curriculum, and ideas that she can share with children and their families. She also coordinates a network of children's directors who meet monthly to share ideas and resources.

E. *Relationship with the denominational structure and Ministry Plan*

As Faith Alive engages in planning for new resources, it does so with careful attention to the strategic priorities and goals incorporated in the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church (hereafter referred to as Plan).

Faith Alive staff have also been heavily involved in the development of the balanced scorecard, which is designed to help implement the Plan. Faith Alive is committed to working with other denominational agencies and institutions to help ensure the success of this initiative.

In addition to this work directly associated with the Plan, Faith Alive works closely with other CRC agencies and related organizations to assist them in their ministry. Examples of this include the following:

- Faith Alive provides various CRC-developed English-language resources needed by Christian Reformed Home Missions to carry out its ministry. We also work with a number of other agencies in this way.
- World Literature Ministries works with the mission agencies to provide publishing support for their foreign-language literature needs. Most of this work is focused on Spanish-language resources.
- We partner with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) in a number of ways, including the 2012 release of *Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship*, copublished with both CICW and Baker Publishing Group. Planned for 2013 is the release of a new bi-denominational hymnal, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, done in partnership with CICW and the Reformed Church in America.
- *The Banner* regularly publishes information about the ministries of the various CRC agencies and institutions. In fact, each issue of the every-household *Banner* includes eight pages of information about denominational agencies and ministries in the Church@Work section, as well as regular coverage in the news section.
- We provide order fulfillment services for several of the CRC agencies.

F. Relationships with other organizations

During the past few years, Faith Alive has placed an increased emphasis on developing relationships with other Christian organizations in an effort to increase the impact of our ministry and to enable us to broaden the range of resources we offer. Many of these relationships have proven to be very helpful. These are some of the more significant relationships:

- Reformed Church in America (RCA)—One of the most significant developments in recent years was the agreement to enter into a full partnership with the RCA, whereby Faith Alive Resources is the resource provider for the RCA. This agreement was implemented on December 1, 2004, and has been working well.
- Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA)—Several years ago we formed a partnership with the Presbyterians for Renewal organization within the PCUSA. This organization, serving over 3,000 evangelical congregations, is a copublisher of the *Walk With Me* curriculum. The PCUSA carries our *Friendship* curriculum and our *Kid Connection* curriculum.
- We work closely with the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators on their annual conference. We also partner with the nascent Association of Christian Reformed Educators.
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)—Our entire catalog, along with an endorsement letter from the general secretary of the EPC and numerous other promotional materials, is sent to the churches of this denomination.
- Christian Schools International—We meet regularly with staff members from this organization to discuss shared resources, plans, and other pertinent issues. We also work together on collaborative marketing efforts,

providing each other with access to our customer lists for appropriate titles.

- Dynamic Youth Ministries (DYM)—We also meet twice annually with the staff of DYM to discuss plans and opportunities for collaboration.
- Baker Book House—We periodically copublish books with this publisher. *Seeking God’s Face* released in 2010 as a copublished title. *Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship* released in 2012.

G. Use of Faith Alive Christian Resources by CRC churches

Most CRC churches continue to make use of the many resources offered by Faith Alive, but this year we note some significant declines. In the first eight months of fiscal year 2012, about 73 percent of CRC churches placed orders for Faith Alive materials. This represents a 22 percent drop from the previous two years and a 12 percent decline from five years ago. Further, 51 percent of CRCs ordered one or more of our curricula for children during the same eight-month period, representing a nearly 20 percent drop from last year, as well as from the previous five years. Decreasing loyalty to denominational resources and an increasingly competitive curriculum marketplace have placed pressure on Faith Alive to create innovative new approaches to curriculum publishing (see section II, B, 1), find ways to retain and expand its customer base, and expand its distribution channels. While many CRC churches continue to place a high value on ensuring that their children are being taught using curriculum written from a Reformed perspective, other CRCs are finding other methods to accomplish this or are simply choosing other materials, many of which do not present a Reformed world and life view. At the same time we are encouraged that Faith Alive curricula are being positively received as high-quality, easy-to-use curricula by CRCs and churches from other denominations that use these materials.

H. Antiracism

Faith Alive continues to be an active participant in the effort of the CRC to respond to synod’s directive to initiate a significant response to the issue of racism in the CRC. Faith Alive employees voluntarily participate in creating personal development plans aimed at understanding each other and our perspectives on racism and developing goals for growth. Faith Alive also has an anti-racism team that reviews staffing levels, job descriptions, and posting to ensure that Faith Alive’s hiring and staffing efforts are consistent with its anti-racism policies.

The Faith Alive board also has an active antiracism team committed to achieving the following vision approved by the board: “The Faith Alive board covenants to become an antiracist community by respecting and valuing cultural diversity as a God-given asset of the human family.”

I. Salary disclosure

Faith Alive, in accord with the action taken by synod, submits the following annual compensation data:

Job level	Positions	Compensation quartile (includes housing allowance)
18	1	1st
17	1	1st and 2nd
15	1	3rd

IV. Recommendations

A. The Faith Alive Christian Resources board requests that synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following people when matters of Faith Alive are discussed:

For the board

Rev. Pieter Pereboom, president

Mr. Mark Rice, director

For *The Banner*

Rev. Robert De Moor, editor in chief

For the Editorial Department

Rev. Leonard Vander Zee, director

For the Worship Department

Rev. Joyce Borger, worship editor

B. That synod by way of the ballot ratify the elections of and reappoint members to the Faith Alive Christian Resources board from the nominees presented.

C. That synod endorse *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, scheduled for release in June 2013, as an approved hymnal for the CRC (see section II, B, 3, b, and Appendix).

Grounds:

1. Synod 2007 approved the development of a bi-denominational hymnbook, now titled *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, to be compiled in cooperation with the Reformed Church in America (*Acts of Synod 2007*, pp. 579-80).
2. The editorial committee, made up of equal membership from the CRC and RCA, is now close to finalizing the list of songs and hymns for this book. The appendix to this report provides the list of songs recommended by the committee as of February 15, 2012. (Additional information and updates in the process are available at www.liftupyourheartshymnal.org.)
3. Precursor songbooks to *Lift Up Your Hearts*—namely, *Contemporary Songs for Worship* (2008), *Hymns for Worship* (2010), and *Global Songs for Worship* (2010), have been developed by Faith Alive with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and have been well received by CRC and RCA churches and the wider hymnal audience. Many of the songs in these collections will be included in *Lift Up Your Hearts*.
4. A sampler, including the song list to date, an outline of the hymnal, and forty songs, was made available to the churches in early 2012 for their consideration, inviting engagement in the review process.

Note: Recommendations on financial matters are included in the report of the denominational Board of Trustees and will be presented to synod by way of the finance advisory committee.

Faith Alive Christian Resources
Mark Rice, director

Appendix

Lift Up Your Hearts Song List (as of Feb. 15, 2012)

A

A Certain Place
A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing!
A Litany for the Sick or Dying
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
A Shield about Me
A Sower's Seed Fell on a Path
Abana Alathi fi Ssama
Abide with Me
Across the Lands
Agnus Dei (Scotland)
Ah, Holy Jesus, How Have You Offended
Ahead of Us a Race to Run
Alabad al Señor naciones todas
Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed (cont. Kauflin)
Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?
All Along
All Are Welcome
All Creatures of Our God and King
All Glory Be to God on High
All Glory, Laud, and Honor
All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
All My Life
All on Earth and All in Heaven
All People that on Earth Do Dwell
All Praise to You, My God, This Night
All Things Bright and Beautiful
All Who Are Thirsty
All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly
All Will Be Well
Alleluia (Berthier)
Alleluia (Duncan)
Alleluia (Monteiro)
Alleluia (Pavlechko)
Alleluia (Uruguay)
Alleluia, Alleluia (Honduran)
Alleluia, Alleluia (So. African trad.)
Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks
Alleluia! Alleluia! Hearts to Heaven
Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen!
Alleluia! Sing to Jesus
Amazing Grace
Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)
Amen (Themba Amen)
Amen siakudu misa
Amid the Thronging Worshipers
Ancient Words

And Can It Be
Angels from the Realms of Glory
Angels We Have Heard on High
Approach Our God with Songs of Praise
Arise, Shine, for Your Light Is Come
Arise, Your Light Is Come!
As a Deer in Want of Water
As He Gathered at His Table
As in That Upper Room You Left Your Seat
As Moses Raised the Serpent Up
As the Deer Pants for the Water (Nystrom)
As the Deer Pants for the Water (Scheer)
As with Gladness Men of Old
As-salaamu Lakum
At the Name of Jesus
Awake! Awake and Greet the New Morn
Away in a Manger
Away in a Manger (alternate words)
Awit sa Dapit Hapon

B

Baptized in Christ
Baptized in Water
Bathed in the Waters of Life
Be Gracious to Me, Lord
Be Still and Know
Be Still and Know II
Be Still, for the Presence
Be Thou My Vision
Be unto Your Name
Beams of Heaven
Beautiful One
Beautiful Savior
Because He Lives
Before the Throne of God Above
Behold the Lamb
Behold the Lamb of God (Keithan)
Beneath the Cross
Beneath the Cross of Jesus
Benediction
Better Is One Day
Bless the Lord, Bless the Lord
Bless the Lord, My Soul
Bless the Lord, O My Soul
Bless the Lord, O Saints and Servants
Blessed Assurance: Jesus Is Mine
Blessed Be Your Name
Blessed Jesus, at Your Word
Blessing and Honor and Glory and Power
Blest Are the Innocents

Blest Are They
Blest Be God
Blest Be the Tie That Binds
Blow Wild and Blow Freely
Bread of the World in Mercy Broken
Break Now the Bread of Life
Breathe on Me, Breath of God
Bring Forth the Kingdom
Bring Peace to Earth Again
Bring We the Frankincense of Our Love
Built Upon God's Holy Mountain
By Faith Have God's Saints Walked from Age into Age
By Grace We Have Been Saved
By the Babylonian Rivers
By the Sea of Crystal

C

Calvary
Cantad al Señor
Cantemos al Señor
Canticle of the Turning
Canto de esperanza
Cast Down, O God, the Idols
Cast Your Burden upon the Lord
Celtic Alleluia
Child of Blessing, Child of Promise
Children from Your Vast Creation
Children of the Heavenly Father
Christ Be Our Light
Christ Is Alive! Let Christians Sing
Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation
Christ Is Risen! Shout Hosanna
Christ Jesus Came to Nazareth
Christ, Mighty Savior
Christ, the Life of All the Living
Christ the Lord Is Risen Today
Christ upon the Mountain Peak
Christ, We Climb with You the Mountain
Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies
Christian Hearts in Love United
Church of God, Elect and Glorious
Clap Your Hands, All You Nations
Come, All You People, Praise Our God
Come, All You Servants of the Lord
Come and Fill Our Hearts
Come Away from Rush and Hurry
Come, Christians, Join to Sing
Come Down, O Love Divine
Come, Holy Spirit
Come, Holy Spirit, Our Souls Inspire

Come Join the Dance of Trinity
Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down
Come, Now Is the Time to worship
Come Now, You Blessed, Eat at My Table
Come, One and All, from Near and Far beyond This Age
Come Quickly, Lord, to Rescue Me
Come, Sing to God with All Your Heart
Come, Thou Almighty King
Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus
Come to Me, O Weary Traveler
Come to the Savior Now
Come to the Water
Come to Us, Beloved Stranger
Come, Worship God
Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain
Come, You Disconsolate
Come, You Thankful People, Come
Comfort, Comfort Now My People
Commit Your Way to God the Lord
Creator of the Stars of Night
Creator Spirit, by Whose Aid
Cristo Vive
Crown Him with Many Crowns

D

Day by Day
Day of Delight and Beauty Unbounded
De tierra lejana venimos
Deep Within
Deliver Me from Evil
Depth of Mercy
Do Not Keep Silent, O God
Dona Nobis Pacem
Dona Nobis Pacem II
Don't Be Afraid
Dwell in Me, O Blessed Spirit

E

Earth and All Stars
Eat This Bread
El Señor es mi luz
Emmanuel
Eternal Spirit, God of Truth
Every Heart Its Tribute Pays

F

Faith Begins by Letting Go
Far from Home We Run, Rebellious
Father, Long before Creation
Father, We Give You Thanks, Who Planted

Fear Not, Rejoice and Be Glad
Fill Thou My Life, O Lord, My God
For All the Faithful Women (OT and NT)
For All the Saints
For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free
For the Beauty of the Earth
For the Fruit of All Creation (Thanks Be to God)
For the Glories of God's Grace
For the Healing of the Nations
For the Honor of Our King
For the Music of Creation
For Your Gift of God the Spirit
Forever
Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive
From All That Dwell below the Skies

G

Gather Now around His Teachings
Gather Us In
Gbemi Jesu
Gift of Finest Wheat
Give Glory to God, All You Heavenly Creatures
Give Me a Clean Heart
Give Me Jesus
Give Praise to Our God
Give Thanks
Give Thanks to God for All His Goodness
Give Thanks to God the Father
Give Thanks to God Who Hears Our Cries
Give to Our God Immortal Praise
Give to the Winds Your Fears
Give Us Clean Hands
Gloria
Gloria a Dios
Gloria, Gloria
Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken
Glory and Honor
Glory Be to the Father
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah
Glory in the Highest
Glory to God
Go, My Children, with My Blessing
Go Now in Peace
Go, Tell It on the Mountain
Go to Dark Gethsemane
Go to the World!
God, Be in My Head
God, Be Merciful to Me
God Be with You
God Be with You Till We Meet Again

God, beyond Glory, Gracious and Holy
God Has Gone Up
God Has Gone Up with Shouts of Joy!
God Himself Is with Us
God Is Here Today
God Is Known among His People
God Is Love
God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength
God Is So Good
God Marked a Line and Told the Sea
God Moves in a Mysterious Way
God, My Hope on You Is Founded
God of All Ages
God of Freedom, God of Justice
God of Grace and God of Glory
God of Great and God of Small
God of Justice, Ever Flowing
God of Light and God of Darkness
God of Mercy, God of Grace
God of Our Life
God of the Prophets
God of the Word
God of This City
God of Wisdom, Truth, and Beauty
God of Wonders
God, Stir Your Gifts
God, the Father of Your People
God, We Give to You Our Offerings
God, We Honor You
God, We Sing Your Glorious Praises
God, Who Created Hearts to Love
God, Who Touches Earth with Beauty
God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending
God Works His Purposes in Us
God, You Call Us to This Place
God's Glory Fills the Heavens
Good Christian Friends, Rejoice
Good Christians All Rejoice and Sing
Good to Me
Goodness Is Stronger than Evil
Grace Greater than Our Sin
Gracious Spirit
Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading
Grant Now Your Blessing
Great God, Your Love Has Called Us Here
Great Is the Lord Our God
Great Is Thy Faithfulness
Greet Now the Swiftly Changing Year
Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer

H

Hail and Hosanna
Hail, O Once-Despised Jesus
Hail the Day that Sees Him Rise
Hail to the Lord's Anointed
Haleluya Puji Tuhan
Halle, Halle, Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Sing Praise to Your Creator
Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises
Happy Are They Who Trust
Happy Day
Happy Is the One
Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes
Hark, the Voice of Jesus Calling
Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Have Mercy on Me, O God
Have Thine Own Way, Lord
Have We Any Gift Worth Giving
He Is King of Kings
He Is Lord
He Knows My Name
He Leadeth Me
He Lives, He Lives (the Lamb who once was slain)
Healer of Our Every Ill
Hear My Cry and Supplication
Hear My Cry, O God, and Save Me
Hear My Prayer, O God
Hear, O Lord, My Urgent Prayer
Hear Our Praises
Hear Our Prayer, O Lord
Hear the Fool
Hear Us, O Lord, as We Voice Our Lament
Heleluyan: Hallelujah
Help Us Accept Each Other
Here from All Nations
Here I Am
Here I Am, Lord
Here I Am to Worship
Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather
He's Got the Whole World in His Hands
High in the Heavens, Eternal God
His Eye Is on the Sparrow
Holy Gift of Love
Holy God
Holy God, We Praise Your Name
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty
Holy, Holy, Holy/Santo, Santo, Santo
Holy Is the Lord

Holy Spirit
Holy Spirit, Come
Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God
Holy Spirit, Mighty God
Holy Spirit, Truth Divine
Hosanna
Hosanna, Loud Hosanna
Hours and Days and Years and Ages
How Blest Are They Whose Trespass
How Blest Are Those Who Fear the Lord
How Bright Appears the Morning Star
How Can I Keep from Singing?
How Clear Is Our Vocation, Lord
How Deep the Father's Love for Us
How Firm a Foundation
How Great Is Our God
How Great Is the Love of the Father
How Great Thou Art
How I Love You, Lord My God
How Long, O Lord, How Long
How Long Will You Forget Me, Lord
How Lovely Is Your Dwelling
How Lovely, Lord, How Lovely
How Shall the Young Direct Their Way?
How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds
How Sweet Was the Garden, Fertile and Fair
How Vast the Benefits Divine
How Wonderful, the Three-In-One
Humble Praises, Holy Jesus
Humbly in Your Sight We Come Together, Lord

I

I Am the Bread of Life (Toolan)
I Am the Holy Vine
I Call to You, My Rock
I Come with Joy
I Give You My Heart
I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art
I Have Called You by Name
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Calling
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say
I Know It Was the Blood
I Know Not Why God's Wondrous Grace
I Know that My Redeemer Lives!
I Lift My Eyes Up
I Love the Lord
I Love the Lord (Philippine)
I Love to Tell the Story
I Love You, Lord, for You Have Heard My Voice
I Love You, Lord, Today

I Need Thee Every Hour
I Rejoiced When I Heard Them Say (Farrell)
I Serve a Risen Savior
I Sought the Lord, and Afterward I Knew
I Surrender All
I Waited Patiently for God
I Want Jesus to Walk with Me
I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light
I Was Glad
I Will Be Your God
I Will Exalt My God and King
I Will Exalt My God, My King
I Will Extol You, O My God
I Will Give You Rest
I Will Hide Your Word inside My Heart
I Will Put My Law
I Will Sing a Song of Triumph
I Will Sing of My Redeemer
I Will Sing unto the Lord
I Will Trust in the Lord
I Worship You, O Lord
If You and I Believe in Christ
If You But Trust in God to Guide You
If You Love Me
I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me
I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me
Imagine
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
In a Deep, Unbounded Darkness
In an Age of Twisted Values
In Christ Alone
In Christ There Is No East or West
In Deepest Night
In God Alone
In God the Father I Believe
In Great Thanksgiving
In Labor All Creation Groans
In My Day of Fear
In Our Households, Heavenly Father
In Sweet Communion, Lord, with Thee
In Thanksgiving Let Us Praise Him
In the Breaking of the Bread
In the Day of the Lord
In the Heavens Shone a Star
In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful
In the Sanctuary
In You Is Gladness
Instruments of Your Peace
Isaiah 49
Ishworo

It Is Good to Give Thanks to You, Lord
It Is Good to Sing Your Praises

J

Je louerai l'Éternel
Jerusalem the Golden
Jesu, Jesu
Jesu tawa pano
Jesus, All for Jesus
Jesus Calls Us Here to Meet Him
Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult
Jesus Christ Is the Way
Jesus Christ, Our Living Lord
Jesus, Draw Me Ever Nearer
Jesus Heard with Deep Compassion
Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land
Jesus Is Lord
Jesus Is Our King
Jesus, Jesus, Oh, What a Wonderful Child
Jesus, Light of the World
Jesus Lives
Jesus Loved Each Little Child
Jesus, Lover of My Soul
Jesus Loves Me, This I Know
Jesus, Priceless Treasure
Jesus, Remember Me
Jesus Shall Reign
Jesus, Tempted in the Desert
Jesus, Thank You
"Jesus the Lord Said, 'I Am the Bread'"
Jesus Took a Towel
Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory
Just a Closer Walk with Thee
Just as I Am, without One Plea

K

Keep What You Have Believed
Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning
Khudaya rahem kar
Kind and Merciful God
Knowing You
Koinonia
Kum Ba Yah, My Lord
Kwake Yesu nasimama
Kyrie (Brumm)
Kyrie (from Ghana)
Kyrie (from Russia)
Kyrie (Prayer of Confession)

L

La paz del Señor
Laudate Dominum/Sing Praise and Bless the Lord
Laudate Omnes Gentes
Lead Me, Guide Me
Lead on, O King Eternal
Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence
Let All Nations Praise the Lord
Let All Things Now Living
Let Justice Flow Down
Let My Prayer Rise before You
Let the Giving of Thanks
Let the Peoples Praise You
Let This Be My Supreme Desire
Let Us Break Bread Together
Let Us Pray to the Lord
Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ
Lift Every Voice and Sing
Lift High the Cross
Lift Up the Gates Eternal
Lift Up Your Hearts unto the Lord
Lift Up Your Voices, Shout and Sing
Light Dawns for the Righteous
Like a Child Rests
Like a River Glorious
Like the Murmur of the Dove's Song
Listen, God Is Calling
Listen, Sisters! Listen, Brothers!
Listen to My Cry, Lord
Living Stones
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
Lo Yisa Goi
Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending
Long Ago You Taught Your People
Look and Learn
Lord, as the Day Begins
Lord, Chasten Not in Anger
Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing
Lord God, Almighty
Lord, Have Mercy
Lord, Have Mercy II
Lord, I Bring My Songs to You
Lord, I Gladly Trust
Lord, I Lift Your Name on High
Lord, I Pray
Lord, I Want to Be a Christian
Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now
Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil
Lord, Listen to My Righteous Plea
Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying

Lord, Make Us Servants
Lord Most High
Lord, My Petition Heed
Lord of All Good
Lord of All Hopefulness
Lord, Our Lord, Your Glorious Name
Lord, Our Lord, Your Glorious Name II
Lord, Show Me How to Count My Days
Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak
Lord, the Earthquakes, Wars, and Famines
Lord, to Whom Shall We Go
Lord, to You My Soul Is Lifted
Lord, We Hear Your Word with Gladness
Lord, Who May Dwell Within Your House
Lord, Who throughout These Forty Days
Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service
Lord, You Are My Strength
Lord, You Have Searched Me
Lord, You Were Rich Beyond All Splendor
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
Love God with All Your Soul and Strength
Loving Spirit
Low in the Grave Christ Lay
Lying Lips that Falsely Flatter

M

Magnificat (My Soul Proclaims the Greatness)
Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
Man of Sorrows—What a Name
Mantos y palmas
Many and Great
Mary Had a Baby
May God Bless You
May the Lord God Hear You Pray
May the Lord, Mighty God
May the Mind of Christ, My Savior
May the Peace of Christ Be with You
Mayenziwe
Meekness and Majesty
Memorial Acclamation
Mfurahini halleluya
Mighty Is the Power of the Cross
Mighty to Save
Mikotoba o kudasai
Morning Has Broken
Mungu ni mwema
My Faith Looks Up to Thee
My God, How Wonderful You Are
My Heart Is Firmly Fixed
My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less

My Jesus, I Love Thee
My Lord and My God
My Lord, What a Morning
My Only Comfort, Now Always
My Savior's Love
My Shepherd Is the Lord
My Shepherd Will Supply My Need
My Song Forever Shall Record
My Song Is Love Unknown
My Soul Finds Rest (Townend)
My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone
My Soul in Stillness Waits
My Times Are in Your Hands
My Tribute

N

Nada te turbe
Nae pyöngsaeng sowŏn
Nations, Clap Your Hands
Nearer, Still Nearer
Neither Death nor Life
No hay Dios tan grande
Not for Tongues of Heaven's Angels
Not unto Us, O Lord of Heaven
Not What My Hands Have Done
Nothing but the Blood
Now Behold the Lamb
Now Blessed Be the Lord, Our God
Now Go in Peace (Caribbean)
Now Thank We All Our God
Now the Feast and Celebration
Now the Green Blade Rises
Now with Joyful Exultation

O

O Blessed Spring
O Christ, Our Hope
O Christ, Our Hope, Our Heart's Desire
O Christ, the Lamb of God
O Christ, You Wept When Grief Was Raw
O Come, All Ye Faithful
O Come, Let Us Sing
O Come, My Soul, Sing Praise to God
O Come, O Come, Immanuel
O Day of Peace
O for a Closer Walk with God
O Give the Lord Wholehearted Praise
O Gladsome Light, O Grace
O God, Beyond All Praising
O God, Defender of the Poor
O God, Great Father, Lord, and King

O God, My Faithful God/Litany for the Slandered
 O God of Every Nation
 O God of Love, Forever Blest
 O God, Our Help in Ages Past
 O God, We Have Heard
 O God, You Are My God Alone
 O Great God and Lord of the Earth
 O Holy Spirit, by Whose Breath
 O Jesus, I Have Promised
 O Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts
 O Joyous Light of Glory
 O Lamb of God Most Holy!
 O Let My Supplicating Cry
 O Little Town of Bethlehem
 O Lord, as a Deer Longs for Cool Water
 O Lord, Be Our Refuge
 O Lord, Come Quickly: Hear Me Pray
 O Lord, Hear My Prayer
 O Lord, How Excellent
 O Lord, Our Lord, How Excellent Is Thy Name
 O Lord, You Are My Light
 O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High
 O Love of God, How Strong and True
 O Love that Will Not Let Me Go
 O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee
 O Morning Star, O Radiant Sun
 O Praise God's Name Together
 O Praise the Lord, for It Is Good
 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
 O Sons and Daughters
 O Splendor of God's Glory Bright
 O the Deep, Deep, Love of Jesus
 O When Will We See Justice Done?
 O Wind of Heaven, God's Own Storm
 O Word of God, Incarnate
 O Worship the King
 Of the Father's Love Begotten
 Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing
 Oh, Look and Wonder
 Oh que' bueno es Jesus
 Oh, to See the Dawn
 On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry
 Once Again
 Once in Royal David's City
 Once in Royal David's City, When the King Was in Distress
 Once We Sang and Danced with Gladness
 One Bread, One Body
 One Generation Will Call to the Next
 One People Here We Gather
 Open Our Eyes

Open the Eyes of My Heart
Open Your Ears, O Faithful People
Order My Steps
Ososo
Our Children, Lord, in Faith and Prayer
Our Father
Our Father in Heaven
Our Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth
Our God
Our Help
Our Help Is in the Name of God the Lord
Out of Need and Out of Custom
Out of the Depths I Cry to You on High

P

Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior
Pelas dores deste mundo
People of the Lord
Perdon, Señor
Plaintive Is the Song I Sing
Praise God for the Harvest of Orchard and Field
Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow
Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow II
Praise God! Earth and Heav'n Rejoice!
Praise Him! Jesus, Blessed Savior
Praise Is Your Right, O God, in Zion
Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven
Praise the Lord, O My Soul
Praise the Lord, Sing Hallelujah
Praise the Lord, the Day Is Won
Praise the Savior, Now and Ever
Praise the Spirit in Creation
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
Praise Ye the Lord
Precious Lord, Take My Hand
Protect Me God: I Trust in You
Pues si vivimos

R

Rebuke Me Not in Anger, Lord
Refuge and Rock
Rejoice in God's Saints
Rejoice, O Pure in Heart
Rejoice, O Zion's Daughter
Rejoice, the Lord Is King
Rejoice, You Righteous, in the Lord
Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers
Remember Not, O God
Restore Us Again
Resurrection Hymn
Ride On, King Jesus

Ride On! Ride on in Majesty!
Robed in Majesty
Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

S

Salaam
Salvation Belongs to Our God
Sanna sannanina
Santo Espíritu, excelsa paloma
Santo, santo, santo (Salvador)
Santo, santo, santo, mi corazon
Saranam, saranam
Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise
Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us
Savior of the Nations Come
Savior, When in Dust to You
See Christ, Who on the River's Shore
See My Hands and Feet
Seek Ye First the Kingdom
Send Out Your Light and Your Truth
Sent Forth by God's Blessing
Shadows Lengthen into Night
Shepherd Me, O God
Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns
Shout to the Lord
Shukuru Yesu
Silent Night! Holy Night!
Since My Mother's Womb
Since Our Great High Priest, Christ Jesus
Sing a New Song to the Lord
Sing a Psalm of Joy
Sing, Choirs of New Jerusalem
Sing of the Lord's Goodness
Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above
Sing Praise to the Lord
Sing Praise to the Lord, You People of Grace
Sing, Sing a New Song to the Lord God
Sing to God with Joy
Sing to the King
Sing to the Lord of Harvest
Sing to the Lord, Sing His Praise
Sing! A New Creation
Softly and Tenderly, Jesus Is Calling
Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child
Somos pueblo que camina
Somos uno en Cristo
Song of Simeon
Song of Zechariah
Songs of Thankfulness and Praise
Soon and Very Soon

Soorp astvatz
Speak a Word to Us, Isaiah
Speak, O Lord
Spirit
Spirit Divine, Inspire Our Prayer
Spirit of God, Unleashed on Earth
Spirit of God, Who Dwells within My Heart
Spirit of the Living God
Spirit Working in Creation
Stand Firm
Stay with Me
Step By Step
Surely, Surely
Surrender
Sweet Refreshment
Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

T

Table of Plenty
Take Me to the Water
Take My Life
Take My Life and Let It Be
Take, O Take Me as I Am
Take Our Silver and Our Gold
Take the Saving Word of God
Take Up Your Cross
Take Us as We Are, O God
Tama ngakau marie
Taste and See
Teach Me, O Lord, Your Way of Truth
Teach Me Your Way, O Lord
Tell Out, My Soul
Tell Your Children
Thank You, Lord
That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright
That's Why We Praise Him
The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power
The Church of Christ Cannot Be Bound
The Church of Christ in Every Age
The Church's One Foundation
The City Is Alive, O God
The Cry of the Poor
The Day You Gave Us, Lord, Is Ended
The Ends of All the Earth Shall Hear
The First Place
The Gifts of God for the People of God
The God of Abraham Praise
The Grace of Life Is Theirs
The Heavens Declare Your Glory

The King of Love My Shepherd Is
 The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns
 The Lord Be with You
 The Lord Bless You
 The Lord Is God, the One and True God
 The Lord Is King, Enthroned in Might
 The Lord Is My Light
 The Lord Is My Light and My Salvation
 The Lord Is My Shepherd
 The Lord, My Shepherd, Rules My Life
 The Lord of Hosts Is with Us
 The Lord unto My Lord Has Said
 The Lord's Prayer
 The One Is Blest
 The People Who in Darkness Walked
 The Seed Must Fall
 The Servant King
 The Servant Song
 The Spirit Came as Promised
 The Steadfast Love of the Lord
 The Strife Is O'er, the Battle Done
 The Trees of the Field
 The Trumpets Sound, the Angels Sing
 The Wonderful Cross
 There in God's Garden
 There Is a Balm in Gilead
 There Is a Place Prepared for Little Children
 There Is a Redeemer
 There Is Power in the Blood
 There Where the Judges Gather
 There's a Wideness in God's Mercy
 They'll Know We Are Christians
 Thine Is the Glory
 This Holy Covenant Was Made
 This Is My Father's World
 This Is the Day
 This Is the Day the Lord Has Made
 This Is the Feast of Victory
 This Joyful Eastertide
 This Little Light of Mine
 Those Who Place on God Reliance
 Through It All
 Through the Red Sea
 Throughout These Lenten Days and Nights
 Thuma mina
 To God Be the Glory
 To Him Who Sits on the Throne
 To Mock Your Reign
 To My Precious Lord
 To the Hills I Lift My Eyes

To Your Unequaled Strength, O Lord
Toda la tierra
Today in Celebration
Todos los que han sido bautizados
Told of God's Favor
Total Praise
Touch the Earth Lightly
Tu fidelidad
Tu has venido a la orilla

U

Ubi caritas et amor
Unless the Lord Constructs the House
Up to You I Lift My Eyes
Uri Uwer'Uwer'Uwera
Use These Gifts
Uyai Mose

V

Vengo a ti Jesus amado
View the Present through the Promise

W

Wade in the Water
Wait for the Lord
Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying
Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters
Water Has Held Us
We Are an Offering
We Are Called
We Are People on a Journey
We Are Your People
We Cannot Measure How You Heal
We Celebrate the Unity of the Spirit
We Come, O Christ, to You
We Find an Image of the Christ
We Give Thanks unto You
We Give You but Your Own
We Have Put on Christ
We Know that Christ Is Raised
We Praise You, O God
We Pray for Peace
We Receive Your Blessing
We Shall Overcome
We Shall Walk through the Valley in Peace
We Sing the Mighty Power of God
We Will Follow
We Will Walk with God
We Worship You, Whose Splendor Dwarfs the Cosmos
Wei yuan Shen di ai
Welcome into This Place

We're Marching to Zion
We've Come This Far by Faith
Were You There
What a Friend We Have in Jesus
What Adam's Disobedience Cost
What Child Is This
What Does the Lord Require of You
What Feast of Love
What Grace Is This
What Shall I Render to the Lord
What the Lord Has Done in Me
What Wondrous Love
When a Prophet Sings of Justice
When Cain Killed Abel
When Evening Falls and Labors Cease
When God First Brought Us Back from Exile
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
When Israel Fled from Egypt Land
When Israel Was in Egypt's Land
When Love Is Found
When Memory Fades
When Morning Gilds the Sky
When Our Savior Yesu Went Away
When Peace like a River
When the King Shall Come Again
When the Lord Restored Our Blessing
When We Walk with the Lord
When You, O Lord, Were Baptized
Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life
Whoever Fears the Lord
Why Stand So Far Away, My God
Why This Dark Conspiracy
Wildflowers Bloom and Fade
Will You Come and Follow Me
Will You Leave the Light of Heaven
Wind Who Makes All Winds that Blow
Wisdom's Table
With All My Heart I Thank You, Lord
With Grateful Heart My Thanks I Bring
Within Our Darkest Night
Within the Shelter of the Lord
Worthy Is Christ

Y

Yesu azali awa
You Are before Me, Lord
You Are Good
You Are Holy
You Are Mine
You Are My Hiding Place

You Are My King
You Are Our God; We Are Your People
You Are the Living Word
You Cunning Liar, Why Publicise
You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd
You Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim
You Shall Love the Lord
Your Grace Is Enough
Your Hands, O Lord, in Days of Old
Your Love Is Before My Eyes
Your Mercy and Your Justice
Your Mercy Flows
Your Name
Your Word Sheds Light upon My Path

I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church in North America maintains employee benefit programs that provide retirement, health, life, and disability benefits for employees of the denomination in its ministries, agencies, local churches, and other CRC organizations.

II. Board matters

The ministers' pension plans, special-assistance funds, and employees' retirement plans are governed by the U.S. and Canadian Boards of Pensions. These boards meet several times per year, usually in joint session. Separate meetings of the boards are held as needed.

Mr. Jack Byeman and Mr. Kurt Knoll are each completing their first term on the U.S. Pension Trustees in 2012 and are eligible for a second three-year term. Concluding service on the U.S. Pension Trustees is Mr. James Clousing. The following slate of nominees is presented for election of one member to a three-year term:

Mr. Michael Cok of Bozeman, Montana, is the founding partner of Cok Kinzler law firm and has practiced law for thirty-four years as a civil trial lawyer. He has served as a long-time member on several boards, including the Montana Justice Foundation and the Montana Trial Lawyers Association. Mr. Cok served nine years on the Manhattan Christian School Board, many as its president. In addition, he has served as an elder in the Bozeman CRC and as president of its council. Presently Mr. Cok is working to start a CRC church plant in Bozeman. He attended Calvin College and graduated from the University of Montana law school, where he is an adjunct instructor.

Mr. Thomas Dykhous of North Haledon, New Jersey, is the executive director and head of school for the Eastern Christian School Association. Mr. Dykhous serves on the boards of the Barnabas Foundation and the Christian Health Care Center Foundation and is a trustee of the Christian Schools International Pension Fund. He has a B.A. in economics from Fairleigh Dickinson University. Mr. Dykhous is a member of Faith Community CRC in Wyckoff, New Jersey, where he has served both as a deacon and an elder.

Rev. Kevin te Brake is completing his first term on the Canadian Pension Trustees in 2012 and is eligible for a second three-year term. Completing service on the Canadian Pension Trustees are Mr. Greg Kist and Ms. Claire Veenstra. The board requests that synod elect *two* members from the following slate of three nominees for election to a three-year term:

Mr. Henry Eygenraam of Markham, Ontario, is a retired consultant to Christian Stewardship Services (CSS), having recently retired as its executive director. Prior to joining CSS, he spent twenty-eight years in sales and management in the insurance and financial services industry, where he worked with individual and corporate clients providing insurance, employee benefits, and pension plans. Mr. Eygenraam is a chartered life underwriter, charter financial consultant, and certified financial consultant. He is a member of Willowdale CRC, where he presently serves as president of council.

Ms. MaryAnn Kokan-Nyhof of Winnipeg, Manitoba, is the vice president of retail sales for MGI Financial, where she does retirement planning with individual Canadians. She is the treasurer of the Greater Winnipeg Society for Christian Education and serves on the Finance Committee for Calvin Christian Schools. Ms. Kokan-Nyhof is a certified financial planner. She is a member of Covenant CRC in Winnipeg.

Dr. Dick Kranendonk of Hamilton, Ontario, serves as chairman of the Hald-Nor Community Credit Union. Mr. Kranendonk has previously served as the executive director of the Bible League of Canada, as vice president of administration and finance at Redeemer University College, and as a senior staff member at the Canadian Council of Christian Charities. Mr. Kranendonk has a doctorate in finance and administration. He is a member of Ancaster CRC, where he has served two terms on council.

III. Benefit-program activities

A. Ministers' pension plans

The ministers' pension plans are defined-benefit plans. Benefits paid by the plans are defined by formula, and the required funding of the plans is determined by actuarial calculations. The primary purpose of the plans is to provide retirement benefits to plan participants. The plans also provide benefits to the surviving spouses of participants, as well as to any dependent children who are orphaned. In addition, long-term disability benefits are provided through an insurance product to all full-time, active participants in the plans who have furnished the information concerning compensation and housing, as required by the insurance carrier.

The following is a summary of participant counts as of December 31, 2011, for each plan and in total. Participants having an interest in both plans (generally the result of having served churches in both the United States and Canada) appear in the column where their interest is greatest.

	United States	Canada	Total
Active ministers	728	252	980
Ministers receiving benefit payments	596	134	730
Spouses and dependents	148	38	186
Withdrawn participants with vested benefits	107	24	131
Total	1,579	448	2,027

Independent actuarial firms are employed to prepare valuations of the plans. These actuarial valuations furnish the information needed to determine church and participant assessment amounts. The U.S. plan is required to have a valuation every three years, while the Canadian plan is required to submit an annual valuation to provincial regulators. Information regarding church and participant assessment amounts will be presented later in this report.

1. Portfolio balances and performance

Plan assets are invested in diversified portfolios under the management of professional investment-management firms. These firms are required to adhere to the denomination's investment guidelines, and their

performance is measured against established benchmarks and regularly reviewed by the trustees.

The plans' actuaries have informed us that as of the date of the plans' last valuation, the actuarial liability totaled approximately \$108.9 million for the U.S. plan and \$34.9 million for the Canadian plan. These amounts reflect the present value of the plans' obligations to all participants, including active, disabled, and retired pastors, widows, and dependents.

Market value of the portfolios is summarized as follows:

	December 31, 2011	December 31, 2010
United States (U.S. \$)	\$87,057,000	\$90,913,000
Canada (Can. \$)	29,977,000	31,339,000

Dividends, interest, and appreciation in the value of the plans' holdings provide a significant portion of the resources needed to meet the plans' obligations to the active participants and to fund payments to retirees and beneficiaries.

2. Plan review

The pension plan has undergone several changes since separate plans for the United States and Canada were established in 1983. While the basic defined benefit form of the plan was not altered, changes were made to improve benefits provided by the plan, to clarify how the plan is administered, and to improve the protocols used to obtain funds needed to pay costs.

The more significant changes to the plans (or changes that affect them) made by recent synods include the following:

2001 Approved a variety of optional benefit forms in addition to the plan's normal form.

Applied the plan's 1.46 percent multiple to all service beginning January 1, 1985.

2003 Approved guidelines for part-time service.

Required payment for upgrading the interests of previously frozen participants reinstated as active members of the plans.

Acted to replace self-insured disability benefits with an insurance contract.

Changed funding protocols for all organized churches, effective January 1, 2004, to require payment of the greater of direct costs or per-member assessments.

Linked timely payment of contributions (the greater of participant or per-member costs) to the grant of credited service to first or only pastors of organized churches.

2004 Required that pension costs of endorsed chaplains be paid as a condition for active participation in the plan, effective January 1, 2006.

Approved rule VII for synodical procedure, requiring synods to defer any proposed action concerning the plans until advised by the pension trustees.

Amended Church Order Article 15 to include specific elements of “proper support,” including payment to the denomination’s ministers’ pension plan.

- 2010 Decreased the multiplier used to determine benefit amounts from 1.46 percent to 1.3 percent for credited service beginning January 1, 2011.

Approved a change in the early retirement reduction factor to 0.5 percent from 0.3 percent per month, effective January 1, 2014.

- 2011 Increased the normal retirement from age 65 to age 66.

Advanced the implementation of the change to the early retirement factor (from 0.3% to 0.5% per month) from January 1, 2014, to July 1, 2011.

Froze the final three-year average salary upon which benefits are calculated in Canada at the 2010 level.

Changed the normal form of retirement benefit from joint and survivor to single life with five years certain. (Participants can still elect to receive a joint and survivor benefit at a slightly reduced level of payment.)

To provide a transition into this benefit form change, a supplemental survivor benefit will be available to participants who retire through 2016. The spousal supplement will be based on the years of ministers’ participation in the Ministers’ Pension Plan with the following schedule:

Annual benefit for retirements

Year	\$ amount per year of credited service
7/1/2011 through 12/31/2012	\$50
1/1/2013 through 12/31/2013	\$40
1/1/2014 through 12/31/2014	\$30
1/1/2015 through 12/31/2015	\$20
1/1/2016 through 12/31/2016	\$10

These supplemental payments will be payable to the minister’s spouse at the time of the pastor’s retirement for the lesser of ten years or the remaining life of the spouse. These payments will be taken from the Special Assistance Fund (SAF). Funding for the SAF continues to be provided through ministry shares.

3. Funding

All organized churches are expected to pay church assessments determined by an amount per active professing member age 18 and older or, if greater, the direct costs of their first or only pastor’s participation in the plan. The current amount of the assessment for 2012 is \$42.96 per member in Canada and \$37.20 in the United States, and direct costs have been set

at \$9,840 and \$7,704, respectively. These amounts are collected by means of monthly billings to each organized church, based on reported membership statistics.

All emerging churches and other denominational ministries that employ a minister as a missionary, professor, teacher, or in any other capacity, including organizations that employ endorsed chaplains (with the exception of chaplains serving in the military who are not yet entitled to receive any military pension benefits), are required to pay the annual cost of participation in the plan. All pension assessments, however determined, are billed monthly, and the grant of credited service for pastors is contingent on timely payment of amounts billed.

It is anticipated that the above rates will be enough to continue to improve the funding status of the plans according to the Canadian regulators. While circumstances could change, it is unlikely that there will be a need for further increase in the pension contribution costs for the next several years.

B. Employees' retirement plans

The employees' retirement plans are defined-contribution plans covering most employees of participating denominational agencies and ministries who are not ordained as ministers of the Word. In the United States, contributions are paid to the plan by participating employers in an amount up to 6 percent of compensation. An additional employer contribution of up to 4 percent of compensation is made to match employee contributions of a similar amount. In Canada, contributions of up to 9 percent are paid to the plan by participating employers. In Canada, there are no contributions made to the plan relative to matching employee contributions. In both plans, participants may make additional contributions up to the limits determined by federal regulation. Participants receive periodic statements indicating the dollar amount credited to their accounts, the value of their accounts, and the vested percentage.

Individual participants direct the investment of their account balances among several investment alternatives, including fixed-income and equity funds. The investment alternatives are currently managed for U.S. participants by J.P. Morgan Chase Trust Division, which also serves as custodian of the plan's assets, and for Canadian participants by Sun Life Financial Group.

As of December 31, 2011, the balances in these plans totaled approximately \$21,592,000 in the United States and \$2,986,000 in Canada. As of that date, there were 378 participants in the U.S. plan and 82 in the Canadian plan, categorized as follows:

	United States	Canada
Active	236	76
Inactive	142	6

C. Consolidated Group Insurance

Oversight of the denomination's Consolidated Group Insurance is provided by the Board of Trustees.

Consolidated Group Insurance is a denominational plan that offers health, dental, and life coverage in the United States and Canada to ministers and employees of local congregations and denominational agencies and

ministries. Currently there are 1,119 participants in the program. The most significant categories of participants include 545 pastors and employees of local churches, 298 employees of denominational ministries and agencies, and 276 retirees. The plan in Canada is a fully insured plan with coverage purchased through a major health-insurance provider and is supplemental to health benefits available through government health programs. In the United States, a trust has been established to fund benefits and expenses of the plan.

Premiums charged by the plan in Canada are set by the insurance carrier. The premiums for the U.S. plan are based on overall expectations of claims and administrative expenses for the coming year.

D. Financial disclosures

Audited or reviewed financial statements of the retirement plans and of all of the agencies and institutions are made available each year to the treasurer of each classis, with the request that they be made available to any interested party. In addition, summary financial statements are included in the *Acts of Synod*. Individualized statements are furnished to active members of the ministers' pension plans and the employees' retirement plans.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Canadian Board of Pensions and of the U.S. Board of Pensions, and to Mr. John H. Bolt when insurance matters and matters pertaining to pension plans for ministers and employees are discussed.

B. That synod designate up to 100 percent of a minister's early or normal retirement pension or disability pension for 2013 as housing allowance for United States income-tax purposes (IRS Ruling 1.107-1) but only to the extent that the pension is used to rent or provide a home.

C. That synod by way of the ballot elect one nominee to a first term and reappoint two members to a second three-year term on the U.S. Board of Pensions beginning July 1, 2012.

D. That synod by way of the ballot elect two nominees to a first term and reappoint one member to a second three-year term on the Canadian Board of Pensions beginning July 1, 2012.

Pensions and Insurance
John H. Bolt, director of finance
and administration

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry (Rev. Ron Klimp, director)

I. Introduction

The mandate given by synod to the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry is that “Chaplains are called by the church to extend the ministry of Christ to persons in institutional or specialized settings.” We like to refer to our chaplains informally as “the first responders of the spiritual world in secular settings.”

The mission of the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry is “to implement and regulate the denomination’s commitment to chaplaincy by recruiting, training, and endorsing persons to provide ministry in specialized settings, including military chaplains, pastoral counselors, institutional spiritual caregivers, hospice care, and others called to minister in places where the institutional church is not present. The office supports and promotes the development of chaplaincy and related ministries for the denomination.”

The second part of the ministry’s title (*and Care*) was added by Synod 2009 to emphasize the importance of reconnecting chaplains and their gifts to the broader commitment of our churches to be caring communities. By requiring a Covenant of Joint Supervision to be formulated among each calling church, chaplain, and this office, we are creating more conversations with churches and seeing more deliberate interaction between the parties. We are also taking steps to remind classes to recognize, include, pray for, and utilize the skills of chaplains.

II. Ministries of the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

A. *Ministry that is transforming lives and communities worldwide*

Our chaplains have the unique opportunity to influence individual lives in crisis. They also influence the institutions in which they serve by calling the organizations to ethical standards of care and concern. This influence of our chaplains stretches literally from the prison to the Pentagon.

Currently we have seven chaplains serving as clinical pastoral education supervisors. These persons are instrumental in training our future chaplains and those of other denominations as well. A number of other chaplains are employed to serve as directors of departments or to independently manage a counseling or chaplaincy ministry. Several others serve on committees or are officers of national chaplaincy or credentialing associations.

Two of our twenty-four military chaplains have received promotions this year. One is serving under the chiefs of chaplains in the Pentagon. We currently have six chaplains with the rank of Colonel, four with the rank of Lt. Colonel (Commander in the Navy), and four with the rank of Major (Lt. Cmdr. in the Navy). Two serve in the Canadian Forces. Several of our military chaplains are currently deployed overseas, one of whom has received the Army Ranger pin and is currently deployed (for the second time) with a special forces group in Afghanistan.

B. *Ministry to and with the local churches*

All CRC chaplains have a calling church. Most have filled the pulpit of their calling church or of other area churches on numerous occasions. Some

have served on the church council, at classis, and as delegates to synod. Some pastor local churches while serving the local hospice, prison, or Reserve military personnel part-time. Chaplains conduct adult education classes and workshops and help formally and informally with pastoral care in local congregations. We intend to encourage this interaction with the local church as part of the new emphasis reflected in the title of this ministry: *Chaplaincy and Care*. A document called “Covenant of Joint Supervision” is currently becoming a required agreement for accountability between all chaplains and their calling churches.

We are also currently encouraging churches to be particularly aware of the needs of deployed and returning military members and families. We are able to share some ideas and information (much of it from our military chaplains) with those who ask and refer them to other resources available for their guidance and encouragement in this important task.

C. *Collaborative efforts*

The Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry collaborated with a number of agencies and organizations over the past year:

1. We have helped to initiate a discussion among a number of individuals and agencies within our denomination around developing a process to better assess the gifts, competencies, aptitudes, and personality traits that would suggest the “best fit” (for example, parish ministry, church planting, missions, chaplaincy) for an individual interested in kingdom service. We are continuing to work toward refining that objective.
2. We have met with a committee of representatives from various agencies to discuss the need for continuing education standards for existing pastors (similar to what is required for board-certified chaplains and professionals in other occupations).
3. We have worked with *The Banner* and other publishers to get the stories of chaplains out to the denomination and wider church bodies.

D. *Stories to share*

Our chaplains continue to strive for excellence in their profession. In the past year, *The Banner* has featured several of our chaplains and their specific ministries. These and other stories, plus information about chaplaincy, are now available on our denominational website: www.crcna.org/chaplaincy.

Our chaplains serve in leadership roles in a variety of professional organizations, including American Association of Pastoral Counselors, American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Association of Professional Chaplains, Canadian Association for Spiritual Care, C.G. Jung Institute of Chicago, College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy, Michigan Chaplains Association, and VISN 18 Chaplain Operational Board.

E. *Development of future ministry*

The future of chaplaincy depends on several things beyond our control (such as the growth or restriction of chaplaincy positions in the military and institutional settings of the United States and Canada) and on developing an interest among both younger and older members of our denomination who feel drawn to full-time ministry but are not sure what kind. We are

encouraging chaplains to tell their rich and moving stories of interacting with men and women in crisis situations who are looking for meaning and hope. We are also attempting to interact with churches and classes to help create opportunities for chaplains to tell these stories.

F. Current chaplaincy statistics

1. Total chaplains serving the CRCNA: full-time, 96; part-time, 25
2. Chaplains in the United States: full-time, 82; part-time, 21
3. Chaplains in Canada: full-time, 14; part-time, 4
4. Active military chaplains: 14 in the United States; 2 in Canada; 5 in the National Guard and Reserves
5. Seven new chaplains: Jeffrey Dephouse, Lynn A. Likkel, Ricardo E. Orellana, Sarah Roelofs, Larry Van Zee, Kevin Vryhof, and Marc Zumhagen.
6. Four recently retired chaplains: Richard M. Hartwell Jr.; Harry Kuperus; Ruth J. Romeyn; and Richard J. Silveira.
7. Military chaplains who have served in the past year, or are currently serving, overseas: (Capt.) Jonathan Miklos Averill, (Lt.) Shawn L. Bootsma, (Cmdr.) Roger L. Bouma, (Col.) William C. Hensen, (Maj.) InSoon G. Hoagland, (Capt.) Peter Hofman, (Capt.) Antonio Illas, (Maj.) Timothy L. Rietkerk, (Capt.) Gerald P. Van Smeerdyk, (Lt. Cmdr.) Douglas J. Vrieland, and (Maj.) Timothy Won.

Note: These chaplains interact daily with thousands of people, often in crisis situations, who may or may not have a faith commitment or a church connection. At a very nominal cost to the CRCNA, their employer's total ministry support has an estimated value in excess of \$8 million annually.

III. Recruitment and training

Over the past year Chaplaincy and Care Ministry has organized recruiting events at Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, Cornerstone College, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, Kuyper College, Hope College, Providence Christian College, and Western Theological Seminary. We expect similar events to be held at Dort College, Trinity Christian College, Redeemer University College, and The King's University College sometime in 2012. In addition, one local high school invited us to give a presentation. Several of our current or retired chaplains were able to tell their stories and answer questions from students at most of these events.

This development seems to represent a growing interest among educational institutions and students in non-traditional ministry options such as chaplaincy. We currently are working with twenty-two students and assisting them as needed in their education, both financially and through mentoring. In the future, funding for this will come increasingly from the Chaplains Development Fund. We are encouraging many of our contributors to specify this fund with their gift.

We maintain a list of persons interested in chaplaincy ministry (currently over one hundred people). Every other month the office sends job postings to these persons and to our current chaplains.

Every year in early June CRC chaplains gather for a conference sponsored by Chaplaincy and Care Ministry. Since chaplains work at the margins of church and society, they relish the time they can spend with each other at the annual conference to renew friendships, learn together, and talk with fellow servants of the Lord who are living with the unique pressures, joys, and challenges that chaplaincy brings.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod urge parents, CRC youth and education ministries in our churches, and Christian schools to encourage our young people to prayerfully consider a wide range of ministry options, including chaplaincy ministries and other specialized Christian vocations.

B. That synod urge churches to pray regularly for chaplains who walk daily with those in crisis situations, have significant influence in secular institutions, and serve in difficult and sometimes dangerous situations—especially those who are separated from home and family by military deployment.

C. That synod urge churches and classes to welcome chaplains at their regular meetings (some classes have appointed a “chaplain of the day” for each meeting) and to explore with them how to use their training and gifts to benefit the care ministries of the local church.

D. That synod remind chaplains’ calling churches that they are obligated to complete a Covenant of Joint Supervision with their chaplain and with the Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry and that these covenants are to be reviewed and re-signed every five years.

The Committee for Contact with the Government/Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue (Mr. Mike Hogeterp, research and communications manager)

The Committee for Contact with the Government, operating as the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, is a justice and reconciliation ministry of the Christian Reformed churches in Canada. From an office that is just steps from Parliament Hill in Ottawa, the Centre for Public Dialogue studies critical issues facing Canadian society from a Reformed perspective and interacts with legislators in a constructive and respectful manner.

The Centre’s work on reconciliation in Indigenous education is continuing in 2012 via dialogue with Indigenous leaders and educators, analysis of expected policy developments, and conversation with Parliamentarians. We continue partnerships with the Reformed Church in America Regional Synod of Canada, the Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee, the Office of Race Relations, and the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action to draw attention to the need for reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and others living in Canada. In particular, we encourage all Christians, and indeed all Canadians, to become aware of and participate in the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Beyond extensive advocacy and education on Indigenous justice and reconciliation, the Centre for Public Dialogue is developing a new research and advocacy priority on refugee issues. This work builds on Synod 2010's deliberations on justice for migrants and is based on collaboration with CRWRC (Refugee settlement—Canada) and the Office of Race Relations. These tasks of seeking justice and speaking hope are a calling for all of the church of Christ. For this reason the Centre for Public Dialogue works with churches and other ministries to create opportunities for learning, discussion, and action. Please join the conversation at www.crcna.ca/PublicDialogue.

Disability Concerns (Rev. Mark Stephenson, director)

I. Introduction

The mission of the Office of Disability Concerns (DC) is “to bring about the full participation of all people with disabilities in the life of the church and the full participation of the church in the lives of people with disabilities.” Our mandate is “to assist the congregations and regional bodies of the Christian Reformed Church to ensure that members with disabilities receive appropriate congregational care and participate fully in congregational life.” Our vision can be summarized briefly: “In churches, ministries, and communities, everybody belongs, and everybody serves.”

The ministry began in 1982 when its first newsletter was published and a part-time staff person was hired in response to decisions by synod. Critical decisions by Synods 1985 and 1993, as well as in other years, affirmed and guided the work of Disability Concerns and committed the CRC to include and engage people with disabilities in all aspects of church life. This year the Office of Disability Concerns celebrates 30 years of ministry within the CRC.

The primary work of DC is done by volunteers. We have regional disability advocates who serve 38 (out of 47) CRC classes, about six hundred church advocates, seven agency advocates, and six Disability Concerns Advisory Committee members. Besides the advisory committee, we have four regional committees serving in Michigan, Ontario, Alberta, and the Chicago area, and we have one committee that assists churches in ministry to people with mental illnesses: the Mental Health Task Force. Our staff consists of a full-time director and two part-time administrative assistants serving in Canada and the United States.

II. Ministries of Disability Concerns

A. Ministry that is transforming lives and communities worldwide

In cooperation with the Reformed Church in America Disability Concerns ministry, the Office of Disability Concerns produced the *Inclusion Handbook* in 2011 to help churches and individuals learn how to welcome and interact with people with disabilities. The DC website and Network pages had over 19,600 visits, with over 37,000 page views, this past year. Users accessed a variety of resources in these pages, including the DC newsletter *Breaking Barriers*, which is available there in Spanish and Korean as well as in English.

B. Ministry to and with the local churches

To help the churches, the Mental Health Task Force prepared resources, including a four-part Bible study *Let's Talk! Breaking the Silence Around Mental Illness in Our Communities of Faith*. The DC Alberta committee produced a workshop, "Being Community: Walking Beside Someone with Mental Illness," which has been offered to and presented to churches in Alberta. Our guidebook for pastors and councils, *A Compassionate Journey: Coming Alongside People with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses*, now in its second printing, continues to be used by congregations and individuals throughout North America. DC sponsors conferences each year in various locations, including one in southern Ontario that has trained church leaders and disability advocates every year since 1996. Our director speaks at various conferences, classis meetings, worship services, and seminary classes; he also conducts training for church planters, seminary students, and Christian Reformed World Missions volunteers.

C. Collaborative efforts

In 2008, the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the CRC formed a Disability Concerns partnership. This partnership has borne fruit, including joint publication of the newsletter *Breaking Barriers*, the *Inclusion Handbook*, and a combined Facebook page. The director of RCA Disability Concerns, Rev. Terry DeYoung, along with a few RCA volunteers, attends the regional CRC DC committee meetings. The two ministries jointly sponsor a DC leadership conference each summer to encourage, inspire, and inform our key volunteers. CRC and RCA Disability Concerns requested of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA and of the RCA General Synod Council that our denominations commit to provide reasonable accommodations for participants at our annual synodical assemblies. These requests were approved in 2011.

The Mental Health Task Force is itself a collaboration between Disability Concerns and Classis Quinte's Faith and Hope Ministry. Disability Concerns engages in a number of other collaborations as well, including work with Diaconal Ministries Canada, Christian Reformed World Missions, Calvin Theological Seminary, Trinity Christian College, CLC Network, Friendship Ministries, Western Theological Seminary, Hope Network; as well as in national partnerships, including Pathways to Promise.

D. Stories to share

Over the past 30 years, Disability Concerns has provided resources to churches so they could engage people with disabilities in their ministries in new and important ways, including serving as officebearers.

Ms. Elizabeth Schultz was elected by her church as an administrative deacon in 2011. In this capacity, she receives the offering during worship; and she serves on the administrative team and council as council liaison to the worship committee and as a delegate to classis. She writes,

Growing up with cerebral palsy that affects my movement and my speech, I constantly had to prove myself. As an adult, I had to tell people that I have a college degree so that they would not "baby talk" to me. Some thought of me only as a "project." They saw my chair and heard me speak, then assumed that I was intellectually disabled. They certainly didn't think of me as a leader. When I joined a new church, the shift in public perception—from being a project to being a leader—was just mind-blowing. . . . This shift became clear one Sunday evening when Pastor Jim told me that I had been nominated to be

an administrative deacon. At that moment, I knew that I had been blessed with a church family that “got it.” I may not be able to do everything physically that most other people can, but I can do ministry. . . . [God] has blessed me with a church family that understands and celebrates differences. If it wasn’t for God, I would not be here. I give all the glory to God. In fact, I thank God for my disabilities, because through them I am the woman I am today.

(“When Understanding Leads to Serving,”
 Breaking Barriers, Winter 2012, p. 1)

Mr. Dan Woodwyk, who has Down syndrome, has ushered worshippers at his church for over thirteen years. Ms. Pat Huisingsh, a fellow parishioner and a Disability Concerns regional disability advocate, wrote about Dan’s involvement at their church:

He knows everyone in the congregation and knows where to usher in the elders so they can sit with their families. . . . In December 2005, Dan was installed as an assistant deacon. He takes the offering a few times each month during his regular, scheduled services and fills in when other deacons are gone. “He just loves doing it,” said Brenda Woodwyk, Dan’s mother. “He is especially ecstatic when he gets to carry the plates up front for the offertory prayer. This has been great for his self-esteem, because we’ve had to say no to many things that realistically he can’t do. But this is one thing we could definitely say YES to. He looks forward to Sundays!” . . . Brenda Woodwyk said that she has seen a lot of difference in how people with disabilities are treated in churches as compared to 39 years ago when Dan was born, and she believes that the ministry of Disability Concerns has helped to bring that change in attitudes.

(“Creativity Prompts Attitude Changes,” *Breaking Barriers*, Winter 2012, p. 3)

E. Development of future ministry

As we look ahead to the coming year, we sense God leading us to expand the scope of our ministry. We will continue to strengthen our network of volunteer leaders by recruiting, encouraging, and training regional advocates. We are considering translation of more Disability Concerns resources into Korean and Spanish. We hope to be of additional assistance to all CRCs in their ministry with a new story project, “Stories of Grace and Truth,” that tells the journey of people with mental illnesses and of their family members. Finally, we urge our entire denomination to seek answers to a critical question for our time: How can the churches and institutions of our denomination work at developing a more complete diversity in our membership and leadership with a well-rounded sensitivity to ethnicity, culture, gender, age, and disability?

Developing a more complete diversity of our membership is a matter of justice. We rightly stand against classism, sexism, and racism; and we stand for full inclusion, involvement, and leadership of both genders, as well as cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds in our churches and institutions. Similarly, we must stand as strongly against ableism—discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities—and stand for full inclusion, involvement, and leadership of people with and without disabilities. The Office of Disability Concerns gives thanks to God and to our denomination for the opportunity to serve churches in breaking barriers and in growing their ministry with people with disabilities.

III. Recommendations

A. That synod encourage Christian Reformed churches, classes, and educational institutions to sponsor events to celebrate Disability Week from October 15-21, 2012.

Grounds:

1. Specific and intentional events that recognize the importance of breaking down barriers and including people with disabilities will remind God's people of the welcome our Lord gives to all of his people (Luke 14:15-24) and will encourage them to press on toward becoming a community in which every member knows that he or she is indispensable (1 Cor. 12:12-27).
2. This date coincides with the denominational schedule for offerings, which assigns the third Sunday in October to Disability Concerns.
3. The Bible calls God's people to be a caring community as the covenant people of God. In 1985, the CRC committed itself as a denomination to eliminate barriers of architecture, communication, and attitude "in order to use the gifts of all people in our life together as God's family." Although our Lord Jesus calls all of his people to ministry in his church, the church has not always made it possible for people with disabilities to participate fully and sometimes has isolated them and their families.

B. That synod note with gratitude Disability Concerns' Thirtieth Anniversary of faithful service to the CRC, and thank the people who have been involved as staff and volunteers for their dedication to helping churches become healthier communities that intentionally seek to welcome, include, and be engaged by persons with disabilities and their families.

Pastor-Church Relations (Rev. Norman J. Thomasma, director; Rev. Cecil Van Niejenhuis, pastor/congregation consultant)

I. Introduction

The Office of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR) maintains focus on its mandate to support pastors, staff, councils, and congregations through two basic functions—intervention and education. Over the thirty years of its existence, PCR and the churches have been challenged to recognize that while these functions remain basic, there are adjustments required because of changing culture, economic factors, and programs.

The ministry of PCR involves both *direct* involvement with pastors, staff, councils, and congregations and *extension* or cooperative activities, whereby staff of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations train and support others who provide direct support to pastors, staff, councils, and congregations.

II. Ministries of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations

A. Probably the most familiar activity of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations is its direct involvement in cultivating healthier relationships within the life of congregations. This may involve interventions when there are conflicts, recognizing that times of conflict can also be opportunities for

congregations and pastors to consider their core values and how their current path could be adjusted to more faithfully conform to these core values and mission priorities. To increase capacity, PCR has identified several skilled, experienced practitioners who can assist with this work on a contract basis. PCR is also exploring innovative ways to work with churches and pastors in crisis or transition.

B. PCR extends its work through regional pastors in classes that provide support, encouragement, and counsel to pastors and spouses challenged by the demands of life and ministry. These pastors also assist in setting up mentor relationships for new pastors and encourage the development of support mechanisms when there are multiple staff persons within a congregation. In November 2011, thirty-eight regional pastors gathered in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for encouragement and education. Dr. Jaco Hamman from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, challenged participants to consider the place of grief and loss in their own lives and in the lives of pastors and families in their regions.

C. PCR continues to advance the work of mentoring new pastors. Mentoring, beginning in the seminary and continuing throughout a pastor's ministry, is seen as a crucial area of pastoral growth and accountability. Through peer groups supported by the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program and assigned mentoring relationships, this aspect of encouragement and learning continues to be a key part of many pastors' experience. In partnership with Calvin Theological Seminary, PCR staff leads a seminar on reading ministry contexts, meeting with students prior to their first field assignment and for debriefing afterward.

D. Educational and retreat activities for councils, congregations, classes, and church staff also continue to be a focus of PCR activity. In many ways the educational and intervention activities are closely linked. In partnership with Sustaining Pastoral Excellence and one of its peer groups, PCR has developed a manual titled *Evaluation Essentials for Congregational Leaders* to assist congregational leaders in providing helpful evaluations for pastors and church staff.

E. Specialized Transitional Ministers (STMs) are trained to help congregations deal with challenges and opportunities during the transition between pastors. For a number of years the denomination has employed several transitional pastors. This strategy has been phased out and replaced with a new strategy, which involves developing a guild of endorsed STMs that works in close partnership with PCR. A steering committee has been formed, consisting of Rev. Ron Bouwkamp, Rev. Ron Fynewever, Rev. Peter Hogeterp, and Rev. Larry Slings. Along with the PCR staff, the steering committee is developing protocols for endorsement, salary guidelines, and approaches to continuing education. Several new pastors entered the endorsement process during the past calendar year, bringing the number of endorsed or pre-endorsed STMs to eighteen. PCR also maintains a list of retired pastors who are willing to serve congregations in the capacity of stated supply for purposes of preaching and pastoral care.

F. The Staff Ministry Committee (SMC), a subcommittee of PCR, supports more than 1,000 non-ordained church professionals in a variety of ways. Opportunities for networking and distribution of resources are offered, and churches are increasingly requesting services pertaining to staffing issues. SMC is currently piloting a credentialing process for church staff. In addition, SMC is exploring ways to support the growing number of ministry associates in the CRC.

G. On behalf of synod, the Office of Pastor-Church Relations administers a continuing education fund for pastors and professional church staff. Grants of up to \$750 per year are awarded to pastors and staff who demonstrate the value of an educational event and/or opportunity they are pursuing. The number of applications for these funds continues to grow. It is gratifying to experience this growing interest in continuing education. It is also a challenge as the committee makes decisions regarding how the funds will be distributed.

In addition, in response to a directive from the Board of Trustees, PCR convened a meeting of key stakeholders to explore ways to strengthen the continuing education expectations and opportunities for clergy in the CRC. A report of that meeting was submitted to the Board of Trustees.

H. The Ministerial Information Service (MIS) maintains a database of more than eight hundred pastor profiles, as well as several hundred congregation profiles. These profiles are used by search committees of congregations looking for pastors and by pastors seeking new positions. The Office of Pastor-Church Relations, with the assistance of a volunteer committee, recommends pastoral candidates for search committees.

I. PCR continues to partner with Pastors on Point of Stillwater, Minnesota. Two venues are offered—one being a wilderness experience with a group of pastors, and the other a one-to-one venue provided in Stillwater. Pastors on Point, directed by Mark Stevenson, provides an in-depth vocational assessment, using a System for Identifying Motivated Abilities (SIMA).

III. Considerations for the future

A. PCR is exploring ways to develop a web-based approach to the Ministerial Information Service—an approach that may provide greater freedom for communication among churches looking for pastors, as well as for pastors and pastoral candidates looking for churches.

B. PCR continues to seek effective ways to build a working relationship with newly ordained pastors and church staff. Given synod's decisions about ministry associates, PCR is finding ways to better serve this expanding group among the churches. We are also meeting with Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) students currently enrolled at Calvin Theological Seminary and are familiarizing them with the work of our office. As part of the broader network of denominational entities who work with candidates, PCR also attempts to maintain a working relationship with the Candidacy Committee.

C. One significant project that should be finished by the time of synod is the writing and production of a pastor search process training tool. Like the *Evaluation Essentials* training tool, this initiative is motivated by the significant number of requests PCR receives asking for help with pastor search processes.

D. As one of the denominational ministries, PCR continues to explore ways to work with other denominational ministries, in addition to responding to congregations, staff, and pastors. It is our goal to encourage healthy ways of doing ministry in the CRC.

E. For the future PCR is dealing with challenges to expand capacity on a number of fronts. Because of increasing requests for our services, we are being encouraged to explore and develop creative, strategic ways to respond effectively to the needs of pastors, congregations, and staff. Part of this dynamic is an examination of how we are addressing the goal of eliminating activities that are less justifiable from a cost/benefit perspective.

Race Relations (Rev. Esteban Lugo, director)

The Office of Race Relations continues in its pursuit of greater impact for ministry through partnerships by developing collaborations with denominational agencies, specialized ministries, the Reformed Church in America, and Christian Reformed institutions of higher learning, as well as organizations outside the CRC. The four strategic initiatives for which Race Relations is privileged to be responsible are (1) antiracism and racial reconciliation initiatives that provide education and resources, (2) the Multiethnic Conference, (3) All Nations Heritage celebrations, and (4) a scholarship program that provides not only financial assistance but also training in antiracism and cultural awareness for students attending our institutions.

Within our antiracism and racial reconciliation mandate, we are called to provide education and resources to equip our denomination to combat not only the effects of the sin of racism but also to facilitate reconciliation through materials and workshops. First are our flagship workshops, Widening the Circle in Canada and the Dance of Racial Reconciliation (DORR) in the United States. Second, in answer to questions of “What’s next?” we are ready to pilot the Dance of Racial Reconciliation, Level 2. Third, in partnership with the CRC Office of Social Justice and the Reformed Church in America, a workshop called Church Between Borders: A Workshop on Immigration Reform (CBB) has been developed and piloted. Fourth is *Facing Racism*, a DVD that provides a series of six small-group studies that enable congregations to engage the issue of racism and reconciliation in a modern way. Fifth is Leadership and Race, a workshop designed to develop and support leadership that contributes to racial justice. Sixth, we are developing a youth version of DORR, which should be available in the fall of 2012. Seventh is a DORR curriculum for small groups, which covers a 12-week period. Eighth, the study committee report *God’s Diverse and Unified Family* is available for purchase from Faith Alive Christian Resources. Ninth, we provide bulletins and bulletin covers for All Nations Heritage celebrations on the first Sunday in October. Tenth is the Multiethnic Conference every two years, the

next one scheduled for 2013. Eleventh, we sponsor a Race Relations Scholarship Program. Finally, we support the CRCNA Race Relations Team, which serves within the administrative offices to encourage and work toward a racism-free environment within the CRC's three workplaces.

The work of Race Relations and its effectiveness are expanding throughout North America, thanks to the hard work of regional staff and volunteers. For example, in October Race Relations Canada had the opportunity to represent the CRC and meet with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Over four days, Aboriginal survivors of residential schools told their stories of loss of childhood, family, language, culture, roots, innocence, self-esteem, identity, and trust. The presence of a Race Relations staff person was a catalyst for the Christian Reformed churches in the Maritime Provinces to begin to work together on Aboriginal issues. In addition to other DORR workshops, we held a very successful DORR workshop in New Jersey at a Hispanic church that recognized that even within its own multicultural community it needed to understand antiracism and racial reconciliation and how to reach out to others regarding these issues. Finally, as a result of Race Relations' presence in California, it is reported that the Classis Greater Los Angeles Race Relations Team is implementing its strategic plan, and that Classis California South now has a Race Relations Team in place. Last fall, our California staff person conducted two DORR workshops—one in a church and one at a Christian high school. In addition, at the time of this writing, a CBB workshop and a facilitator training were scheduled to take place in the southern California area in February, and a similar CBB workshop was scheduled to occur during the same time in Grand Rapids.

The denomination continues to face the challenge of placing a high value on the dignity of all persons, on the inclusion of multiple cultures in life together as a church, and on the integrity of that identity. To that end, the ministry of Race Relations continues to lead and encourage throughout the whole church. Race Relations is committed to its statement of vision and its mandate to make the CRCNA a truly diverse and unified family of God. We continue to attribute all the progress and success that has been made in this ministry only to the grace and goodness of God. We covet your prayers.

Safe Church Ministry (Mrs. Bonnie Nicholas, director)

I. Introduction

The Office of Safe Church Ministry comes alongside CRC churches, providing resources for abuse prevention and response. Each of three mandates is necessary to the ministry's success in making our churches safe places, where relationships are respectful and where abuse is not tolerated. These mandates are to provide *education* for churches, *support* for those affected by abuse, and the *advisory panel process* in the case of church leader misconduct.

II. Ministries of Safe Church Ministry

A. *Ministry that transforms lives and communities worldwide*

The gospel speaks directly to the core of abuse—misuse of power. Misusing power and authority for selfish gain, whether physical, sexual, or emotional, is the heart of abuse. It stands in direct opposition to the way of Jesus, who uses his infinite power sacrificially for the sake of those he loves. We are called to follow him with the same attitude of mind (see Phil. 2:5-8). As we do so, we become communities that reflect his powerful, transforming love.

Unveiling truth about abuse remains the greatest challenge of Safe Church Ministry. *Safe Church Ministry: A Church Leader's Role* has been created as a user-friendly guide that is available online. It contains information about abuse, the harm done, the needs of those who have been affected, and ways to respond. This resource has been used in various contexts as far away as Haiti and as close as Calvin College. It is our hope that this resource, and others like it, will help churches become better prepared to prevent abuse from occurring and to respond to abuse that has already taken place.

B. *Ministry with the local church*

The Office of Safe Church Ministry is a valuable resource for consultation regarding safe church policies and potential responses to situations involving abuse. Over 380 interactions with churches, organizations, and individuals were recorded between July 1 and December 30, 2011.

Abuse Awareness Sunday, designated as the fourth Sunday in September, was promoted with letters to churches and to Safe Church team members. Resources were posted to our website, including a bulletin insert titled “Is it Abuse?” that highlights the power differential involved in abuse by a church leader. Over 24,000 bulletin inserts were requested by over 133 churches for Abuse Awareness Sunday in 2011.

A new downloadable presentation, “What Does Safe Church Ministry Do?” was created and posted to our website to help provide a quick overview of Safe Church Ministry. It has been used by Safe Church team members in churches and classis meetings and has been translated into Spanish.

C. *Collaborative efforts*

Safe Church Ministry partnered with the Office of Social Justice to present a day-long workshop on restorative practices and hosted a dinner discussion about future collaborative efforts as the denomination moves forward in its commitment to restorative practices. Collaborative work has also begun on a manual regarding the use of restorative practices in cases of church leader misconduct.

A Safe Church Ministry presentation is given each fall at Calvin Theological Seminary. In addition, this year the director participated in discussions with staff and as part of a panel presentation for Calvin College students, in response to a situation of misconduct that became public. The Office of Safe Church Ministry is pleased to offer information and consultation to these institutions as they serve students who represent future leadership in the CRC.

Plans are being finalized for the first Safe Church Ministry conference to better equip Safe Church Ministry team members to be excellent local resources for churches. Much of our ministry happens at the local and classis levels by trained Safe Church team members. The conference will provide

valuable learning opportunities, motivation, and synergy. In addition, the conference will help build partnerships with organizations that are presenting at the conference. Churches are encouraged to support Safe Church Ministry by providing resources for their representatives to attend this conference (thus developing closer partnership with churches).

D. Stories to share

A call was received from a pastor who just wanted to say thank you. The Office of Safe Church Ministry had been very helpful, he said, as he considered how to respond to a person in his congregation who had a criminal history of sexual abuse. Several concerns and ideas were discussed for providing an extra layer of protection for church members while allowing the one who has offended to experience the advantages of involvement in a church community. The pastor said it had been especially valuable for him to hear compassion expressed toward the one who had offended, as well as for the one who had been victimized.

A praise-filled email was received from a person leading a small group using *Bethesda: Come to the Water* (published in partnership with Faith Alive Christian Resources). One woman in the group expressed thankfulness for the small circle of women she found in the Bible study, saying, "I was validated and never felt shamed in that safe place. I found healing there." What a wonderful expression of the value of creating a safe place in our churches where the harm of abuse can be freely discussed.

A pastor called as he was preparing a sermon about David and Bathsheba (part of a series on the life of King David). Even though that episode is a familiar story, he was realizing anew how horrific the sin was, understanding the power differential involved, and wondering how those in his congregation might respond if he used the word *rape* in naming the sin. He said that he knew of members in his church who had suffered an abusive experience and wondered how they might respond. He asked how he could be sensitive to them and to their needs. Should he preach the sermon at all? Was it safe? It was a blessing to explore these issues with a pastor who cared so much about the Lord's truth and his congregation. The sermon was preached, and it offered a valuable opportunity for greater understanding, bringing to light an issue that thrives in silence and secrecy.

There are many stories to tell, usually starting with a comment like "I need your advice about a situation; it's complicated." And oftentimes the situations *are* complicated. Webs of deception need to be untangled. Hurt and humiliation need to be healed. Relationships in church and family need to be restored. There is anxiety over not knowing how the church will respond. This uncertainty helps maintain the veil of silence that surrounds abuse. As we grow together in our knowledge and understanding, we will be able to respond to abuse more openly and consistently, with compassion and justice for all.

E. Development of future ministry

Last spring a retreat of Safe Church team leaders provided an opportunity to discuss the marks of a truly safe church. The top four listed below have become goals to help guide Safe Church Ministry into the future.

1. Every church has a written safe church/abuse prevention policy in place. (Currently 605 of 1,069 CRC churches have such a policy. The number is growing.)
2. Every church has protocols, which are always carefully followed, for responding to misconduct by a church leader. (Synod has approved “Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations against a Church Leader,” though not every church council knows and understands the advantages of using these guidelines.)
3. Issues of abuse can be freely discussed without blame or shame. (This requires an acknowledgment that abuse occurs both inside and outside the church, and that it has an impact within our congregations. When people can count on a compassionate and just response from the church, they will be freer to disclose abuse and begin taking needed steps toward healing and restoration.)
4. Leadership at all levels is supportive of Safe Church Ministry efforts. (Resistance still exists, coming from those who do not believe that abuse is a problem. Partnering with the Social Research Center at Calvin College to provide a new study about abuse in the CRC could help break down that resistance.)

Safe Church Ministry seeks to be primarily a ministry of education and prevention. Increased awareness and understanding are key to realizing the goals above. We must continue to develop leadership and to expand our resources, offering them in Spanish, Korean, and perhaps other languages to reach a broader audience.

We will move forward with the Lord’s blessing, knowing that the Lord is working among us (and in spite of us) to help the church become his holy body in the world, reflecting his truth and grace in all our relationships. Our future rests with him, in his power to create, to convict, to motivate, to heal, to forgive, and to transform.

III. Recruitment and training

Safe Church Ministry will continue to recruit Safe Church team members who are committed to the above-mentioned goals. Many classes do not have a Safe Church team. We believe that a large number of people exist in our churches who have a heart for this ministry yet remain a largely untapped resource. Discovering these people and offering them tools and training are priorities.

In partnership with other agencies, we are committed to moving ahead with an increased use of restorative practices, and we will seek to increase the number of trained facilitators who could be available to CRC churches.

Social Justice and Hunger Action (Mr. Peter Vander Meulen, coordinator)

I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church has always had a good track record on addressing hunger and poverty but has realized that more needs to be done

to address the *root causes* of world hunger. Understanding that hunger is always part of a complex web of natural disasters, poverty, oppression, structural injustice, and spiritual alienation, the CRC formed the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJ) to address these root causes.

Today the OSJ works to develop a deeper understanding of and response to God's call to "let justice flow like a river" in our personal and communal lives and in the structures of our societies, especially as it relates to hunger and poverty. The OSJ works to educate CRC members and to encourage and support their engagement in social justice issues. The OSJ is also occasionally involved in direct advocacy.

The Office of Social Justice acts in three ways: (1) through congregational social justice contacts or groups, (2) through organizing collaborative efforts with existing denominational agencies and institutions, and (3) through ecumenical efforts and partnerships. In short, this office aims to be a catalyst that energizes and organizes our denomination for more appropriate, effective, and efficient action on behalf of and with the poor and the oppressed.

II. What is social justice?

Doing justice is about making things right. It is seeking restoration of our world and society through vocal, active, fearless love for others. It is being part of Jesus' incredible ministry of reconciliation, restoring broken relationships, and making all things new.

Justice is the work we are already doing—renewed, revamped, refocused on the needs of the marginalized. It is a lens that reframes our community outreach, coffee hour, missions, and worship. Seeking justice makes us question whether we are actually putting the last first and standing with the poor, oppressed, and powerless.

III. Our work

A. We assist congregations to understand and become active in social justice issues

1. With the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), the OSJ continues to support the Micah Challenge, a global Christian movement that encourages Christians to deepen their engagement with the poor and challenges government leaders to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are eight measurable, time-bound targets that address poverty and its root causes. This past fall marked the second year of our "Show of Hands" campaign, which celebrates the progress made thus far on the goals and encourages continued support. Over 75 groups in the United States and Canada participated, resulting in several hundred handprints being sent to our legislators.
2. The OSJ has also partnered with CRWRC to start a new movement of justice-seeking within our churches. The Congregation Justice Mobilization (CJM) project is well into its fifth year with a shared full-time coordinator. Some of the many initiatives coming out of CJM include presentations on various hot topics, an expanded resource collection for small groups, and growing relationships with over 300 congregations. This project is furthered by a Canadian staff person in partnership with the Centre for Public Dialogue.

3. *OSJ News* is our bimonthly newsletter for CRC justice activists. This popular newsletter is delivered electronically to over 2,500 recipients and supplies a unique Christian Reformed perspective on social justice news and events. Another popular resource is *OSJ Prayers*, a weekly email list of the most pressing justice issues around the world needing prayer. To subscribe to any of our publications, visit www.crcjustice.org and click on "Newsletters."
 4. The OSJ website (www.crcjustice.org) serves more than two thousand visitors each month. In addition to providing news and advocacy opportunities, the site supplies practical resources and helpful information to pastors, deacons, social justice committees, students, and every CRC member who wants to live the call to do justice. The OSJ also engages with over two thousand subscribers on Facebook and Twitter who are eager to learn, speak, and act as agents of social justice.
- B. In addition to our core goals of helping congregations and small groups become effective communities of salt and light, we work on education and advocacy regarding select issues important to the CRC.
1. We have added two part-time staff members to promote restorative justice projects in the United States and Canada and to further develop those already in place. Particularly in Canada, there is increased emphasis on restorative practices in all areas of communal life. This increased focus on restorative justice stems from the actions of Synod 2005.
 2. In Canada we continue to benefit from and support KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. We also work with the Canadian Council of Churches Commission on Justice and Peace and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.
 3. We were charged by Synod 2010 to help the Christian Reformed Church welcome the stranger amidst a broken immigration system. In light of that call, the OSJ's strategy includes three components: (1) increasing congregations' capacities to recognize the dynamic challenges that are faced by migrants, (2) helping congregations to remember that we are created to live in community and that throughout history God has blessed the church with opportunities to welcome strangers, and (3) challenging CRC members to personally and publicly commit to taking action to make their communities and nations better places for immigrants to live. Our new "Church Between Borders" curriculum, developed in partnership with the Office of Race Relations, has been piloted in several churches with positive results.
 4. The OSJ has also added a part-time member of our staff to serve as Middle East ministry coordinator. Through our involvement in the Middle East Ministry Team, we help further the CRC's growing desire to be aware of, partner with, and stand in active solidarity with Christian communities in the Middle East. We work in partnership with Christians for Middle East Peace, the Reformed Church in America, Hope Equals, and others in the service of building peace in the Middle East—especially in Palestine-Israel.

5. When appropriate for our areas of focus, the OSJ facilitates advocacy activities in Washington, D.C., and supports the work of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue to do the same in Ottawa, Canada. This year such advocacy included comprehensive immigration reform, humanitarian budget cuts, and fund allocation to alleviate the effects of climate change.

The Office of Social Justice, in collaboration with the agencies and institutions of the CRC, looks back with gratitude on a productive year. We look forward to continuing to assist members of the CRC in becoming salt and light in the service of God's justice and mercy.

Urban Aboriginal Ministries

The three Canadian CRC urban Aboriginal ministries are Indian Family Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Indian Metis Christian Fellowship in Regina, Saskatchewan; and Native Healing Centre in Edmonton, Alberta. As more Aboriginal people migrate to the big city, these ministries are evolving into important crossroads. Many Aboriginal people have left loving support systems, community, and family to move into the city. This rural to urban transition affects people spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. A hot or cold drink, a meal together, and times of common prayer help urban Aboriginal people adjust to their new environment.

The three ministries become the listening ears and hands of help during high crisis in people's lives. It is the gospel story of Jesus' love dwelling among his created beings and building a lasting peace. In Edmonton this past year, the Native Healing Centre ran a successful kids' cultural camp and pre-employment program and developed a worship circle called Standing Stones. Indian Metis Christian Fellowship helped people in Regina to honor Christ's sacrificial death through a "Memorial Wake" held on Good Friday. The ministry's Chimatawa Dance Troupe learned and performed traditional and hip-hop dances glorifying Christ. In Winnipeg, Indian Family Centre staff and volunteers created a new parent center within the ministry, but unfortunately a break-in occurred and educational toys and books were taken. The broader Winnipeg community responded by giving even more books and educational toys to the ministry.

The Creator's Spirit continues to empower urban Aboriginal ministries' staff, volunteers, and community members to worship and live in truth, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, wisdom, and love.

STANDING COMMITTEES

I. Introduction

Synod 2004 established the Synodical Ministerial Candidacy Committee (SMCC), which is now known as the Candidacy Committee. The committee mandate is available in a document titled “Journey Toward Ordination,” which is available on the Candidacy Committee website (www.crcna.org/candidacy). The members of the committee meet three times per year. As with other denominational committees, Candidacy Committee members serve a potential of two three-year terms.

In the past year, two of our ex-officio positions have been filled by new persons—Rev. Joel Boot, as executive director; and Rev. Jul Medenblik, as Calvin Theological Seminary liaison. Our committee is appreciative of their presence and has a sense that we are maturing in our task. The committee is grateful for this opportunity to serve the church and is continually aware of the responsibilities and challenges implicit in this task. As we continue our work, the support, encouragement, and counsel of the church is greatly appreciated.

II. Committee membership

The following people currently serve on the Candidacy Committee: Dr. Amanda Benckhuysen (2014/1), Rev. Peter Choi (2014/2), Rev. Mary-Lee Bouma (2013/1), Rev. Ken Koeman (2013/1), Rev. Gilbert Varela (2013/1), Mr. Roy Heerema (2013/2), Ms. Kristen Pikaart (2012/1), Rev. Melvin Jackson (2012/1), Dr. Albert Wolters (2012/2), Rev. Jul Medenblik (ex officio as the Calvin Theological Seminary representative), Rev. Joel Boot (ex officio as the executive director), and Rev. David Koll (non-voting staff).

Two of the committee members (Rev. Melvin Jackson and Ms. Kristen Pikaart) are completing a first term and are eligible for reappointment. Dr. Albert Wolters is completing his second term. The committee recommends that Rev. Melvin Jackson and Ms. Kristen Pikaart be appointed to a second three-year term. We also recommend that synod elect from the following nominees to fill the vacating position:

Rev. Calvin Hoogendoorn is a minister of the Word serving as senior pastor of the First CRC in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He has served three CRC congregations over a period of 24 years. He has also served on the Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary and the Board of Trustees of Dordt College, and he has served on the presidential search committee for Trinity Christian College. Rev. Hoogendoorn is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary and has a D.Min. from Covenant Theological Seminary.

Rev. Joel Kok is a minister of the Word serving as senior pastor of Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ontario. He has served four CRC congregations over a period of 23 years. Rev. Kok has served in local classes on the student fund, Home Missions, classical interim, and campus ministries committees. He is a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary and has a Ph.D. from Duke University.

III. A review of training efforts

The work of the Candidacy Committee since its inception in 2005 has included helping the CRC find ways to ensure that adequate orientation to the

CRC and training in the Reformed perspective takes place for those entering ordained ministry in the CRC. This work is being carried out in a number of ways:

- We continue to have a close relationship with and a high regard for the ministry of Calvin Theological Seminary. It is an invaluable partner in the preparation of pastors for the CRC.
- The committee continues to review and refine the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidates (EPMC), the designated program for those who attend seminaries other than CTS. In the past year, the Candidacy Committee has moved ahead with a “24-month non-resident EPMC” program. This program enables EPMC students to select either the more traditional one semester of residency or a two-month, mentor-enhanced on-line delivery of the same course work. Initial reaction to the program has been very positive, with over fifteen persons currently enrolled.
- We also continue to work hard to refine the orientation and vetting process of pastors who enter the CRC as already ordained pastors (under Church Order Article 8). We are seeking to provide a consistent, effective means of ensuring that these pastors are familiar with the Christian Reformed Church and its theological perspective, culture, and ministries, so that they can own these as part of their own story. Major changes to the process are not yet ready to present to synod—more minor adjustments to the process are being administered by the committee. An example of the latter is development of a more consistent and efficient background check process.
- The Korean Institute in Ministry (KIM) program is now in its sixth year as an intensive Korean-language orientation program for Korean-speaking pastors. It is being so well received that Korean pastors who have been ordained in the CRC for years are expressing a desire to attend the program as a refresher course. The committee sees opportunity to use this program as a model for the training of other non-English and English-language groups.
- A one-week orientation called “Welcome to the CRC” has been held for the past three years. This program is intended for pastors affiliating with the CRC through Church Order Article 8, Article 23, or from the Reformed Church in America, and can be used as part of a broader orientation strategy. This year the program was offered in the Pacific Northwest.

Through these initiatives, the Candidacy Committee is seeking to be sensitive to the realities of our modern world and the needs of the church. We welcome any suggestions that may help us in this endeavor.

IV. A discussion of some challenges

A. Reflecting on the supply of candidates

Over the past few years, observant persons have noted that the number of “waiting candidates” has been increasing. The Candidacy Committee wants to assure the church that we are aware of this trend and are actively contemplating its significance.

For a forty-year period leading up to 2008, the number of new candidates approved each year was rarely greater than forty. Then in 2008 the CRC was blessed with fifty-two new candidates, and each successive year there have been more than forty new candidates. At this same time churches are taking a longer time in their search process, pastors are retiring later, use of non-ordained staff and ordained ministry associates is on the rise, and a tight economy is causing local churches and other ministries to eliminate ordained staff. All these factors have an effect on the experience of candidates waiting for a first call.

Connected with the current “supply of candidate” discussion is the reality that more candidates are limiting their availability for call. Many of these do so for good reason—sensitivity to the needs of a working spouse; a desire to immediately work on a post-seminary degree; an opportunity to engage in an adventurous short-term missions assignment while still being eligible for call; or a strong sense of call to a specific ministry type or location. The latter is an expression of our diversity: in earlier days many of our ministries were similar in nature, and the ministry orientation of those in seminary was more uniform; now the orientation of those entering ministry is as varied and diverse as the ministry needs of our churches.

One other factor in this discussion is the practice of ordaining women. Women candidates generally find that their ministry opportunities are more limited than those of their male counterparts, so the calling process can take longer. The new phenomenon of married couples graduating from seminary, both of whom have M.Div. degrees and both of whom are eligible for call, creates a challenge on our calling and supply system that was not previously experienced.

All of this contributes to a reality that current candidates are growing familiar with—the calling process takes longer than it once did. The good news is that many—even most—eventually get a call within the CRC. The Candidacy Committee seeks to prepare those becoming candidates for the challenge of waiting, and it encourages them to be active in communicating their availability to the church. The Candidacy Committee also wishes to encourage the churches to be attentive to the needs and the readiness to serve represented by these waiting candidates.

B. Developments in the office of ministry associate

1. Recent history of the office

Over the past few years, the number of persons serving in the CRC as ordained ministry associates has been growing significantly. This is an expected result of the strategy adopted by Synod 2007 to make more use of, offer more support to, and give greater value to the office of ministry associate (see *Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 299). This strategy was closely tied to returning to the historical usage of Church Order Article 7, limiting the number of persons entering the ordained office of minister of the Word without the prescribed theological training (see *Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 298).

Since the decisions of Synod 2007, much use, development, and discussion of the office of ministry associate has taken place. The oversight of the office resides at the local and regional levels, with official denominational involvement taking place only through the actions of synodical

deputies, as specified in Church Order Article 23. However, synod has given the Candidacy Committee the mandate of discussing with and advising the church regarding standards for ministry associate training.

Under the umbrella of that mandate, and in the absence of any other denominational entity specifically charged with providing resources for the use and development of this office, the Candidacy Committee is involved in the ongoing discussion of the office. Our director is serving as a resource person for inquiring classis leaders and local churches, and he fields a significant number of calls regarding the use and process of this office. Toward that end, a “Ministry Associate Handbook” has been created, gathering all the statements synod has made on the office into one accessible document. The handbook also includes referrals to resources for ministry associate training, direction on preparing for examination, and a variety of tools for services of ordination. The handbook is available on the Candidacy Committee website: www.crcna.org/candidacy.

2. A ministry associate workshop

In October 2011, the Candidacy Committee convened a three-day workshop on the office of ministry associate to promote the discussion and development of the office. Thirty-seven participants gathered for this event, representing 17 classes and 14 training groups (Classis Leadership Development Networks and other formal and informal educational institutions). The committee feels that this discussion is so significant that it has included a full report on this workshop in the Appendix to this report to synod.

The workshop resulted in identifying a number of ways in which the office of ministry associate can be administered with greater success. The Candidacy Committee is committed to encouraging the regional classes to consider the suggestions offered by workshop participants, and will do so over the coming year. Some of the specific suggestions follow:

- Offer a sample protocol for a process toward ordination.
- Encourage classes and ministries to design ministry associate learning plans in consultation with leaders who are familiar with the relevant ethnic and cultural setting.
- Provide a resource list of training and support tools and organizations for those entering the office, and for the ministries and classes that are overseeing their training.
- Encourage a denominational discussion regarding continuing education for pastors, including both ministers of the Word and ministry associates.
- Encourage a culture of leadership development at the denominational, regional, and local levels, so that the church is consciously raising up leaders for the future.
- Continue to develop the Ministry Associate Handbook as a tool for those administering and making use of the office.

3. A suggested addition to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a

The current Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a requires local classes, with concurrence of the synodical deputies, to approve any new job descriptions that may be filled by a ministry associate, ascertaining

that the position fits the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001. These guidelines are posted in the Ministry Associate Handbook, accessible through the Candidacy Committee webpage, and indicate that a job description must be ministerial in nature. Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a follows the statement of Synod 2001, as it lists ministries such as “education, evangelism, pastoral care, music, and ministries to children, youth, adults, and others within and outside of the congregation.”

Over the past year the Synodical Services office has received inquiries from synodical deputies seeking help in the task of determining what is an acceptable job description. The Candidacy office occasionally receives similar requests from classes and local ministries. The following statement has now been added to the Ministry Associate Handbook:

Elements of a good job description include the following:

1. A description of the functions and responsibilities that are ministerial in nature (see the first paragraph of Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a).
2. A description of the supervision and lines of accountability for the position.
3. Specific notation of whether preaching and/or leading the sacraments are to be included in the position.

The Candidacy Committee believes the church would be well served if this statement were to be included in the Church Order itself, in order to make it more accessible and give it more official standing. Thus, the Candidacy Committee proposes that synod instruct the executive director to ensure the addition of the above statement to the General Regulations section of Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a.

4. The name of the office of *ministry associate*

One of the suggestions and requests made most consistently and strongly at the ministry associate workshop pertained to the title of the office of ministry associate. The current title *ministry associate* was created by Synod 2003. The former term *evangelist* was recognized as being inappropriate for the many uses and job descriptions that were being approved relative to the office, and was particularly awkward for some serving in institutional chaplaincy.

In response to the encouragement of participants in the ministry associate workshop, and to input from numerous other persons over the past few years, the Candidacy Committee proposes to Synod 2012 the adoption of the new title *commissioned pastor* for the office. The current title of *ministry associate* is discouraging to many currently ordained in the office, making them feel marginalized or disrespected. Those who would formerly have been ordained to the office of minister of the Word under Church Order Article 7 often question whether the church sees them as a “minister” or as a mere “associate.” The suggested alternative, *commissioned pastor*, is received with appreciation by those the committee has consulted. This new title is identical to the title used in the RCA for a similar ministry category. The new title fits well with our practice and the principles adopted by synod in acknowledging that the office has “the character of pastoral extension” (see the adopted synodical guidelines for the office in the *Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 506).

This Church Order change would give greater honor and respect to those serving in the office and would address an area of misunderstanding that is frequently encountered by those making use of the office of ministry associate (as it is currently titled). Church Order Article 23-a begins with the statement “Ministry associates shall be acknowledged as elders of their calling churches, with corresponding privileges and responsibilities.” Some use this statement as a rationale to maintain a clear “associate status” for those serving in the office, not wanting to confuse them with those responsible for ordained pastoral ministry. The misunderstanding here is twofold.

First, historically, when Church Order Article 23 was originally added to the Church Order, and as the office was initially recognized, the intent of the church was to raise, not lower or contain, the status or honor of those who would serve in the office. Previously, the work had been done by non-ordained evangelists who had no ecclesiastical standing in the church. For these servants to be included around the table of the church council and consistory was a major step of affirmation.

Second, as our denominational discussions over the past decade have resulted in synod going back to the “historical usage” of Church Order Article 7 (the route to pastoral ordination for those without the required theological education), synod also committed to the goal of “more value, more use, and more support” for the office of ministry associate (see *Agenda for Synod 2007*, pp. 299-303).

Thus, the proposed change of title from *ministry associate* to *commissioned pastor* is consistent with both the original intent of the office and the recent goals adopted by Synod 2007. The change in title has the endorsement of the Office of Chaplaincy and Care, which was one of the main initiators of the change by Synod 2003. The change in the title would serve to encourage numerous persons who are currently serving among us, yet would not change any of our current policy or practice regarding the office. Should synod agree to this title change, the wording of the reference to the office in Church Order Article 23 and other articles could easily be adjusted by the Office of Synodical Services.

C. *Perspectives on Article 8*

Another challenge frequently encountered in the work of the Candidacy Committee on which we would like to reflect is the challenge of proper administration of Church Order Article 8. This article provides a way for those ordained in other denominations to serve in the CRC. There are two particular areas of stress in administering Article 8. First, the potential number of pastors seeking access by way of Article 8 is overwhelming. Second, the process of discerning *need* for a congregation and ministry takes great wisdom.

The committee receives approximately fifty inquiries each year from pastors around the world who would like to serve in the CRC. If the CRC had an “unencumbered access” to ordained ministry for such interested persons, our already slow process for candidates fresh out of seminary would be even slower.

The Church Order offers some natural “checkpoints” regulating access to ordained ministry for those ordained in other denominations. These “checkpoints” speak to the second area of challenge experienced by the committee.

In Church Order Supplement, Article 8, E, the opening two statements make clear that use of Article 8 requires both an inquiring pastor and an eligible congregation. Congregations are able to use Article 8 only if they have done a sustained and realistic search within the cadre of already eligible pastoral candidates.

Relative to discerning *need* for a congregation and ministry, the Supplement to Article 8 gives four specific criteria for *need* (see Church Order Supplement, Article 8, E, 4). Two of these criteria are often rather straightforward: (1) our current supply of indigenous leaders for multicultural and ethnic minority churches is generally still insufficient, and (2) a new-church developer (or a leader of a congregation affiliating with our denomination) can generally enter ministry in the denomination without adversely affecting the future of those candidates and pastors who are looking for a call within the denomination. The committee recognizes that the other two criteria for *need* (i.e., “extraordinary qualifications” and “urgent need within a particular congregation”) require significant deliberation and wisdom. In this task of discernment the Candidacy Committee asks for the prayers of the church.

We have recognized one rather innovative route that allows “qualified” inquiring pastors who are ordained in other denominations to more efficiently become ordained in our midst. Rather than waiting for an undetermined number of months or even years for an “eligible congregation” to come along, inquiring ordained pastors are invited to enroll in our Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidates. By doing so they can proceed through the vetting and orientation process required of students who have been trained in other seminaries and eventually become an Article 6 candidate. This route is most often faster than the Article 8 route. Our committee feels that advising persons to follow this route is consistent with our responsibility relative to both Article 6 (the seminary route) and Article 8 (the route for those already ordained).

D. Translations of our confessions and the Church Order

Another challenge that the committee is addressing is the communication of our history, confessions, and Church Order to those with limited English-language skills. As our denomination experiences growth in ethnic communities having primary languages other than English, the CRCNA will have to be more and more purposeful in providing core documents in other languages. This will serve not only affiliating pastors but also the church leaders and members within their congregations. Having a ready, accessible set of accurately translated documents that we consider essential to our life together will be hospitable and will enable greater unity in our future.

Currently the largest non-English language group in the denomination is the Korean community. Our Synodical Services Office has already invested in translating the CRC Church Order into Korean, and this document is available as a free download on the denominational website (as is the English version of the Church Order.) Our denomination also has a ten-year-old Korean translation of the booklet “What It Means to Be Reformed.” However, no denominationally sponsored translation of the three Reformed confessions currently exists. In the Korean-language training of affiliating Korean pastors, the documents have been purchased from an independent

Korean bookstore and have been distributed only to pastors involved in this program (Korean Institute in Ministry).

The Candidacy Committee recognizes that the resources of the denomination in general are currently stressed, and that the resources of Faith Alive Christian Resources (the denominational ministry currently charged with non-English translation of our resources) are especially stressed. Yet we consider this matter to be urgent in nature. We are working with Korean CRC leaders to obtain and create Korean translations of the Reformed confessions, and to place these on the denominational website alongside the Korean translation of the Church Order and the “What It Means to Be Reformed” booklet. We hope to enlist the financial support of the Korean CRC community, as well as the support of the Synodical Services Office, for this task.

We also are thrilled that the Chinese CRC population is very interested in a similar project. This group in the CRC is rather small in number, with ten Chinese-speaking CRC ministries, yet the potential population in North America and in the world is enormous. Seven of the ten Chinese CRC ministries are now led by pastors who have affiliated with the CRC in the past three years and who have come through our new CRC orientation programs. They are offering their enthusiastic service to the denomination for this project, with the hope of having an accessible resource that can bless their own congregations, as well as congregations and Christians across the world. Our committee, in cooperation with the Synodical Services office, and in discussion with the Faith Alive translation committee, will seek to make progress in this project in the coming year.

The committee is also aware that the Spanish-language group is the largest non-English language group in North America, and we seek to engage CRC leaders in this community to also support and develop a Spanish-language denominational resource site with core CRC documents. This may be done either by collecting existing translated documents or by developing new ones.

All these translation projects have costs associated with them. Although the communities that will use the translated documents can rightly be invited to share the burden of these costs, our committee feels that this matter is worthy of denominational attention and sponsorship. Thus we commend this matter to the churches and synod for discussion and consideration in the coming year.

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. David R. Koll (director of candidacy) and to Dr. Albert Wolters (member of the Candidacy Committee) when the Candidacy Committee report is discussed.

B. That synod by way of the ballot appoint one member to the Candidacy Committee from the nominees presented, and reappoint the two members eligible for a second three-year term.

C. That synod approve the following addition to Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a, and instruct the executive director to ensure the appropriate insertion into the Church Order:

Elements of a good job description include the following:

1. A description of the functions and responsibilities that are ministerial in nature (see the first paragraph of Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a).
2. A description of the supervision and lines of accountability for the position.
3. Specific notation of whether preaching and/or leading the sacraments are to be included in the position.

Grounds:

1. Such a change will serve synodical deputies and leaders of classes and local ministries as they create and evaluate job descriptions for this office.
2. Such a change maintains the current and desirable spirit of flexibility in the use and administration of this office.

D. That synod approve a change in title from that of *ministry associate to commissioned pastor*, as described in Church Order Article 23 and mentioned at other articles within the Church Order, and instruct the executive director to ensure that the appropriate editorial changes are made within the Church Order.

Grounds:

1. Such a change will give encouragement and support to those serving in this office.
2. Such a change will show a positive response to many who have expressed marginalization because of the current title.
3. Such a change is consistent with the denominational goal articulated most recently by Synod 2007 that the denomination give “more value, more use, and more support” to those serving in this office.
4. Such a change has the serendipitous benefit of being parallel in nature to the term currently being used for persons doing similar work in the Reformed Church in America.

E. That synod take note of the various initiatives and challenges identified by the Candidacy Committee as noted in this report and thank them for their continuing work.

Candidacy Committee
David R. Koll, director

Appendix

Report on Ministry Associate Workshop

October 17-19, 2011, Grand Haven, Michigan

Prepared by Rev. David Koll, director of candidacy

I. Introduction

On October 17-19, 2012, thirty-seven participants gathered to discuss the use and development of the office of ministry associate in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The participants came at the invitation of the CRC Candidacy Committee and represented 17 classes and 14 training

groups (Leadership Development Networks, informal institutions, and formal educational institutions).

II. Raw data

The event began with an hour of introductions and overview on Monday evening, October 17. On Tuesday, October 18, all participants spent the morning in one of four small groups, discussing the challenges and opportunities of the office with a particular, assigned area of focus. In the Tuesday afternoon session, each of the four groups reported their thoughts to the main body. On Wednesday, October 19, the participants divided into the same four groups for a morning session of reviewing and considering any and all concerns related to the office of ministry associate. The Wednesday afternoon session included brief statements or propositions from each of the four small groups. There was also a brief panel discussion, a large group open discussion time, and a closing time of prayer.

As a companion to this report there is a separate document with a variety of appendices. *Note:* A copy of the accompanying appendices is available from the Candidacy Committee office. Email dkoll@crcna.org to make a request. Appendix 1 contains the descriptions of the four small groups and the focus questions used to prompt them in their discussion time. The other appendices give access to the notes preserved by the recorders of each of the four discussion groups. The format of each appendix reflects the style of each reporter. The hope is that provision of this “raw data” will be helpful for those who wish to review it.

The Tuesday morning small groups met around the following topics:

- A. Vetting Persons for Ordained Pastoral Ministry (see Appendix 2)
- B. Doing Denominational Orientation (see Appendix 3)
- C. The Multiethnic Vision and Reality (see Appendix 4)
- D. Equality and Distinctiveness among Pastors (see Appendix 5)

The Wednesday morning and afternoon summary session notes are also included in the appendices to this report.

Group 1 Summary Notes (Appendix 6)

Group 2 Summary Notes (Appendix 7)

Group 3 Summary Notes (Appendix 8)

Group 4 Summary Notes (Appendix 9)

Large Group Panel Summary Thoughts (Appendix 10)

I am tremendously grateful for the participation of each person who attended the workshop, and for the support and encouragement shown by the classes and organizations that sent them. I am also very thankful for the help of the persons who served as facilitators of the small group discussion, and for the recorders who prepared and preserved the notes of the discussion. I am confident that I speak for each of the participants as I express the hope and prayer that God will use this event, the appendix notes, and this report to advance the work of God in the CRC through the office of ministry associate.

III. Refined data

In order to help sort through the many words and thoughts presented in the appendices, I have taken the summary statements from each of the four

groups and refined them into numbered statements. In preparation for this report, these refined statements were shared with the persons who were present at the workshop. Wherever possible, editorial and content suggestions have been taken into account in the final form of these statements.

There is no presumption that these summary notes represent all the thoughts offered at the workshop, nor that the workshop itself can function as the final word in any of these matters. There is, however, a sincere hope that the discussion of the office of ministry associate and, even more broadly, the related discussion of the routes to ordained pastoral ministry in the CRC can be advanced through this project.

A. Group 1 Summary Statements

- 1-1: It's a matter of the heart: We must discern and attend to the heart of people as they move through our processes for ordination and ministry associates.
- 1-2: We value a welcoming ethos, swinging wide the gates to beckon people into future ministry through Article 23.
- 1-3: Beginning at the grass roots, we must champion all efforts being made to mobilize and cultivate people to come to a place in their lives where they feel free to follow their calling.
- 1-4: We must balance our standards with sensitivity to different cultures. We need standards but must ask ourselves how they mesh with each cultural setting.
- 1-5: Don't forget to raise up the critical role of laypeople in ministry, remembering that the Reformation taught us that being a layperson is also a high and holy calling. We need to be wary of using labels (and ordination) inappropriately, elevating the ministry of such people above that of the laity.
- 1-6: The title *ministry associate* is not serving us well, as it contributes to a culture of demeaning those with such an ordination.
- 1-7: It's the gospel, stupid. The gospel has to drive our discussion. We must always ask what is in the best interest of the gospel as we consider whether or not to ordain a person as a ministry associate.
- 1-8: It's critically important that a group of people observe, support, and influence the person moving into candidacy, so that the candidate's eventual calling is given a compelling confirmation from that group.

B. Group 2 Summary Statements

- 2-1: Bear in mind the wisdom of the saying "Fix the end and flex the means."
- 2-2: Change the title *ministry associate* to a new title that utilizes the term *commissioned*, as the RCA has done.
- 2-3: Orientation should include teaching candidates our history, our polity, our denominational processes, and also honor the flexibility found among our various cultural subgroups.
- 2-4: We must keep a high bar on lifelong learning among all our leaders.
- 2-5: We must reaffirm our standards already identified in Article 23. This means that our CMLTs must also be able to ascertain the functional expertise of a candidate.
- 2-6: Leadership development is a continual process.

- 2-7: We must emphasize to the local churches that they have the resources to empower future Article 23 candidates to find their future. A critical task of ordained ministers of the Word is to *raise up future leaders*. This needs much greater emphasis.
- 2-8: We need to clarify how Article 23 applies to preaching pastors on the one hand and to other staff members on the other.
- 2-9: We need to produce financial guidelines for ministry associate salaries. This is a matter of honoring them as well as paying them.

C. Group 3 Summary Statements

- 3-1: Each major ethnic group should shape the ordination process for its own group.
- 3-2: The Candidacy Committee should do a fact-finding study of each ethnic group to determine the minimum educational requirements for that group.
- 3-3: Minimum common standards for ordination as a ministry associate are the four “Cs”: competence, calling, character, and content (knowledge).
- 3-4: It appears to us that the feared loss of our CRC identity is inhibiting our ability to adapt appropriate changes for different ethnic settings.
- 3-5: In order to recognize the legitimacy of Article 23 ministry associates serving as pastors, we recommend that the CRC revisit the use of Article 7 as an alternate route into ministry.
- 3-6: Article 23 should have two levels:
 - Ordination for those who will serve as commissioned ministers of the Word.
 - Ordination for those who will serve in staff ministry positions.
- 3-7: The calling of ministry associates should be transferable to another classis without a new examination.

D. Group 4 Summary Statements

- 4-1: We recommend that the Candidacy Committee craft a new name for ministry associate that incorporates the term *pastor*.
- 4-2: Incorporate learning contracts early in the preparation of an individual for ordination as a ministry associate.
- 4-3: Include a greater awareness and involvement on the part of the classis in the ministry associate ordination process. For example, a classis should expect at least three events to happen before ordination occurs:
 - a. The candidate should attend a classis meeting early on, simply to be introduced to the classis.
 - b. The classis should receive reports on the progress the candidate is making toward ordination.
 - c. The classis then conducts the final examination for ordination.
- 4-4: Uphold the concept (and requirement) that classis must contextualize the ministry associate examination in each particular case.
- 4-5: Celebrate the newly ordained ministry associates at synod and in *The Banner* each year and foster networking links among them and communication from the denomination to them.

- 4-6: Reduce the obstacles for a ministry associate to serve as a lead pastor in an established congregation.
- 4-7: Encourage the Candidacy Committee to identify and promote examples of best practices of leadership development in and for the congregations.
- 4-8: Encourage each classis to create an LDN to further leadership development, knowing that this may also lead to some leaders becoming ordained as ministry associates.
- 4-9: Inspire pastors to value raising up leaders, even leaders from within their congregation for their congregational ministry.

IV. Reflections on the data

The “refined data” statements in section III above contain a number of very helpful ideas. Each of them comes out a discussion focused on offering some concrete direction for the use and development of the office of ministry associate in the Christian Reformed Church. In response, section IV attempts to bring some focus to the “refined data” statements. In so doing we seek to find the way forward toward the stated denominational goal of “more value, more use, and more support” for the office of ministry associate (see *Agenda for Synod 2007*, pp. 299-303). In each point there are suggested action steps for the local classis teams and for the denominational Candidacy Committee. These are given in the spirit of humility, with the intention of helping each participant in the discussion identify some concrete responses that can be taken. In this way we can perhaps avoid the all too common experience of expending our energy in merely talking rather than doing.

1. The name *ministry associate* is in need of change.

(Note the concerns stated in Section III: 1-6; 2-2, 4-1, and the concerns reflected in comments 3-5 and 3-6.)

The current title is often seen as demeaning. Making a title change for this office can be a concrete step in living out the goal of “more value, more use, and more support” for those in this office. There may be merit in using a term that is similar to the RCA term *commissioned pastor*. There may also be merit in using a term that incorporates the term *minister*. The terms *commissioned minister* and *commissioned pastor* had near unanimous support among the participants of the workshop.

Follow-up: Candidacy Committee to consider proposing such a change to synod.

2. Attention needs to be paid to the process or protocol toward ordination of ministry associates.

(Note comments as stated in Section III: 1-1,1-2, 1-8, 2-3, 2-5, 3-3, 4-2, 4-3.)

The process of identifying and then preparing a person for ordination as a ministry associate will be best served when it is done thoughtfully. The process needs to include times of encouraging relationship building, construction of and follow-through of a negotiated learning plan, assessment of progress through the learning plan, and then eventual advocacy of the ministry associate at a scheduled classis examination. The current process is,

at worst, a very individualized experience in which the classis does not meet the ministry associate candidate until a classis exam, and in which there has been no agreed upon discerning process before the exam. The current process, at its best, involves active participation by numerous classis leaders, as well as the sponsoring ministry, each giving hospitable and honest feedback to the ministry associate candidate and to a negotiated learning plan. No change in church polity has to occur for this matter to be addressed. It is the purview of each classis to determine how a person is judged to be ready for examination for the office of ministry associate.

Follow-up: Classis committee to propose and implement a healthy protocol. Candidacy Committee to offer a resource to classes for such a protocol.

3. Recognize and attend to *ethnic and cultural* particulars.

(Note comments as stated in Section III: 1-4, 2-1, 3-1, 3-2, 3-4, 3-5, 4-4.)

One of the great benefits of the office of ministry associate as a local or regional ordination is that it can be very flexible and ministry specific. Each classis team and each designer of a learning plan needs to be consciously and purposely in consultation with those acquainted with the ethnic and cultural context related to the ministry that will be served. If a given classis does not have expertise in a given culture or ethnic ministry, there are neighboring leaders and denominational leaders who can help. Among the many resources available are the members of the Home Missions ethnic ministry team. As in point 2 above, this issue can immediately be addressed at the local classis level.

Follow-up: Classis committee to own and implement this value in designing learning plans for ministry associates. Candidacy Committee to encourage classes and ministries toward such sensitivity and values, and to resource a good connection with consultants as they are needed.

4. Recognize and attend to the “principle of proportionality.”

(Note the concerns as stated in Section III: 2-8, 3-6, 4-4.)

The principle of “proportionality” states that the depth and particularity of training required is in proportion to the position that will be filled (see *Agenda for Synod 2007*, p. 303). Ministry associate positions that involve broad responsibility similar to the work done by ministers of the Word (i.e., preaching, solo or senior leadership) will need a learning plan that has more and broader components than the learning plan of a “specialized” ministry position. Attending to this principle can help prevent the need to divide the office of ministry associate into two or more “subsets.” Synod, in its previous discussion of matters related to the office of ministry associate, has noted that there is great value in not creating a multiplicity of offices. (See *Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 506; and *Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 611.)

Follow-up: Classis committee to carefully review each proposed ministry associate position and make a learning plan that is suitable for that description. Candidacy Committee to encourage and support classes and local ministries with a variety of tools for training and supporting a variety of ministry associate positions.

5. Nurture a culture of continuing education for pastors.

(Note the concerns as stated in Section III: 2-4, 2-6, 4-7.)

The denominational commitment to maintain a tradition of theologically educated clergy can be maintained and developed, even as there is more use, support, and value given to the office of ministry associate. Toward this end, if ministers of the Word are actively committed and encouraged to continue to learn throughout their careers, the task of encouraging ministry associates to continue to learn will have greater credibility. The current trend of making more use of “non-theologically educated pastors” does not have to signal a change in commitment to theological education. Instead, it can simply signal a change in the *sequence* in which theological education is experienced (i.e., during a life of ministry rather than exclusively before a life of ministry). Classes are well within their area of responsibility as they encourage ministers of the Word, ministry associates, and their sponsoring ministries to attend to the priority of continuing education. Ministry associates serving as solo or lead pastors can be encouraged to make a learning plan that moves them toward eventual ordination as minister of the Word.

Follow-up: Classis committees to examine their priorities and policies as they pertain to supporting and encouraging continuing education for pastors and other church leaders. Candidacy Committee to encourage the denominational discussion re continuing education for pastors, and to actively participate in this discussion in partnership with other appropriate denominational ministries. (See the reference to the September 2010 BOT minutes, as quoted in the *Agenda for Synod 2011*, p. 333.)

6. Nurture a culture of leadership development.

(Note the concerns as stated in Section III: 1-3, 1-5, 2-6, 2-7, 4-7, 4-8, 4-9.)

The task of nurturing a culture of leadership development is coordinate to, but distinct from, the task of nurturing a culture of continuing education for pastors. The truth is that making disciples, identifying future leaders, and strategically raising up leaders constitute a high priority enterprise for the future of the church. This is also explicitly part of the biblical role of a pastor (Eph. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:2). The development of the role of ministry associate can be seen as an indication that this task is being taken more seriously now than at any other time in our denominational history.

Follow-up: Classis committees to examine their priorities and policies as they pertain to supporting and encouraging pastors and ministries to develop a cadre of leaders in the church. Candidacy Committee to continue resourcing both classes and LDNs in the task of training ministry associates. This means continuing the development of the “Ministry Associate Handbook” and enhancing the listing of LDN and denominational resources available to LDNs, classes, local ministries, and pastors.

7. Enhance denominational support.

(Note the concerns as stated in Section III: 2-9, 3-7, 4-5.)

The discussion at the Ministry Associate Workshop identified a few particular areas of concern where denominational action can offer the support

and encouragement needed for ministry associates to work as ministry colleagues rather than “underlings.” Among the particular suggestions given were (1) the provision of a salary guideline and a benefit package, (2) a public, denomination-wide celebration of new ministry associates, and (3) mechanisms for communication with and among ministry associates. Other such ideas can likely be identified. The past three years have seen a purposeful address of such issues by the Candidacy Committee, as evidenced in sections 8 and 9 of the Ministry Associate Handbook (see www.crcna.org/candidacy). Yet the existence of the handbook is not as widely known as it should be. The need for continuing development of this handbook is apparent, and the advocacy for those serving as ministry associates is critical to the denominational strategy of giving ministry associates “more value, more use, and more support.”

Follow-up: Classis committees to become acquainted with the Ministry Associate Handbook, offer suggestions for its development, and offer the resources contained in it to their various ministry associates and ministries. Candidacy Committee to (1) continue developing the Ministry Associate Handbook, (2) continue giving serious consideration to each suggestion offered, and (3) attend to overall advocacy for the value, use, and support given to ministry associates.

8. Recognize the variant opinions regarding the road ahead.

(Note the concerns as stated in Section III: 3-5, 3-6, 3-7, 4-6.)

The current ministry associate discussion comes out of a decade-long denominational discussion of routes to ordination, use of Church Order Article 7 (the route to ordination as minister of the Word for those without the prescribed theological training), and standards for ordained ministry. In the past few years synod has minimized the use of Article 7, while committing itself to the strategy of “more value, more use, and more support” for the office of ministry associate (see the *Agenda for Synod 2007*, pp. 294-303). The Candidacy Committee continues to believe this is a worthy strategy, and the majority of those attending the workshop concurred. However, a divergence of opinions still exists, as expressed even at the workshop. In our denominational discussion, a degree of diversity is inevitable—and even advantageous. Certainly not all suggestions offered for the use of Article 23 will have the same validity or will deserve the same need for immediate acceptance. To move ahead in a healthy manner, we will have to practice deep respect for each person involved, recognizing that variant people make for variant views, and variant views allow for measured and new approaches to complex problems.

Follow-up: Classis committees and Candidacy Committee to work at thoughtful approaches to ordination matters, and toward respectful expression of suggestions and proposals that will move us into the future.

V. Conclusion

The discussion of the office of ministry associate is a critical and timely discussion in the CRC. We are navigating a time in history where the cultures of the world are meeting in North America. The CRC is finding ways to

address people far beyond the historic Dutch immigrant culture out of which it was birthed. There is a notable trend relative to the sequencing of theological education, as more persons are gaining ministry experience before and concurrent with their theological education instead of after their theological education.

The efforts of this workshop have produced numerous suggestions for local classes and for the denominational Candidacy Committee to consider. Notably, many of the suggestions do not require changes in polity, and the consensus felt at the workshop was healthy. It may be that as we move ahead with these suggestions, the frustrations of past discussions regarding ordination will be experienced less and less, and the joy and unity of ministry in the CRC will be experienced more and more. This is certainly our prayer. May God bless us as we discern which of the suggestions in this report to act on, and as we discern appropriate steps toward implementation.

Note: A copy of accompanying appendices to this Appendix is available from the Candidacy Committee office (write to Rev. David Koll at dkoll@crcna.org).

I. Introduction

The EIRC is honored to represent the CRC in its ecumenical relationships. Sometimes these relationships are institutional and formal, and at other times they are established and fostered through more casual encounters. But whatever the venues—major ecclesiastical assemblies, multilateral associations, worship halls, denominational offices, or coffee shops—“the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) is experienced and celebrated.

The confessional expression that the CRC is part of the “church universal” takes on flesh and blood in our ecumenical relationships. These relationships are not exclusively with denominations that are similar to the CRC. In fact, there is considerable diversity in such fellowship, not only in our church-to-church relationships but also through our affiliation in ecumenical organizations. When one considers our participation in the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), the Evangelical Fellowship in Canada (EFC), the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), Christian Churches Together (CCT), the Global Christian Forum (GCF), and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), one can sense that the reality is more than a confessional expression. Followers of Jesus from a wide variety of traditions, languages, and polities can stand together in obedience and service. When we hear the respect and appreciation that is given to the CRC and show respect and appreciation for our brothers and sisters in other denominational families, we give thanks and praise to God for the way his Spirit breaks down the walls of division that have so often marked the history of the church. For every expression of unity in Christ, we give thanks.

The two-part name of this committee (ecumenical and interfaith) reflects that there are two dimensions to the assignment given by synod. Both are significant, and they are clearly distinct. Ecumenical relationships exist between the CRC and other Christian traditions, and interfaith dialogue takes place between the Christian churches and faith traditions that have a non-Christian tradition. The EIRC is careful to differentiate between the two activities, and it seeks to assist the members and congregations of our denomination to do likewise.

This is an eventful time for the EIRC, with a lot of ecumenical activity taking place at several levels of denominational life. Perhaps the most significant of the activities this past year has been the engagement with the discussion surrounding adoption of the Belhar Confession. The formal discussion and recommendations concerning the Belhar Confession are contained in Appendix A to this report.

II. Membership and meetings

The members of the EIRC for the current year ending June 30, 2011, are Rev. Pedro Aviles (2013/2); Dr. Emily Brink (2013/2); Dr. William T. Koopmans, chair (2012/2); Ms. Debra Ortiz-Vásquez (2013/1); Dr. Shirley Roels (2012/1); Dr. Jay Shim (2014/1); Rev. Peter Slofstra (2013/2), vice-chair; Dr. John Suk (2014/1); Ms. Rebecca Warren (2014/2), who was elected to become chairperson effective July 1, 2012; and Ms. Anne Zaki (2012/1).

Rev. Joel Boot and Dr. Peter Borgdorff serve as ex officio members of the EIRC.

The EIRC met in September 2011 and January 2012. Typically the on-site meeting locations alternate between Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Burlington, Ontario.

III. Nominations for membership

The first term of Dr. Shirley Roels ends June 30, 2012, and she is eligible for a second term. The EIRC heartily recommends her to synod for reappointment to a second term.

Dr. William Koopmans is completing his second term as of June 30, 2012. Dr. Koopmans has served the committee and the CRC with distinction and wise counsel. For the past several years he also served as chairperson of the EIRC. Dr. Koopmans will continue to serve as an adviser to the executive committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Dr. Koopman's leadership will be missed by EIRC members. Ms. Anne Zaki recently moved with her family back to her native home in Egypt and is, therefore, not available to serve a second term. The EIRC will miss Ms. Zaki's vision and international experience. Both Dr. Koopmans and Ms. Zaki have faithfully served the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC. The EIRC recommends that synod express its gratitude for their service.

In keeping with the synodical guidelines and requirements for diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, geographical location, and ordination, the EIRC presents the following slates of nominees to synod to fill these positions, asking that synod appoint one nominee from Western Canada and one from Eastern and Central Canada.

Western Canada

Rev. Karen Norris lives in Edmonton, Alberta, and serves as a hospital chaplain after having served as the pastor of congregational life and outreach at West End Church in Edmonton. In her résumé Rev. Norris writes, "As a youth worker to immigrant youth in Halifax, and as a chaplain resident in inner-city Edmonton, I often encounter individuals and families from different denominations and faiths. It would be a delight to continue to grow and contribute to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue within the CRC."

Mr. Andrew Geisterfer also lives in Edmonton, Alberta, and is a lawyer by profession. Mr. Geisterfer is a member at Ottewell CRC, where he has served as a deacon, an elder, and as chairman of council; he has also served Classis Alberta North as chairman of the student fund committee. In his résumé Mr. Geisterfer writes, "This looks like a very interesting opportunity. I am eager to serve and believe I have the gifts which would be an asset to this board."

Eastern and Central Canada

Dr. James Payton is a professor of history at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He is a member of the Ancaster CRC and a former member of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee. Dr. Payton is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary. He has also been active in interfaith dialogue under the auspices of the Canadian Council of Churches and has served on many faith-related committees over the years. In his résumé Dr. Payton writes, "I greatly enjoyed the privilege of serving on the IRC/ERC from 2004-2010. The concerns of ecumenism and of interfaith relations are fundamental to me. My own faith journey (from Fundamentalist Baptist to Reformed) has led me to appreciate the diversity within the Christian

church while remaining committed to the Reformed faith to which the Lord led me long ago.”

Dr. Robert Sweetman is a university professor at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario, and a member of First Toronto CRC. He served three terms as an elder and on numerous occasions served as a delegate to Classis Toronto. In his résumé Dr. Sweetman writes, “My late colleague George Vandervelde was someone whose work I greatly admire. I have an amateur interest in ecumenical relations stemming from my long past (graduate student at the Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies) and present association with Catholic institutions of philosophical and theological education and the rich philosophical and theological tradition. I have come to learn much from over the years. I would be happy to serve if such experience were deemed valuable to the committee and in doing so would feel I was holding up George’s work and legacy in some small way.”

IV. Information regarding ecumenical relations

A. Fraternal delegates

The EIRC appointed the following fraternal delegates to the assemblies of churches and ecumenical organizations with which the CRC has a relationship or has membership:

1. To the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) General Assembly, Rev. George Young.
2. To the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), Rev. Bruce Adema and Dr. Peter Borgdorff.
3. To the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa, Dr. Peter Borgdorff.
4. To the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Dr. Henry De Moor.
5. To the regional meeting of WCRC (CANAAC), Dr. William Koopmans and Ms. Rebecca Warren.

B. Representatives and observers to ecumenical organizations

In accordance with the provisions of the Ecumenical Charter of the CRCNA, the EIRC appointed representatives and observers to various ecumenical organizations. These gatherings often provide occasions to connect with representatives of churches with which the CRC is in ecclesiastical fellowship or dialogue, and members of the EIRC take every opportunity to make those connections.

1. Rev. Joel Boot serves as the CRCNA’s representative on the board of directors of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).
2. Rev. Peter Slofstra and Rev. Bruce G. Adema serve as the CRCNA’s representatives on the governing board of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC).
3. Rev. Joel Boot and Dr. Peter Borgdorff serve as the CRCNA’s representatives to Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT-USA).

4. Rev. Bruce G. Adema represents the CRCNA to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC).
5. Rev. William T. Koopmans serves as an adviser to the executive committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Dr. Peter Borgdorff, former president of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, serves as a member of the executive committee.
6. Rev. Joel Boot serves as the CRCNA's representative to the Global Christian Forum (GCF). Dr. Peter Borgdorff serves as a member of the North American Foundation of the GCF.
7. Dr. Peter Borgdorff serves as a member of the board of Sojourners.

V. Multilateral relationships – ecumenical organizations

A. World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

The WCRC as a global ecumenical organization is composed of 230 denominations, all of which have roots in the Reformed tradition and subscribe to the historic Reformed confessions. Together these denominations have a membership of more than 80 million people. With offices located in Geneva, the WCRC is dedicated to building fellowship and relationships among its member churches and to bearing witness to and for those in the world who suffer from all forms of oppression. The latter is summarized and designated in a “commitment to justice” that is deeply rooted in our biblical understanding of what it means to be God’s agents of mercy in his world.

The CRC is represented in the governance of the WCRC through the participation of Drs. William Koopmans and Peter Borgdorff, both of whom serve the executive committee of WCRC. While the theological span of the WCRC member-churches is broad—and the cultural influences in the organization are globally diverse—it is a privilege for the CRC to be engaged in such a global expression of the body of Christ.

B. Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

The CRC is a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). The EFC focuses on bringing evangelical Christians together for greater impact in mission, ministry, and witness. It does so by working closely together for ministry empowerment and by working cooperatively to address the government and the courts on current issues of interest and concern.

C. Canadian Council of Churches

The CRC in Canada is a member of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). The CCC works primarily through its Commissions on Faith and Witness and on Justice and Peace. The CRC has representation on both commissions, and the CRC representatives make the CRC’s voice heard in matters relating to ecumenical relations and to broad concerns within our culture and world. Rev. Bruce G. Adema and Rev. Peter Slofstra serve on the board of the CCC.

D. National Association of Evangelicals (USA)

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) meets twice each year, allowing representatives of evangelical denominations, ministries, and congregations to discuss matters of common interest and concern. In addition to

these membership meetings, the CRC cooperates with the NAE commissions in the area of chaplaincy ministries (especially as that relates to endorsement of chaplains' issues). From time to time, the CRC is asked to participate in other NAE initiatives.

E. Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. and the Global Christian Forum

Since the fall of 2001, church leaders from a wide spectrum of ecclesiastical traditions have been meeting to discuss and create a new kind of ecumenical organization that includes participants from all Christian traditions at the same table: Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT-USA). The present participants in CCT-USA represent five families of churches, as follows: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Historic Protestant, Evangelicals/Pentecostals, and Historic Ethnic. The global expression of this same ecumenical configuration, with perhaps even a more diverse participation, is the Global Christian Forum. Both CCT and GCF represent an emerging trend in ecumenical formation. The facts that we live in a global village today and that this world needs a more unified Christian witness make these expressions an exciting frontier in ecumenical engagement.

VI. Bilateral relationships

Relationships with other denominations are an important part of the CRC's witness in and to the body of Jesus Christ. The CRC is in regular contact with many of the denominations through their representatives who gather at a variety of ecumenical events throughout the year. Partnerships and ministry alliances of various kinds allow the CRC to be a participant—and to exercise its voice—in meaningful ways. Continuing contact and consistent interaction make these relationships meaningful and effective.

The CRC maintains special relationships (ecclesiastical fellowship and churches in dialogue) with a number of Reformed denominations. An exchange of ecumenical delegates at meetings of the broader assemblies is a common occurrence, usually on a rotating schedule, and Synod 2012 will again share in that experience as fraternal greetings are exchanged. It is expected that Synod 2012 will welcome visitors from Africa, North America (both Canada and the United States), and possibly other parts of the world. These guests will be introduced and will have an opportunity to address synod on Tuesday, June 12, 2012.

VII. Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue

With the adoption of the Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism by Synod 2011, the dialogue participants are proposing the next consultation. The prospectus for Round 8 reads as follows:

Prospectus for the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue Round Eight

Following a meeting in New York on 19 September 2011 and a follow-up phone conference on 4 October 2011, ecumenical officers of the SEIA, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church of America, the Christian Reformed Church, and the United Church of Christ agreed to the following prospectus for the next round of the Catholic-Reformed consultation.

Even as we wrestled through theological and dialogical challenges in the last round, the five communions, in a historically significant moment, affirmed

These Living Waters: The Agreement on the Recognition of Baptism. The time for a new round of dialogue, which we agree needs to manifest signs of continuity with the last round by means of advancing the foundations in sacramental theology that were established, seems appropriate. The topic of the consultation is largely based, therefore, on the recommendations made in *This Bread of Life*, the culminating document from the previous round of consultation.

More precisely, in its conclusion to the last round of dialogue, participants noted: “We must also acknowledge that our deliberations were hampered by several ecclesiological issues that arose which were sometimes the cause of considerable tension. Thus we believe that it would be good for us in the future to explore together these ecclesiological issues which still stand before us, including how our sacramental theology relates to the theology of ministry and ordination, the relationship between an individual congregation and the universal Church, understanding each other’s polity, and the nature of the Church and how authority is exercised within that understanding in service to the Body of Christ.”¹ The upcoming consultation will focus on the nature and meaning of the Church.

Given the challenges and preliminary goals identified, the dialogue will be designed to address issues that are ecclesiological in scope. We envision that the proposed dialogue will begin in the fall of 2012. Among the questions that the dialogue will address are the following:

On the ecclesial dimension of the Catholic-Reformed communions:

1. What is our understanding of the role of ministry and the meaning of ordination?
2. How does our sacramental theology, especially our respective interpretations of Eucharist, relate to ministry and ordination?
3. How does each of us understand the relationship between an individual congregation and the universal church?
4. How do we interpret the relationship between the exercise of authority and the role of service?
5. How do we understand the role of episkopé in the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions?
6. How might the ministry of the Bishop of Rome be helpful in the cause of Christian unity?
7. What do we understand to be the mission of the church in light of our shared study on Baptism and Eucharist?
8. How does our understanding of the church’s participation in God’s mission shape our view of the nature of the church?

The CRC participants in the dialogue on baptism were Drs. Susan Rozeboom, Lyle Bierma, and Ron Feenstra. The EIRC is presently considering the participation of the CRC in this next phase of the discussion by appointing Drs. Susan Rozeboom, Ron Feenstra, and Rev. Peter Choi. This intention is conveyed to synod as information.

VIII. Interfaith dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is a relatively new responsibility for the EIRC, and care continues to be taken to differentiate interfaith dialogue from ecumenical engagement.

¹ This Living Bread: Report of the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue on the Eucharist/Lord’s Table, pp. 76-77.

A task force was appointed to discern what kinds of resources would be helpful for the congregations and members of the CRC in participating appropriately and confidently in dialogue with people who adhere to a different faith. The task force has met several times and has developed a “frequently asked questions” segment and has posted an essay titled “Reformed Christian Engagement with People of Different Faith.” These resources will be made available on the CRC website.

IX. The Belhar Confession

Synod 2009 approved the recommendation to propose to Synod 2012 that the Belhar Confession be adopted as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession). It also authorized the EIRC to promote study of the Belhar Confession in the churches during this consideration period.

The EIRC asked Dr. Peter Borgdorff to facilitate, on its behalf, the study of the Belhar Confession. With his assistance, a number of classes have discussed the issues raised by this confession; church councils and congregations have studied it; pastors have preached biblical messages on its themes; and many agencies and offices of the CRC have used the Belhar in their work. We have found enthusiastic engagement at many levels with the content of the Belhar Confession. To assist in the study of the Belhar, the EIRC has produced study materials and a devotional booklet available for free or at minimal cost through Faith Alive Christian Resources (see www.crcna.org/belhar).

The task of promoting study of the Belhar Confession is ongoing. The EIRC is pleased with the interest that congregations and leaders have shown in this confession, and how thoughtfully this important document is being examined and prayed about. Having brought the original recommendation forward to adopt the Belhar Confession as the fourth confessional standard of the CRCNA, the EIRC has been putting considerable effort into facilitating events at which all voices can be heard and all perspectives can be shared—both those currently in favor of adopting the Belhar Confession and those not in favor of such adoption—during this period of discernment.

Especially in this past year, the denominational discussion has become quite intense. Given our propensity to vigorously debate important issues (reflected in the number of overtures concerning adoption of the Belhar Confession), the EIRC wishes to observe that, in its judgment, such debate is good even when some things perhaps get overstated. It is not a good thing, however, when the rhetoric is too intense to the point that it is either personalized or accusatory. While most of the participants in the discussion affirm the validity of the Belhar Confession’s content and teaching, a number of the participants wish to stop short of affirming the Belhar Confession as part of our standards of unity. All discussion participants know that the Belhar Confession is in a different form from the three confessions adopted in 1618-1619 by the Synod of Dort. Just as each of these confessions emerged out of its own context and was drafted for its own particular circumstances, the Belhar Confession also has its own context and story to tell.

The discussion has helped to raise the awareness of the church’s membership on the issues the Belhar addresses, namely: the continuing challenge of racism, the need for active efforts to enhance the unity of the church, the essential ministry of reconciliation, and the pursuit of biblical justice in all

spheres of human existence and in the whole of God's creation. To such ends it is important to speak in our day. Because of agreement on these priorities, almost everyone, with only a few exceptions, affirms the Belhar Confession as a statement the CRC should not ignore.

The full report, with recommendations by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, is contained in Appendix A to this report and was shared in fall of 2011 with the churches to promote study and provide adequate time for response.

X. Churches in ecclesiastical fellowship and ecumenical visitors at synod

The CRC maintains a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with a wide range of Reformed denominations. A complete list of such churches is attached in Appendix B. Some churches are in a less formal relationship with the CRC; however, those relationships are no less important than others. Additionally the CRC participates in a number of multilateral associations.

The EIRC facilitates the invitation and hosting of ecumenical visitors to the synod of the CRC. A rotation schedule of invitation has been developed, allowing synod to welcome people from across the world and from many churches and organizations. Ecumenical guests to this synod will come from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship, a church in corresponding fellowship, and a multilateral ecumenical organization.

We look forward to welcoming them, hearing from them, and growing in fellowship with them.

XI. Recommendations

A. That Dr. William T. Koopmans, chair, Rev. Joel R. Boot, and Dr. Peter Borgdorff be given the privilege of the floor when matters relating to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee are being discussed.

B. That synod express its gratitude to Dr. William Koopmans and Ms. Anne Zaki for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC.

C. That synod by way of the ballot elect two members, one from Western Canada and one from Eastern and Central Canada, to serve on the EIRC, each for a three-year term.

D. That synod by way of the ballot ratify the reelection of Dr. Shirley Roels to the EIRC for a second three-year term.

E. That Synod 2012 adopt the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession) and authorize the executive director to implement the revision of Church Order Supplement, Articles 5, 23-a, and 32-d and the Public Declaration of Agreement to reflect that adoption.

Grounds:

1. It is important, in this time of unprecedented global realities, for the CRC to formally state its commitment to, and to live out, the biblical principles of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
2. Adopting the Belhar Confession is an important witness to the membership of the CRC that together we stand firm on matters that are rooted in scriptural teaching and flow from the heart of God.

3. It is an important witness to Reformed churches worldwide that the CRC will stand with them in matters of important confessional issues.
4. Adopting the Belhar Confession is consistent with the decision of Synod 1996 when it adopted the recommendations concerning *God's Diverse and Unified Family*.
5. This action would mean that the CRC is taking this step in concert with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and that the CRC wishes to reflect our unity with them, a commitment that previous synods have affirmed.
6. Since previous synods have expressed no difficulty with the Belhar Confession on biblical grounds, and considering our own struggles with the issues raised in the Belhar Confession, as well as identifying with the struggles of other churches in the Reformed family over the past four hundred years (e.g., slave trade on the Gold Coast, numerous denominational schisms, etc.), this action would bear witness to our ecumenical partners and the world (as well as CRC members committed to unity, reconciliation, and justice) that the CRC is taking a public stand to promote such principles.
7. While there is no direct reference by name to the historic Reformed confessions in the Church Order itself, the Supplements to the Church Order, Article 5, 23-a, and 32-d, as well as the Form of Subscription, do list the confessions by name.

F. That synod declare the inclusion of (1) the Accompanying Letter, (2) the joint statement of the RCA and the CRC, (3) the statement introducing the Belhar Confession to the CRCNA, and (4) the Prologue section of Appendix A to be part of synod's adoption of the Belhar Confession.

Ground: These documents are important to the proper understanding of the Belhar Confession's context and applicability.

G. That synod encourage the churches to incorporate the themes of the Belhar Confession into their discipling and liturgical ministries.

Ground: Adding the Belhar Confession to the standards of unity in the CRC and, in view of the current issues facing the global society and the church, discipling the current membership of the CRC are first steps in living out the Belhar Confession's themes and embracing its values.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

Pedro Aviles
 Joel R. Boot, ecumenical officer
 Peter Borgdorff, ecumenical officer
 Emily Brink
 William T. Koopmans, chair
 Debra Ortiz-Vásquez
 Shirley Roels
 Jay Shim
 Peter Slofstra
 John Suk
 Rebecca Warren
 Anne Zaki

Appendix A

The Belhar Confession

Prologue

The Belhar Confession speaks to a global reality. All who know something about the respective histories of Canada and the United States can recall the stories of injustice, discrimination, and marginalization that most often were inflicted on members of ethnic minorities. Previous synods of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), as this report will demonstrate, have repeatedly made statements that such expressions of injustice must not continue. Prophetic statements were adopted. A recent synod participated in a service of repentance and asked for forgiveness. All of that was good—but not sufficient. The CRC has not spoken *confessionally* to the issues of injustice and racism. Considering the adoption of the Belhar Confession provides an opportunity to do so now.

Some of the more frequently asked questions during the time of denominational discussion concerning the Belhar Confession have been “Why should North American churches generally, and the CRC in particular, adopt a confession that arose out of a situation in South Africa?” and “What does the Belhar Confession have to do with life here in North America?” These are important questions as we, as a denomination, approach the time of deciding (Synod 2012) whether or not to add the Belhar Confession to the forms of unity in the CRC.

Some years ago the synods of the CRC and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) agreed that the two denominations would cooperate in the process of discernment concerning the Belhar Confession. In that cooperative spirit, the following joint statement was developed as an introduction to the Belhar Confession:

From the very beginnings of the church, often in times of crisis or threat, Christians have sought ways to say to the world, “Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, this is who we are, what we believe, and what we intend to do.” These statements of faith, including the ecumenical creeds and the historic Reformed confessions, though centuries old and far removed from their place of origin, still guide our understanding of Scripture and of faith today, and of the life they call us to live.

In the late 20th century the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa, like Christian leaders centuries before them, stepped forward to confront yet another critical issue that threatened the very core of the gospel message. The church and the society in which it ministered were torn by internal conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and subjugation of the disenfranchised. From this crucible of suffering emerged the Belhar Confession, a biblically based doctrinal standard of justice, reconciliation, and unity. This confession is intended to guide not only the personal lives of God’s children but also the whole body of Christ as it speaks and lives out God’s will—“to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly” with God (Mic. 6:8).

Like the confessions that preceded it, the Belhar Confession becomes a gift from a particular expression of the church to Christians in other parts of the world—a testimony for all of God’s people in our time. South Africa is not alone in its journey with conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and the subjugation of the disenfranchised. The history of oppression in our own countries, and the reality of racism and injustice in our own time call for the voice of the Christian church to be heard with unmistakable clarity—to confess that the Lord of life, who entrusted to us the “message of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19), is the Lord of our hopes and aspirations for a just and reconciled people.

Our South African brothers and sisters have asked us to join them in confession, forgiveness, and healing by formal adoption of the Belhar Confession, that we might together say it aloud and live by it. May our prayer as we respond mirror the words in the “Accompanying Letter” to be read as a preface to the confession: “Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. . . .”

(*Agenda for Synod 2009*, pp. 282-83)

The Belhar Confession

I. Introduction

The denominational discussion about the Belhar Confession has been energetic and fruitful. In many instances the discussion was broadened to include consideration of the meaning of all confessions in the life of the CRC today and, not surprisingly, what it means to be a confessional church at this point in the CRC’s history. These were important discussions, and while we cannot claim that all are of one mind, the dialogue was an important factor in this three-year period of discernment.

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) is pleased to present this report to Synod 2012 in fulfillment of the instruction given to it by Synod 2009. This report begins with the mandate given to the EIRC, followed by the text of the Belhar Confession and its related materials, and concludes with the report of the EIRC.

II. Decisions of Synod 2009 and the mandate given to the EIRC

A. Synod 2009 decided the following with regard to the Belhar Confession:

That synod propose to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession) and the revision of Church Order Supplement, Articles 5, 23-a, and 32-d and the Public Declaration of Agreement to reflect that adoption.

Grounds:

1. It is important at this time [in the light of our history and current reality] for the CRC to formally state its commitment to, and live out, the biblical principles of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
2. Adopting the Belhar Confession is an important testimony to the membership of the CRC that together we stand firm on matters that are rooted in scriptural teaching and flow from the heart of God.
3. It is an important testimony to Reformed churches worldwide that the CRC will stand with them in matters of confessional integrity.
4. Adopting the Belhar Confession is consistent with the decision of Synod 1996 when it adopted the recommendations concerning *God’s Diverse and Unified Family*.
5. This action would mean that the CRC is taking this step in concert with the RCA, a desire that previous synods have affirmed.
6. Since previous synods have expressed no difficulty with the Belhar Confession on biblical grounds, and given Dutch Reformed shortcomings over the past four hundred years (e.g., slave trade on the Gold Coast, numerous denominational schisms), this action would testify to our ecumenical partners and the world (as well as CRC members committed to unity, reconciliation, and social justice) that the CRC is taking a public stand to promote the principles of unity, reconciliation, and justice.

7. While there is no direct reference by name to the historic Reformed confessions in the Church Order itself, the Supplement to the Church Order, [as in] Article 5 (the Form of Subscription), lists the confessions by name.
8. Allowing for a three-year period of reflection (2009-2012) is consistent with the intent of Church Order Article 47 and its Supplement for a confessional matter of this magnitude. The additional time is given to the churches to adequately study and reflect on the proposal and be better prepared for response.

(Acts of Synod 2009, p. 604)

B. Synod 2009 also adopted the following statement in introducing the Belhar Confession to the CRCNA:

As Synod 2009 brings the Belhar Confession before the church for consideration, synod shares with the whole church the profound nature of this moment in the life of the church and therefore one that must not be entered into lightly but rather with godly fear and trembling, humbly trusting that we will be faithful to the gospel. With these understandings synod proposes to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Since Scripture is the only rule of faith and practice, our confessions are and must be historic and faithful witnesses to Scripture. Synod observes that the Belhar Confession truly expresses the biblical goals of unity, reconciliation, and justice; the church's commitment to these goals; and the fact that "true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church" (The Belhar Confession, Article 2).

Synod further observes that, as a faithful witness to Scripture, the Belhar Confession does not negate the biblically derived statements of synod on homosexuality, including those of 1973 and 1996. Finally, synod recognizes that injustice and enmity between peoples are two dimensions of all-pervasive human sinfulness, for which every human being needs Jesus Christ as Savior.

(Acts of Synod 2009, p. 606)

In addition, synod authorized the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC; formerly Interchurch Relations Committee) "to promote the study of the Belhar Confession in the churches during this consideration period," and designated the EIRC "to represent Synod 2009's proposal to adopt the Belhar Confession at the meeting of Synod 2012" (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 607).

Finally, Synod 2009 expressed its gratitude "to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa for enriching the heritage of Reformed churches worldwide by developing and writing the Belhar Confession."

The grounds accompanying the decision are the following:

1. The themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice as expressed in the Belhar Confession are important dimensions of our common faith in obedience to the demands of biblical teaching.
2. The testimony of the Reformed family of churches from the Southern Hemisphere is an important contribution to the awareness and faith of churches in other parts of the world.
3. The Christian Reformed Church in North America wishes to stand in solidarity with brothers and sisters who together bear witness to all matters that reflect the heart of the gospel.
4. Synod 2009 affirms the decision of Synod 1990, which stated that "the Belhar Confession is in harmony with 'the Reformed faith as a body of truth' articulated in the historic Reformed confessions. . . ."

(Acts of Synod 2009, p. 607)

III. Information provided by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

A. Following is a letter written in 1986 by representatives of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) when the Belhar Confession was first circulated to the global Reformed community.

1. We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation. We are aware that such an act of confession is not lightly undertaken, but only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake. In our judgment, the present church and political situation in our country and particularly within the Dutch Reformed church family calls for such a decision. Accordingly, we make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate, nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. Along with many, we confess our guilt, in that we have not always witnessed clearly enough in our situation and so are jointly responsible for the way in which those things which were experienced as sin and confessed to be sin have grown in time to seem self-evidently right and to be ideologies foreign to the Scriptures. As a result many have been given the impression that the gospel was not really at stake. We make this confession because we are convinced that all sorts of theological arguments have contributed to so disproportionate an emphasis on some aspects of the truth that it has in effect become a lie.
2. We are aware that the only authority for such a confession and the only grounds on which it may be made are the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. Being fully aware of the risk involved in taking this step, we are nevertheless convinced that we have no alternative. Furthermore, we are aware that no other motives or convictions, however valid they may be, would give us the right to confess in this way. An act of confession may only be made by the Church for the sake of its purity and credibility and that of its message. As solemnly as we are able, we hereby declare before men that our only motive lies in our fear that the truth and power of the gospel itself is threatened in this situation. We do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any theologies, or achieve any ulterior purposes. Yet, having said this, we know that our deepest intentions may only be judged at their true value by him before whom all is revealed. We do not make this confession from his throne and from on high, but before his throne and before men. We plead, therefore, that this confession would not be misused by anyone with ulterior motives and also that it should not be resisted to serve such motives. Our earnest desire is to lay no false stumbling blocks in the way, but to point to the true stumbling block, Jesus Christ the rock.
3. This confession is not aimed at specific people or groups of people or a church or churches. We proclaim it against a false doctrine, against an ideological distortion which threatens the gospel itself in our church and our country. Our heartfelt longing is that no one will identify himself with this objectionable doctrine and that all who have been wholly or partially blinded by it will turn themselves away from it. We are deeply aware of the deceiving nature of such a false doctrine and know that many who have been conditioned by it have to a greater or lesser extent learnt to take a half-truth for the whole. For this reason we do not doubt the Christian faith of many such people, their sincerity, honor, integrity, and good intentions and their in many ways estimable practice and conduct. However, it is precisely because we know the power of deception that we know we are not liberated by the seriousness, sincerity, or intensity of our certainties, but only by the truth in the Son. Our church and our land have an intense need of such liberation. Therefore it is that we speak pleadingly rather

than accusingly. We plead for reconciliation, that true reconciliation which follows on conversion and change of attitudes and structures. And while we do so we are aware that an act of confession is a two-edged sword, that none of us can throw the first stone, and none is without a beam in his own eye. We know that the attitudes and conduct which work against the gospel are present in all of us and will continue to be so. Therefore this confession must be seen as a call to a continuous process of soul-searching together, a joint wrestling with the issues, and a readiness to repent in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in a broken world. It is certainly not intended as an act of self-justification and intolerance, for that would disqualify us in the very act of preaching to others.

4. Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. We know that such an act of confession and process of reconciliation will necessarily involve much pain and sadness. It demands the pain of repentance, remorse, and confession; the pain of individual and collective renewal and a changed way of life. It places us on a road whose end we can neither foresee nor manipulate to our own desire. On this road we shall unavoidably suffer intense growing pains while we struggle to conquer alienation, bitterness, irreconciliation, and fear. We shall have to come to know and encounter both ourselves and others in new ways. We are only too well aware that this confession calls for the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society which have developed over many years. However, we confess that for the sake of the gospel, we have no other choice. We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice. Accordingly, our prayer is that the pain and sadness we speak of will be pain and sadness that lead to salvation. We believe that this is possible in the power of our Lord and by his Spirit. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation, and true peace to our country.

(*Agenda for Synod 2009*, pp. 283-84)

B. The Confession of Belhar (1986) translated from Afrikaans

(The following text of the Belhar Confession is reprinted from the *Agenda for Synod 2009*, pp. 285-87.)

1. **We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.
2. **We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

We believe

- that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another (Eph. 2:11-22);
- that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain (Eph. 4:1-16);
- that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17:20-23);

- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity (Phil. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; John 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:1-6; Eph. 3:14-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; Gal. 6:2; 2 Cor. 1:3-4);
- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:7-13; Gal. 3:27-28; James 2:1-13);
- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

3. We believe

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22).
- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world (Eph. 4:17-6:23, Rom. 6; Col. 1:9-14; Col. 2:13-19; Col. 3:1-4:6);
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness

and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which, in such a situation, sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. We believe

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;
- that God calls the church to follow him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right (Deut. 32:4; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Eph. 2:14; Isa. 1:16-17; James 1:27; James 5:1-6; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 6:20-26; Luke 7:22; Luke 16:19-31; Ps. 146; Luke 4:16-19; Rom. 6:13-18; Amos 5);
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

- 5. We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Eph. 4:15-16; Acts 5:29-33; 1 Peter 2:18-25; 1 Peter 3:15-18).

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory forever and ever.

Note: This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA). This text is the same as what was adopted by the Reformed Church in America and what is in use by the Presbyterian Church (USA).

IV. Summary of the denominational discussion

Since Synod 2009, the EIRC has offered and facilitated presentations of the Belhar Confession to thirty (30) classes, three (3) regional gatherings,

and twenty-two (22) congregations. Additional presentations were made by the Office of Race Relations, the Office of Social Justice, and others—some of whom presented an affirmative position with reference to adopting the Belhar Confession as a standard of unity, while others presented a position at variance with the official recommendation adopted by Synod 2009. Some classes and congregations took the initiative to study and discuss the Belhar Confession without facilitation from EIRC or other participants. The facilitated discussions on the whole were marked by interest and vigorous dialogue, not only about the Belhar Confession per se, but also about what it means to be a confessional church in the 21st century. The latter was an unintended but vital part of the denominational dialogue. To retain the vitality of that discussion is a desirable quality of our life as a denomination.

While there are voices that raise concerns about the theology (or lack thereof) reflected in the Belhar Confession, the participants in the discussion generally accepted the previous declarations of synod that the Belhar Confession is faithful to Holy Scripture and consistent with the teachings of the Reformed confessions. Therefore the sessions conducted by the EIRC focused on providing background information to the historical development and applicability of the Belhar discussion to the life and ministry of the CRC. Some individuals (and even a classis or two) interpreted that approach as being too proactive for the adoption of the Belhar Confession by Synod 2012. Lest this become a point of contention as synod considers our report, the EIRC wishes to make a clear statement of its rationale as the denominational discussion unfolded.

The denominational discussion has sparked significant interest in and vigorous dialogue about the significance of the Belhar Confession. The discussion also revealed a great deal of passion about the various positions discussed. There certainly was not yet a “being of one mind” concerning the recommendation to adopt the Belhar Confession as a standard of unity. In summary, highlights and the most common issues raised in the discussion follow:

A. Many of the participants were unfamiliar with the Belhar Confession, its history of development, its confessional nature, or even why it is proposed as a confession for Reformed churches both inside and outside of South Africa. That, however, is not a question for the Black and Reformed Conferees that meet annually. The participants in that fellowship have spoken passionately and convincingly about the relevance of the Belhar Confession to the North American experience.

B. Many who participated in the denominational discussion affirm the significance of the Belhar Confession and believe that it makes an important statement about the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice at a time when both the church and the world desperately need to hear that message.

C. The denominational discussion also revealed that there are alternate voices surrounding the decision of Synod 2009. The alternate views most often expressed were that the Belhar does not meet a standard associated with the historic confessions, is too ambiguous, and is too South African.

D. Participants in the discussion frequently asked for the precise reason why the CRC is considering the Belhar Confession for adoption as a fourth

confession. The response consistently given was that the URCSA asked (see the accompanying letter) and Reformed churches around the world—by way of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC)—recommended that member denominations consider adopting the Belhar Confession so as to make it a part of the global Reformed confessional basis (Agenda for Synod 1999, pp. 197-200; Agenda for Synod 2003, pp. 235, 246; Acts of Synod 2007, p. 592).

Synod 2009 also took note of the North American contextual introduction to the Belhar Confession that was prepared by representatives of the RCA and the CRC. While not officially part of the Belhar Confession, it was felt that such a contextual statement would assist the churches in understanding why the Belhar Confession has been judged to be applicable to churches living and ministering in Canada and the United States. Please see the full text of this statement in the Prologue section of this report.

Finally, when the Belhar Confession was circulated to the global Reformed community, the leadership of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa wrote a cover letter to travel with the confession. Synod 2009 considered this letter to be an essential accompaniment to the Belhar Confession and encourages synod to take note of that letter in the discussion that presently engages the Christian Reformed Church. Because of the letter's significance, the EIRC decided to include it (unedited) in section III, A of this report.

V. History of the Belhar Confession's development in South Africa

Understanding the historical development of the Belhar Confession is critical in assessing its validity as a confession and its applicability to the life of the CRC today. In summary form the following historical survey is provided:

A. The development of churches in South Africa

1. Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa established in 1652; three confessions: Heidelberg Catechism (HC), Belgic Confession (BC), and Canons of Dort (CD); "white" denomination associated with the system of apartheid. The roots of apartheid philosophy go back to this time period, when the original settlers considered themselves God's chosen people and a superior race.
2. Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) established in 1881 by the exclusively white DRC for people of color. Initially (from the 1850s on) the separation of "coloreds" from "whites" in worship was optional at the discretion of a local church council. The separation was institutionalized when a new denomination was formed.
3. Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) established in 1963 for "blacks."
4. Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) established in 1968 for people of "Indian descent."
5. Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) established in 1994; the DRMC ("coloreds") joined with the DRCA ("blacks").

B. *Dates leading up to the Belhar Confession*

1. 1652 – The Dutch formed a station at the Cape and introduced slavery.
2. 1857 – The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa decided to have separate services for “colored” members (discrimination at the Lord’s Supper was already occurring well before 1857).
3. 1881 – The Dutch Reformed Mission Church was established by the “white” Dutch Reformed Church for people of color.
4. 1963 – The Dutch Reformed Church in Africa was established for “blacks.”
5. 1968 – The Reformed Church in Africa was established for “Indians.”
6. 1978 – The Dutch Reformed Mission Church (“coloreds”) and Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (“blacks”) decided to work for unity, an ideal that took sixteen years to fulfill. In the process, the Belhar Confession was formulated (1982).
7. 1982 – The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), which in 2010 was reconstituted as the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), meeting in Ottawa, Ontario, with a South African serving as president (the current president is also a South African), declared a *status confessionis* concerning apartheid. *Status confessionis* is a Latin term meaning that which is foundational for belief and behavior and must be affirmed by professing members of the church. In addition to calling apartheid a heresy, WARC suspended the white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.
8. Later that same year (1982), the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (which is now part of the URCSA), at a meeting in Belhar (a suburb of Cape Town) also declared a *status confessionis* regarding apartheid, reasserting that it is a heresy and a misrepresentation of the gospel. In addition, the DRMC drafted a statement (that in 1986 became the Belhar Confession) dealing with three issues: (1) the unity of the church, (2) reconciliation in Christ, and (3) the justice of God. The synod also adopted an official accompanying letter addressed to the DRMC member congregations to explain the decision to draft the confession and to attest to the seriousness, spirit, and purpose behind it. It must be understood that the original audience of this letter was the DRMC member congregations, and that explains the use of the personal pronouns in the letter. After the Belhar Confession was adopted in 1986 and was presented to the global Reformed community, it was decided that the original letter would accompany the Belhar Confession as an apologia and explanation for the development of this statement of faith. The resulting Belhar Confession was adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in 1986. When these denominations united in 1994, the newly formed Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa reaffirmed the Belhar Confession as one of its four confessions.

VI. History of the Belhar Confession and related matters in the CRC

A. *The origin of the discussion in the CRC*

It is important to note that the CRC has a history of its own related to the Belhar Confession. What follows is a summary of that history. Synod has, on a number of occasions, encouraged further consideration of issues related to biblical justice (including issues surrounding racism), as well as the themes articulated in the Belhar Confession.

1. 1959 – “In view of the racial tensions and the flagrant violation of the scriptural principle of equality occurring in society and the church both in America and in our world, the church has a calling to register a clear and strong witness to her members and her world” (*Acts of Synod 1959*, p. 84).
2. 1984 – “The IRC is giving careful consideration to the synodical decisions of the [Dutch Reformed Mission Church] at its meeting in 1982, particularly the New Confession which is adopted” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 172). “It is also essential for our denomination to relate with integrity to those who long and work for racial justice in South Africa” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 220). “Furthermore, the confession adopted by the [Dutch Reformed Mission Church] can only be judged to be in essential accord with the declarations on race issued by the [Reformed Ecumenical Council] and by synods of the CRC. . . . In view of the relation of ecclesiastical fellowship that exists between the CRC and the [Dutch Reformed Mission Church] and other Reformed churches in South Africa . . . , and in view of the ecumenical relationship of the CRC with the Reformed churches of South Africa in the Reformed Ecumenical Council, it is incumbent on the CRC, out of integrity toward these relationships, to judge the rightness of the judgment of the [Dutch Reformed Mission Church] concerning apartheid (that it is a sin) and the “moral and theological justification of it” (that it is a theological heresy) and concerning the faithfulness of the Reformed confessions and Scripture of the . . . new confessional statement. As for the latter, it is our judgment that the new confessional statement is in accord with the decisions of several synods of the CRC” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, pp. 602-3).
3. 1985 – “Further informal discussions were held [with the Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa] on such questions as the relations between the constituent synods of the ‘Algemene Sinode,’ reactions to the Belhar Confession, and the assessment of the recent constitutional changes in South Africa” (*Acts of Synod 1985*, p. 211).
4. 1989 – “That synod instruct the IRC to study the Belhar Confession and present recommendations to Synod 1990 in response to the REC request” (*Acts of Synod 1989*, p. 497).
5. 1990 – “That synod endorse the IRC’s evaluation (pp. 217-219) which judges that the Belhar Confession is in harmony with ‘the Reformed faith as a body of truth’ articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and is in basic agreement with REC and CRC decisions on race made over the past decades; and, therefore, that synod declare that it has no objection to its inclusion in the list of Reformed confessions in Article II

of the REC constitution" (*Acts of Synod 1990*, p. 625). Note: At a subsequent meeting of REC the recommendation to add the Belhar Confession to Article II of the REC Constitution was vigorously debated but then not adopted. Nevertheless, it is assumed that the position of the synod of the CRC stands.

6. 1996 – Synod considered an extensive report from its Committee to Articulate Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Family of God (*Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 510-15, 595-619). This report was published in 1996 (by Faith Alive Christian Resources) under the title *God's Diverse and Unified Family*.
7. 1997 – "We believe . . . the ministry of racial reconciliation has to take a greater role and priority in the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. . . . We therefore urge synod to increase its efforts and its commitment toward the advancement of racial reconciliation" (Pastoral Ministries Report, *Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 686).
8. 1999 – "The general synodical commission of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa met in Bloemfontein on October 19-22, 1998. The CRC delegation was warmly welcomed to the meeting and was permitted a presence at the discussion table for the duration of its visit. We brought greetings, and in response we received greetings to our churches in which the relationship between our churches was prized, our well-being was prayed for, and our churches were challenged to adopt the Belhar Confession as their own. . . . The URCSA's challenge to the CRC to adopt the Belhar Confession needs further reflection. . . . The URCSA believes it is necessary that the Belhar Confession be accepted as part of the confessional basis of a new, unified church in South Africa. To the URCSA this is a nonnegotiable condition" (*Agenda for Synod 1999*, pp. 197-200).
9. 2003 – "The general secretary of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) reiterated what he had told the IRC earlier, namely that the URCSA was asking churches in ecclesiastical fellowship with it to study the Belhar Confession to determine what place that confession might take among the faith statements of the respective denominations. The IRC has received this oral invitation as an official request from the URCSA and has committed itself to review and study the Belhar with a view to making a recommendation to synod about its status sometime in the future" (*Agenda for Synod 2003*, p. 235). "The CRC did make an initial decision regarding Belhar in 1990 when it said that the Belhar Confession 'is in harmony with "the Reformed faith as a body of truth" articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and is in basic agreement with REC and CRC decisions on race made over the past decades. . . .' (*Acts of Synod 1990*, p. 625). . . . Synod 1990, however, did not say anything about the Belhar Confession's status within the CRC itself, and that is the kind of decision the URCSA would like the CRC to consider" (*Agenda for Synod 2003*, p. 246).
10. 2004 – "The BOT is also committed to seeing the implementation of the decisions made in 1996 when synod adopted the report *God's Diverse and*

Unified Family" (Board of Trustees Report, *Agenda for Synod 2004*, p. 68). "The Christian Reformed Church has always had a good track record on addressing hunger and poverty but has realized that more needs to be done to address the *root causes* of world hunger. Understanding that hunger is always part of a complex web of natural disasters, poverty, oppression, structural injustice, and spiritual alienation, the CRC formed the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJHA) to address these root causes. Today, the OSJHA works to develop a deeper understanding of, and response to, God's call to let justice flow like a river in our personal and communal lives and in the structures of our societies, especially as it relates to hunger and poverty" (*Agenda for Synod 2004*, pp. 68-69).

11. 2005 – "The CRC and RCA delegations first met in December 2002. Three items were given priority for consideration: (1) the so-called orderly exchange of ministers from one denomination to the other, (2) a unified approach to dealing with the Belhar Confession as requested by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, and (3) a concerted effort to find new ways to cooperate in ministry and among our congregations and classes. Our discussions with representatives of the RCA have been guided by the following agreed-upon items (as reported to Synod 2003): . . . Examine the Belhar Confession together because the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) has requested both the RCA and the CRC to study and adopt the Belhar. It may be possible for our two denominations to formulate a united statement of agreement on it. That would be a powerful statement to the URCSA" (*Agenda for Synod 2005*, p. 240). "The RCA has made great strides toward a greater understanding and acceptance of the Belhar Confession. The CRC participants in the dialogue group encouraged the RCA to produce their study materials in a form that would allow for its use as a discussion guide in the CRC context" (*Agenda for Synod 2005*, p. 241).
12. 2007 – "That synod encourage the ongoing work of the Interchurch Relations Committee to inform and engage the churches concerning the Belhar Confession and the issues raised by it through: (1) a greater dissemination of the Belhar Confession to the congregations in order to familiarize the denomination with it and the issues raised by it, and (2) regional level dialogues to be initiated by the Interchurch Relations Committee as part of their process of expediting a recommendation to Synod 2009" (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 592).
13. 2009 – "That synod propose to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession) and the revision of Church Order Supplement, Articles 5, 23-a, and 32-d and the Public Declaration of Agreement to reflect that adoption" (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 604; see grounds in section II, A of this report).

The summary of synodical decisions listed above concerning the history of the Belhar Confession and related matters in the CRC references the decisions of Synod 1996. At that time synod adopted a comprehensive statement titled *God's Diverse and Unified Family*. The EIRC encourages synod's

delegates to read that report, also referenced above. While synodical reports are at risk of collecting dust on bookshelves, this particular report is critical to the discussion on the Belhar Confession. There is substantial consistency in the content of synod's decisions concerning matters of racial justice and what is confessed in the language of the Belhar Confession.

That consistency is clearly demonstrated in Synod 1996's adoption of the twelve biblical and theological principles as follows:

Creation

1. The world as God created it is rich and God glorifying in its diversity.
2. The created world with all its diversity has its unity in the one God, who created it through Jesus Christ.
3. The unity and diversity of the human race and of created reality reflect the unity and diversity of the triune God (namely, his oneness and threeness).

Fall

4. A fundamental effect of sin is the breakdown of the community.

New Creation

5. The uniting of all things in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God's eternal plan for the ages.
6. Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God's saving work.
7. Already in the old covenant the scope of God's mission is racially and ethnically inclusive.
8. In Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church, God gives new power to the church, power to break down walls of separation and create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture.
9. The church is God's strategic vehicle for embodying, proclaiming, and promoting the unity and diversity of the new creation.
10. God calls Christians to find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Jesus Christ.
11. Obedience in matters of racial reconciliation calls us, individually and corporately, to continually repent, to strive for justice, and to battle the powers of evil.
12. Christians live and work in the hope that one day the reconciliation of all things will be fully realized.

(Acts of Synod 1996, pp. 512-13)

Following the adoption of these principles, Synod 1996 also adopted the following recommendations:

That synod, on the basis of the above principles, declare that to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people, and that to ignore his calling to turn this principle into experienced reality is sinful according to God's Word and the Reformed confessions.

Grounds:

- a. The . . . report demonstrates that the Bible declares this reconciled community to be God's will.
- b. The confessions declare that the catholicity of the church means that Christ "gathers, protects, and preserves" the church "out of the entire human race" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21 [Q. and A. 54]).

[And] that synod call the whole church—individual members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA—to respond to the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God by committing themselves

- a. To pray and work for the increased enfolding of ethnic-minority persons into the CRCNA in order to reflect more fully the racial and ethnic diversity of Canada and the United States.
- b. To ensure the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence at all levels of denominational life.

(*Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 513)

While these decisions of Synod 1996 do not directly address the CRC's adoption of the Belhar Confession, they do lay the biblical and theological framework for giving serious consideration to the Belhar Confession's emphasis on unity, reconciliation, and justice. The 1996 decisions of synod focus primarily on the one unified family of God, while the Belhar Confession covers a broader area of biblical teaching. Nevertheless, the consistency and overlap between these two sources is striking and can be considered as complementary.

Finally, it is appropriate to emphasize that the adoption of the Belhar Confession would not replace the confessions already affirmed as the basis of our unity; rather, the Belhar should be seen as connecting and complementing our historic creeds.

B. Connecting with our ecumenical partners

The synod of the RCA in 2010 officially adopted the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of unity. During the time of the EIRC's consideration and in conversation with representatives of the RCA, it was judged that a statement of introduction to the Belhar would help present the confession in the North American context. A joint statement was developed and is cited in the Prologue, above. In addition, a letter was sent to all the ecumenical partners with whom the CRC is in ecclesiastical or corresponding fellowship. Not all of them responded, but a number of them that did respond have not yet taken up the matter of how to respond to the Belhar Confession. The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) considered the adoption of the Belhar Confession at its general synod in October 2011. It was striking that the discussion (both pro and con) was almost identical to the discussion in the CRC leading up to Synod 2012. After much discussion and extended debate, the DRC overwhelmingly adopted the Belhar as a fourth confession. Finally, while not a church in ecclesiastical fellowship, the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) voted not to adopt the Belhar Confession. It should be noted, however, that 63 percent of the PCUSA presbyteries voted in favor of adoption. The motion to adopt the Belhar Confession did not pass because the polity of the PCUSA (as in the RCA) requires a two-thirds majority to adopt a motion.

VII. Content of the Belhar Confession

A. An overview

Like the Belgic Confession (1561), the Canons of Dort (1618-1619), and the Barmen Declaration (1934), the Belhar Confession is a declaration of faith that emerged when certain practices in society and also the church were so clearly contrary to biblical teaching that the integrity of the proclamation of the gospel was at stake. The Belhar Confession focuses not only on the importance of believing and proclaiming biblical principles aright but also on the importance of obedient living and costly discipleship. The Belhar Confession's call for faithfulness in the areas of unity, justice, and reconciliation is both a timeless and a timely affirmation that such biblical themes are at the core of what

it means to be the body of Jesus Christ in the world. While the specific history of injustice in South Africa became the occasion for the drafting of a confessional response, both the political/social and the religious environments are similar in countless places around the globe. Similarly, North American history provides us with numerous examples that, at the core, were and are similar to the experience of people in South Africa. The current practice of injustice, in all its forms and in every land, lends support to the position that the Belhar Confession is universally applicable and relevant.

The five articles of the Belhar Confession and its tone-setting Accompanying Letter (the full texts for both are cited in section III, above) can be summarized as follows:

1. Faith in the triune God

The Belhar Confession first confesses faith in the triune God. However, it goes further in identifying the practices of such a God “who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit.” This phrase clearly echoes Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 54 (Lord’s Day 21). (See John 10:14-16; Acts 20:28; Rom. 10:14-17; Col. 1:18.)

2. Unity of the church

The structure of the Belhar Confession is similar to that of the Canons of Dort, a confession that also arose out of a serious controversy in the church. Articles 2-4 of the Belhar Confession begin by affirming biblical doctrines and then reject teachings that are contrary to Scripture. It is self-evident that the unity of the church is paramount in the teachings of the Holy Scriptures as a gift to all of the disciples of Jesus. The unity of the church is in Christ and is the reality for all who follow him. The Belhar Confession states this as the principal reality in response to the polity of the church in South Africa during the apartheid era, when church unity was compromised based on racial heritage. The message is the same for the church everywhere. If 11 a.m. on Sunday morning is still one of the most racially segregated hours of our time, then this message is for all who live in such a cultural environment.

3. Reconciliation of people in Christ

This is the gospel for all—regardless of race, color, or origin. The gospel of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5) is God’s activity among people of all races as he gathers them unto himself. Reconciliation in Christ supersedes all human divisions. In Christ all are one.

4. God’s justice and care for the suffering, and the call of the church to work against injustice

While some have alleged that this emphasis in the Belhar Confession identifies it with “liberation theology,” it is indisputable that the Holy Scriptures teach us much about God’s concern for those who are suffering and are the victims of injustice. The prophets of the Old Testament, as well as the teaching of the New Testament, repeatedly emphasize that the church is called to “preach good news to the poor . . .” (Isa. 61:1).

5. A call to integrate the faith we confess and the practices by which we live

This inclusion in the Belhar Confession represents the best dimension of the Reformed tradition. The integration of what is confessed and what

is lived in every sphere of human existence is of one piece. Word and deed together—what we confess and how we live—are integral to the Belhar Confession’s understanding of how God is for us and in us.

All of the confessions adopted since the Protestant Reformation emerged within specific circumstances. Likewise, the Belhar Confession emerged from within a specific South African experience. However, the themes of the Belhar Confession are biblical and universal. Even if one assumes the Belhar Confession to be primarily a response to the practice of forced (racial) segregation in South Africa (though its themes reach far beyond the issues of racial discrimination alone), the global picture reflects that racial divisions are a cancer-like reality in many cultures. The North American experience is no exception. Forced segregation has also been practiced in both Canada and the United States, and the practice of functional racial divisions is deeply embedded in North American culture (e.g., Native-American, Aboriginal, and First Nations residential schools, reservations, the containment of Japanese during World War II, public school segregation, the Timothy Christian School episode in CRC history, and so forth). In that sense the Belhar Confession speaks to the context of life in the CRC, as well as the general cultural setting within which CRC members live and work.

As was true among the nearly 200 participants in the focus groups that preceded the decisions of Synod 2009, some participants in the denominational discussion felt that the Belhar Confession lacks applicability to the North American context. Many more of the participants preferred to discuss how synod might best respond. Suggestions and preferences ranged from that of synod gratefully noting and receiving the Belhar Confession as the testimony of the South African churches, to that of synod (like the general synod of the RCA) adopting the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession complementary to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. Specifically, suggestions made and discussed were considered by Synod 2009 as follows:

1. Propose the adoption of the Belhar as a fourth confession.
2. Adopt the Belhar as an ecumenical confession (a new category not on par with the historic three confessions).
3. Approve the Belhar Confession as a statement of faith on par with the Contemporary Testimony.

Synod 2009, upon recommendation of its advisory committee, chose to adopt option 1 by a 75 percent vote. Both at Synod 2009 and during the denominational discussion there appeared to be a strong conviction that the Belhar Confession raises deep issues for considering our biblical faith and our understanding of the core of the gospel.

The denominational discussion also engaged the issues that flow from the specific content of the Belhar Confession. For example, the statement in Article 2 “that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.” Does such a declaration exclude consideration of a member’s ethical and moral lifestyle practices? The EIRC believes that such statements need not be interpreted as excluding all other considerations. In fact, at the 2008 synod meeting of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, it was suggested that the Belhar Confession demands the inclusion of all

people into the membership and offices of the church, including those committed to same-sex relationships. It is noted, however, that the synod firmly rejected this suggested interpretation as flowing from the Belhar Confession as adopted in 1986. Synod 2009 of the CRC, furthermore, in anticipation of this concern, adopted a supplemental statement that is pertinent to this point. Synod, in effect, stated that adopting the Belhar Confession would not cancel out or contradict previously adopted ethical guidelines that guide the church (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 606).

Also frequently discussed is Article 4 (the justice section) of the Belhar Confession, which states “that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” Does this declaration mean that God is not the God of the rich? The EIRC believes, and Synod 2009 concurred, that this statement is fully consistent with what is written in Isaiah 61 and repeated by Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry in Luke 4. It is a confessional statement of God’s concern for those in special need and not a limiting statement for God’s providential care as experienced by all. Nevertheless, does this language suggest an implied endorsement of what is known as “liberation theology”?

Liberation theology can be described in a variety of ways, but at its core it is “an interpretation of religious faith from the perspective of the poor, oppressed and victimized” (B.A. Robinson). It is true that the Belhar Confession emerged out of a crucible of suffering, and it is also true that the language of the Belhar Confession clearly calls the church to recognize “that God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry” (Art. 4). But such language is not the exclusive domain of liberation theology, and the phrase “that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” does not mean that the Belhar Confession is flawed in its biblical understanding of God’s concern.

The EIRC believes that the phrase “in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” should be read in the context of the rest of the article, and the EIRC notes that the language of this article is remarkably close to the language of Scripture. It is possible to read into almost any phraseology some unintended meaning, and it is more likely, as John de Gruchy argues, that the Belhar actually provides “a creative Reformed response to the challenge of liberation theology” (John W. de Gruchy, “The Church Always Reforming,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 12:2 [1991], p. 174).

B. Is the Belhar Confession biblical and consistent with the Reformed confessions?

This is the critical question that Synod 2012 must answer again as it considers adopting the Belhar Confession as the fourth confession for the CRC. Synod 1990 adopted the EIRC’s evaluation “that the Belhar Confession is in harmony with ‘the Reformed faith as a body of truth’ articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and is in basic agreement with REC and CRC decisions on race made over the past decades; and, therefore, that synod declare that it has no objection to its inclusion in the list of Reformed confessions in Article II of the REC constitution.”

That decision represents more than the formal approval to add the Belhar Confession to the constitution of REC. To say that there is harmony within the various confessions also affirms, at least implicitly, that the Belhar

Confession is biblical in its content and confessional affirmations. Because several synods have affirmed that conclusion, it likely is not necessary to make the case again. Furthermore, the Reformed ecumenical organization(s) of which the CRC is a member have also affirmed the biblical and confessional integrity of the Belhar Confession.

C. Would the Belhar Confession enrich the CRC's confessional basis?

The EIRC believes the clear answer to be yes. The following points are the EIRC's reasons for recommending the adoption of the Belhar Confession:

1. The Belhar Confession fills a significant gap in our confessional heritage. There is little mention in our three historic Reformed confessions (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) of the significant biblical themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice. These three confessions were written within sixty years of each other and were adopted within the context of conditions in northern Europe. Much has been learned about the fullness of the Reformed faith since that time, and the Belhar Confession supplements the confessions that have guided Reformed churches.
2. The Belhar Confession's content is the gospel and is fundamental to our faith. The biblical themes of the Belhar Confession are larger in Scripture than some of the other themes the historic confessions focus on. For example, Scripture is less explicit about total depravity than the obligation for God's people to live in unity. Further, countless passages of Scripture indicate God's concern about justice for the poor, widows, orphans, the suffering, and so forth.
3. The Belhar Confession addresses key issues of concern to all churches. For example, racism and other forms of exclusion are universal. The Belhar Confession is currently being studied by a number of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. According to Professor Lyle Bierma, a leader of the Middle Eastern Council of Churches believes that the Belhar is highly relevant to the conflict in Palestine and Israel.
4. The time and place of the Belhar Confession's origin expand the breadth of our confessional base, making it more representative of worldwide Reformed faith throughout history. What is particularly significant is that the Belhar Confession is the first and only confessional contribution received from the Reformed community in the Southern Hemisphere. Also, the Belhar Confession is the only confession in the global Reformed community's history that wasn't written during the sixty-year period from 1561 to 1619.
5. The Belhar Confession can enrich our Christian way of life. As the letter from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa points out, the Belhar Confession functions as "an instrument for profound self-examination, to help determine whether the church really lives by the faith it proclaims." The Belhar Confession's theological confrontation of sin has made a contribution to the reconciliation effort among Reformed churches in Southern Africa and has aided the process of reconciliation within the nation of South Africa. It may do so elsewhere. In South Africa, the Belhar Confession has also been integrated into Christian music, worship, and personal and corporate confessions of guilt. It can be used in the same way by CRC congregations.

VIII. Why adopt the Belhar as a confession?

There are some participants in the denominational discussion who are suggesting that synod “affirm,” perhaps even “endorse,” the Belhar Confession but not adopt it as a fourth confession. Presumably, if the Belhar Confession were “affirmed” or “endorsed” instead of “adopted,” then it would have a standing in the CRC similar to the Contemporary Testimony. It is important to note that the proponents of this alternative action by synod, for the most part (with some exceptions), have not raised principal objection to the Belhar Confession as such. It should also be noted that the EIRC report to Synod 2009 mentioned that this option had been considered by the committee but, for various reasons, was not recommended as the preferred way forward. At least part of the reason Synod 2009 decided on the adoption route is that “affirming” or “endorsing” the Belhar Confession seemed a less than adequate response to the global reality, as well as to the context of injustice, racial tension, and disunity within which the CRC does its ministry. The themes of the Belhar Confession, it seems to the EIRC, deserve more than mere affirmation. Because the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa declared, and the Reformed Ecumenical Council recommended, that the Belhar Confession have confessional status, speaking confessionally is the preferred and more excellent way.

Another important dimension that EIRC wishes to call to synod’s attention is the following. Speaking confessionally to an issue is different from affirming or endorsing the Belhar Confession to be a good and helpful expression of the faith. The Contemporary Testimony, as popular in the CRC as it is, and as beautifully written as it is, is *our* testimony. It is our statement of what we believe the CRC is to be and to do. In many ways it is as much a statement to ourselves about what we believe (subject to periodic revision) as it is a statement to the world. But, however it is affirmed, it is not a confession, was not written as one, and has never been proposed to the global Reformed community as a confession. The Belhar Confession is consistent with what CRC synods have said about the Belhar Confession’s themes for decades. It has been called a confession that is “a cry from the heart” by a part of the Reformed family that suffered injustice and dehumanizing racism for several hundred years. While the Belhar Confession was given voice in the context of South Africa, the experience of the oppressed and disenfranchised is a global problem that also finds expression in the North American communities of which we are a part and within which our congregations minister. It is because the Belhar Confession also speaks to us and our faith formation that the EIRC reaffirms its recommendation that the Belhar Confession be adopted as a fourth confession and be considered a standard of our faith and faithfulness to the gospel’s message.

IX. Church Order Supplement revisions

Church Order Supplement Article 5 lists the confessions in the Form of Subscription. In the event that synod adopts the Belhar Confession, it is appropriate that it then be added to the list of confessions within this supplement. Similarly, Church Order Supplement, Articles 23-a and 32-d, would also need to reflect the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the forms of unity for officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church. The

recommendation of the EIRC is simply that the office of the executive director be authorized to make the appropriate changes.

If these changes are accepted by Synod 2012, the question has been asked whether all current officebearers would be required to once again sign the Form of Subscription. That question can only be answered by synod itself, but the EIRC suggests that such a requirement is logistically very difficult and probably unnecessary. If the changes are accepted, the Belhar Confession will be included in all future references to the confessions of the CRC. If any officebearers should be faced with a difficulty contained in the Belhar Confession that would prevent them from giving their assent with a clear conscience, then the same procedure would apply as is already the case for such a difficulty with any of the other confessions that are part of our standards of unity.

X. Conclusion

The EIRC was instructed by Synod 2009 to represent (and defend) the Belhar Confession decision at Synod 2012. The denominational discussion exposing some alternate convictions notwithstanding, the EIRC feels compelled to now place this matter before the church with the same recommendation it brought to Synod 2009. All confessions are rooted in specific historical events and circumstances. The Belhar Confession is no different and comes to us as a “cry from the heart” from brothers and sisters both outside and inside the Christian Reformed Church. It is our prayer that synod will take a confessional stand on the fundamental importance of the unity of the church and the importance of proclaiming the message of reconciliation, and make an unwavering commitment to the pursuit of biblical justice in a sinful and broken world.

XI. Recommendations

A. That Synod 2012 adopt the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession) and authorize the executive director to implement the revision of Church Order Supplement Articles 5, 23-a, and 32-d and the Public Declaration of Agreement to reflect that adoption.

Grounds:

1. It is important, in this time of unprecedented global realities, for the CRC to formally state its commitment to, and to live out, the biblical principles of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
2. Adopting the Belhar Confession is an important witness to the membership of the CRC that together we stand firm on matters that are rooted in scriptural teaching and flow from the heart of God.
3. It is an important witness to Reformed churches worldwide that the CRC will stand with them in matters of important confessional issues.
4. Adopting the Belhar Confession is consistent with the decision of Synod 1996 when it adopted the recommendations concerning *God’s Diverse and Unified Family*.
5. This action would mean that the CRC is taking this step in concert with the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and that the CRC wishes to reflect our unity with them, a commitment that previous synods have affirmed.

6. Since previous synods have expressed no difficulty with the Belhar Confession on biblical grounds, and considering our own struggles with the issues raised in the Belhar Confession, as well as identifying with the struggles of other churches in the Reformed family over the past four hundred years (e.g., slave trade on the Gold Coast, numerous denominational schisms, etc.), this action would bear witness to our ecumenical partners and the world (as well as CRC members committed to unity, reconciliation, and justice) that the CRC is taking a public stand to promote such principles.
7. While there is no direct reference by name to the historic Reformed confessions in the Church Order itself, the Supplement to the Church Order, in Articles 5, 23-a and 32-d, as well as the Form of Subscription itself, do list the confessions by name.

B. That synod declare the inclusion of (1) the Accompanying Letter, (2) the joint statement of the RCA and the CRC, (3) the statement introducing the Belhar Confession to the CRCNA, and (4) the Prologue section of this report to be part of synod's adoption of the Belhar Confession.

Ground: These documents are important to the proper understanding of the Belhar Confession's context and applicability.

C. That synod encourage the churches to incorporate the themes of the Belhar Confession into their discipling and liturgical ministries.

Ground: Adding the Belhar Confession to the standards of unity in the CRC, and in view of the current issues facing the global society and the church, discipling the current membership of the CRC is a first step in living out the Belhar Confession's themes and embracing its values.

Appendix B

Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship and Formal Dialogue

I. Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship

Following is a list of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship, referencing the year in which such fellowship was established.

A. Africa

1. Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN) (1974)
2. Church of Christ in the Sudan Among the Tiv (NKST) (1974)
(Nongo U Kristu U Ken Sudan Hen Tiv)
3. Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) (1983)
(Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika)
4. Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) (2001)
(Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika)
5. Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) (1982)

6. Reformed Churches in South Africa (1974)
(Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika)
7. Reformed Churches in South Africa (Synod Soutpansberg) (1989)
8. Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria (2003)
9. Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) (1982)
(Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider Afrika)

B. Asia, Australia, and Indonesia

1. Christian Church of Sumba (Indonesia) (1974)
(Gereja Kristen Sumba)
2. Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar (2011)
3. Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines (1997)
4. Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) (1974)
5. Christian Reformed Church of Sri Lanka (1974)
6. Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) (1974)

C. Europe

Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC) (1982)
(Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken-Buiten Verbond)

D. North America

1. Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) (1986)
2. Reformed Church in America (RCA) (1976)

E. Latin America

Christian Reformed Church in Cuba (2001)
(La Iglesia Cristiana Reformada en Cuba)

F. South America

1. Evangelical Reformed Church in Brazil (1974)
(Ireja Evangelica Reformada no Brasil)
2. Reformed Church in Argentina (1974)
(Iglesias Reformadas en le Argentina)

II. Churches in Formal Dialogue

It is synod's prerogative to decide with which denominations the CRC will maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and with which denominations the CRC will be in *formal dialogue*. Following is a list of churches currently in *formal dialogue* with the CRC:

- A. Christian Reformed Church in Eastern Africa (Uganda)*
- B. Christian Reformed Church of Haiti*
- C. Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Nkhoma Synod) - Malawi*
- D. Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar*
- E. Evangelical Reformed Church of Burundi*
- F. Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC)*
- G. Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN)*
- H. Reformed Church in Zambia*
- I. Reformed Church of East Africa (Kenya)*

I. Introduction

The Historical Committee is a standing committee of the Christian Reformed Church established by Synod 1934 to oversee the work of the denominational archives and promote publication of denominationally related historical studies. The committee's members are Dr. James De Jong, chair (2012, second term); Ms. Angie Ploegstra (2013, second term); Mr. William Sytsma (2013, second term); Dr. Lyle Bierma (2014, first term); Dr. Richard Harms (ex officio), secretary.

Dr. James De Jong is completing his second term on the Historical Committee. The committee thanks Dr. James De Jong for his six years of diligent and faithful service, most recently as chair. The committee presents the following slate of nominees for election of a new member to begin a first term of three years on July 1, 2012:

Dr. Robert Schoone-Jongen has a doctorate from the University of Delaware. He is an associate professor of history at Calvin College and mentors the college's aspiring social studies teachers. His career includes twenty-seven years of teaching at Minnesota Christian High School in Edgerton, Minnesota. Outside of the classroom Dr. Schoone-Jongen has conducted research on rural immigrant communities in the United States and Canada and has published on such Dutch Reformed communities. In addition, he studies the immigrant experience, particularly the role of religion in that experience. In addition to numerous presentations at professional conferences, his work has been published in such diverse titles as *The Annals of Iowa*, *Minnesota History*, and *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*.

Rev. Gerrit W. Sheeres is an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church, and he served churches in Falmouth, Wyoming, Zeeland, and Kentwood, Michigan; and Lynden, Washington, before retiring in 1997. He is a student of history, particularly of the Dutch in North America and in the Christian Reformed Church, having presented at historical conferences and translated many church minutes and personal letters from Dutch into English. In addition, Rev. Sheeres was on translation teams for the following books: *For Us It Is an Honor and a Pleasure* (2007); *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society* (2008); *Essential Truths in the Heart of a Christian* (2009); *Our Worship* (2009), *Freedom on the Horizon* (2009), and *The Calvin Handbook* (2009).

II. Archives staff

Dr. Richard Harms is the curator of the Archives, housed in Heritage Hall at Calvin College. He serves the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin College as archivist. Other staff include Ms. Hendrina Van Spronsen, office manager; Ms. Wendy Blankespoor, library assistant; Ms. Laurie Haan, departmental assistant; Dr. Robert Bolt, field agent and assistant archivist; and volunteers Dr. Paul Bremer, Mrs. Willene De Groot, Mr. Ed Gerritsen, Mr. Fred Greidanus, Mr. Ralph Haan, Mrs. Helen Meulink, Rev. Gerrit W. Sheeres, Mrs. Janet Sheeres, and Mr. Ralph Veenstra.

III. Archival work during 2011

The committee finished processing the H. Evan Runner papers; copies of the inventory have already been sent to scholars in Grand Rapids; McAllen, Texas; and Seoul, South Korea. These individuals are using the collection, along with those of Paul Schrottenboer, Peter Steen, and Bernard Zylstra, when examining the Christian philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. The Runner papers will be a test in digitizing an entire collection so that copies of the digitized files can be sent to researchers rather than requiring that they come to Grand Rapids.

Twenty-four cubic feet of records were added to our collection of Christian schools records. The additional material came from schools (primarily Oakdale and Sylvan) closed because of the recent reorganization of Christian schools in Grand Rapids. The collection now totals 109 cubic feet and documents the history of schools from throughout Canada and the United States. We translated and opened for research the very early twentieth-century letters of Peter Verwolf, a Dutch immigrant in the Dakotas who was incarcerated for a time. The letters provide a unique view of his life in prison. The research files of Dr. H.J. Brinks, emeritus professor of history and emeritus director of Heritage Hall, have been organized and are now open to research. The material details the Dutch in North America, as well as West Michigan history topics.

We organized the papers of Dr. Rod Jellema, a poet living in the Washington, D.C., area. We processed the business papers of chemist Pierson Boermans, which include much on his business ties and personal travels in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s. The personal papers of poet Beth Merizon are now available for research. Rev. Bartel Huizenga's work as a home missionary is documented in his papers, as is Dr. Peter De Boer's work in history and education. Fifty-eight hours of recorded interviews with artist Armand Merizon conducted by Muriel Zandstra were received and transferred from analog to digital format. We received the personal and professional papers (eighteen cubic feet) of Dr. Gerard Van Groningen, who served as an ordained minister, missionary, professor, and administrator during his career.

We also received and processed the research files of Dr. Andrew Barnes detailing Christian missionary work in Nigeria during the first half of the twentieth century. We organized and opened for research the records of the Psalter Hymnal Revision Committee, 1977-1987, and we received and organized the records of Epicenter Community CRC, a discontinued congregation in Bradenton, Florida. Denominational records from the campus ministries program and the denominational ministries office were added to the denominational archives.

One of our volunteers has completed the translation of the Holland, Michigan, Central Avenue CRC minutes through 1912 and, with additional permission granted by the church, will complete the translation of the minutes through 1927. Translation of the Prosper, Michigan, CRC minutes has begun. Volunteers continued dutifully keying in data for the project to make vital records information from *The Banner* available online. One volunteer entered all the membership information recorded on index cards from Westview CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.) into a spreadsheet. We added eighteen genealogies to our extensive collection and its catalog. Building on the work recently published via our website on post-WWII Dutch immigration, one of

our volunteers has begun indexing family and vital record information from *Calvinist Contact*.

During the summer we received the extensive papers of Vernon Ehlers, who served as a representative of Kent County for ten years in the Michigan state legislature, and then as a Michigan state representative to the U.S. Congress for eighteen years. The papers include legislation that he sponsored; legislation that he actively worked to support; correspondence; and service on the House Committees on Education and Labor, Science and Technology, and on the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment; as well as documents from the work necessary for reelection. His material totals 107 boxes of records.

IV. Publications

Wm. B. Eerdmans published Dr. Kurt Selles's *A New Way of Belonging: Covenant Theology, China, and the Christian Reformed Church, 1921-1951* with funding provided by *Origins*. We are preparing a newly translated and significantly annotated version of the CRC synodical minutes, 1857-1880, for publication through the offices of the Historical Committee of the Reformed Church in America, with whom we have partnered on several previous book publication projects. We added the 2010 family information from *Banner* notices to our website (<http://www.calvin.edu/hh/Banner/Banner.htm>), where we currently provide more than 60 thousand citations to *Banner* — family information for the years 1985-2010.

V. Recognition

A. The committee acknowledges the following individuals who have served a combined 5,213 years in ordained ministry and will celebrate significant anniversaries in 2012:

71 years, 1941-2012	Harold Petroelje Gysbert J. Rozenboom
68 years, 1944-2012	Paul Han
67 years, 1945-2012	Edward Boer George D. Vanderhill James W. Van Weelden
66 years, 1946-2012	David B. Muir Seymour Van Dyken
65 years, 1947-2012	John A. De Kruyter Herman Minnema Bernard E. Pekelder Clarence Van Ens
64 years, 1948-2012	Carl G. Kromminga, Sr. Peter M. Macaskill Howard B. Spaan
63 years, 1949-2012	John A. Petersen Albert J. Vanden Pol

62 years, 1950-2012	Lugene A. Bazuin Martin D. Geleynse Dick C. Los Lammert Slofstra Leonard F. Stockmeier
61 years, 1951-2012	Isaac J. Apol Gerard Bouma Willis P. De Boer Jacob Hekman Leonard J. Hofman Jacob Kuntz MyungJae Lee John T. Malestein John C. Medendorp Leonard Sweetman Clarence J. Vos Wilmer R. Witte
60 years, 1952-2012	Ralph D. Baker Leonard C. Bossenbroek William D. Buursma Harold De Groot John H. Elenbaas Raymond R. Graves John M. Hofman Herman Leestma Chester M. Schemper Richard D. Sytsma Rits Tadema Samuel Vander Jagt John Van Ens Benjamin Ypma Martin G. Zylstra
55 years, 1957-2012	Wilbur L. De Jong Jay De Vries Gerrit J. Heersink Earl S. Holkeboer Louis E. Kok Pieter Kranenburg Eugene W. Los Harvey A. Ouwinga Eugene F. Rubingh Arnold Rumph Gordon T. Stuit Jack Stulp Paul C. H. Szto Louis M. Tamminga Peter Van Egmond Roger E. Van Harn

Gerald F. Van Oyen
James E. Versluys
Donald P. Wisse
Lloyd J. Wolters

50 years, 1962-2012

William A. Bierling
Gerrit A. Bieze
John Boonstra
Henry R. De Bolster
Michael De Vries
William J. Dykstra
Henry Eshuis
Jan Friend
Wendell M. Gebben
Gary G. Hofland
Louis Kerkstra
Gerald M. Nyenhuis
Peter Sluys
Arthur J. Stienstra
Berton Van Antwerpen
Henry B. Vanden Heuvel
Duane E. VanderBrug
Howard D. Vanderwell
Jack B. Vos
Cornelius Vriend
Jochem Vugteveen

B. We report the following anniversaries of ministries that will occur in 2012:

125 years, 1887-2012

Bunde, MN
Grand Rapids, MI – LaGrave Avenue
Hull, ND
Oak Lawn, IL – Calvin
Oakland, MI

100 years, 1912-2012

Fort Collins, CO – Immanuel
Hancock, MN
Hanford, CA
Inwood, IA
Lombard, IL
McBain, MI – Calvin
Sibley, IA

75 years, 1937-2012

Modesto, CA

50 years, 1962-2012

Blyth, ON
Cutlerville, MI – Covenant
Denver, CO – Hillcrest

Edmonton, AB – Ottewell
Farmington, NM – Maranatha Fellowship
Grand Rapids, MI – Grace
Grandville, MI – Hanley
Grimsby, ON – Mountainview
Oak Forest, IL – Hope
Phoenix, AZ – Orangewood
Prince George, BC
Welland, ON – Grace

25 years, 1987-2012

Abbotsford, BC – Zion Chinese
Anaheim, CA – The Good Shepherd
Byron Center, MI – Friendship
Kalamazoo, MI – Heritage
Sheboygan, WI – Hmong
St. Catharines, ON – Jubilee Fellowship
Vicksburg, MI – Korean
Westminster, CA – Korean Church of Orange County
Zuni, NM

VI. Reminders

The committee again asks congregations that have observed anniversaries during 2011 or that will observe anniversaries during 2012 to send copies of commemorative materials (booklets, historical sketches, videos, photographs, and so forth) to the Archives.

During 2011, official minutes of 88 Christian Reformed churches and four Christian school organizations were received and microfilmed, and the copies were stored in our vault. The originals were returned, usually by United Parcel Service. Official minutes were received from all 47 classes. Anniversary materials were received from 24 Christian Reformed churches.

Of the 850 organized congregations that have existed for at least ten years, 672 have sent their minutes to the Archives for microfilming. This includes records from two churches that have never had their records duplicated. Due to the persistent and frequent reports of lost or misplaced minutes, the Committee again urges congregations to utilize this very inexpensive means to produce a backup copy of their important records; backups that will be stored in a secure location with access given only with the permission of the church. The following classes are to be commended for each of their churches that have had their minutes duplicated for at least ten years: Arizona, B.C. North-West, Eastern Canada, Grand Rapids East, Hamilton, Minnkota, Niagara, Thornapple Valley, and Zeeland.

VII. Regional representatives

The Historical Committee has a regional representative in each classis who acts as a liaison between the committee and the churches within that classis. During this past year Mr. Jack Bol resigned as our representative in Classis Rocky Mountain, and Mr. Walter Ackerman succeeded him. As this report was being prepared, Mr. Alvin Berkompas resigned as our representative in Classis California South and offered to work with the stated clerk

to find a successor. Mr. Perry Recker, our representative in Classis Chicago South, would like to be relieved of his duties but will remain until a successor is named. Newly appointed stated clerks who agreed to serve as our representatives include Mr. Fernando del Rosario in Classis Central California, Rev. Roger Kramer in Classis Columbia, Rev. Kenneth Van Wyk in Classis Grand Rapids South, Rev. John Veenstra in Classis Hamilton, and Rev. Vernon Vander Zee in Classis Southeast U.S. Communications have been sent to each of our representatives thanking them for their services throughout 2011 and requesting that they continue to serve another year.

VIII. Space

The committee is pleased to report that renovation of our space began during the summer of 2011. Funds provided by *Origins*, the Hekman Library, and the Calvin College development staff made possible the renovation of five rooms, a closet, and a hallway into one large open area with state-of-the-art environmental controls, allowing us to store more material within the same footprint. In December 2011 work began on Phase II—the renovation of the staff work space, the conversion of our current reading room into storage space, and the construction of a new reading room. During Phase II Heritage Hall temporarily moved to the college's Surge Building. The work is scheduled to be completed by the time of synod's meeting; all archives will have been transformed into a new facility with optimal environmental controls, new staff space and reading room, and expanded storage capacity to meet growth anticipated for the next ten years. The committee looks forward to having synodical delegates in 2013 visit the new facilities.

IX. Digitizing of synodical *Acts of Synod* and the *CRC Yearbook*

Synod 2011 allocated \$4,000 to the Historical Committee to digitize and make available the *Agenda for Synod* and *Acts of Synod* for the years 1881-1998 (1857-1880 and 1999-present are already available in digital formats). The project is currently on schedule (with the project approximately 50 percent complete by mid-December 2011), and we anticipate that it will be completed by June 2012. Records for each year will be fully searchable. Available records can be viewed at the following (temporary) website: http://libguides.calvin.edu/crcna_synod.

X. Recommendations

A. The committee requests that Dr. Richard H. Harms be given the privilege of the floor when matters pertaining to its mandate come before synod.

B. That synod by way of the ballot elect a new member to the Historical Committee to serve a first term of three years.

C. The committee asks that synod remind the classes that Synod 1912 instructed that all records from discontinued ministries be sent to the Archives. Given the recent request for records from ministries closed for a number of years, we ask that all congregations search their files for such material and send these to the archives. This will certainly reduce the amount of material some local churches are storing unnecessarily. Archives staff will organize and sort the material to ensure that materials with legal or historical

significance are preserved. Our shipping address is Archives, Calvin College, 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402. Our email address is crcarchives@calvin.edu; our telephone number is 616-526-6313; and our fax number is 616-526-7689.

D. The committee requests that synod encourage the 39 classes whose 178 member churches more than ten years old have not had their minutes duplicated to contact the Archives to have this done.

Historical Committee

Lyle Bierma

James De Jong, chair

Richard Harms (ex officio), secretary

Angie Ploegstra

William Sytsma

I. Brief overview

In 2012, the Sermons for Reading Services Committee solicited and processed twenty-four sermons that are now available on the denominational website. Emails, personal conversations, and website hits indicate that this service continues to be used and is widely appreciated, particularly by smaller and remote congregations for whom filling the pulpit every Sunday is a challenge.

In past years, the committee has had many requests for additional search capabilities on the website. Since upgrading the site last year, the committee has not received any more requests, which indicates that people are able to use it with greater ease. We thank the denominational Proservices website staff for their work on our behalf.

Churches have increasingly requested that the committee provide video sermons that could be shown when they are unable to get a minister. For our committee to gather this information would require more time, web space, and funding. Instead, last year the committee added links to sites of CRC pastors/churches where video sermons are available. This seems to have satisfied that need.

The committee is currently composed of Rev. Ken Benjamins (2014); Rev. Rich deLange (2012), serving as chair and secretary; Rev. Stephen Tamming (2013); and Rev. Mark Verbruggen (2014). We thank Rev. Rich deLange for serving the past six years. The committee asks synod to appoint Rev. Lambert Sikkema to serve on the Sermons for Reading Services Committee.

Rev. Lambert J. Sikkema is the pastor of First CRC in Hanford, California. He holds an M.Div. degree from Calvin Theological Seminary. Rev. Sikkema has served on the CRC ad hoc committee on corporate bylaws and on the Fund for Smaller Churches Committee. Rev. Sikkema also currently serves on the board of Trinity Christian College.

With the inclusion of ministers on this committee from a wider cross-section of the denomination, we are having our annual meeting via the Internet. We used Google Hangout this year for the first time with good success. We thank the Lord for the sermons received, posted, and used by CRC churches both within our denomination and worldwide.

II. Recommendations

A. That synod approve the work of the committee and encourage the churches to avail themselves of the sermons for reading services on the CRC website.

B. That synod by way of the ballot appoint Rev. Lambert Sikkema for a three-year term on the Sermons for Reading Services Committee.

Sermons for Reading Services Committee
Ken Benjamins
Richard deLange, chair/secretary
Stephen Tamming
Mark Verbruggen

DENOMINATIONALLY RELATED AGENCIES

Launching an ambitious fundraising campaign just a couple of years before a serious global economic downturn might sound like a recipe for disaster, but for supporters of Dordt College it was an opportunity to demonstrate their solid commitment to supporting our work.

The *Beyond Jubilee: Vision 2020 Campaign* kicked off during the college's 50th-year Jubilee celebration with a goal of raising \$50 million. Through this process, we have relearned something we have always known: that all blessings flow from God. At the conclusion of the campaign our goal of \$50 million was not only met but was far exceeded. The total raised came to \$57,334,277.76. Over 14,000 alumni and friends of Dordt College donated, and an outstanding 100 percent of the college's faculty and staff contributed.

God's people came through with true dedication to the work of the sovereign Christ in whose kingdom Dordt College is one small part. Our goal was not just to raise money to make this a nicer college. Meeting the campaign goal enables Dordt College to fulfill its mission and make a real difference in God's kingdom.

As a result of the campaign, new programs have been launched, student scholarships have been increased exponentially, faculty research and scholarship have been supported, and campus development efforts have become evident in new structures such as the Douglas and Henrietta (Miedema) Ribbens Academic Complex and a new clock tower.

For more than 55 years, we have continued to be blessed by the support of churches in the Christian Reformed denomination. We are as thankful today for that support as we were as a fledgling institution. With your help, we are able to continue our work of training Christian leaders who can make decisions and plan and direct God-glorifying development in our culture.

Enrollment is up again this year and is the highest it has been in more than a decade, thanks to a large incoming freshman class and high retention rates for upperclassmen. Of the 1,414 students who enrolled at Dordt College for the 2011-2012 school year, 47 percent are members of a Christian Reformed Church. Students from the family of Reformed churches make up 67 percent of our student body. We believe passionately that we have something valuable and distinct to offer Christian young people, and we hope you continue to actively encourage your students to attend CRC-affiliated colleges.

Dordt College has been especially honored this year by being named to several "Best Colleges" lists, including those of *U.S. News & World Report*, *Washington Monthly*, *Princeton Review*, and *Forbes.com*. Our nursing and engineering students continue to hold exceptional pass rates. In fact, the engineering pass rate exceeds those of the top engineering schools in the country. Even in tough economic times, our graduates have maintained a 97 percent placement rate, with students either employed or in graduate school within six months of graduation.

Dordt College is honored to serve in Christ's kingdom, and we are thankful for the tremendous blessings we have received from Christian Reformed churches, as well as from other denominations and friends of the college.

Dordt College
Carl E. Zylstra, president

I. Introduction

The Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) is a graduate school preparing a new generation of Christian scholars for work in Christian and non-Christian colleges and universities, drawing on the resources of interdisciplinary philosophy and theology from a reformational perspective. The ICS is privileged to serve the Reformed community, which birthed and sustains it, the broader Christian community (especially but not only those who have been called to study at ICS), and the community at large. The ICS's doctoral and master's programs are a vital component of the Reformed vision and mission in higher education in North America and beyond. ICS has legal authority to grant the degrees of doctor of philosophy, master of arts, and master of worldview studies.

II. Teaching and mentoring

In the 2011-2012 academic year, eleven courses were offered on-campus, and two were conducted in distance mode. Forty-three students are enrolled in degree programs. Ten of these are engaged in course work, and the others are at the thesis-writing stage of their M.A. or Ph.D. degrees. There were also 22 part-time students from the University of Toronto and the Toronto School of Theology (of which ICS is an affiliate member).

June 2011 saw the completion of the first Ph.D. in which ICS is the only granting institution. In July two candidates were awarded conjoint ICS/VU Amsterdam doctorates after successfully defending their dissertations. It is anticipated that eleven students will have degrees conferred at the 2012 Convocation in May (4 Ph.D., 3 M.A., and 4 M.W.S.).

III. Public outreach

ICS remains committed to sending faculty and students to churches and community centers in North America to present lectures and workshops about matters concerning Christians and the general public. In 2011-2012, these presentations were as follows:

- Art, Civil Society, and Public Justice: A Double Book Launch. March, Toronto.
- *Art in Public* Book Launch. Symposium: Art in Public in Grand Rapids (Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts). March, Grand Rapids.
- Healing Art/Dog-kissed Tears: Lambert Zuidervaat. April, Edmonton and Calgary.
- *Art Talks*. This annual event was co-hosted by the Toronto School of Theology and had the theme "Religion, Art, and Spirituality." It included an exhibition of artworks and a panel discussion with four Christian artists. April, Toronto.
- "God Is Dead and I Don't Feel So Good Myself": A Christian response to the new atheism. November, University of Waterloo.
- ARIHE Lecture: "Heaven: Is It Part of Creation?" (Dr Don Sinnema). November, Toronto.
- "Hungering for a New Politics: The Life's Work of Gerald Vandezande" (co-sponsored with Citizens for Public Justice). February, Toronto.

- Worldview Conferences: “Songs of Love and Sorrow: Reengaging the Social Ethics of Music.” February/March, Edmonton, Calgary, Surrey.

IV. Research

The ICS faculty published nine scholarly articles and one book, worked on three book manuscripts that have been accepted for publication, and submitted two book proposals. They presented nineteen papers at scholarly conferences and twelve papers and lectures at church and community conferences. Faculty also served as referees in two tenure processes. One financial grant was received, and applications for three more are currently in process. Junior members (students) were also active: an incomplete list includes two books, three scholarly articles, and eight conference presentations.

The ICS formally opened the Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics in October 2011. Dr. Lambert Zuidervaart, director, presented his inaugural address to 120 dinner guests. The Centre continues its program of inter-faculty colloquia, with participants from the University of Toronto and elsewhere. Each semester, two invited papers are presented and a formal response prepared, with general discussion ensuing.

February 2011: Simone Chambers, Professor of Political Science, UT, “Secularism Minus Exclusion: Developing a Religious Friendly Idea of Public Reason”; Ronald Kuipers, Assoc. Prof. of Philosophy of Religion, ICS.

March 2011: Shannon Hoff, Asst. Professor of Social and Political Philosophy, ICS, “Inheriting Identity and Practising Transformation: The Time of Feminist Politics”; Marsha Hewitt, Professor of Ethics and Contemporary Theology, Trinity College, UT.

October 2011: Robert Sweetman, H. Evan Runner Chair in the History of Philosophy, ICS, “Storytelling as Mode of Persuasion and Inquiry in Dominican Rhetorical Theory of the Mid-13th Century”; Michele Mulchahay, Leonard E. Boyle Chair in Manuscript Studies, Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, UT.

November 2011: Robert Gibbs, Professor of Philosophy and Director of Jackman Humanities Institute, UT, “Ethics of Commands, Laws and Narratives”; Joseph Mangina, Professor of Systematic Theology, Wycliffe College, UT.

February 2012: Mario D’Souza, Dean of Theology, University of St Michael’s College, UT. “Philosophers of Education: Jacques Maritain, Bernard Lonergan, and the Question of Classicism”; Doug Blomberg, Professor of Philosophy of Education, ICS.

A book containing papers from the “Truth Matters” conference (2010) has been recommended for publication by reviewers, and a grant in support of this project from the Reid Trust was gratefully received.

Final arrangements are in hand for the Social Justice and Human Rights Conference, April 27-28, 2012, on the campus of Emmanuel College, Toronto. Keynote speakers will be Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff and Dr. Melissa Williams.

Institute for Christian Studies
Chris Gort, president

In fall 2011, The King's University College welcomed 678 students to study and be a part of our community, an increase of ten over the previous year. We are encouraged by modest increases in enrollment over the past few years and pray that prospective students and their parents will continue to see the extraordinary value of Christian higher education offered at King's.

This past fall, the environmental studies program at King's received professional accreditation from Environmental Careers Organization Canada, the certifying body of the Canadian Environmental Accreditation Commission. The accreditation is in addition to the academic accreditation already bestowed by the Campus Alberta Quality Council. The King's University College is the only post-secondary school in Canada to earn such professional recognition for an environmental studies program that includes both bachelor of arts and bachelor of science degrees.

Maclean's, Canada's leading news magazine, published its 2011 results from an annual Canada-wide student satisfaction survey. King's ranked at the top of the list in four out of the five categories that included student ratings on the following statements:

- Most of my professors encourage students to participate in class discussions.
- Professors treat students as individuals, not just numbers.
- Most of my professors are reasonably accessible outside of class to help students.
- My learning experiences at this university have been intellectually stimulating.

During 2011 some significant accomplishments by faculty were recognized. Dr. Peter Mahaffy, professor of chemistry, garnered international recognition by receiving the 2011 James Flack Norris Award for outstanding achievement in the teaching of chemistry. Dr. Mahaffy is the 60th recipient of this prestigious award and only the second Canadian to be so recognized. In addition to this, Dr. Mahaffy was one of eleven North American scholars (and the only Canadian) appointed to the American Chemical Society's Presidential Working Group on Climate Science.

King's has experienced some significant changes in senior leadership in 2011. At the end of June, Dr. Harry Spaling completed a five-year term as vice president academic and returned to his faculty role. Dr. Hank Bestman, professor of biology and biochemistry, has ably stepped into the vice president academic role. In the fall we welcomed our new vice president for institutional advancement, Mr. Dan VanKeeken, who will spearhead efforts to ensure a bright future for King's with the implementation of new strategies for marketing, fundraising, and recruitment.

A Presidential Search Committee has been struck to begin the task of selecting the next president for King's. Dr. Harry Fernhout has announced that he plans to retire in the summer of 2013 after eight years of service at King's. Please pray for those involved in the search process as they seek suitable candidates who fully embrace the mission and vision of King's and who will be able to successfully lead this university into the future under God's guidance.

The King's University College continues to be blessed with generous support from Christian Reformed churches. Through area college ministry shares and other offerings, churches contributed over \$570,000 to King's in 2011, allowing us to maintain and build programs, offer student financial support, and control tuition. We thank God for the ongoing support of Christian higher education at King's. May God bless your work on behalf of his church during Synod 2012.

The King's University College
J. Harry Fernhout, president

Kuyper College has now completed its 72nd year, and we recognize our close association with the Christian Reformed Church over these years in the developments that have enabled us to be the college we are today. A primary example of this relationship is the new program we are jointly carrying out with Calvin Theological Seminary—the Accelerated Pre-Seminary Studies program. Through this landmark agreement, students are able to complete their college and seminary degrees in a total of six years, rather than the more typical seven-year program. Thus, graduates can enter church service more readily and save personal time and expenses in doing so.

This fall we will be assessed for reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Along with this will be a coordinated assessment by the Association of Biblical Higher Education. The college has been preparing for these visits for the past two years, and we are ready to receive the assessment teams. Kuyper is very strong in the area of academic programs and in the strategic planning we have done to carry out and further the stated mission of the college. The accreditation process, while tremendously challenging, is an opportunity to focus on ensuring innovation, best practices, and increasing institutional effectiveness.

The programs, opportunities, and caliber of students we have are highly energizing. Our emphasis on “Christian leadership” training has taken hold throughout the curriculum and student life programs over the past year. Students are very engaged in understanding and carrying out the intent of our positioning statement, “Bringing God’s grace into today’s culture.” This has been highly motivational for faculty and staff alike as we look for ways that God’s Word can speak more directly into the needs of society and through the many different majors we offer. Our internship requirement also provides another avenue to not only make ministry and service more tangible to those served but to give our graduates the opportunity to hone the practical skills they need to be highly effective in their work and witness.

We are also enthusiastic about the growing substance behind the name *Kuyper* as embodied at the college. We have become partners with Acton Institute and have initiated work as the Kuyper Translation Society to translate Abraham Kuyper’s seminal three-volume work on common grace. This initial effort is intended to help evangelicals more effectively engage the public square. Translation of other Kuyper materials and publication in other languages are also planned. Please refer to our website for a link that provides additional information (www.kuyper.edu).

All of us at the college express our appreciation for the support and prayers of the CRC. We are glad to be close partners with you in serving the Christian Reformed Church specifically and the worldwide community of believers generally. God’s blessings to you in your work for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Kuyper College
Nicholas V. Kroeze, president

Greetings from Redeemer University College to the delegates to the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. We look forward to welcoming you in person to our campus in June 2012. Our hope is that God will guide and bless your meetings, that you will have a wonderful experience on our campus, and that our efforts as church and university will give a powerful testimony to God's kingdom of grace in the world around us.

What might strike you first when you arrive at Redeemer is the presence of new features at our campus—a soccer dome, a solar panel array, a renovated administrative center, upgraded lab facilities, and storm water ponds. These additions to our campus are indeed blessings for which we are grateful. But more important is what these features signify—namely, our conviction that Christ is Lord over all things, and our commitment to engaging our wider community and caring for our environment as hands and feet of his grace in our world.

These commitments are evident across Redeemer's curricular and co-curricular programs, perhaps especially in several new initiatives. Last summer we launched a Youth Ministry Certificate program, and two off-campus courses are planned in Ottawa and Windsor for summer 2012. We have also launched an international relations minor in our political science program and a bachelor of science (honors) in health sciences beginning in September 2012. We also are grateful for two short-term partnerships between Crossroads Media and Redeemer's Theatre Arts department to develop productions of the gospel for possible television broadcast, and between Hamilton's Job Prosperity Collaborative and Redeemer to coordinate our student service-learning and volunteer work in downtown missions.

In addition to these initiatives, we have been blessed by a number of speakers, including Dr. Peter Leithart as presenter for our "The World and Our Calling" and ARIHE lectureship. The Dooyeweerd Centre's work of translation continues, and the Paideia Centre is continuing to bring in speakers and scholars who are exploring a Reformed worldview and Neo-Calvinist philosophy. One of the expected highlights for this year is a scheduled meeting, as part of the Scripture and Hermeneutics consultation, to interact with N.T. Wright in San Francisco. The Pascal Centre has been awarded a grant from the Jackman Foundation to enable Dr. Jitse van der Meer to write a popular book on the relations of faith and science.

This year we welcomed 892 full-time equivalent students, and 929 students overall. Our students represent 10 Canadian provinces, 6 U.S. states, 20 other countries, and 50 different denominations. We share with the CRC a deep concern for nurturing a living faith and discipleship; a Reformed, Christ-centered understanding of life across the liberal arts and sciences; a vision for whole life education that connects life and learning; and a goal of equipping students to be servant-leaders of God's kingdom in our contemporary culture.

We are very grateful for the prayers and faithful financial support we have received from the Christian Reformed community, including the ministry shares we receive from area Christian Reformed churches. This support is essential for our mission of providing Christian university education and Christian scholarship from a Reformed Christian perspective. We believe

that a strong partnership between church and university is vital for helping our young adults develop in Christian discipleship and effective kingdom service. We pray that God will bless not only the meeting of synod but also the CRC's efforts to faithfully nurture the body of Christ.

We look forward to seeing you at Redeemer in June for Synod 2012!

Redeemer University College
Hubert R. Krygsman, president

As Trinity Christian College continues to expand its academic offerings, the college is pleased to announce the launch of two graduate studies programs. The Master of Arts in Special Education (for certified teachers) and the Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology are scheduled to begin in fall 2012. Both offer a combination of online instruction and face-to-face classes.

The college is also beginning a new program for selected students interested in the areas of math, science, and technology. The college's newly created Eureka Learning Community links discovery, learning, and Christianity as students work alongside professors in those areas of study. Students will explore environmental issues and propose solutions that can make a difference in God's creation. Potential study topics include improving green energy use on campus and conserving water.

Trinity officially closed a successful capital campaign in 2011, and the impact can be witnessed across campus as athletes practice and compete in the new Trinity Athletics and Recreation Complex and nursing students learn hands-on skills in the new Cynthia Sander Nursing Lab, complete with high-tech simulation mannequins.

Trinity's annual fund raising event in October 2011 marked the formal dedication of the new Trinity Athletics and Recreation Complex. The volleyball team enjoyed a successful season, and players from that team and other Trinity teams are also enjoying the new DeVos Gymnasium. The performance lab provides another high-tech space for exercise science majors and other students, as well as athletes, who utilize new equipment such as the BOD POD—a state-of-the-art body composition tracking system.

In the new nursing lab, students continue to learn skills that better prepare them for patient care during their clinicals and in their careers after graduation. Newly added in February were "newborn" and "mother" simulation mannequins that will provide junior and senior nursing students with further training in obstetrics.

Church leaders and members enjoy a variety of workshops and seminars offered through the Church Connection Initiative at Trinity (CCIT). CCIT is a catalyst for collaborative learning that strengthens local church ministries and equips leaders and lay members with instruction, knowledge, and opportunities by offering resources focused in four areas: preaching, worship, leadership development, and service. Highlights of spring 2012 offerings included Science and the Faithful Church: A Seminar for Pastors and Church Leaders and the seminar Portrait of Dementia: Helping People Live Well.

We are grateful for God's blessings evidenced in many areas, including the financial support we receive from Christian Reformed churches directly from offerings or from various classes in the form of redirected ministry shares (per the denomination's policy). During 2011 we gratefully accepted \$168,678.65 in funds from CRC churches and classes.

Trinity Christian College
Steven Timmermans, president

Calvinist Cadet Corps

The past year saw the Cadet program expand with the addition of new merit badges. Boys in grades 4-6 can now earn badges in Memorial Day, Geocaching, and Filmmaking. This year some additional badges were approved: Advanced Bible Study, Church Leadership, and Cadet History and Organization. The boys in Grades 1-3 gained a merit badge in Bat Study. And boys in grades 7-9 will be looking at a new adventure: Taxidermy. The amount of material available continues to grow and change.

The most visible evidence of God's blessing in the past year was the 2011 International Camporee. These events come only once every three years, and the 2011 event was near Reed City, Michigan. It drew 1,200 people for a week of wilderness-style camping. The spiritual blessings at camporees are always great, and this one was no exception. God sent a storm on the last night of camp that was centered directly over our site, Camp Whitetail. Eight inches of rain poured down in four hours, washing out the surrounding county roads and creating a river in our assembly area. It was the third camporee in a row that became a challenge to leave, but remained a wonderful experience. God gained the glory.

Regional training events continue to successfully draw good numbers of men. These events typically take place on a Saturday and offer the opportunity for a man to attend four or five workshops from a choice of more than a dozen. Besides international and regional training, localized training takes place throughout North America on a nearly monthly basis. We are currently planning to expand our training program to include mentoring and coaching, club by club, and even one-on-one as needed.

Training is also important to Cadet counselors in Africa. Mr. Daniel Nandwa, our coordinator in Kenya, has led training sessions for each of the club regions in the past year. These sessions are three days long, and it takes quite a commitment for counselors in Kenya to attend. Travel is difficult at best and is very hard on vehicles. Despite the challenges, excitement for the Cadet ministry in Kenya remains high. Please pray for the Cadets and counselors in Africa, North America, and around the world.

Calvinist Cadet Corps

G. Richard Broene, executive director

GEMS Girls' Clubs

Do. Love. Walk. Our Micah 6:8 aim continues to fuel the ministry of GEMS Girls' Clubs as we seek to equip women and girls to live radically faithful lives—doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

Highlights from 2011 include the following:

- Creating opportunities for GEMS Girls' Clubs to start in countries around the world by launching our GEMS International website with downloadable resources created especially for developing countries.

- Responding to the Holy Spirit’s nudging to invest in urban ministry in greater ways, starting with the creation of a staff position to guide and direct those efforts.
- Training and equipping women in a mentoring role as counselors more than ever before. Thirty-seven-hundred of our 5,400 counselors participated in one or more training events.
- Reaching more girls with the love of Christ than ever before through the growth of our clubs—now 924 clubs strong.
- Placing greater emphasis on prayer at all levels of GEMS.
- Continuing to respond to our call to Africa by training and equipping women to serve as counselors in our 75 Zambian GEMS Girls’ Clubs, bringing our first work team from North America to the Esther School to help with construction, welcoming new staff people for the Esther School, and helping them prepare for their summer of 2012 departure.
- Looking for additional ways to speak into girls’ lives, resulting in the beginning of a book series that will engage girls and inspire them to walk more closely with God.

Goals and new initiatives for 2012 are as follows:

- Continue and expand the emphasis on prayer throughout all levels of GEMS.
- Create strategic partnerships with urban churches and nonprofit organizations for the purpose of taking the GEMS ministry into urban settings.
- Create a life-defining experience for early teen girls at GEMS International Summer Camp.
- Inspire and empower preteen girls to become Micah Road walkers—to live out their faith daily—by publishing *The Micah Road Mysteries*, a series of fiction books for preteen girls.
- Help families build strong bonds, expand their communication skills, and engage in acts of service together by offering the We Walk Tour for preteen girls and their moms and mentors.
- Open the Esther School, a Christian dayschool in Chongwe, Zambia, built by GEMS Girls’ Clubs.
- Expand the arms of GEMS to serve more girls and more clubs in North America, and internationally as well.

For all the opportunities for kingdom work, service, and growth, GEMS gives thanks to our great God. We give thanks also to the Christian Reformed Church for entrusting to our care and nurture your beautiful girls!

GEMS Girls’ Clubs

Jan Boone, executive director

Youth Unlimited

In 2011, through the work of the Holy Spirit, over 2,500 youth and their leaders experienced the love of Christ at a Youth Unlimited faith forming event.

In partnership with 28 local congregations, Youth Unlimited mobilized 120 churches to send 1,717 youth to show the love of Christ by serving others all across North America through Serve.

In its sixth year, the Where U At? Urban Youth Conference was again a great weekend for urban high school students to get away and spend time with God and friends. Every year this event helps stretch, heal, and care for the heart, soul, and faith of the participants. Two hundred students came from 20 West Michigan churches and organizations.

Live It! 2011 was all about **connecting youth to God** and helping them understand how to use their gifts and talents for him. The impact of 650 students using their talents to glorify God resulted in the city of Marion, Indiana, asking Youth Unlimited to return in 2012! Youth Unlimited has agreed to return, offering a new event called The Marion Project!

2011 also saw Youth Unlimited put extra effort into supporting church youth workers. Six soul care weekend retreats were offered—three in Canada and three in the United States—and 220 adults came to hear God’s voice, rest, learn, and enjoy the fellowship of other youth workers.

To give practical help and share best practices in youth ministry, *Equip Magazine* was sent to the 460 churches that requested it. Many churches also used Youth Unlimited to help them set an intentional youth ministry vision and plan using the *Compass 21* tool.

In June 2011, 23 youth workers and church leaders took a trip to the Holy Land. During this experience, they were able to see the Bible come to life in new ways by walking the land and listening to great teachers. Each one returned home excited to apply what they had learned to their youth ministry efforts.

Youth Unlimited was excited to begin a partnership with Redeemer University College, creating a youth ministry certificate. This college certificate serves paid and volunteer youth workers in a way that further equips and strengthens them in their youth ministry efforts. The first class had 12 participants!

In 2012 Youth Unlimited will refine its ministry focus around faith-forming experiences for youth. We will also look for partners with similar values, beliefs, and kingdom perspective to assist us in equipping and resourcing youth workers.

Youth Unlimited appreciates the partnership of the Christian Reformed Church and eagerly anticipates how God will bless the lives of young people, youth workers, and congregations in 2012 and beyond.

Youth Unlimited
Jeff Kruithof, executive director

Friendship Ministries is an international/interdenominational ministry committed to sharing God's love with people who have intellectual disabilities and enabling them to be active members of God's family.

Friendship Ministries provides opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to be baptized and make profession of faith using our resource *Expressing Faith in Jesus*. Other Friendship members have found ways to serve and share with their congregations by ushering, helping to lead worship, and participating in service projects.

There are more than 300 Friendship programs in Christian Reformed churches in Canada and the United States, and many of these programs involve multiple CRC congregations. Many programs also collaborate with churches in other denominations, which helps extend their outreach into the community.

We are a worldwide organization:

- Currently, there are more than 1,100 Friendship programs in 28 countries.
- Friendship groups are in more than 65 denominations.
- Friendship serves approximately 17,000 people with intellectual disabilities.
- This past year we began a new program in the United Kingdom.
- Through *Ministerio Amistad*, the Spanish arm of Friendship Ministries, there are four programs in the Cuba CRC. There are almost 300 programs in Latin America.
- This past year 92 new programs were started. Our goal is to keep up this pace for the next year.

We collaborate with the CRC:

- Our executive director has served as on the Disability Concerns Advisory Committee for over 15 years.
- Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) students in the pastoral care class are required to attend a Friendship group and write a one-page reflection paper. The Friendship executive director meets with the classes to help process the experience.
- CTS students may participate in Friendship groups as a service learning option.

We offer high-quality curriculum materials to help groups grow in faith:

- The Friendship Bible Studies used in our programs have three themes with 95 sessions: *God, Our Father; Jesus, Our Savior; The Spirit, Our Helper*.
- *Living God's Way* has 13 sessions on the Ten Commandments.
- *Psalms: God Cares How I Feel* has 10 sessions.
- We offer *God, Our Father; Jesus, Our Savior*; and *Compartiendo la Palabra de Dios con Personas con Discapacidad* in Spanish (the last being a translation and combination of our Program Guide and *What Friendship Mentors Need to Know*).

- Our book *Autism and Your Church* is a resource for congregations that need help including people with autism spectrum disorders. This has been revised and is being translated into Spanish.

Friendship Ministries partners with Faith Alive Christian Resources in developing the materials used in Friendship programs. Together with Faith Alive, we are also developing webinars that offer training on various aspects of disability ministry. Our first webinar deals with how to include people who have autism spectrum disorders, and our second is on ministering with people who have severe disabilities. Other webinars are in the planning stages.

Additional services we provide:

- consultation on including children in church education programs
- consultation with parents on how to approach the congregation for inclusion of their sons and daughters with intellectual disabilities
- ideas for recruiting volunteers for programs
- consultation on making worship a more multi-sensory experience, which is often helpful for people who have disabilities
- consultation on how to include people with intellectual disabilities in worship and the life of the church
- recommending resources as needed on various topics for ministering with people who have disabilities

Mentors who volunteer in the programs often tell us how their spiritual lives are enhanced through their ministry with people who have intellectual disabilities. Families express that Friendship programs are the one place their son or daughter is fully accepted and spiritually nurtured. This witness has encouraged many families to either remain in their congregations or to join another church that has a Friendship program. Friendship has also been a source of outreach to many care providers who are included in these programs when they bring friends to a church that has a program.

Friendship Ministries
Nella Uitvlugt, executive director

This year, Partners Worldwide has equipped thousands of businesspeople and entrepreneurs around the world to fulfill their unique calling to “business as ministry for a world without poverty.” By using their businesses to create sustainable jobs, businesspeople are transforming lives, through business, for God’s glory!

This movement of people serving through business is gaining tremendous momentum. More than ever before, Christians are being affirmed, encouraged, and commissioned to be Christ’s agents of transformation in their sphere of influence—including business. This year is no different.

In partnership with CRWRC, Partners Worldwide is currently equipping twenty business owners in the small town of Leogane, Haiti, as they lead the way to create 100,000 jobs in Haiti by 2020! This coming year, we will continue to expand partnerships with faith-based organizations as we equip business owners and entrepreneurs throughout Haiti to strengthen their businesses, create jobs, and work to eradicate poverty.

Because the global network of businesspeople continues to grow, Partners Worldwide is now registered in Hong Kong and Canada, expanding opportunities for Christian businesspeople to follow their call in 23 countries! Within the network, Partners Worldwide is equipping nearly 17,000 business owners and entrepreneurs to use their business in Christ’s transformation of lives and his restoration of all things. Offering unique tools and resources for businesspeople to utilize, this year Partners Worldwide translated the small and medium business training curriculum into Spanish, Mandarin, French, and Haitian Creole; offered regional and national business conferences to over 4,000 people; continues to provide Business as Mission curriculum and study guides for thousands to learn from; and facilitates long-term mentoring relationships with over 400 dedicated business mentors and coaches.

More than ever before, Christians are being affirmed, encouraged, and commissioned as Christ’s agents in their sphere of influence, including business. And the impact of these business-affiliate partnerships around the world is amazing. The 2011 results show that businesses created and retained 26,700 jobs, making a direct impact on the lives of over 133,000 people with sustainable incomes that support families with dignity.

Over \$3.3 million (US) were also distributed through affiliates of Partners Worldwide to provide small business loans this year. And because businesspeople involved are encouraged to be stewards of their time, talents, and treasure, these loan funds are consistently recycled to use again and again each year.

Through the ministry of Partners Worldwide, business people are participating in God’s holistic transformation, especially as the body of Christ affirms and commissions them. As more people recognize the untapped potential that exists for kingdom transformation through businesspeople, the demand for the work of Partners Worldwide continues to increase. Thank you to the Christian Reformed Church for partnering in this vital ministry of Partners Worldwide. We look forward to partnering with more CRC churches and businesspeople of the CRC to continue creating jobs and transforming lives around the globe.

Partners Worldwide
Douglas Seebeck, president

The Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLTI) was created in 1997 as retired Calvin Theological Seminary professors and active missionaries expressed a desire to train pastors who had not had opportunities for formal religious training. Recognizing the huge growth of the church in the developing world and the need for leaders in the church led to the creation of seven training manuals covering the basic areas of ministry that we often take for granted.

The training manuals incorporate an inductive style of teaching that is focused on reading Scripture, asking questions, and discussing the topics with peers, allowing for anyone to facilitate a group who has gone through the training. The desire is for those being trained to go back to their congregations and train their church leaders and lay pastors. TLTI engages in training with the intent that it be passed along to and picked up by indigenous peoples and become self-sustaining as quickly as possible. The local church is where the work gets done, and when believers are led by faithful, obedient, knowledgeable leaders, God is honored.

Designed as an interdenominational training institute, the program was first piloted in Africa and was then known as Project Africa. The success of the teaching curriculum soon caught fire such that currently TLTI has training in over 50 countries and is tracking well over 10,000 trainees. The training manuals are currently available in 22 languages.

In North America the TLT material is being used in Leadership Development Networks and as elder and deacon training. It is also being used to strengthen the leadership of immigrant churches in our communities and as a tool to encourage the North American churches to be more missional in their own community and the world.

The mission of Timothy Leadership Training Institute is “to train pastors, evangelists, and lay leaders worldwide for the purpose of building viable and healthy congregations and communities.”

Our mandate comes from 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things you have heard me teach before many witnesses, commit to faithful people, who shall be able to teach others also.”

Last year the Timothy Team held 84 training events around the world, an increase of 68 percent over 2010. This represented 336 denominations, 1,184 congregations, and almost 10,000 participants. This is only possible through the hard work of our staff and of master trainers, the dedication of volunteers, the support of donors, and the grace of God. We also share the strength of partner CRC agencies: CRWRC, Christian Reformed World Missions, Back to God Ministries International, and Calvin Theological Seminary, as well as partnerships with Words of Hope and Mission India.

We are grateful to God for this outreach of the Christian Reformed Church, and we look forward to partnering with more CRC churches to bring glory to our God through this ministry.

Timothy Leadership Training Institute
Charles Powell, president

STUDY COMMITTEES

Note: A full-color version of this Creation Stewardship Task Force report is available for download at crna.org/synodresources in order to view the charts contained in Appendix A in color.

Outline of the report

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II. The mandate: history, analysis, and approach

III. Laying the foundation

- A. *Knowledge of God*
- B. *Knowledge of the natural world*
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IV. Biblical principles on caring for creation

- A. *A biblical, contemporary testimony*
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- A. *Degradation of the earth's habitability*
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- A. *The climate system*
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IX. Translating knowledge and gratitude into responsible action and joyful service

- A. *Previous declarations on creation care and climate change*
- B. *What can we learn from these declarations?*
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Appendices

Appendix A: A Climate Change Primer

Appendix B: Refereed, Gray, and Popular Literature

Appendix C: Declarations on Creation Care and Climate Change

Appendix D: Background to the Cornwall Declaration

Appendix E: Recommended Publications and Resources for Action

Appendix F: Glossary

Appendix G: Biographies of Contributors

I. Introduction

We acknowledge that “the earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1), taking seriously our task of imaging God’s love for the world and all creation (cf. Gen. 1:26). We acknowledge and honor our Creator as we serve and keep his creation (cf. Gen. 2:15), ever seeking to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (cf. Micah 6:8). We are stewards of God’s gifts, stewards of God’s world. The foundation for our stewardship is the Bible, through which we come to know God’s will for our lives (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17) and for creation (cf. Rom. 8:18-25). Scripture also explains that creation is an eloquent proclaimer of God’s glory (Psalm 19:1)—a revelation so convicting that not a single human being has a valid excuse for not knowing God’s everlasting power and divinity (Rom. 1:20).

It is with gratitude to God for the blessings of his Word and his creation that we convey this, our task force report on caring for God’s creation, to Synod 2012 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America in response to its mandate of 2010 (see *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 870-72).

II. The mandate: history, analysis, and approach

The committee carefully reviewed its mandate and its approach to these issues to ensure it stayed true to the intentions of Synod 2010:

That synod instruct the Board of Trustees to assemble a task force that will report to Synod 2012, to identify a biblical and Reformed perspective of our position on creation stewardship, including climate change, applicable to this millennium, for congregations, society, and our global gospel partners.

Grounds:

- a. *Our World Belongs to God*, paragraph 51—“We commit ourselves to honor all God’s creatures and to protect them from abuse and extinction, for our world belongs to God”—makes clear our responsibility to address this concern.
- b. Sufficient relevant material already exists from which we may draw to create such a position statement.
- c. A great deal of the science on this subject elicits widely varying opinions that often retard any active response.
- d. There is an urgent need to focus on the biblical and Reformed perspective so that we may unify our community around common ground and enable the formulation of concrete positive action strategies.

(*Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 871-72)

In order that our work be of maximum assistance to the Christian Reformed Church, we also noted the immediate and longer term denominational contexts in which our task force came to be.

The immediate event that precipitated the formation of our task force by Synod 2010 was a divided synodical advisory committee. This “pre-advice”

committee, assigned to review segments of the work of the Board of Trustees, could not agree on recommending ratification of the Board of Trustees' previous endorsement of the "Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change." This declaration, the product of a 2009 Micah Network¹ conference in Limuru, Kenya, was signed by senior staff of CRWRC and the Office of Social Justice and was subsequently endorsed both by the executive committee of CRWRC and by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA. The core concern of a significant segment of the committee was the declaration's assertion that human activity has contributed to the degradation of creation and the potentially dangerous warming of earth's climate. Neither the science nor the theology behind this assertion was clear to them—thus the recommendation to form a task force. Similar concerns were raised by individual members of the church, illustrating the urgency and timeliness of this issue.

At the same time that Synod 2010 was dealing with objections and disagreements arising from climate change issues, it was instructing denominational staff to do more to raise the awareness of members of the CRC around creation stewardship issues.

Widening our historical lens a bit, we observe that the CRC has a long history of making significant intellectual, theological, and spiritual contributions toward environmentally responsible living. Because of our Reformed, Christian view of this world and of God's plan for its redemption, CRC members have the theological roots to affirm a commitment to work vigorously to protect and heal the creation for the glory of the Creator, as we wait for the restoration of the creation to wholeness. Long before "ecology," "environmental protection," and "creation care" became buzzwords, CRC members were living out a deep commitment—in their callings and in their lives—to the respectful treatment of God's earth, honoring the claim of Psalm 24:1 that "the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it."

However, the prophetic voice calling us to fulfill our appointment by the Creator as "earthkeepers and caretakers to tend the earth, enjoy it, and love our neighbors" (*Our World Belongs to God*, para. 10) has often come more from faithful individuals, congregations, and scholars than from a prophetic consensus at the level of the denomination or its agencies and institutions.

There is good anecdotal evidence to conclude that for decades CRC members and congregations have examined their behavior in light of the biblical calling to be stewards of God's creation and resources. They have found both small and large ways to resist the allure of wastefulness and overconsumption by making personal lifestyle choices to reduce, reuse, and recycle. They have contributed much to assisting others in times of distress and in developing their potential.

CRC scholars also had, and still have, a prophetic voice for creation care, producing much helpful information and suggesting many practices for sustainable development and responsible living. Already three decades ago, the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship researched and produced the book *Earthkeeping* (Loren Wilkinson, Peter DeVos, Calvin DeWitt, Eugene Dykema,

¹ The Micah Network is a global coalition of approximately 350 Christian, evangelical relief, and development organizations that meet periodically to discuss and cooperate around major issues confronting the poor and disenfranchised. Both CRWRC and the CRC Office of Social Justice are members and active participants.

and Vernon Ehlers [Eerdmans, 1980]), a pioneer publication in the field of Christian environmental stewardship.

Several synods have made an effort to address creation care. First, in response to various overtures in the early 1990s, the synodical Task Force on CRC Publications and the Environment examined the use of resources at the denominational level, and synod commissioned CRC Publications to produce study guides on the ethical framework of environmental stewardship. This resulted in the publication of the first edition of *Earthwise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues* in 1994 by CRC Publications, published again in second (2007) and third (2011) editions by Faith Alive Christian Resources. The task force has cited and used material from the third edition, *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*, at various places in this report. Second, Synod 1997 alerted churches to the Reformed Ecumenical Council's report "The Just Stewardship of Land and Creation," which includes guidelines and recommendations that can be used by churches, classes, and institutions.

In 2008, in response to an overture from Classis Niagara requesting synod to consider stewardship guidelines, synod instructed the Board of Trustees to establish and maintain a webpage with up-to-date eco-justice resources. The overture requested clear guidelines for CRC institutions, agencies, and congregations to implement practices that respect God's creation. Such a request came out of the strong concerns that CRC members, congregations, and institutions engage in excessive levels of consumption similar to the rest of our affluent society.

All three of synod's actions on creation care over the past two decades served to help the denomination to embrace the work already undertaken by many individuals and congregations. The Creation Stewardship Task Force hopes to expand on this important work in this report.

Climate change

Despite the strong tradition of stewardship in our Reformed worldview and significant involvement on the part of CRC members whose vocation places them directly at the core of the scientific inquiry process, the denomination has, until recently, not engaged one of the most pressing stewardship issues of today—climate change.

In fact, as noted earlier, the public engagement of this issue on the part of denominational staff and leaders is the precipitating event bringing about the creation of our task force and the report that follows.

Given the mandate of the task force and the context briefly outlined above, the task force believes the report must focus on helping the CRC reach a consensus on these issues that is rooted in our commitment to the care of creation and in Reformed theological and scientific knowledge. This in turn must support and inspire constructive engagement that is urgently required by the reality of a warming world. We hope that the work of the task force can serve as a guide to shape denominational ministry with partners around the world and the education of CRC members, as well as to inform an effective advocacy response from individuals, agencies, and the denomination itself.

The task force is confident that its work is rooted deeply in the biblical and Reformed heritage we all share, and will therefore resonate deeply with the CRC. We are also aware that the topic of climate change generates intense

passion and diverse opinions on many levels, and that some of our conclusions may draw opposition. Nevertheless, it is our hope that the report may serve to enhance and deepen the critical conversations and engagement of the wider church and society. Our hope is that this report will at least serve to unify our community around common principles and understandings regarding care for God's creation. We also deeply desire that the in-depth information about the science of climate change and potential implications will serve to enable and motivate the participation of Christians of all political and cultural affiliations in their formulation of concrete positive action strategies.

III. Laying the foundation

There is a great deal of perceived conflict between science and religion. Some of this can be traced to differences in what philosophers call epistemology. Epistemology is the study of knowledge: what it is, how it is acquired, and how we know what we know. Our knowledge of God is acquired differently from our knowledge of the natural world. Knowledge of God must be revealed to us by God in some way. Knowledge of the structure and operation of the physical world can be discovered through human investigation using the gifts of investigation given by God.

A. *Knowledge of God*

Psalm 19:1-2 tells us, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge."

Basic to theology is the notion of revelation, the idea that God reveals knowledge of himself to humans. Revelation is the only way humans can acquire knowledge of God. In other words, unless God condescends to make himself known to us, humans will not know God. This is in contrast to how we acquire knowledge of the physical world. God does not need to reveal the structure and function of the physical world to us. We have direct access through our senses to the physical world. We observe some aspect of the physical world, test those observations, and draw conclusions based on those observations. But in order to know anything at all about God, God has to reveal himself. Following the teaching of Scripture, the Belgic Confession identifies two ways that God has chosen to disclose himself to human persons: through creation (general revelation) and through Scripture (special revelation).

God reveals himself through creation. Paul indicates in Romans 1:20 that God's "invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature" can be clearly seen all around us. John Calvin writes that God, "in order that none might be excluded from the means of obtaining felicity" has been pleased "so to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily place himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.5.1). As a result, humans are without excuse for not acknowledging God and praising God for his wisdom and glory.

Despite the clarity of God's self-revelation in creation, sin has distorted the human ability to acquire true knowledge of God through creation alone. Paul explains that humans inevitably distort what they see in creation and

end up worshipping something less than the true God as he has revealed himself. Calvin elaborates this sentiment, writing that although God's glory shines in creation like "bright lamps lighted up to show forth the glory of its Author," these lamps are "altogether insufficient of themselves to lead us into the right path" (*Institutes*, 1.5.14). As a result, God graciously gives humans God's own Word, which both clarifies the knowledge of God available in creation and explains the way humans are able to have a right relationship with their Creator. Because God is incomprehensible, humans will never know God completely. But Scripture, along with the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, enables human persons to know as much as they need to about God in this life to be in a restored relationship with God.

Creation, therefore, is one of the two ways or "books," as the Belgic Confession says, through which God has chosen to reveal himself to humanity. In fact, for many people creation may be the first encounter they have with the eternal power and divine nature of God. Creation is thus an evangelical witness to the power and glory of God. Given this understanding of creation, Christians should be compelled to ask whether the degradation of creation distorts this powerful witness. Can a smog-filled atmosphere and polluted lakes point to the Creator in the same way as a pristine river and clear blue sky? Does a person in a large city looking through the brown haze at seemingly dulled stars feel the same awe as the psalmist who, observing the beauty of the unpolluted night sky, exclaimed, "What is mankind that you are mindful of them?" (Ps. 8:4). Clearly, no small part of our concern for creation should be a concern to preserve this glorious theater of God's might and glory.

B. Knowledge of the natural world

Scientific Method

Knowledge of the natural world comes about through our observing what happens, and discovering universal laws that explain what we see. Scientists develop hypotheses—from a combination of knowledge and imagination—to explain what they see in reality. Hypotheses are testable because they make predictions of future events based on past events. Some hypotheses regarding climate change are tested against prehistoric records of geologic and climate changes. A hypothesis is refined over time through testing and debate. This process hones the hypothesis into a clearer statement of reality, often aided by mathematical formulae. Although, in some sense, a hypothesis can never be fully proven, its certainty can be raised to very high levels by this ongoing process. The result is that the hypothesis progresses to a theory and then, infrequently, to a law.² This is the scientific method.

Science is a search for an understanding of how the physical universe operates. It spans a range of disciplines, including physics, chemistry, biology, geology, meteorology, oceanography, ecology, and cosmology, all of which are relevant to the biosphere in which we live. Science has developed theories such as gravity, electromagnetic radiation (explaining the behavior of light, radio waves, microwaves, X-rays, etc.), and the relativity of space

² The definition of what is meant by a "scientific law" varies with scientific discipline and is itself worth a philosophical discussion. We use it here to simply identify those theories that have progressed to such a level of maturity that we accept them as true in our everyday life. For example, we ignore the Law of Gravity at our peril.

and time. Some of these theories are codified as laws, such as Newton's law of universal gravitation or the laws of electromagnetism.

Explanations of phenomena develop over time and are changed with new developments in knowledge. For example, both Newton's laws of motion and Einstein's theory of relativity explain the behavior of objects influenced by gravity. Both predict very closely the same behavior for most of what we observe every day, but for applications where greater precision is required (for example, GPS technology or interplanetary space flights) it becomes clear that Einstein's theory is superior, more fully explaining the behavior of gravity.

Science may be considered a search for truth where truth is not capitalized and is understood by scientists to always be, to some extent, provisional. Science has an element of uncertainty, but this uncertainty is quantifiable and, for the most part, reducible in time. In our daily life, we often say that the outcome of an event, such as a sports game, is uncertain, and we may argue that the uncertainty is quantifiable because there are some odds associated with the outcome based on expected team performance. Ultimately, however, that event is uncertain until the game is played and then all uncertainty is removed.

Scientific uncertainty becomes more difficult to quantify as phenomena become more complex and may change with time. For example, the uncertainty in tomorrow's weather forecast is well understood and actually quite small, but the uncertainty in the forecast for ten days from now is substantially greater and considerably more difficult to quantify.

Uncertainty is the focus of scientific research; consequently, scientists speak often about uncertainty. This may lead the public to think that all science is totally uncertain. That is far from the truth. Scientists rarely discuss science that is certain because it is uninteresting in the sense that it is well understood. Scientists should speak more clearly about uncertainty, but the public should understand that the cutting edge of science is about defining what the limits of uncertainty are and how to go about reducing that uncertainty.

Scientists speak to each other by reporting their research in peer reviewed articles, or "primary literature."³ Submitted articles are reviewed by carefully chosen peer scientists who can provide a scholarly review of the submission. Articles are only published when they pass the review process and earn the approval of the journal editor. This process is designed to keep researchers precise, honest, and thorough in reporting their results. Over time, published articles can be used to track the progression of scientific ideas.

In addition to peer reviewed articles, science is reported in "gray literature" and "popular literature." Gray literature consists of reports from federal or state agencies, colleges and universities, think tanks, institutes, and foundations. This literature is important, but it is not considered as authoritative as primary literature because it typically does not undergo the same kind of disciplined peer review. Popular literature consists of newspapers, magazines, leaflets, and brochures. Like gray literature, it also is important and, while it may be useful, is not normally considered authoritative. Many people use the gray or popular literature to learn about scientific issues and

³ The information in this and the following paragraph is expanded in Appendix B. We think that it is very important for the broader community to understand the distinctions drawn here, and we encourage a careful reading of that appendix.

to inform their opinions. This literature is often easier to read and understand, and it may be written in a less technical or a nontechnical way.

Arguably the most contentious area between religion and science is the nature of authority. Much of religious and theological discussion is concerned with the nature of divine authority and how we humans are to understand that authority. Science appeals to authority but *only* in the sense of an appeal to the consensus of the scientific community. There is no appeal to a higher, absolute authority. When a scientist begins a sentence about science with “We believe . . .,” he or she is making a statement about the consensus that the scientific community has reached on the subject. To use an overly simplistic situation, consider a scientist who says that “we believe the earth is spherical.” He or she means that the consensus of the scientific community, based on both observation and theory, is that the earth is spherical, and the statement is an appeal to the authority of the community. The flat-earth society, which exists and maintains that the earth is flat, is not viewed as authoritative because that position is not credible within the context of scientific understanding (and uncertainty) and, hence, not part of the consensus.

The scientific method is limited to explanations of causes and effects among natural events or “phenomena”—that is, events or aggregate processes that are observable in one way or another. It can explain how things happen, but it cannot address deeper questions such as the meaning of life or the existence of God. Since scientific tests of hypotheses must be repeatable, science also cannot address the existence of miracles that are exceptions to the normal laws of nature. Furthermore, science works from the presupposition that nature operates on the basis of fixed, predictable, universal laws. It cannot explain the origin of those laws, but it can help us understand how those laws affect the created order and life within that order.

C. *Unity of knowledge*

God is the creator of everything that exists—spiritual and physical. The fixed, predictable, universal laws of nature were put in place by God. The doctrine of providence teaches not only that God created the world with these laws but also that his ongoing care of the world includes sustaining the world through these laws. This does not mean God is bound in some way to the laws of nature. God can and does at times supersede these universal laws. Scripture testifies to this in numerous stories—but perhaps most dramatically in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ordinarily, however, God uses the laws of nature as the means for his continuous care of the world.

Faith in God includes recognition of the means God uses to providentially care for creation. The fact that God is sustaining creation through the laws of nature ensures, at least to some degree, the reliability of the scientific method. Scientists are trained to recognize the ordered patterns in nature, and to test their investigations of various parts of the creation by means of these patterns that God continues to maintain. Thus scientific findings should be considered reliable, insofar as they are dealing with the realm of observable phenomena.

Scientific knowing, then, is one way God has given humans to learn about the world around them. Christians should wholeheartedly affirm the work of scientists who, through their investigation of the physical world, offer information that may enhance human flourishing and insights about creation that further display God’s invisible qualities and offer opportunities to praise God.

IV. Biblical principles on caring for creation

A. *A biblical, contemporary testimony*

The CRC's *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* provides an excellent framework for examining the biblical principles that underlie creation care. By following the biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation, we hope to make clear that the gospel message includes the entire creation.

With biblical principles firmly in hand, we are equipped to think about what the response of individuals and the church as a whole ought to be. Confession of our participation in the degradation of creation is one aspect of our response. Commitment to discipleship that develops Christian character is another aspect. Character that is oriented around love for God and neighbor reflects a desire to care for the world God has entrusted to us and those around us for the benefit of all of creation.

We therefore present portions of the Contemporary Testimony as a reflection of biblical teaching on creation care, outlining what this teaching means for how we live as stewards of God's world.

1. Creation

7. Our world belongs to God—
not to us or earthly powers,
not to demons, fate, or chance.
The earth is the Lord's.

*God alone is Creator.
The earth is the Lord's.*

Reflecting Scripture, the Contemporary Testimony affirms God as Creator of all that is. God's ultimate ownership of everything is implied from the fact of his creating, and is also taught directly in Scripture (Ps. 24:1; 50:9-12). Because the world belongs to God, humans do not have the right to use creation as they please. Rather, humans are stewards, caretakers of the earth that is the Lord's. All the things that we can say we own—our land, our homes, our cars, our copyrights, and our patents—ultimately belong to God.

8. In the beginning, God—
Father, Word, and Spirit—
called this world into being
out of nothing,
and gave it shape and order.

See Genesis 1, where Creator, Word, and Spirit call creation into order. For the role of the Word in creation and Jesus as the Word, see John 1:1-14.

9. God formed sky, land, and sea;
stars above, moon and sun,
making a world of color, beauty, and variety—
a fitting home for plants and animals, and us—
a place to work and play,
worship and wonder,
love and laugh.
God rested
and gave us rest.

In the beginning
everything was very good.

On creation, besides Genesis 1 and 2, see Psalm 19; 33:6-9; and 104.

All of creation is created good.

10. Made in God's image
to live in loving communion with our
Maker,
we are appointed earthkeepers and
caretakers
to tend the earth, enjoy it,
and love our neighbors.
God uses our skills
for the unfolding and well-being of his
world
so that creation and all who live in it may flourish.
*For the image of God, see Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10;
and James 3:9.*

*Humans are both an
inseparable part of the
created order and have a
special role within and a
unique responsibility for all
parts of the biosphere.*

As imagebearers of God, humans are entrusted with taking care of the creation. Scripture presents this responsibility as both a gift and a command. Living as God intended includes taking this responsibility seriously.

2. Fall

13. In the beginning of human history,
our first parents walked with God.
But rather than living by the Creator's word of life,
they listened to the serpent's lie
and fell into sin.
In their rebellion
they tried to be like God.
As sinners, Adam and Eve feared
the nearness of God
and hid.
*For the fall of humanity into sin, see Genesis 3. On the serpent, see, in addition to
Genesis 3, Revelation 12:9 and 20:2.*

*In our fallen condition we are
alienated from God and creation.*

In trying to be like God, Adam and Eve sinned and were removed from the presence of God. This alienated humanity from God, each other, and the rest of creation.

The legacy of human sin is not merely about disobedience but also about an inherited deformity all humans live with. This deformity affects everything we do and even how we think. We no longer acknowledge the true God (Rom. 1). We no longer recognize how we are supposed to live. As a result, we fail to take seriously the gift of stewardship. We are inclined to corrupt our proper dominion of God's world into domination and abuse.

15. When humans deface God's image,
the whole world suffers:
we abuse the creation or idolize it;
we are estranged from our Creator,
from our neighbor,
from our true selves,
and from all that God has made.
*On the defacing of God's image, see Romans 1:21-23; for the restoration of the
image in Christ, see Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:22-24, and
Colossians 3:10.*

*Human sin affects all of
creation.*

The history of exploration of the "new world" has taught us that when humans attempt to dominate other people and cultures, the mindset of domination can stretch to the environment as well. Abuse of our fellow human

beings reflects an overall attitude of disrespect for creation as a whole. Repenting from this attitude and seeking restoration with each other, including native cultures, opens the door to restoring a right relationship with creation.

3. Redemption

18. While justly angry,
God did not turn away
from a world bent on destruction
but turned to face it in love.
With patience and tender care
the Lord set out
on the long road of redemption
to reclaim the lost as his people
and the world as his kingdom.

For God's response to sin, see Genesis 3:9-15, John 3:16, and Luke 1:68-75; for the aim to restore the kingdom, see Revelation 11:15.

God's plan of salvation includes the restoration and reconciliation of all creation.

23. Remembering the promise
to reconcile the world to himself,
God joined our humanity in Jesus Christ—
the eternal Word made flesh.
He is the long-awaited Messiah,
one with us
and one with God,
fully human and fully divine,
conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.

For Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, see Luke 1:31-35, John 1:1-14, and Hebrews 1:2-3.

The fact that the eternal Christ was made flesh affirms the goodness and value of the created world. Against the many ancient religions that promoted escape from the material world, Christians affirmed the material world because the second person of the Trinity chose to take on flesh, becoming fully human so that humanity could become like him.

24. As the second Adam,
Jesus chose the path we had rejected.
In his baptism and temptations,
teaching and miracles,
battles with demons
and friendships with sinners,
Jesus lived a full and righteous human life before us.
As God's true Son,
he lovingly obeyed the Father
and made present in deed and word
the coming rule of God.

In Romans 5:12-21, Christ is designated the second Adam. Hebrews 2:10-18 and 4:14-5:2 teach about his life of righteous humanity; the announcement of the kingdom is found, among other places, in Mark 1:1, 14, 15.

We look to Jesus as our example.

25. Standing in our place,
Jesus suffered during his years on earth,
especially in the tortures of the cross.
He carried God's judgment on our sin—
his sacrifice removed our guilt.
God raised him from the dead:
he walked out of the grave,
conqueror of sin and death—
Lord of Life!

We are set right with God,
given new life,
and called to walk with him
in freedom from sin's dominion.

For Jesus' lifelong suffering, see Hebrews 5:7-10. All four of the gospel passion accounts portray the depths of his suffering on the cross. Jesus' resurrection victory is proclaimed often, especially in Matthew 28:1-10 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

Because of Christ's work on our behalf, Christians are now able to live as God intended. No longer slaves to sin, we are now slaves to Christ. Our minds and hearts have been healed through Christ's atoning sacrifice. We are enabled to hear God's call to follow Christ and his mission in the world. Of primary importance is the call to go, preach the gospel, and make disciples of all nations.

Discipleship entails teaching others all that Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20). This includes the command to be caretakers of the creation. Caring for God's world is part of our task as Christians. We need not despair that this command is too difficult or too much for us to accomplish. God is with us always and enables us to follow him in all that God commands through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit within us. God has called us, and God will work in and through us to accomplish what he intends (Phil. 1:6; 4:13).

4. The mission of God's people

Given what the Bible teaches about the goodness of creation, the task of humans to care for creation, the effects of sin on our ability to know how to exercise proper stewardship of creation, and God's gracious sacrifice of Jesus Christ that offers the restoration of proper human dominion of creation, we may then ask how we, as followers of Jesus Christ, should live in light of God's command to care for his world. Once again, the Contemporary Testimony offers a biblically based starting point for considering how humans should fulfill our task as earthkeepers.

43. Jesus Christ rules over all.
To follow this Lord is
to serve him wherever we are
without fitting in,
light in darkness,
salt in a spoiling world.

On the rule of Christ over the whole world, see Philippians 2:9-11, Colossians 1:15-20, and Revelation 11:15; on being light, salt, and not fitting in, see Matthew 5:13-16 and Romans 12:1-2.

44. Life is a gift from God's hand,
who created all things.
Receiving this gift thankfully,
with reverence for the Creator,
we protest and resist
all that harms, abuses, or diminishes the gift of life,
whether by abortion, pollution, gluttony,
addiction, or foolish risks.
Because it is a sacred trust,
we treat all life with awe and respect,
especially when it is most vulnerable—
whether growing in the womb,
touched by disability or disease,
or drawing a last breath.

*All life is a gift from God and
should be treated with respect
and dignity.*

When forced to make decisions
at life's raw edges,
we seek wisdom in community,
guided by God's Word and Spirit.
*On respect for all life, see Deuteronomy 5:17 and Psalm 104:14-30 and 139:14-16.
Our very bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.*

50. Grateful for advances
in science and technology,
we participate in their development,
fostering care for creation
and respect for the gift of life.
We welcome discoveries that prevent or cure diseases
and that help support healthy lives.
We respect embryonic life,
approaching each new discovery,
whether of science or of medical technique,
with careful thought,
seeking the will of God.

In Genesis 1:28-31 and 9:1-7, God gives to humanity the right and responsibility to develop and care for creation; for a reflection on the limitations of human technology and need for divine wisdom, see Job 28; for the continuing goodness of creation and the need for a prayerful approach to what we use of it, see 1 Timothy 4:4-5.

51. We lament that our abuse of creation
has brought lasting damage
to the world we have been given:
polluting streams and soil,
poisoning the air,
altering the climate,
and damaging the earth.
We commit ourselves
to honor all God's creatures
and to protect them from abuse and extinction,
for our world belongs to God.
*Genesis 1:28-29; 7:1-5; Psalm 8; and Romans 8:18-25 teach that we are entrusted
with caring for the earth.*

As we are convicted by the Holy Spirit, we need to confess and repent of actions that degrade the biosphere.

5. New creation

We recognize that our efforts to care for creation will not bring in a new creation. We also recognize that there are many challenges in our world to God's rule, but we believe that we should confront those challenges by seeking to do God's will on earth, as it is in heaven. We must be responsible in our creation care even as we know that God's plans cannot and will not be thwarted by human actions. God is sovereign, and the earth will endure—"seedtime and harvest . . ." (Gen. 8:22)—until at a time known only to the Father (Matt. 24:36), Christ returns in triumph to complete what his resurrection started: the restoration of the heavens and earth. Thus our ultimate motivation in creation care is not any secular notion of "saving the planet"; salvation is through Christ alone. The Christian's ultimate motivation for creation care is love for God and neighbor. This love for our neighbor includes both this generation and generations to come because we do not know the time of Christ's return.

55. Our hope for a new creation is not tied to what humans can do, for we believe that one day every challenge to God's rule will be crushed. His kingdom will fully come, and the Lord will rule. Come, Lord Jesus, come. *On this hope, see 1 Peter 1:3-12, 2 Peter 3:3-13, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, and Revelation 11:15.*

We are not required nor even able to "save the world," but we are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ, the one who has and is setting things right, in joyful love and service to God and our neighbors.

56. We long for that day when our bodies are raised, the Lord wipes away our tears, and we dwell forever in the presence of God. We will take our place in the new creation, where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, and the Lord will be our light. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

For the coming of the kingdom of God, see Matthew 24, Acts 1:10-11, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, and Revelation 19:11-16. First Corinthians 15 speaks of the resurrection of the body, Revelation 21:4 of the wiping away of tears, and Revelation 21:22-27 of the light of heaven.

57. On that day we will see our Savior face to face, sacrificed Lamb and triumphant King, just and gracious. He will set all things right, judge evil, and condemn the wicked. We face that day without fear, for the Judge is our Savior, whose shed blood declares us righteous. We live confidently, anticipating his coming, offering him our daily lives—our acts of kindness, our loyalty, and our love—knowing that he will weave even our sins and sorrows into his sovereign purpose. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Our being set right with God is eagerly anticipated by all of the created order (Romans 8).

Revelation 5 describes the Lion and the Lamb. For the just judgments of the Lord, see Revelation 19:1-10. A picture of the multitude of those declared righteous in Christ is found in Revelation 7:9-17. The concept of God weaving all things together is found, among other places, in Romans 8:28-39.

58. With the whole creation we join the song: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" He has made us a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and we will reign on earth. God will be all in all, righteousness and peace will flourish, everything will be made new, and every eye will see at last

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow. . . ."

that our world belongs to God.

Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus!

For the imagery of this paragraph, see Exodus 19:5-6, Isaiah 40, 1 Peter 2:9-10, and Revelation 4-5.

B. Basic principles for earthkeeping

Some basic principles for earthkeeping naturally follow from our understanding of Scripture as outlined in the Contemporary Testimony. The following principles are a summary of the principles given in *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*, third edition (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011), pp. 72-80; used and adapted with permission.

1. Earthkeeping principle

- a. As the Lord keeps and sustains us, so we must keep and sustain our Lord's creation.
- b. Genesis 2:15 tells us that Adam and Adam's descendants were expected to *serve* the garden and to *keep* it.
- c. The Hebrew word '*abad*' ("serve") in this passage occurs 290 times in the Old Testament, and it is most often translated as "serve," as in Joshua 24:15: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."
- d. God also expected Adam and his descendants to meet the needs of the garden of creation so that it would persist and flourish. The word for *keep* (*shamar*) is sometimes translated as "guard," "safeguard," "take care of," and "look after," indicating a loving, caring, sustaining kind of keeping.
- e. When we fulfill God's mandate to serve and to keep the creation, we make sure that the creatures and other living things under our care are maintained so that they can flourish. They must remain connected with members of the same species, with the many other species with which they interact, and with the soil, air, and water they depend on.
- f. As God *keeps* those who believe, so God's people should *keep* his creation.

Earthkeeping

As the Lord keeps and sustains us, so we must keep and sustain our Lord's creation.

2. Fruitfulness principle

- a. We should enjoy but not destroy creation's fruitfulness.
- b. God's blessing of fruitfulness is for the whole creation. In Genesis 1, God declares, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky" (1:20). And God blesses these creatures with fruitfulness: "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth" (1:22).

- c. While we are expected to enjoy creation and its many fruits, we may not destroy the *fruitfulness* that creation's fullness depends on. Like Noah, we must preserve and care for God's many species whose interactions and relationships with each other and with land and water make up the fabric of the biosphere.

Fruitfulness

We should enjoy but not destroy creation's fruitfulness.

- d. We must let the profound admonition of Ezekiel 34:18 echo in our minds: "Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?"

3. Sabbath principle

- a. We must provide for creation's *Sabbath* rests. In Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, God commands us to set aside one day in seven as a day of rest for people and for animals. God commands, "Six days you shall labor and do all your

Sabbath

We must provide for creation's Sabbath rests.

- work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns" (Ex. 20:9-10). This Sabbath day is given to help us all get "off the treadmill," to protect us all from the hazards of continuous work, to help us pull our lives together again. It's a time for rest and for expressing appreciation to God for the creation resources given for human use. In the New Testament, Jesus affirms and clarifies the meaning of Sabbath; the Sabbath is made for those who are served by it—not the other way around (Mark 2:27).

- b. Not only will every seventh day be set aside for rest for humans and animals, but every seventh year is also to be set aside to give rest to the land. "For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the LORD" (Lev. 25:1-7). The land is not to be relentlessly pressed either.

- c. Does this command create a problem for people? Leviticus 25:20-21 says, "You may ask, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?'" God's answer: "I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years." God was instructing people to trust his provision. Blessing and fruitfulness come from God. "If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit" (Lev. 26:3-4).

- d. Sabbath, therefore, is deeply connected to the flourishing of all of creation. This Sabbath is not a legalistic requirement; it's a profound

principle. In some farming regions, the land is allowed to rest every *second* year, while in others, practices like conservation tillage and cover crops are used, without any “year off.” The good steward will use practices specific to local conditions that are best suited to sustaining the soil. The key is the intent to keep the resource fruitful for the generations to come. The Sabbath applies to all of the resources of creation that we use.

4. Discipleship principle: We must be disciples of Jesus Christ—the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things.
 - a. No question about it—the Bible calls us to be disciples of, or *followers after*, someone. But we are not to be disciples of the Adam of Genesis, who neglected to serve (*‘abad*) and keep (*shamar*) the creation. The Bible tells us that we must be disciples of “the last Adam,” Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:45).
 - b. All who follow Jesus follow the example of the one who makes all things new, the one who makes all things right again (Rev. 21:5). Colossians 1:19-20 puts it this way: “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself *all things*” (emphasis added).
 - c. Who is this Christ we are to follow? He is the one *in whom* and *for whom* all things were created (Col. 1:16). He is the one *through whom* God made the universe and *through whom* God redeems his people (John 1:3; Col. 1:16, 20; Heb. 1:3).
 - d. God reaches out sacrificially to make things right again. Jesus Christ, the final Adam, undoes the damage done by the first Adam and his followers. While followers of Adam bring death and degradation, Christ brings life and restoration (Rom. 5:12-17). The children of God work as followers and disciples of the final Adam. People who are happy being Christ’s servant stewards are people for whom the whole creation is eagerly looking (Rom. 8:19).
5. Kingdom priority principle: We must seek first the kingdom of God.

Our culture today proclaims, “Seek first a job (money, success), and all other things will be yours as well.” It is tempting to yield to this message and to follow people whose highest priority is to gather up immense material gains. But Jesus advises us to seek first the kingdom of God and God’s way of doing things; then everything else we need will be given to us as well (Matt. 6:33). In seeking God’s kingdom, we discover that happiness and joy are *by-products* of our stewardship; fulfillment comes as a *result* of seeking the kingdom. It first is our calling, our vocation. We affirm this calling whenever we pray as

Discipleship

We must be disciples of Jesus Christ—the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things.

God’s kingdom

We must seek first the kingdom of God.

Jesus taught us: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done *on earth . . .*" (Matt. 6:9-10).

6. Contentment principle: *We must seek true contentment.*

- a. Everyone's prayer today should be that of Psalm 119:36: "Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain." Relentless pressing of land and life to produce more and more seriously degrades God's creation.

- b. In 1 Timothy 6:6 we learn that "godliness with contentment is great gain." Contentment means aiming to have the things that will sustain us while not pressing beyond that.

An Amish saying based on this passage goes like this: "To desire to be rich is to desire to have more than what we need to be content."

Hebrews 13:5 puts it this way:

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

Contentment

We should seek godliness with contentment.

- c. Being content helps us personally, and it helps preserve creation's integrity. All the things we use, all the things we make, everything we manipulate, everything we accumulate derives from creation itself. If we learn to seek godly contentment as our great gain, we will take and shape less of God's earth. We will demand less from the land. We will leave room for God's other creatures. We will be responsible stewards, caretakers, keepers of creation. We will regularly allow creation to heal and perpetuate its fruitfulness, to the glory and praise of its Maker.

7. Praxis principle: *We must practice what we believe.*

- a. Scripture admonishes us to act on what we know is right. The failure of people to act on what they know is right is well-documented—and the shortcoming challenged—in the pages of Scripture:

"My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. Their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but they do not put them into practice" (Ezek. 33:31-32).

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

- b. Merely knowing God's requirements for stewardship is not enough. Merely believing in God is not enough, for Scripture tells us that even demons believe in God (James 2:19). We must practice God's

Praxis

We must practice what we believe.

requirements, or they do no good. Creation care is an integral part of the church's evangelical witness to the world.

8. The con-servancy principle: *We* must return creation's service to us with service of our own.
 - a. This principle overarches all the others. The word *conservancy* refers to conservation and often denotes an organization that regulates fisheries and/or protects other natural resources. In this discussion this word is hyphenated to draw attention to its root meaning—*con* + *serve* means "to serve with."
 - b. We already know from experience that the creation serves us with good food, beauty, herbs, fiber, medicine, pleasant microclimates, continual soil-making, nutrient processing, and seed production. The garden and the larger biosphere provide what ecologists call "ecosystem services," such as water purification by evaporation and percolation, moderation of flood peaks and drought flows by river-system wetlands, development of soils from the weathering of rocks, and moderation of local climates by nearby bodies of water. Yet Genesis addresses *our* service to the garden.
 - c. The garden's service *to us* is implicit; service *from us* to the garden is explicit. Like Adam, we are expected to return the service of the garden with service of our own. This is a reciprocal service, a "service with"—in other words, a *con-service*, a *con-servancy*, a *con-servation*. This reciprocal service defines an engaging relationship between garden and gardener, between the biosphere and its safeguarding stewards. Our love of our Creator God, God's love of the creation, and our imagining this love of God—all join together to commission us as *con-servers* of creation.

Con-Servancy

We must return creation's service to us with service of our own.

V. History of caring for creation

A. The habitable world

1. The earth is the Lord's

This is a proclamation given throughout Scripture. "To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it" (Deut. 10:14), "for the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world" (1 Sam. 2:8b). God is the landlord, and we are God's tenants (Lev. 25:23), for "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (1 Cor. 10:26).

In Psalm 24:1 it is written, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." This biblical announcement, going back some 3,000 years, makes explicit that the *physical earth* and the *biosphere* are the Lord's. The Hebrew words here are *eret*z for "earth" and *tebel* for "the habitable world." First written in Hebrew, Psalm 24:1 was translated into Greek by rabbis for the library at Alexandria in the time of Alexander

the Great. That translation, the Septuagint, renders these words this way: The *ge* is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the *oikoumene* and all who dwell in it.

Ge is the root for our word *geology*, and *oikoumene* is the root for our word *ecumenical*. The *oikoumene*, in antiquity, was used to refer to "the habitable world" or "habitable earth," the earthly abode for us and all living creatures. The word *oikoumene* comes from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning "house" or "household." In our day, that remarkable interwoven fabric of life-sustaining habitats, the *oikoumene*, is called the biosphere.

There are more words whose root is *oikos*, including ecology ("oikology"—study of the household) and economics ("oikonomics"—management of the household). Most important for our task and privilege of caring for creation is the word *oikonomia*, the biblical translation for which is usually "stewardship."

2. *Oikoumene*: loving God and neighbor

Throughout history we have been increasing our understanding of the *oikoumene*. In the sense of its being the biosphere we have come to understand it as the remarkable system of processes and materials through which God sustains the habitable earth. In the sense of its being ecumenical we are coming to understand its meaning as it extends beyond "our own kind of people" to all people with whom we share the biosphere. In doing this we increasingly are putting into practice the biblical message on neighborliness, with its principal text being the reply of Jesus to one of his questioners: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37-40; also see Lev. 19:18, 34; Matt. 19:19; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8).

As we have broadened our understanding of who our neighbor is, we have embraced different kinds of people as part of *humankind*, and we have come to work more *ecumenically* across denominations in our vocations and Christian mission. This includes the recent union of the Reformed Ecumenical Council with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), of which the Christian Reformed Church in North America is a member. This ecumenical communion of Reformed churches spreads across 108 countries and consists of Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, and United churches that share roots in the 16th-century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox, and other Reformers. Our broadened communion is helping us through God's grace to proclaim the message of Psalm 24 and to present a convicting witness and service to the world as followers of Jesus Christ in proclaiming the good news to all creation. And, considered in the context of what we are learning about the biophysical world, our understanding of *ecumenical* goes well beyond the WCRC to embrace the whole of the habitable earth, the whole biosphere, in witness and in caring service.

From antiquity, the habitable world has been viewed as a great gift and a highly ordered abode within which people are to live in harmony. This

gift of the biosphere enrobes earth, even as earth hangs in orbit within our solar system and thus operates within the ineffable immensity and grandeur of the highly ordered system of systems we call the universe. The grand entirety of our universe has been given the beautiful name *cosmos*—the Greek word that affirms creation’s order and embraces *all things*. And this is the cosmos that God loves (John 3:16). It is no wonder that in imaging God’s love for the cosmos, we also can love the world as God does! “Of course not in its strivings . . .” as Abraham Kuyper wrote, but “because God has thought it out; because God has created it; because God has *maintained* it and *maintains* it to this day.” We cannot love God without loving what God loves.

Our world-and-life view, our way of seeing ourselves, the world, the biosphere, the creation, the cosmos—in space and in time—ranges from individual to provincial to biospheric to cosmic; it expands from microscopic to macroscopic, local to global, planetary to all things! In our time, standing as we are on earth and in its biosphere, our widening biospheric world-and-life view is illumined by images of God’s *oikoumene* seen through the lens of an orbiting satellite and of God’s inspired Word.

Accordingly, our stewardship extends to embrace God’s *oikoumene*, reaching as far as God’s love for the world; reaching as far as all things we affect and the world that affects us. Our stewardship is as wide, as deep, and as extensive as the systems we affect, and with which and within which we interact. Our stewardship images God’s wide-embracing love, bringing good news that meets creation’s expectation of the coming of the children of God (Rom. 8:20-22).

B. *A just, ordered, and lawful creation*

As we continue to understand the meaning of stewardship in our day, we continue to be affirmed in our biblical faith in the order and lawfulness of the cosmos—from its greatest components to its tiniest. God’s law is present at the dawn of creation, and it is by faith in God’s Word that we trust God’s law. And flowing from God’s law is God’s justice, not only in the dynamic structure and operations of creation, but also as prescribed to human beings as basic to responsible living in wholesome relationship with other people, other creatures, and the whole creation. Jesus Christ comes as the Son of Man not to abolish, but to fulfill God’s law (Matt. 5:17).

C. *The Word made flesh and the covenantal context of creation care*

Christianity derives its pervasive strength by translation of God into the flesh in Jesus Christ and by the translation of Holy Scripture into various languages in various cultures.⁴ Not only does God proclaim that God’s work is “very good” in the narrative of Genesis 1, but God takes on human flesh, joining with creation for the purpose of redeeming it. And similarly, as we translate the ancient understanding of God’s *oikoumene* (οἰκουμένη) into its scientific understanding as God’s *biosphere*, we come to understand the full-orbed beauty of God’s love for the cosmos. In this beauty we also come to understand the meaning of caring for creation in our time. Principles on the care of creation, gleaned from the overall canon of Scripture, reverberate

⁴ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 26.

in Jesus Christ, the *Logos* (Word) through whom the whole creation has its integrity. Locating ourselves within the canonical drama of Adam and on through Israel to Jesus crucified, risen, and commemorated in the Lord's Supper, we come to understand, in adopting the mind of Christ, that we participate with Christ in the reconciliation of all things.

D. Misappropriation of dominion

Human and cultural degradation needs particular attention in our study, because every one of the problems and challenges confronted in caring for creation has to do with people, both as the source of these problems and challenges and as those affected. This is particularly true in regard to land. The relationship of the ancient people of Israel with God focuses largely on the promise, expectation, and reality of receiving the promised land. In the biblical and Christian perspective the human-land relationship is interconnected with the Creator and Redeemer. Land relationships always have three major components: land, people, and the Lord. So it must be from this three-party perspective that we engage our thinking and action about land in our present day, for the earth continues to belong to the Lord.

Our first attention, therefore, is on this relationship. And as we consider the idea of land from this Christian perspective, we quickly recognize that farmers and agrarian cultures remain a pervasive segment of our world, with 2.5 billion people (among a world population of about 7 billion) gaining their livelihood from the land. This large agrarian population is entrusted with the land, as it has been for centuries and even millennia past. For them, stewardship of land held in trust over the generations remains the cultural and ethical norm. Holding the land in trust, however, as stewards and as cultures that transfer land from generation to generation, is being seriously threatened by external factors. These are forces that increasingly push agrarian people to the margins, even eliminating them and their agrarian culture altogether. Agrarian culture is being degraded and destroyed worldwide, and long-standing traditions of tending the land are being supplanted by new dominant agents whose purpose is not to "grow the soil" or sustain agrarian society but to achieve present and immediate gains. Local knowledge and local investment in land and soil are being discarded widely. And the pleasure of living on the land, the wholesomeness of agrarian culture, and the beauty of the earth are thereby diminished.

A 2008 *New York Times* article titled "Food is Gold, So Billions Invested in Farming"⁵ helps to illustrate this transformation of land from trust to commodity as it reports, "Huge investment funds have already poured hundreds of billions of dollars into booming financial markets for commodities like wheat, corn, and soybeans. But a few big private investors are starting to make bolder and longer-term bets that the world's need for food will greatly increase—by buying farmland, fertilizer, grain elevators, and shipping equipment. . . . And three institutional investors . . . are separately planning to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in agriculture, chiefly farmland,

⁵ Diana B. Henriques, "Food is Gold, So Billions Invested in Farming," *New York Times*, June 5, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/05/business/05farm.html?scp=1&sq=%22Food%20is%20Gold%22&st=cse>.

from sub-Saharan Africa to the English countryside.”⁶ This article went on to announce the “ambitious plans” of a major firm “to invest in farmland in sub-Saharan Africa, where it plans to consolidate small plots into more productive holdings . . .” explaining that Africa was chosen because “land values are very, very inexpensive.” In this revolutionary transformation of agrarian landscapes into investments in industrial-scale production, food becomes money, land becomes commodity, and “investors” are distanced from land as the place and habitat for people who are engaged in life and living.

This revolution is difficult to confront, in part because we may be among its “investors,” but, more important, because the interests that pursue this new expansive concept of “dominion” have no visible person who is responsible to the one whose land this is. As God’s Word says, “Do not take advantage of each other. . . . The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land” (Lev. 25:17, 23). It also says that the land must be returned to the poor and meek (Lev. 25:28). As for the new entities that appropriate dominion of the land from people who live on the land, a related passage from Scripture takes on important relevance as it tells us “even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD” (Jer. 8:7).

Of course, most Christian missions, Christian relief and development agencies, and other institutions protect, help, and support this one-third of the world’s people with another concept of dominion: dominion as service, dominion as stewardship, dominion as ministry. And we expect that caring for creation practiced as caring for the land and caring for peoples will continue to grow and confront dominion as domination.

Misappropriation of dominion—taking from the meek to further empower the strong—has been repeated throughout history. In the medieval church this misappropriation took form in the “Doctrine of Discovery,” a misappropriation that continues to the present in many forms. This interpretation and understanding of dominion affected application of the great commission given by Christ: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20). In fulfilling this mandate, the church, acting through European Christian nations, began to explore the entire world, bringing the gospel and, along with it, European culture and values. Its expression is well represented by this statement by the pope in 1455 to the king of Portugal:

The Roman pontiff, successor of the key-bearer of the heavenly kingdom and vicar of Jesus Christ, contemplating with a father’s mind all the several climes of the world and the characteristics of all the nations dwelling in them and seeking and desiring the salvation of all, wholesomely ordains and disposes upon careful deliberation those things which he sees will be agreeable to the Divine Majesty and by which he may bring the sheep entrusted to him by God

⁶ One of these funds, the Blackrock World Agricultural Fund, was launched in 2010 and by August 2011 had invested more than \$600 million dollars. *Fact Sheet, BGF World Agriculture Fund*, available at <http://www.blackrocklatam.com/content/groups/latinamericansite/documents/literature/1111111656.pdf>.

into the single divine fold, and may acquire for them the reward of eternal felicity, and obtain pardon for their souls. This we believe will more certainly come to pass, through the aid of the Lord, if we bestow suitable favors and special graces on those Catholic kings and princes, who, like athletes and intrepid champions of the Christian faith, as we know by the evidence of facts, not only restrain the savage excesses of the Saracens and of other infidels, enemies of the Christian name, but also for the defense and increase of the faith vanquish them and their kingdoms and habitations, though situated in the remotest parts unknown to us, and subject them to their own temporal dominion, sparing no labor and expense, in order that those kings and princes, relieved of all obstacles, may be the more animated to the prosecution of so salutary and laudable a work. (From the papal bull *Romanus Pontifex* [Nicholas V], January 8, 1455).⁷

The understanding of dominion as reflected in this papal bull affected the medieval church's understanding of the great commission and also its understanding of the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:25-28). This was applied to Africa and the New World in *Romanus Pontifex* and *inter caetera* (1493), which allowed Portugal and Spain to claim dominion and sovereignty over all lands they "discovered." England, France, and the Netherlands also relied on the doctrine in their own exploration of the "New World." According to Native American Robert Williams, a professor of law at the University of Arizona, the rights given by *Romanus Pontifex* and *inter caetera* served as the legal basis for appropriation of indigenous lands, resources, and rights over subsequent centuries. For example, in the 1823 case of *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, the United States Supreme Court relied on the doctrine of discovery in finding that legal title to land flowed from English grants, while Native Americans merely held a right of occupancy. And these two papal bulls continued to empower other nations in their "discovery" of lands new to them.

The doctrine of discovery is closely related to Manifest Destiny, the idea that Europeans and European culture were destined to expand across all of North America. Due to the conflict between Manifest Destiny and indigenous sovereignty and individual rights, the United States government passed a number of laws to facilitate the expansion of European people and culture, including the Indian Removal Act of 1831, the Dawes Act of 1887, and the Education Act.⁸ As a result of these actions, indigenous peoples were denied the right to exercise sovereignty over their own affairs, were forcibly relocated to new and sometimes undesirable locations in the United States⁹

⁷ This papal bull gave Portugal the authority to claim Africa as their domain of discovery. The quotation given here is reprinted in William H. Worger, Nancy L. Clark, Edward A. Alpers, *Africa and the West: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, *From the Slave Trade to Conquest, 1441-1905*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p.14.

⁸ The conflict between European and indigenous culture is perhaps best embodied in the words of Richard Pratt, an army officer who founded the first Indian boarding schools under the Education Act. His purpose was to "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." See, for example, Charla Bear, "Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many," National Public Radio (May 12, 2008), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16516865>.

⁹ (a) Cherokees, Creeks, and Choctaws; *Trail of Tears* documents move from Georgia to Eastern Oklahoma (1831); (b) Navajo; *Long Walk* reports removal of Navajos to Fort Sumner, New Mexico (1893).

(and sometimes were relocated again when the lands became valuable),¹⁰ and were required to abandon their own culture and language and assimilate into the surrounding culture of the European majority.¹¹ These actions diminished the ability of indigenous people to know God through general revelation and deprived them of the ability to exercise stewardship over their own lands in a manner consistent with their cultural values.

In the same way that the church, and society as a whole, has reconsidered its formerly held views with respect to the exercise of dominion over creation, it has reconsidered, to a degree, the policies through which it exercised dominion over indigenous people, who are also part of creation and image-bearers of God. In some places, such as India, colonial powers constituted a small minority, and indigenous persons have since reasserted sovereignty over their own lands. In other places—including the United States—indigenous persons comprise a small minority and exercise sovereignty, if at all, in small areas that do not reflect their heritage as independent and sovereign nations. In the United States some steps have been taken to redress the effect of past policies that harmed indigenous persons by the taking away of their individual rights. For example, at a December 2010 Tribal Nations Conference, President Obama announced that the United States would reverse its previous policy and support the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People. Also in 2010, the United States settled a class action lawsuit regarding alleged mismanagement of trust fund assets held on behalf of Native Americans, agreeing to pay \$3.4 billion to class members. Similarly, some religious institutions have recognized past abuses. For example, in 2009 the General Convention of the Episcopal House of Delegates passed a resolution titled “Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery.” By adopting this resolution, the House of Delegates gave support to the indigenous people in their ongoing efforts to assert their inherent sovereignty and fundamental human rights as peoples to be respected.

This of course raises the important commandment “Love your neighbor as yourself” and the great commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” This also raises the divine claim, “The earth is the LORD’s. . . .”

We know that discord in society and over land has a long history, beginning already in the garden when Adam decided to violate his God-given stewardship. Much of it comes from humans’ striving to claim the garden, claim the earth, claim creation—for themselves. As we look into the history of our dealing with each other and the earth, we find truth in this statement of Robert Williams: “The conquest of the earth is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.”

¹⁰ After initially designating the entirety of the Black Hills as part of the Great Sioux Reservation in the Fort Laramie treaty, the United States reversed course and appropriated that land after gold was discovered in 1874. In 1980, the United States Supreme Court, in *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, found that this appropriation was an illegal taking of the Sioux Nation’s land and awarded it more than \$100 million in compensation. Subsequently, the Dawes Act forced individual land ownership of each tribe. This created both haves and have-nots and diminished the capacity of indigenous people to exercise stewardship over their lands in a manner consistent with their culture.

¹¹ This was enacted through the Education Act of the federal government by placing children of these displaced people into boarding and residential schools that were sometimes supervised by church organizations.

The forced and violent transformation of nearly all indigenous communities into colonies of Western nations here and elsewhere around the globe by “discovery” of their lands by European “explorers” washed much, but not all, indigenous knowledge away. An example is in south India, where contour-hugging terraces step down the mountain slopes. Once functional in growing rice for their builders and descendants, providing habitat for birds and frogs and wetland plants, fostering lives of many species intertwined with human life and sustenance, many have been transformed into tea plantations. Conversations with local people reveal that in many cases they no longer have knowledge of the rice that once flourished there. And as they are asked about what once were rice paddies, they counter by saying they are tea plantations. Yet, in select places in India where indigenous knowledge combines with functional and productive terraced rice paddies, the indigenous stewardship ethic remains strong, as the famed medical doctor to Indian lepers, Paul Brand, reminds us in his essay “Handful of Mud.”¹² In Cameroon the marvelous uses being made by native people of native plants for veterinary medicines are ancient discoveries that have recently been re-discovered by Western veterinary medicine and pharmaceutical companies.

VI. The current status of creation

A. Degradation of the earth’s habitability

Creation’s *oikoumene*, the biosphere, is the system provided by God that sustains us and all life on earth. We have good reason to celebrate God’s remarkable provisions for the habitable earth and to bring to God our continued praise for these. We appreciate how the biosphere relates to the rest of creation through the atmosphere—earth’s great spherical gaseous envelope. And we are awed by God’s sustaining grace that permeates the whole of creation. The biosphere is a remarkable gift to all of us and to all of life. For a long time we have taken this gift of the biosphere and its gaseous envelope for granted. And this was particularly true of the atmosphere that seemed so large that we believed we could not change or degrade it. Today, however, we know that we cannot take the biosphere and its atmosphere for granted, and the reason is that we are in the process of changing it—with serious consequences. In the book *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*, the changes being made are described as “Seven Degradations of Creation.” These are briefly summarized, with permission, in the following (see *Earthwise*, third edition [Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011], pp. 44-55, for additional detail and references):

1. Alteration of earth’s energy exchange

Earth’s atmosphere is a “crowning jewel” of the biosphere—whose beauty and transparency sustains life on earth and mediates energy flows between earth and space. Yet human beings are responsible for its degradation locally, regionally, and globally through the injection of pollutant chemicals and compounds into earth’s atmosphere. Beyond the many consequences of this degradation on our lungs and breathing—like asthma, emphysema, and lung cancer—we are responsible for injecting

¹² In: Wesley-Granberg Michaelson, *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, pp. 136-50.

into the atmosphere various greenhouse gases beyond the capacity of the biosphere to absorb them, a topic considered more fully later in this report (see section VII and Appendix A). One of the major chemical corporations, DuPont, has responded to this degradation by eliminating the production of Freon, the effects of which included creating the hole in the earth ozone layer, and by saying, "We believe the scientific understanding of climate change is sufficient to compel prompt, effective actions to limit emissions of greenhouse gases. We believe that to be successful these actions will require concerted engagement by the world's governments, along with technological innovations by businesses, and individual actions by all citizens."

2. Soil and land degradation

During the latter half of the twentieth century, nearly one-third of arable lands worldwide were lost to erosion and taken out of production. In Asia, Africa, and South America annual soil loss was about 8 tons per acre, and in the United States and Europe the loss was about 6 tons per acre—these deficits contrast sharply with annual soil formation rates that average about 0.4 tons per acre.¹³ Soil erosion losses are compounded by associated reductions of water infiltration, soil water-holding capacity, topsoil thickness, soil carbon sequestration, organic matter and nutrients, soil biota, and productivity; by associated increases of water run-off, surface water eutrophication, and siltation of rivers and streams; and by reduction of hydroelectric capacity by siltation of reservoirs. Many farmers sustain their soils through good stewardship, but they also continue to struggle to reconcile the tension between the short-term and long-term economic and environmental dimensions of their sustainability.

3. Consumption, waste, and ecosystem dysfunction

In our day, 870,000 different chemicals are being used in commercial quantities, most of them brand-new to the creation. Many and perhaps most of these are part of the environment in which we and other organisms live. Yet these are materials that living organisms have not had experience with in the past. Unlike chemicals made by organisms and the earth, some of these chemicals leave living things defenseless. Some are even specifically designed to destroy life: biocides, pesticides, herbicides, avicides, and fungicides.

4. Land conversion and habitat destruction

Since 1850 people have converted 2.2 billion acres of natural lands for human uses (8.9 million square km, an area slightly smaller than China's total land area of 9.2 million square km). Compare this with earth's total of 16 billion acres of land that support some kind of vegetation (a nearly equal area consists of ice, snow, and rock) and a current world cropland of 3.6 billion acres. The greatest land conversion under way today is tropical deforestation, which removes about 25 million acres of primary forest each year—an area the size of the state of Indiana.

¹³ R. Lal, "Soil erosion and the global carbon budget," *Environment International* 29 (2003): 437-50.

5. Species extinctions

There are some 10,000 known bird species, of which about one goes extinct each year. Research predicts that by the end of this century as many as 10 species of birds will go extinct each year. Without action to preserve birds, 12 percent of all known bird species are predicted to become extinct by the year 2099. And, if needed action is not taken, 23 percent of mammals, 25 percent of conifers (pines, spruces, and relatives), and 32 percent of amphibians will be threatened with extinction during this century. In addition, 70 percent of the world's coastal fish stocks are overexploited or collapsed, and 90 percent of the biggest fish have been wiped out. Further, habitats are lost around us so that even butterflies, once so common in everyday life, are being destroyed.

6. Global toxification

Of the thousands of chemical substances people have created, hundreds have been injected into the atmosphere, discharged into rivers and oceans, and leaked into groundwater by means of "disposal" systems and by pollution from our vehicles, homes, chemical agriculture, and industry. Some have joined global circulations, with substances like DDT showing up in Antarctic penguins. Cancer has become pervasive in some herring gull populations and is increasingly prevalent in our communities and congregations. Globally circulating toxins disrupt ecosystems, and hormone-mimicking chemicals create reproductive disorders and negatively affect development in animals and people.

7. Human and cultural degradation

Among the most severe reductions of creation's richness are the degradation and extinction of cultures that have lived peaceably and sustainably on the land for centuries. Many Amish and Mennonite farming communities in North America, for example, operate under severe pressure from increasing land taxes and encroaching urban development. In many cases these pressures compel them to abandon their farms. In the tropics, longstanding cultures living cooperatively with the forest are being wiped off the land by force, death, and legal procedures devised to deprive these people of their traditional lands. As they are run off or extinguished, so is their rich heritage of unwritten knowledge. Successful ways of living in harmony with the land are forgotten, names of otherwise undescribed forest creatures are lost, and information on the uses of a wide array of tropical species for human food, fiber, and medicine is wasted.

B. *Environmental complexity and solutions*

As outlined in the previous section, there is no doubt that humans have modified and are modifying their environment in ways that are more extensive than those of any other living species. Here we take a brief look at the integrated response to these degradations.

We begin by noting that human-induced environmental changes do not always impair the ability of other living species to live or of the ecosystem to function. Human population increases and the desire for different lifestyles have led to alterations in ecosystems (such as forest removal), expansion of and changes in agricultural practices, management of hydrological systems to provide clean water, sanitation systems, transportation networks, and many

other changes. The changes altered the landscape and the balance of species in the ecosystem, favoring grasslands (pasture) and crops over forest and wetlands, as well as favoring domesticated animals over wild animals. These changes allowed human society to flourish in sometimes healthy and sometimes unhealthy relationships with ecosystems. The changes in the world in which we live would have been barely imaginable 100 years ago and beyond comprehension 200 years ago. In the absence of human activity, however, ecosystems tend to change much more slowly in response to factors such as climate variability, growth of plant and animal populations, and species migrations. These processes occur generally on time scales that are much longer than the rate of human development and landscape modification.

There is ample evidence that human modifications of the environment have led and continue to lead to environmental degradation. As summarized above, these include air pollution; water pollution; species extinction; the introduction of foreign compounds into the environment; depletion of natural resources, including fresh water, problems with waste disposal and sanitation, potential climate change, and many others. In some cases, we have alleviated problems, reducing their impact on the environment and human health. For example, the air quality in the Los Angeles Basin is now much better than it was 30 to 35 years ago. This improvement is principally the result of a variety of regulations that have been put in place, including catalytic converters on automobiles, restrictions on certain types of stationary combustion engines, and removal of power generation facilities to outlying areas.

Many of these environmental problems have common root causes and, therefore, solutions for one can help solve another. Solutions are often a combination of regulation and voluntarily adopted practices. For example, in agricultural crop production, farmers have long recognized the benefits of building up organic matter in soil to keep it well-structured, healthy, and productive. The greenhouse gas issue provides an additional reason to maintain high organic matter soil, because it keeps carbon out of the atmosphere.

In some instances however, solving one problem can make another worse. For example, when chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) were introduced as alternatives to ammonia in home refrigerators, they solved a risk to human health and made automobile air conditioning possible, but they introduced a risk to the environment, since CFCs are powerful greenhouse gases (and they deplete stratospheric ozone).

It is increasingly evident that we need to look for integrated solutions to environmental problems that simultaneously address interlocking issues. Power generation provides an interesting example. Power generation in North America is heavily dependent on the use of carbon-based fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas. Combustion of these fuels produces air pollutants such as sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter, as well as carbon dioxide, and in some cases it creates serious waste products and contamination of local fresh water. In the United States, fuel imports burden the economy and are linked to issues of national security. Thus, reducing both total power usage by conservation and reducing the fraction of that power produced by carbon-based fuels through the use of renewable sources can simultaneously address multiple environmental problems.

Ecosystems are often negatively affected by human activities. Some changes, such as the conversion of the eastern North American forests to

crop lands and the use of trees for fuel, were almost inevitable during early settlement. It is interesting to note that some of this land, such as large parts of Michigan and central Pennsylvania, is now being allowed to return to forest, although the new forest most often is a far different ecosystem from the previous forest. Other changes, such as the draining of wetlands and the loss of fish spawning grounds through development, might have been prevented had the importance and ecosystem services of these wet lands and riparian zones been widely appreciated at the time. Marine ecosystems continue to experience degradation due to a wide variety of causes. Ocean ecosystems suffer from the removal of peak predator species by overfishing, while great estuaries, such as Chesapeake Bay and Puget Sound, suffer from contamination by toxic substances and sewage due to run off and dumping. Increasing carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere leads to increased amounts of carbon dioxide in the upper ocean, which in turn increases ocean acidification that is harmful to many organisms, especially those that depend on carbonaceous shells, such as mollusks, and carbonaceous skeletons, such as corals.

It is not the intent of this report to address each and all of these problems. Each represents an assault on the environment that has been given to us by God and of which we have been commanded to be good stewards. The majority of these environmental problems are recognized by the community as serious problems that need to be addressed by a combination of personal and societal actions. The task force strongly encourages the Christian community broadly and members of the Christian Reformed Church specifically to be active in addressing these issues.

One issue in particular, namely climate change, has become a matter of substantial concern and controversy in the United States and Canada. This issue was specifically identified in the task force mandate because of its importance and because of the controversy surrounding it. The following sections address climate, climate change, and how we should respond to it.

VII. Climate change

A. *The climate system*¹⁴

1. Physical climate system

The average temperature of earth is maintained by a balance of absorbed solar radiation and thermal radiation emitted to space. Solar absorption occurs primarily at the earth's surface. In the absence of an atmosphere, the amount of solar radiation absorbed by earth would be only enough to heat the planet (surface plus atmosphere) to an average temperature of about -18° C (0° F), which we know both from straightforward physics and satellite observations. Thermal emission, which is the loss of energy from the earth system, occurs primarily from the middle levels of the atmosphere, typically 5 to 10 km (3 to 6 miles) above the surface. The atmosphere, like any warm body, emits thermal radiation in all directions, both upward toward space and downward toward the earth surface. The earth surface, because it is warmed by both absorbed solar

¹⁴ This section is a synopsis of a longer section on climate and climate change included as Appendix A.

radiation and emitted thermal radiation from the atmosphere, is much warmer (by about 15° C or 60° F) than the average temperature of the planet. This warming of the earth surface by downward thermal radiation from the atmosphere has been named the “greenhouse effect.” Although the physics of what keeps a greenhouse warm is actually different, the name captures the sense of a surface that is warmed by the presence of an overlying, absorbing atmosphere.

If the greenhouse effect were not operating—that is—if the atmosphere were not emitting thermal radiation, life as we know it would not be possible on the surface of earth because it would be too cold. Each of us has experienced this greenhouse effect. On humid summer nights, the temperature remains high because the large amount of thermal radiation from a moist atmosphere prevents cooling of the earth surface. On clear nights, locations at a higher elevation cool more quickly and to lower temperatures than those at lower elevations because the atmosphere is less dense at a higher altitude and therefore radiates less energy. In winter, clear nights are usually colder and cloudy nights are usually warmer, because clouds increase downward thermal emission.

The three principal absorbers (and emitters) of thermal radiation in the atmosphere are the molecules of water vapor (H₂O), carbon dioxide (CO₂), and ozone (O₃). Water vapor absorption and emission is by far the most important contributor to greenhouse warming, with carbon dioxide second and ozone a distant third, along with all other absorbing gases. Although water vapor is the most important greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide is the key regulator of the magnitude of the earth’s greenhouse effect because removal mechanisms for carbon dioxide are very slow and its residence time, therefore, is very long (hundreds of years on average).

Atmospheric water vapor concentrations are strictly controlled by temperature. Water vapor is removed from the atmosphere by precipitation, which forms when air cools to the dew point temperature (or condensation point) and clouds are formed. For any air parcel, the condensation point is only a function of temperature. Therefore, the atmosphere cannot hold an unlimited amount of water vapor. From the perspective of the atmosphere, the ocean provides an infinite source of water vapor, so that, on a global average, the relative humidity (the ratio of the water vapor in an air parcel relative to the maximum water vapor amount that could be in the parcel at saturation) of the atmosphere remains constant, maintained by an approximate equilibrium between evaporation from the ocean (and from the land surface, to a lesser extent) and condensation and precipitation.

If the average temperature of the atmosphere rises, then the amount of water vapor in the atmosphere will also increase. But, since water vapor is a greenhouse gas, adding water vapor to the atmosphere increases the absorption and emission of thermal radiation by the atmosphere, which increases the downward thermal radiation from the atmosphere and further warms the surface. This process is called a *positive feedback*—*positive* in the sense that the initial direction of change (warming of the surface and atmosphere) is further enhanced over the initial change itself, and *feedback* in the sense that the initial response (more water vapor) actually drives a larger change.

Carbon dioxide is the regulator of earth climate on the time scale of a century. When carbon dioxide is added to the atmosphere, some fraction of that increase remains in the atmosphere from centuries to millennia. Because carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas, the surface warms. Because the surface warms, the atmosphere warms as well, and more water vapor is added to the atmosphere. Because water vapor is an even more efficient greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, the surface warms further, additionally warming the atmosphere and allowing more water vapor to be added to the atmosphere. This process of positive water vapor feedback amplifies the initial change due to carbon dioxide, but the carbon dioxide itself is the regulator because of its long lifetime in the atmosphere.

Clouds both reflect solar radiation, which cools the earth, and absorb infrared radiation, which warms it. On average for the current climate, clouds cool earth by reflecting more energy than they absorb. Cloud processes are quite complex, but a great deal is known about these processes at the scales both of individual clouds and of aggregate cloud systems. The difficult question, however, is How will clouds change in a warmer world? Although the answer to this question is uncertain, some general statements can be made. A warmer atmosphere with more water vapor is not necessarily an atmosphere with more clouds, because clouds are the result of dynamical motions. However, the clouds in a warmer atmosphere may be thicker (have more condensed water in them) than in a cooler atmosphere. If cloud properties do change in a warmer world, then the question is, Will they produce a net negative feedback (more additional reflection than absorption) or a net positive feedback (more additional absorption than reflection)? Answering this question is complicated and can only be done with the use of global climate models, because there are no currently available data that provide a definitive answer. The consistent answer from a variety of modeling studies is that cloudiness increases slightly in a warmer world but that, more significantly, the changes in cloud properties produce a positive feedback, further warming an already warmer world.

2. Carbon cycle and the biosphere¹⁵

Carbon is the central atom of the organic molecules that are essential to life. All living organisms on earth, including humans, have bodies that are based on carbon. Green plants are called producers, because they use energy from the sun to change carbon in the atmosphere into the organic forms that provide the building blocks and energy for the structure and function of all living organisms. All these organisms depend on the forms of carbon produced through photosynthesis by land plants and by phytoplankton in lakes and oceans.

Each year, plants on the surface of earth take in about 120 billion metric tons of carbon in the form of carbon dioxide and convert it to organic forms. Roughly the same amount is released back into the atmosphere by respiration from plants and animals, and from the decomposition of the organic carbon in their remains. Because most of earth's land mass and forests are in the northern hemisphere, there is an observable annual

¹⁵ The source of the carbon budget estimates here is *IPCC Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis*, pp. 511-33, updated to 2009 using data from Fig. 4 in Appendix A.

cycle in carbon dioxide concentrations, with a minimum in the northern hemisphere summer and a maximum in the northern hemisphere winter. This annual change in carbon dioxide, while actually large, is a near equilibrium process (the amount of carbon dioxide “breathed” in during the summer is the same amount “breathed” out in the winter, because the amount of vegetation is very nearly the same from year to year). Most natural ecosystems are close to equilibrium; the amount of organic carbon that has accumulated in the ecosystem is sufficiently large so that the amount decomposing each year is equal to the amount added each year.

The amount of carbon stored in organic form in the soils and plants of the world amounts to approximately 2,300 billion metric tons, and the annual cycle involves about 120 billion metric tons of carbon. The amount of carbon emitted to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide from human activities seems small in comparison to these numbers. Human activity adds a total of 8.8 billion metric tons annually (7.7 billion metric tons are from humanity’s use of carbon-based fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas, and another 1.1 billion metric tons are from land-use change—mainly through the clearing of forests). However, the fact that atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide are rising is evidence that the world’s biological systems are not capable of absorbing all these emissions on a net basis. Since preindustrial times the amount of carbon in the form of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has grown from about 597 billion metric tons to about 762 billion metric tons today (see Fig. 4, Appendix A).

The increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere increases the primary productivity of plants that use the C_3 photosynthetic pathway.¹⁶ While increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide may contribute to higher yields of many agricultural crops—such as wheat, soybeans, rice, and potatoes—not all crops are of the C_3 type. In many countries of Africa and Central America, as much as 50 to 88 percent of agricultural land is in C_4 crops, such as corn, sorghum, millet, and sugarcane. These C_4 crops are expected to respond to increased carbon dioxide with higher yields only under conditions of drought stress.

The increased carbon dioxide concentration can also alter the species composition of ecosystems. This occurs because some plant species exhibit a greater growth response to the increase than do others, changing their competitive ability. For example, a forest-scale experiment found that the plant species most responsive to free-air enrichment of carbon dioxide was poison ivy—and the plants had higher levels of skin irritant in their leaves. In another such experiment in Wisconsin, however, both birch and

¹⁶ Plants of the C_3 type rely completely on the Calvin cycle for biochemical conversion of carbon dioxide to the sugars from which plant tissues are made. In this cycle, the rate-limiting enzyme is called “Rubisco”—short for ribulose biphosphate carboxylase-oxygenase—which, owing to its low efficiency, often makes up as much as 50 percent of a plant’s total leaf protein. C_4 plants have a more active enzyme—phosphoenolpyruvate carboxylase—that can more efficiently capture carbon dioxide for transfer to the Calvin cycle. Thus they are able to grow more effectively at low carbon dioxide concentrations, and during warmer temperatures and drought stress. J.R. Ehleringer and T.E. Cerling, “ C_3 and C_4 Photosynthesis,” 186-190 in H.A. Mooney and J.G. Canadell, eds., *Volume 2, The Earth System: Biological and Ecological Dimensions of Global Environmental Change*, Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change, 2002.

aspen trees showed increased tolerance of heat stress in a carbon dioxide-enriched environment.

Increasing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere also leads to an increase in the carbon dissolved in the ocean. Carbon dioxide is soluble in sea water, and an increase in the amount (pressure) of carbon dioxide results in more carbon dioxide being dissolved in the water. When carbon dioxide dissolves in water, it forms carbonic acid, the same acid found in carbonated beverages, and this shifts pH to being more acidic. Over the past several decades, consistent measurements have been made of the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and the upper mixed layer (approximately the top 100 m) of the ocean. In addition, we know how much carbon dioxide has been produced by burning carbon-based fuels during this same period. Based on these measurements, roughly half of all the carbon dioxide produced by fuel consumption has dissolved into the ocean mixed layer. This dissolved carbon dioxide has made the ocean about 30 percent more acidic (less alkaline) over time. The process of ocean acidification is the result of simple, fundamental chemistry, and there is no way to prevent it. As long as carbon dioxide levels continue to increase in the atmosphere, the ocean will continue to become more acidic (see Appendix A for ocean acidification and pH).

So far, 244 billion tons of carbon in the form of fuels have been burned and emitted as carbon dioxide. Known conventional reserves of carbon in coal, oil, and natural gas add up to about 1,000 billion tons, and the total amount that eventually could be exploited may amount to 3,700 billion tons. So it is clear that humanity has the potential to continue increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide considerably!

B. Climate change: Is the earth warming?

1. Evidence for warming from natural systems

The climate of earth is warming, a statement that can be made on the basis of both observations of physical and biological phenomena and direct measurements. Each of us lives in contact with nature and, using a perceptive eye, we can observe some of this evidence for ourselves. Many natural systems around us integrate the effect of environmental variables. Observing and learning from trends in the behavior of these natural systems does not require mathematical models or detailed scientific analysis. For instance, the extent of ice in glaciers and ice sheets is a natural integration of a variety of climate variables such as temperature, precipitation, prevailing wind direction, and more. The observation that any of us can make via travel, historical photography, and anecdotal stories is that the majority of mountain glaciers around the world are in retreat, many drastically. Glaciers in some famous areas such as Glacier National Park in Montana are in danger of disappearing altogether. Similarly, the summer meltback of sea ice that covers the Arctic Ocean is easily monitored by satellite imagery, and meltback is on average significantly greater than in the past (see Fig. 7, Appendix A). Relevant satellite images and data are available on the Internet and can be viewed by anyone with an Internet connection. Continental ice sheets on Greenland and Antarctica, although still very extensive, are also experiencing significant melting and shrinkage, as confirmed by measurements on the ice sheets and from satellite.

Other natural systems that show evidence of global warming may be closer to home for us. The length of the growing season is increasing in most areas because the date of the last expected spring frost is steadily moving earlier and the date of the first fall frost is moving later. Published plant hardiness zones are shifting northward in the northern hemisphere. Plants are flowering earlier on average than in the past. Bird and insect migrations are occurring earlier in the spring and later in the fall, and the destination of migrating bird and insect populations is shifting northward in North America. These natural systems all point to an earth that on average is warming.

2. Evidence for warming from direct measurements

Many direct temperature measurements have been and are being made of both the atmosphere and the surface layer of the oceans. The longest records are thermometer measurements of surface air temperature and of ocean surface water temperature. These data are in one sense quite simple, because we all understand thermometer measurements, but in another sense the data can be complicated. Constructing a global temperature record requires accounting for changes in the number of measuring sites over time, the characteristics of the sites, and measurement techniques. Several different groups of scientists have analyzed the basic thermometer data to each construct a record of surface temperature over the past 100 to 150 years, and their results are very similar. The record shows quite clearly that the earth surface is warmer now (averaged over about a ten year period from 2001 to 2010) than at any other time in the past 150 years (see Fig. 5, Appendix A). A rapid rise in temperature occurred from about 1910 to 1940, and a slightly more rapid rise occurred from 1975 to the present. During the period from 1940 to 1975, the temperature was roughly constant. The total increase in temperature from 1900 to the present is about 0.8° to 0.9° C, or about 2° F.¹⁷ This may seem like a small change, but it is not when compared to the estimated change in surface temperature of 5° to 7° C between the last glacial period (when much of North America was covered by a mile-deep sheet of ice) and the current interglacial period.

A word of caution is appropriate here. The earth's surface temperature fluctuates from year to year due to a variety of internal oscillations in the ocean-atmosphere system. The El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is perhaps the most widely publicized of these natural oscillations, but there are others that climate scientists know of and study. Consequently, it is very risky to argue that a particularly warm year is an indication of global warming or that a particularly cool year is an indication that global warming is not happening. Climate scientists tend to look at 10-year (decadal) averages, or even longer periods, to establish trends in surface temperature. Data from a single recent year (such as the relatively cold year of 2008 or the relatively warm year of 2010) cannot be used to extrapolate a trend; one can only wait for another few years to understand the decadal trend.

Satellite measurements of earth are available since about 1975. Satellites orbit far above earth's surface and its atmosphere; instruments on these satellites measure all or some portion of the thermal radiation emitted by

¹⁷ A figure showing surface temperature for the past 150 years is included in Appendix A.

the planetary system. Because this radiation is emitted by both surface and atmosphere, measuring it is not the same as measuring an actual temperature with a thermometer. It is a challenging problem to reconstruct atmospheric temperature trends from these satellite measurements, and the process of doing so has generated quite a bit of debate over the past decade or so. The most recent evaluations, however, including one by the National Academy of Sciences, show that the satellite measurements are in general agreement with the trends from surface temperature measurements and from temperature measurements by routine atmospheric balloon soundings.

C. *Cause of climate change*

The principal driver of the earth's climate (and surface temperature) is solar energy. Thus it is logical to ask whether variations in solar energy output or changes in the amount of absorbed solar radiation are responsible for the observed warming climate. The other principal control on earth surface temperature is the downward thermal radiation received from the atmosphere. Thus, it is also logical to ask whether variations in atmosphere composition have occurred and whether they are responsible for the observed warming climate. A third possibility is that changes in earth surface temperature are driven by internal system variability occurring on time scales in excess of a hundred years. The climate science community has invested a great deal of time and energy during the past 20 years in trying to provide a definitive answer to these questions. The few paragraphs here and the expanded comments in Appendix A provide only a brief summary. Interested readers are referred to the extensive reports available from the U.S. Global Change Research Program, the National Academy of Sciences, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Variations in solar energy input over time are small but probably do play some role in the temperature increase seen in the past century. Total solar irradiance (TSI) is a measure of the amount of solar energy arriving at the earth. Precise measurements of this quantity have only been available since about 1975, when satellites could look at the sun from above the atmosphere. Prior to 1975, scientists can reconstruct an approximate value of TSI based on observations of sunspot number, since variations of sunspot number can be related to variations in TSI. TSI was increasing slightly from before 1900 to about 1960. It has been declining since 1960, and it dropped to its lowest level in more than 100 years in 2010 (see Fig. 8, Appendix A). It is very likely that the temperature increase from 1900 to 1940 was driven in part by this increase in TSI. However, the temperature *increase* since 1975 has occurred while TSI values have been *decreasing*. Further, it is precisely this period for which we have our most accurate measurements of TSI from satellite. Thus, we can certainly rule out solar variability as being the principal driver of temperature warming during the latter part of the past century, and it is probably only partially responsible for the earlier warming, as we shall see.

It is more difficult in a sense to rule out natural climate variability on timescales of a hundred years or more. The thermometer record only extends back about 100 to 150 years, so it is inadequate for this purpose. Longer term records going back 1,000 years or more have been constructed from temperature proxies (see Fig. 6, Appendix A). Proxies are constructed by measuring

temperature-sensitive properties of physical or biological systems and then by inferring temperature from the measured properties. Tree rings are one example of a proxy. Results from these proxy studies have generated a great deal of controversy over the past few years, much of it producing far more noise than clarity. The most straightforward conclusion from all this research and discussion is that global mean surface temperature was higher during the past few decades of the 20th century than during any comparable period since at least A.D. 1600.¹⁸ This conclusion comes from a report prepared by the National Academy of Sciences, as requested by the president of the United States, and is supported by a wide range of science. Reconstructions of temperature further back in time are difficult due to the lack of adequate proxies and the increasing uncertainty in their interpretation.

Carbon dioxide concentrations and the concentrations of other greenhouse gases have been increasing at accelerating rates since the mid-1800s. Carbon dioxide concentrations alone have increased from 280 ppmv (parts per million by volume) around 1850 to about 390 ppmv today (see Fig. 2, Appendix A). We know that increasing greenhouse gas concentrations increase the absorbing potential of the atmosphere, which must lead to increasing downward thermal radiation and increasing surface temperatures. This is fundamental radiation physics that has been understood for more than 100 years. The principal question is whether the size of the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations is consistent with the amount of observed temperature increase. The answer to that question, based on extensive global climate model studies, is simply yes. Model simulations of temperature change over the past 150 years agree very well with observations when increasing greenhouse gas concentrations are included; they do not agree at all well when increasing concentrations are omitted (see Fig. 11, Appendix A). Increasing greenhouse gas concentrations, (primarily carbon dioxide), as well as increased solar radiation, contribute to the warming between 1910 and 1940; the warming since 1975 is principally the result of increasing greenhouse gas concentrations. The conclusion drawn from the observations and modeling studies is that the greenhouse gas increases are the primary driver of the warming temperatures.

The temperature plateau between 1940 and 1975 has been used by some to question this conclusion because greenhouse gas concentrations increased during this period as well. It is unrealistic to expect that the average earth surface temperature would be perfectly correlated with increasing greenhouse gas concentrations. Natural variability in the climate system produces oscillations in temperature that are unconnected with trends produced by changes in climate forcing such as greenhouse gases. It is perfectly possible—in fact, it is to be expected—that natural climate variability can mask increasing temperatures or enhance them on timescales of 10 to 20 years. In addition, rapid industrialization of the United States and Europe during and following World War II introduced increasing amounts of particulates into the atmosphere of the northern hemisphere. These particulates reflect solar radiation, effectively cooling earth. Concerns about air pollution and its

¹⁸ National Research Council of the National Academies, *Surface Temperature Reconstructions for the Last 2,000 Years*, Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2006, http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=11676&page=R1.

effects on human health led to regulations that improved air quality in North America and Europe beginning in the 1970s. It is thought that the temperature plateau is in part related to this cycle of air pollution. It is interesting to contemplate whether the industrialization of China, India, and other developing countries in the past decade is producing a similar response.

1. Conclusions from the scientific community

The scientific community has been asked on many occasions since about 1990 to evaluate the question of whether human activity, through increased greenhouse gas concentrations, is responsible for a warming climate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was jointly established in 1988 by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization to conduct periodic assessments of the state of knowledge concerning global climate change. In its most recent assessment report, the Fourth, denoted AR4, the IPCC states,

Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations.

Similar statements can be found in reports from the National Academy of Sciences in the United States and some twenty other national academies. Learned societies such as the American Geophysical Society and the American Meteorological Society in the United States, the Royal Society in the United Kingdom, and a host of other societies around the world are on record as supporting this statement. The scientific community has expended a great deal of effort to understand the causes of climate change (as well as to predict future trends involving global temperature and climate change). There is no ambiguity about these conclusions within the scientific community.

So why do scientists keep talking about “climate change” if they agree that the global trend is warming? The reason is that “global warming” might be interpreted by many as a rather uniform increase in temperature. The actual situation is more unsettling. While the global average temperature is expected to increase, warming the world by increasing greenhouse gas concentrations will also change climate patterns, thereby increasing temperatures in some (probably most) regions while decreasing them in others. Even more surely, rainfall will increase in some areas and decrease in others. These uncertainties in future climate change add to the scope of the challenge of adaptation. So the term “climate change” is meant to express both an expected increase in global mean temperature and change in the distribution of temperatures and variations in other climate quantities, such as rainfall. For the remainder of this report, we use the term climate change with this understanding.

2. How should we understand these statements?

As noted above, the conclusion of the broadly based scientific community is that anthropogenic—that is—human, activities are responsible for the majority of global warming, primarily due to the atmospheric buildup of carbon dioxide from the burning of carbon-based fuels by modern society. This conclusion stems from an understanding of how carbon dioxide operates in the atmosphere based on well understood physical and

biological principles, measurements of increasing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and an estimation of how increasing carbon dioxide affects other related phenomena, such as water vapor and cloud cover, in the atmosphere and earth surface. Most of the pertinent physical interactions are very well understood. The scientific conversation today is not about whether temperature will rise but the magnitude of the increase in the future.

The terminology used in the pertinent reports (such as that of the IPCC) is that human activity is “very likely” to be responsible for the observed change in temperature. In this particular case, scientists interpret “very likely” to mean a greater than 90 percent probability.

What does that “very likely” mean to us? If people were told that their houses had a 90 percent chance of burning down due to faulty wiring, nearly everyone would take immediate action. If they were told their cars had 1 chance in 10 of reaching their desired destination, few people would start out. If you were told that a new medicine helps 9 out of 10 people, you would probably rejoice and try the new drug. The term “very likely” is a call to action.

D. Whom do we believe?

For some readers of this document, the scientific conclusion that “the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations” is the very likely cause for most of global warming is controversial. Other voices in society question this conclusion and offer their own assessments. Some of these questions are helpful. They clarify issues and may appropriately highlight weaknesses. Many questions, however, stem from personal, political, or financial agendas and seek to obscure accepted and reasonable scientific conclusions. This is not a new phenomenon. For instance, the historical debate concerning tobacco and health involved much propaganda and misinformation driven by financial agendas. As with all things in this world, an observer must be astute and discerning in order to separate accepted fact from fiction.

Which voices deserve a hearing, and which should be ignored? In this contentious debate, whom should we believe? This may be difficult for the casual observer to determine. Credible conclusions should be based on objective observation and interpretation, and they should be as free as possible from competing agendas. Such conclusions may be offered by individuals or organizations that have experience and credentials supporting their status. Consensus statements by groups or consortiums should carry more weight than individual comments. Broad support within a respected and knowledgeable community should convey high credibility to their position.

It is true that scientists too are human; scientific conclusions may also contain error, exaggeration, or misstatement. As imperfect humans, this is unavoidable. In part, we should hold scientific conclusions with a light grip, because we know that new information may shift or modify our understanding. Nevertheless, when a broad community of experienced and reliable experts, utilizing the checks and balances implicit in scientific review, agrees on consistent conclusions over a period of several decades, it is reasonable to accept these broadly based conclusions and plan for the future. Each of us has personal experience in making decisions based on imperfect or evolving information as we deal with health, finance, and life issues. Delay also

carries risk, and when significant impacts are very likely, it is no longer sufficient to watch and wait.

VIII. Implications of climate change for the future

A. *What are the impacts?*

How will global warming affect our future? Increasing greenhouse gas concentrations will result in a warmer world. Temperature rise will be greatest in polar regions, especially the Arctic, which will experience loss of sea and land ice. Permafrost at high latitudes will warm and melt, altering the way of life of indigenous people and the animals on which they depend. Sea level will rise due to glacial runoff and water expansion associated with ocean warming. Increasing levels of dissolved carbon dioxide in sea water will cause increasing ocean acidification. Climatic and agricultural zones will continue their poleward shift. Most deserts will increase in size, primarily shifting poleward, while rainfall rates will intensify in already wet tropical areas. Shifts in large-scale precipitation patterns will occur, although the projections of such pattern shifts are uncertain at present.

For worldwide agriculture, there will be areas of winners and losers. Crops in subtropical areas such as the Sahel are expected to produce lowered yields due to increased temperatures and a more variable water supply. Based on temperature alone, the great grain belts of North America are likely to shift northward, leading to improved production on the northern boundaries but reduced production in the south. A warmer climate will almost certainly bring additional water stress on summer crops.¹⁹

Sea level rise will occur, caused by expansion of warmer water and melting of large ice sheets on land. The former effect is more easily understood and is expected to produce 2 to 3 feet of sea level rise by the end of the century. Understanding of the second is more limited, and estimates range from a few inches to another few feet. Sea level rise of 2 to 3 feet will have particularly negative effects on low-lying areas near the sea, such as most river delta regions, which will suffer from a combination of rising sea level and expected greater storm surge, leading to increased flooding, displacement of population, severe erosion, and the possibility of salt water incursion into delicate wetlands. Small island atolls may become uninhabitable due to loss of land surface area and possible destruction of coral reefs and their associated ecosystems.

Regardless of the magnitude of global temperature increases, ocean acidification will continue due simply to the solubility of carbon dioxide in water. A more acid ocean will have negative impacts on organisms with carbonate shells and skeletons, such as mollusks and corals, and perhaps others, at the lower levels of the ocean food web.

Planning and managing infrastructure for water resources, such as dams and reservoirs, will become more difficult because the statistical precipitation distributions on which these decisions are based will change with time. Water infrastructure is typically based on a combination of average flows and managing for extreme events, such as a "hundred year" flood. Such planning requires long-term records because extreme events are by definition

¹⁹ IPCC, *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*.

rare. As climate changes, however, the distribution of events will change, and events that are rare now may become more frequent. Global climate models, because they do not have high spatial resolution, are not very good at predicting extreme events for the current climate or for the future. However, in cases where these global models have been adapted to regional levels, as for example in the Great Lakes Region and the eastern United States, they have been helpful. In addition to supporting such work, countries with both technical and financial resources, such as Canada and the United States, will have many more options for coping with coming challenges than will smaller and poorer countries. The agricultural sector, for example, is likely to manage these changes quite well in Canada and the United States by changing crop varieties and species and managing water usage.

Sea level rise in places like the Netherlands is managed in part by building levees and dikes, but these require massive investments that are not feasible in many developing countries.

The outlook for developing countries with weaker infrastructures, fewer cash reserves, and less technological capability is far more bleak. They most likely will not have the ability to adapt to change with technology, and, in some cases, as in small island states, they may experience population dislocation with no place for people to move. Reduced crop yields due to either persistent climate change or more variable weather may produce chronic malnourishment or episodic starvation.

B. Vignettes

The general description of climate change impacts does not do justice to impacts at the regional and local levels. While it is beyond our mandate to provide a comprehensive review of climate impacts, we have chosen to describe a few specific cases to illustrate what may happen if greenhouse gas emissions continue along their current trajectory. Despite their diversity, these cases share two common themes: they involve communities whose contributions to climate change have been relatively minor and, to the extent that adaptation is possible, who lack the economic and technical resources enjoyed by nations such as the United States and Canada.

1. Arctic communities

Average temperatures in arctic regions are expected to increase at nearly twice the global average rate, making potential impacts even more significant. Among the most likely impacts from climate change are declining snow and ice cover, increasing precipitation, rising sea levels, and thawing permafrost. Coastal communities will face an increased risk of erosion due to rising sea levels and reductions in sea ice. In some cases, entire villages may be displaced. Travel and commerce will also be affected in areas that depend on frozen land and water for transportation routes. In addition, thawing permafrost will result in land instability and will threaten the integrity of key infrastructure, including roads, buildings, and pipelines.

Aspects of this change are already in evidence. Arctic sea ice extent has been steadily decreasing over the past 30 years. The minimum sea ice extent record was set in 2007 and nearly reached again in 2011. The sea ice extent in 2011 was 35 percent below the average value from 1979 to 2000. Melting permafrost, loss of coastal ice, and increased melt water in rivers

has led to increased coastal erosion by destabilizing soil, enhancing wave activity from storm surge, and changing coastal drainage patterns. Entire coastal villages are being relocated because increased erosion is eating away at their foundations.

Changing climate impacts animal behavior and food resources for indigenous people. Ring seals, for example, serve as food for many species of higher predators, including polar bears and humans. The seals require ice sheets with snow cover for breeding dens. They carve a hole through the ice to create a small den in the snow layer on the ice. Reduced ice and snow cover will limit their habitable area and expose them to more predation. Migration and life cycle of large species such as caribou may be affected. Increased snow cover may make access to winter food more difficult, changing snow melt patterns may affect populations of harassing insects, and vulnerability to predators may increase due to deeper snows.

Indigenous peoples, who make up more than 50 percent of the arctic population in Canada, are particularly at risk. Indigenous communities have lived in the arctic for millennia and have adapted to its unique yet demanding climate. Many continue to rely on a subsistence economy and depend on the natural world for their livelihoods, as well as for their cultural and social identity. These communities are at particular risk as rising temperatures and encroachment from other species threaten the plant and animal communities on which their livelihoods and identities are based.

Further, the elders of the native communities provide a remarkable resource of knowledge about changing climate. Because of the intimate connection between each community and its environment and the oral traditions within the community, knowledge of environmental change is preserved collectively within the community. In a recent interview, Frank Logusik Jr., a member of the Togiak Traditional Council in Togiak, Alaska, reported that “in my early time, there used to be lots of snow. . . . Our ice used to stay in our bay until sometime in May, but now, in winter, our bay doesn’t freeze up . . . winds break up the ice.”²⁰

2. African Sahel

Located on the southern edge of the Sahara desert, the Sahel is particularly vulnerable to climate change. The countries that make up the Sahel are among the poorest in the world, with economies heavily reliant on agriculture. The region is characterized by fragile soils that are low in carbon and plant nutrients, making it extremely vulnerable to environmental stresses, as well as overgrazing and erosion.

Studies of the Sahel show the interlocking complexity of environmental and social issues. One such study concluded:

Rainfall variability is a major driver of vulnerability in the Sahel. However, blaming the ‘environmental crisis’ on low and irregular annual rainfall alone would amount to a sheer oversimplification and misunderstanding of the Sahelian dynamics. Climate is nothing but one element in a complex combination of processes that has made agriculture and livestock farming highly unproductive. Over the last half century, the combined effects of population growth, land degradation (deforestation, continuous cropping

²⁰ The interview and additional information about Togiak is available at the North Pacific Research Board and National Science Foundation’s website on “Understanding Ecosystems Processes in the Bering Sea,” http://bsierp.nprb.org/fieldwork/2010/togiak_visit.html.

and overgrazing), reduced and erratic rainfall, lack of coherent environmental policies and misplaced development priorities, have contributed to transform a large proportion of the Sahel into barren land, resulting in the deterioration of the soil and water resources.²¹

The Sahel has been repeatedly stressed by lengthy droughts over the past several decades. Its rainfall is strongly influenced by large-scale patterns of atmospheric circulation and has been in a minimum phase from about 1970 to the present.²² While the expectation is that a recent shift in the large-scale atmospheric circulation pattern will bring a period of increased rainfall, most climate models predict that in the coming century the Sahel will be even drier as a result of climate change.

As past experience has taught, droughts in the Sahel produce devastating results, including food insecurity and starvation, greater likelihood of disease, lost educational opportunities, and many other stresses. While indigenous resources and technologies such as crop diversification, harvest of wild fruits and tree products, shifting to animal husbandry, and migration to urban areas have mitigated some of the impacts of past droughts, they will likely be insufficient to address the challenges resulting from climate change, especially considering the current disarray in the Sahel. Instead, successful adaptation will require strategic partnerships providing the economic and technical resources to develop drought resistant crop varieties, improve soil and water conservation, and restore soil fertility in areas degraded by erosion and desertification.

3. Small island atolls: The Tarawa Atoll, Kiribati

Among the places most directly affected by climate change will be small island atolls. The Tarawa Atoll, a part of Kiribati located at 1° N latitude and 8° longitude west of the international dateline, provides an example of the potential impacts of climate change. The atoll comprises a series of islets with an average width of less than 450 meters, and most of the land is less than three meters above sea level. The total area is approximately 30 km², with a population of 35,000 that is growing at a rate of about 2 percent per year. The population density is stressing the local environment in a variety of ways, particularly in the areas of fresh water and sanitation.

Life on Tarawa Atoll, as on many other atolls, is largely supported by a small fresh water lens (layer) that accumulates in the subsurface from rainfall and runoff and floats on the denser salt water. This lens prevents the intrusion of salt water, allowing plants to grow, and can be tapped by wells for drinking water. As the population increases, the need for fresh water also rises, stressing the fresh water aquifer. If too much water is withdrawn or too much rainwater is used without allowing it to percolate into the lens, salt water can intrude into the lens and damage the island ecosystem. In addition, human and animal waste, if not properly

²¹ Serigne Tacko Kandji, Louis Verchot, and Jens Mackensen, "Climate Change and Variability in the Sahel Region: Impacts and Adaptation Strategies in the Agricultural Sector," United Nations Environmental Programme and World Agroforestry Centre, 2006, <http://www.unep.org/Themes/Freshwater/Documents/pdf/ClimateChangeSahelCombine.pdf>.

²² See here for data, plots, and discussion: Todd Mitchell, "Sahel rainfall index (20-10N, 20W-10E), 1900 - April 2011," Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and the Ocean, September 2011, <http://www.jisao.washington.edu/data/sahel/>.

managed, can enter the fresh water lens, leading to contamination and disease. Conflict over fresh water resources is already a problem in Tarawa.

One might think that a small, near-equatorial atoll would be largely unaffected by climate change but that is far from the case. While expected sea level rise is unlikely to completely submerge the atoll, the impacts of climate change will, most likely, be significant. Sea level rise coupled with storm surges could periodically inundate more than half of the atoll by late in this century. Such inundations would certainly substantially reduce the size of the existing fresh water lens and might render it unusable due to salt water intrusion. Possible increased evapo-transpiration and reduced precipitation may further threaten freshwater supplies for human consumption and agriculture. The inundations would destroy a substantial portion of the atolls' roads, including the causeways connecting the various islets. Inundation and associated erosion will reduce the amount of land available for agriculture, a primary economic driver on the atoll. Increasing ocean acidity and temperature may also harm the atolls' coral reefs, leading to depleted fisheries and the loss of an important buffer against wave action and erosion.²³

While the risk of submersion is a common theme, it is clear that small island atolls such as Tarawa face many other challenges that are also extremely serious. With a per capita GDP of approximately \$600 per year, Kiribati lacks the economic resources to take aggressive action to address the expected impacts. One estimate suggests that the cost of dealing with the infrastructure damage could be more than ten times the annual GDP of the atoll. It is likely that these communities will face permanent evacuation but that the populations will have no obvious place to go.

4. Orissa State, India

Orissa State is located on the east coast of India on the Bay of Bengal, just to the south and slight west of Calcutta. Flooding is an essential feature of Orissa, India; it replenishes groundwater, delivers valuable topsoil and nutrients for agriculture, and sustains valuable ecosystems. As we write this (September 2011), Orissa is being devastated by heavy monsoon rains that have produced the worst flooding in at least 30 years. Estimates are that more than 50 people have died and tens of thousands have been left homeless by rampaging floods and mudslides. Communities in Orissa have adapted to this sometimes volatile environment with agricultural systems based on flood-resistant rice, which are often supplemented with aquaculture, fishing, and some dairy farming.

Climate research suggests that climate change will result in increased temperatures, more variable rainfall, and an increased incidence of flash floods. In addition, sea level rise will create coastal inundation and increased susceptibility to storm surges associated with tropical storms and cyclones. Orissa is already prone to floods and coastal damage from monsoon systems and cyclones. Coupling the anticipated rise in sea level with

²³ A number of studies of Tarawa and its environment are available, including chapter four in the report "Cities, Seas, and Storms: Managing Change in Pacific Island Economies, Vol. IV, Adapting to Climate Change," World Bank, 2000, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPACIFICISLANDS/Resources/4-VolumeIV+Full.pdf>.

the strong likelihood of increasing strength of tropical storms (primarily due to warmer sea surface temperatures) suggests that coastal flooding and erosion can only become worse over the next century.

The impact of variable rainfall is hard to quantify, but is likely to result in reduced crop yields and loss of income for many in Orissa. With almost 60 percent of land devoted to rain-fed agriculture, and with water-dependent rice as its main crop, the agriculture sector is vulnerable. The crops are prone to frequent erosion, inundation, and salinization. Climate projections indicate that flood-prone areas, particularly in the subtropics, will be subject to more intense rain and flooding.

These communities, which have already taken significant steps to adapt to their flood-prone environment, may have few remaining options to build additional resiliency into their economy through adjustments to crop patterns and farming practices. Instead, these communities will be forced to rely on national and international aid to provide for immediate needs in the aftermath of floods and to develop comprehensive strategies to adapt to a changing and more variable world.

Scientists have warned that such impacts on agriculture could occur globally. "In the future, heat stress on crops and livestock will occur in an environment of steadily rising demand for food and animal feed worldwide, making markets more vulnerable to sharp price swings. High and variable prices are most damaging to poor households that spend the majority of their incomes on staple foods."²⁴

The Orissa government has already produced a draft Climate Change Action Plan²⁵ that discusses these issues and possible responses. Addressing the question of why climate change is a serious issue for Orissa, they state:

Continuing climate change variation is predicted to alter the sectoral origins of growth, including the ability of the poor to engage in the farm and non-farm sector, as well as increase inequality, and therefore to reduce the poverty elasticity of growth. The direct impacts of extreme climate-induced events could be the loss of life, livelihoods, assets and infrastructure. All of these will affect the state's economic growth and nullify the effectiveness of pro-poor macroeconomic policies, trade and private sector investment being pursued.

5. Concluding thoughts

These four vignettes illustrate the possible impacts of climate change on diverse communities in our world. While each story is unique, each is also representative. Frank Logusik Jr. could be speaking for hundreds of communities across the Alaskan and Canadian arctic, as well as for our Native American brothers and sisters in the American Southwest who see their own community life being threatened by increasing heat and drought. The complex environmental and social problems occurring in the Sahel and the likelihood that they will be exacerbated by climate change are similar to problems in Mexico and in the arid regions of central Asia. Tarawa is representative of many small island states across the Pacific and

²⁴ D.S. Battisti and R.L. Naylor, "Historical warnings of future food insecurity with unprecedented seasonal heat," *Science* 2009: 240.

²⁵ Draft dated 4 June 2010, produced by the Department of Forest and Environment, Government of Orissa, <http://orissa.gov.in/portal/occap.pdf>.

Indian Oceans. Their societal issues associated with limited resources and overpopulation, which has resulted in part from improved health care provided by developed countries, are already daunting. Coupling them with environmental changes produced by climate change is likely to stress these small islands to the breaking point. Ocean acidification and its possible impacts on reef ecosystems also attack the basic food supply of these small states. Orissa State in India represents dozens of similar locales in the subtropics that depend on monsoon rains for their very existence and yet are threatened by changes in the intensity and variability of these rains, as well as by damage associated with a rising sea level.

The projected impacts are an extrapolation of what is being observed to happen today, coupled with impact assessment studies based on both global climate models and regional models, which are used to provide insight on smaller spatial domains. The magnitudes of the anticipated changes are uncertain because our knowledge of both physical (including biological) and social science is incomplete. Although climate change to date may have increased agricultural productivity in some areas, future impacts are highly uncertain, and the likely detrimental impacts may contribute to significant increases in extreme poverty. Further, we do not know exactly how societies will respond to the threats to food and fresh water that we can anticipate. It is not difficult to imagine that possible outcomes include armed conflict and outright war.

Unfortunately, it appears that global society is unlikely to change its current use of carbon-based fuels and associated economic policies any time in the near future. We are left then to contemplate what we might do to mitigate these impacts.

C. Mitigation and adaptation

The world's population has been expanding exponentially in the past century, and emissions per capita are also still increasing, especially during times of growth in economic well-being. The two trends combine to form a prospect of a very rapid rate of increase in emissions if we let "business as usual" continue.

As we consider what our response to this problem should be, we first acknowledge God's grace in society. God has endowed humans with gifts to innovate: to dream, discover, develop, and deploy means of sustaining themselves from the provisioning of creation. Since God's providence has in the past allowed humans to innovate technologically to increase the abundance of food and material goods they enjoy today, we live in the expectation of the continuation of such providence. We recognize that God created humans as stewards of the biosphere, and we believe that if we take concerted action, God's grace will allow us to develop innovative solutions for mitigation and adaptation.

Mitigation, which means reducing the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, is defined as actions that change the net balance of emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and several other specific substances that warm the planet. These actions include conservation (for example, more judicious use of energy) and more dramatic changes, such as further developing renewable fuels and switching to alternative technologies

and infrastructures. These changes will take real commitment and long-range planning on the part of our society and governments.

Conservation and efficiency yield immediate benefits and may be very low cost or no cost. Well-insulated homes, efficient heating and cooling systems, and higher vehicle mileage standards may cost little or nothing when the energy cost savings are included. Good stewardship mandates that we take these actions to reduce our use of natural resources. Because the construction of power facilities of any sort requires large amounts of energy, the lowest emissions always come from the power plant that was never built.

In the short term, we can substitute less polluting fuels for dirtier fuels. Natural gas emits about 40 percent less carbon dioxide than coal on an equal energy basis and does not contain the heavy metal pollutants of coal. Large new reserves of natural gas have been discovered in the eastern and southern United States, and, to a lesser extent, Canada. Worldwide, there are many large natural gas fields currently unavailable because of distance to markets. We should support efforts to access these fields, particularly when accompanied by processes that remove carbon dioxide from power plant exhaust for processing or injecting into permanent underground storage. Another energy source, nuclear energy, can produce large amounts of carbon-free energy but has particular issues of safety and waste disposal. Wind and solar energy contain promise, but today they mainly supplement traditional energy sources, usually are dilute energy sources, and often are intermittent. Solar energy production in North America is currently financially noncompetitive with other energy sources, but that promises to change with the ongoing development of improved solar energy cells. Increasing the use of renewable energy sources will require improvements in energy storage capability, as well as changes and improvements in the power distribution grid.

While mitigation strategies may be expensive, we should be careful of using cost as an excuse to shy away from doing what is right based on our understanding of the stewardship of creation. These strategies may be expensive in the short term but both cost effective and necessary in the longer term. Economic analyses often discount the cost of actions as they are moved into the future. Such analyses may well be inappropriate for climate change, in which the future costs are likely to be considerably higher because the effects become increasingly likely and more drastic as greenhouse gas concentrations rise.

Adaptation, which means dealing with the climate changes that have already occurred and will continue to occur, involves more changes than many of us can envision. In the near term, we can begin adapting infrastructure to account for anticipated changes. For example, the Netherlands and Germany are increasing the height of dikes along the North Sea to combat sea level rise and anticipated storm surges. Power companies along the Pacific Coast are planning to change reservoir storage capacity and hydroelectric generation capability in anticipation of enhanced winter rainfall and reduced winter snowpack.

While we work at reducing our emissions, we also need to recognize that we as humans need both provisioning and gainful employment. Simply doing less of the things we are currently doing would indeed reduce greenhouse gas emissions but could also lead to increased deprivation and unemployment. On the other hand, policies supporting research and innovation

can potentially lead, along with reduced emissions, to greater productivity through improved efficiency and to increased employment opportunities for skilled and educated workers.

For example, intensifying agriculture through investment in research and development of higher-yielding crops has been shown to have reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Globally, crop yields have more than doubled since 1961. The increased yields have made it possible to feed the world's growing population with much less increase in cropland area than would have been required otherwise. Had the yield increase not occurred, the larger conversion of forests to cropland would have resulted in higher emissions, globally on a net basis, amounting to 590 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents.²⁶ As with other mitigation options, intensification may be associated with trade-offs in other environmental impacts, but it is recognized as a key factor to meet the dual objective of food production and climate mitigation.²⁷

Intensification includes smallholder farms as well as large farms. There are examples of developing countries (including China, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Vietnam) that have recently managed to increase both their forest cover and their agricultural production, showing that even in the face of economic globalization, sound policies and innovation can reconcile forest preservation with food production.²⁸ Such innovation is particularly needed in the tropics, where the carbon loss is greater and the gain in food production is often less per acre of land that is converted to agriculture.²⁹ Approaches to mitigation need to be assessed from a whole-landscape multisector perspective, including life-cycle analysis of technological options.

Anticipating and managing changes to infrastructure, energy production, and food production will demand serious attention to social justice issues. These issues arise from the fact that, as we have noted above, some groups of people will be more, perhaps much more, vulnerable to the impacts of climate change than others, and some groups will have more resources to use for adaptation than others. As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors and seek their good, which includes helping the poor and vulnerable to adapt to these anticipated changes.

IX. Translating knowledge and gratitude into responsible action and joyful service

As confessing Christians in the 21st century, what is our response to these issues of environmental degradation and the particular issue of human-induced climate change? The answer to this question is complex because the

²⁶ J.A. Burney, S.J. Davis, and D.B. Lobell. "Greenhouse gas mitigation by agricultural intensification," *Proceedings of the National Academies of the Sciences*, 107:26 (2010):12052-12057.

²⁷ R. DeFries, and C. Rosenzweig, "Toward a whole-landscape approach for sustainable land use in the tropics," *Proceedings of the National Academies of the Sciences* 107:46 (2010):19627-19632.

²⁸ Eric F. Lambin and P. Meyfroidt, "Global land-use change, economic globalization, and the looming land scarcity. *Proceedings of the National Academies of the Sciences*, 108:9 (2011):3465-3472.

²⁹ Paul C. West, H.K. Gibbs, C. Monfreda, J. Wagner, C.C. Barford, S.R. Carpenter, and J.A. Foley, "Trading carbon for food: Global comparison of carbon stocks vs. crop yields on agricultural land," *Proceedings of the National Academies of the Sciences*, 107:46 (2010):19645-19648.

issues are complex. Moral responsibility and obligation are difficult concepts for issues that span global scales and decades of time; preventive and remedial actions require long-term commitment and international cooperation, both of which are difficult to achieve.

A. *Previous declarations on creation care and climate change*

We are not the first Christians to wrestle with these issues, so it is important for us to consider what has been done already. The committee has considered the following six documents:

- *The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation* from the Evangelical Environmental Network
- *The Oxford Declaration on Global Warming*
- *An Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming* from the Cornwall Alliance
- *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action* from the Evangelical Climate Initiative, which is associated with the Evangelical Environmental Network
- *The Micah Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change* developed at the Fourth Triennial Global Consultation held in Kenya by the Micah Network from July 13-18, 2009
- *African Church Leaders' Statement on Climate Change and Water*, resulting from a meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya, in June 2008 under the auspices of the All Africa Council of Churches

Summaries of the six documents statements are provided below. The documents are included in their entirety in Appendix C for reference.

1. *The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*³⁰ was developed in 1994 by a conference of leaders of the evangelical community under the auspices of the Evangelical Environmental Network. It is a powerful statement calling God's people to renewal and commitment to care of creation. The declaration begins with a statement of worship for the Creator and acknowledgment of our sin and, in particular, that "we have failed in our stewardship of creation." It then describes the degradation of creation and the finite limits for creation against which we are pressing, and it asserts that "human poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation." It follows with a call for confession and repentance and states that all humans have responsibility for creation. It concludes with several statements of purpose, among them:

Therefore we call upon all Christians to reaffirm that all creation is God's; that God created it good; and that God is renewing it in Christ.

We seek a deeper reflection on the wonders of God's creation and the principles by which creation works. We also urge a careful consideration of how our corporate and individual actions respect and comply with God's ordinances for creation.

We recall Jesus' words that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, and therefore we urge followers of Jesus to resist the allure of wastefulness and overconsumption by making personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self restraint and frugality.

³⁰ Those seeking a detailed discussion of this document are encouraged to read S.A. Berry, ed., *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*, Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

We call on all Christians to work for godly, just, and sustainable economies which reflect God's sovereign economy and enable men, women and children to flourish along with all the diversity of creation. We recognize that poverty forces people to degrade creation in order to survive; therefore we support the development of just, free economies which empower the poor and create abundance without diminishing creation's bounty.

We commit ourselves to work for responsible public policies which embody the principles of biblical stewardship of creation.

Before moving on to the declarations specifically dealing with global warming, we note that in 2000, in reaction to *The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*, the Cornwall Alliance³¹ issued a *Declaration on Environmental Stewardship* that addressed some similar issues. The *Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship* claims to represent the perspective of a broader grouping of faiths. It states that it is written by a group of "Jews, Catholics, and Protestants, speaking for ourselves and not officially on behalf of our respective communities." Its expressed beliefs, presented as arising from a common Judeo-Christian heritage, are given without direct biblical references. It agrees with the evangelical declaration that "men and women were created in the image of God," but it places more emphasis on their "privileged place among creatures" and notes concern that "many people mistakenly view humans as principally consumers and polluters rather than producers and stewards. Consequently, they ignore our potential, as bearers of God's image, to add to the earth's abundance." Because of the absence of biblical references, presence of other ideologies commingled in its theological background, and outright denial of science on the issue of climate change, we do not discuss further the *Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship* or recommend it for study.

2. *The Oxford Declaration on Global Warming* arose from a meeting held in 2002 in Oxford, England. This meeting brought together climate scientists and evangelical leaders for mutual scientific and theological education at St. Anne's College. The outcome of this unprecedented gathering of leading scientists and evangelicals was the *Oxford Declaration on Global Warming*. This declaration is well rooted in biblical, theological, and scientific scholarship. Its three main points are
 - a. Human-induced climate change is a moral, ethical, and religious issue.
 - b. The earth's climate is changing, with adverse effects on people, communities, and ecosystems.
 - c. Action is needed now, both to arrest climate change and to adapt to its effects.

It then goes on to recommend actions by Christian denominations, churches, and organizations to increase awareness of climate change, set an example through our own actions, and urge action by national governments.

³¹ A brief history and some additional perspective on the Cornwall Alliance is included in Appendix D.

3. *An Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming*, issued by the Cornwall Alliance in 2009 (hereafter referred to as the Cornwall Declaration on Global Warming) and authored largely by Calvin Beisner, provides a stark contrast to the previous two documents. Despite the placement of *evangelical* in the title, this document arises from an interfaith alliance (see Appendix D). This Cornwall Declaration includes both statements on “What We Believe” and “What We Deny.” The principal belief of this declaration is that “earth and its ecosystems . . . are robust, resilient, self-regulating and self-correcting,” a belief that is unsupported by science and observation. The Cornwall Declaration states that fossil and nuclear fuels are indispensable and that policies to create mandatory reductions in carbon dioxide will increase the cost of energy and will harm the poor. The declaration denies both that the “earth’s climate system is vulnerable to dangerous alteration” and that human contributions to greenhouse gas concentrations are causing global warming. The declaration “Call to Action” is primarily a call to practice creation stewardship and to simultaneously abandon “fruitless . . . policies to control global temperature.”
4. *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action* was produced by the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) in January 2006. The ECI is “a group of senior evangelical leaders in the United States who are convinced it is time for our country to help solve the problem of global warming.” The Call to Action has four main claims:
 - a. Human-induced climate change is real.
 - b. The consequences of climate change will be significant and will hit the poor the hardest.
 - c. Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem.
 - d. The need to act now is urgent. Governments, businesses, churches, and individuals all have a role to play in addressing climate change—starting now.
5. *The Micah Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change* synthesizes the findings of the Fourth Triennial Global Consultation held in Kenya by the Micah Network from July 13-18, 2009. The meeting attracted members of the Micah Network from 38 countries, and the declaration arose from their deliberations. It recognizes that God established just relationships among all of creation, including the establishment of women and men as stewards. It acknowledges that through our sin we have failed to be faithful stewards, but that God “is already at work to renew all things.” It specifically identifies global warming as a result of human activity and enumerates the potential impacts of that warming. It then challenges individuals to “teach and model care of creation” and calls on “local, national, and global leaders to meet their responsibility to address climate change and environmental degradation.” It concludes with the statement “We will labour with passion, persistence, prayer and creativity to protect the integrity of all creation, and hand on a safe environment and climate to our children and theirs.”

6. *The African Church Leaders' Statement on Climate Change and Water* was developed by the All Africa Council of Churches at a meeting held in Kenya in 2008. The Statement affirms "the reality and urgency of climate change and the adverse negative impact it has on entire humanity and particularly on poor and vulnerable communities in Africa." It goes on to state that greenhouse gas emissions have arisen and continue to arise largely from industrialized countries while the negative consequences of [global warming] are felt largely in the global south. It calls upon the governments of the global north to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support adaptation in the global south, offer financial and technological support, promote and implement low carbon strategies, and compensate developing countries for damage already done. The statement also appreciates "the efforts of churches and faith-based organizations in advocating for the rights of the poor and vulnerable communities in the continent [of Africa]" and further challenges them to "recognize the reality of climate change" and to "stand in solidarity with communities that are currently suffering from the negative impacts of climate change." It also challenges churches and faith-based organizations to develop curricula and training modules that help integrate climate change issues into educational material and to establish "eco-congregations" that have a focus on "checking consumerism through behavior change."

B. *What can we learn from these declarations?*

These documents provide contrasting views on evangelical Christian responses to creation stewardship and climate change. Four of them—*The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*, *The Oxford Declaration on Global Warming*, *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*, and *The Micah Declaration*—are quite similar in tone, although the first deals with the general creation care issue, while the latter three deal more specifically with climate change. *The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*, which the Christian Reformed Church signed in 1994, provides a broader and richer perspective on the creation care issue than any of the other documents. *The Oxford Declaration* and *The Call to Action* have a similar perspective on climate change. Both state that climate change is real and occurring now, has moral and ethical implications, affects the poor more than the rich, and requires urgent action. *The Micah Declaration* is similar in tone but places a somewhat stronger emphasis on social justice issues, particularly as they affect future generations. Each of the latter three documents emphasizes the need for the Christian church to be engaged in the discussion of climate change impacts and to act to mitigate impacts, as well as plan for adaptation to them.

The African Church Leaders' Statement is similar to these documents in its recognition of the reality and urgency of climate change, and it has, like the *Micah Declaration*, a strong emphasis on social justice. Its focus, however, is much more on the relationship between the global north being responsible for greenhouse gas emissions and the global south suffering the impacts of global warming. The statement specifically calls out global warming as affecting domestic and agricultural water and food security and is alone among the statements in drawing a possible connection between global warming and resource-based conflicts. Its contention that "a third of the African population has already fallen prey to droughts, flood and resource-based

conflicts resulting from global warming” is difficult to document, likely because of the difficulty in specifying the impacts of climate change that have occurred thus far. Nonetheless, the potential for disasters and conflict associated with climate change in Africa is high.

The Cornwall Declaration on Global Warming takes a completely opposite point of view, challenging not only the idea that human influence on climate change is occurring but even the possibility that creation could be harmed by human activity. In addition, it states that actions to mitigate climate change are neither warranted nor useful and, if taken, will harm the poor.

How can we resolve this apparent dilemma? Which of these alternatives is the pole toward which our denomination should gravitate? We think that the following three primary questions need to be addressed in order to decide:

- Does earth have such a robust climate that human activity cannot alter that climate?
 - Is climate changing due to human activity?
 - Will climate change affect the poor more negatively than the rich, and will policies enacted to mitigate climate change do the same?
1. Does the earth have such a robust climate that human activity cannot alter that climate?

Scripture testifies that God created the earth, including both the physical and biological components of creation, good. Creation and our relationship to it, however, have been warped and distorted by sin. Sin resulted in changes in land productivity and ecosystems (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:18-22). The answer to this first question, therefore, is no, and we must consider instead the degree to which the earth can be altered by human activity. While human activity cannot produce a result so calamitous that the entire human race is wiped out (Gen. 9:15), there is no biblical basis to assert that climate (or any part of creation) is so robust that humans cannot damage their environment in ways that produce pain and loss, including the loss of human life.

This position is borne out by the history of the past century. Even leaving aside the terrible tragedies and genocide associated with the wars and purges of the past century, we can identify many examples of human activity that have had and are having serious impacts on the environment and human life. In many of these cases, but certainly not all, the initial actions were not the product of sinful intent, but the consequences were a manifestation of evil. Thalidomide was introduced as a helpful drug to combat nausea associated with morning sickness, but it caused terrible birth defects. Chernobyl was built to provide nuclear power to the Ukraine, but an explosion and fire, possibly the result of human negligence, produced the worst nuclear power plant disaster in history. The radioactive products devastated both humans and the environment, with effects that will continue for many years. At Love Canal near Niagara Falls, New York, the burial of over 21,000 tons of known toxic waste led to an environmental wasteland and lingering health impacts. Lead was added to gasoline to aid combustion and engine performance, but it contributed to lead poisoning in people and the environment.

Many more examples of similar regional disasters could be cited. But, is there an example of human activity having a global climate impact?

The ozone hole provides an illustrative case in point. As early as the 1920s, chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) compounds were recognized as highly effective refrigerants to replace ammonia and other toxic gases, and as efficient fire-fighting compounds and propellants. The rapid rise in CFC usage, which began in the 1960s, caused atmospheric CFC concentrations to rise from zero to a few thousand ppt (parts per trillion; basically a few thousand molecules of various CFC compounds per trillion air molecules) by 1990. In the early 1980s, two atmospheric chemists alerted the world to the fact that these compounds could affect the atmospheric ozone layer that protects life from the harmful effects of high energy solar radiation. Further research confirmed that this was indeed the case, and the first impacts of ozone loss were identified in the Antarctic stratosphere (some 6 to 10 miles above the surface), perhaps the remotest part of the earth's atmosphere and seemingly the least likely to be affected by human activity. The confirmation of this environmental degradation already in progress led in 1987 to the signing of the Montreal Protocol, which limited the production and use of CFCs. CFC concentrations are now declining, but it will be several more decades before CFCs are reduced to near-zero levels and the ozone layer is healed.

The ozone hole is an interesting example of a problem created by human activity, recognized as such by the scientific community, and then successfully addressed by the international political community through negotiation and regulation. It indicates quite clearly that humans have the capability through their actions to impact the environment both regionally and globally. Although earth's climate is robust and resilient, it is not immune to human activity.

2. Is climate changing due to human activity?

We have addressed this question in Section VII and Appendix A. The scientific community is strongly in support of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) finding, which states that

Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations.

The term "very likely" implies certainty at the 90 percent level of probability.

3. Will climate change affect the poor more negatively than the rich, and will policies enacted to mitigate climate change do the same?

This question regarding the impact of climate change is really two questions that are often entangled, resulting in poorly constructed answers. First, climate change as we understand its consequences will indeed impact the poor more negatively than the rich, particularly at the level of individual countries. Geographically small countries with limited financial resources will have very little opportunity to adapt to climate change. Their populations cannot move to a more benign climate, and they do not have the resources to adapt technologically to anticipated changes. We have provided some examples of these impacts in Section VII, and the scientific studies of which we are aware confirm this general conclusion. While various arguments can be made to the contrary

(e.g., the poor have less to lose; the rich are more susceptible to the social unrest and rebellions that may arise from the impacts of climate change), it is clear to us that there is indeed a social justice issue associated with potential climate change. The African church leaders make this point very forcefully in their statement. Our actions toward reducing emissions of greenhouse gases can be an expression of the love for our neighbors that God requires of us.

The second half of the question asks whether policies to reduce greenhouse gases will affect the poor more negatively than the rich. This is really the question posed in The Cornwall Declaration on Global Warming. It is an economics and policy question that is somewhat beyond the scope of our mandate but deserves a few comments. The conclusion that these policies unfairly affect the poor seems to arise, in part, from the assumption that the only path to a higher standard of living is to follow the highly energy intensive route taken by the United States and other developed countries. This is by no means correct, especially for countries that lack carbon-based fuel reserves or the financial resources with which to pay for them.

In addition, it assumes that we as individual nations and as an international community are unable to implement policies that will address these inequities. This is not the case. In recent years during cold winters in the United States, the price of fuel oil for heating reached disastrous levels for many poor and elderly residents, particularly in the northeast. The government has chosen to provide subsidies for the purchase of heating oil to prevent loss of life because that is the moral course of action. The 1987 Montreal Protocol contained provisions for poorer countries to phase out use of CFCs more slowly to limit disruption to their economies, particularly in refrigeration. It will be incumbent on the more technologically advanced countries to provide technological and financial help for poorer countries. This has happened in the past and can happen in the future.

Effective climate change mitigation will be a significant undertaking and will undoubtedly come at a cost. But the costs of mitigation and their distribution among countries and individuals are separate issues that should not be conflated. As the examples above demonstrate, concerns about the distribution of costs of mitigation can be addressed through financial and technological aid, differentiated responsibilities, and other means. Further, the costs of failing to act will also impact the poor more negatively than the rich. And these costs are likely to be greater (and more difficult to redistribute) than the costs of mitigation. While we must be ever mindful of the costs that our choices have on the poor, those considerations alone are not a reason to avoid taking action.

Further, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to predict technological advances that will change our energy future. A recent example is the ability to drill horizontal wells followed by artificial fracturing to produce natural gas from tight shale formations. This technology can potentially develop vast reserves of natural gas that a few years ago were considered inaccessible. Advances in technology and decreases in costs may change our energy future for a variety of energy sources in ways we cannot predict. These future advances too are a part of God's continuing providence and provision.

There is an additional, important moral issue relating to future generations. The amount of carbon-based fuels on earth is finite, and our generation is consuming them at an ever increasing rate. Estimates of the amount of fuel remaining and the length of time before it is effectively consumed vary widely. There can be no doubt, however, that our children and grandchildren, and their children, will experience more of the risks and less of the benefits of the greenhouse gas emitting practices that we are employing today.

Our analysis of the statements on climate change and their implicit questions leads us to conclude, in terms of the climate change issue, that we most strongly identify with the positions expressed by *The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*, *The Oxford Declaration on Global Warming*, *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*, and *The Micah Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change*. These statements align with our understanding of biblical principles, theology, and environmental science. The positions expressed in the Cornwall Declaration are in general inconsistent with our perception of biblical stewardship and with our observations of what is occurring in our world today.

C. *Position statement on climate change*

The Christian Reformed Church Creation Stewardship Task Force submits the following position statement on climate change.

We reaffirm *The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*.

Its statement of the relationship between God and all of creation, including humanity; the degradation of creation through the effects of our sin; the need for repentance and renewal; and the call for action are as true today as they were in 1994, when it was adopted by the Christian Reformed Church.

We affirm the following statements:³²

1. Climate change is occurring and is very likely due to human activity.
Observations of natural systems and collection of scientific data confirm that the earth on average is warming. Careful scientific research consistently identifies human-induced greenhouse gases as the very likely (90% probable) primary cause of observed global warming.
2. Human-induced climate change is a moral, ethical, and religious issue.
God created the earth and continues to sustain it. Made in God's image, human beings are to care for people and all creation as God cares for them. The call to "love the Lord your God" and "love your neighbor" (Matt. 22:37–39) takes on new implications in the face of present and projected climate change.
3. Human-induced climate change poses a significant threat to future generations, the poor, and the vulnerable.
As higher levels of greenhouse gases accumulate in the atmosphere with time, average global temperature will increase and rainfall will become more variable. Future generations will inherit climate change driven

³² Our statements follow closely some parts of *The Oxford Declaration on Global Warming* and of *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*.

by emissions of today. Changing climate and rising sea level will particularly impact low-lying coastal areas and small islands. Poor societies will have fewer options and resources than wealthier societies to adapt to these changes.

4. Human-induced climate change poses a significant challenge to us all.

Climate change will occur globally and will require adjustments and changes for all people. The changes required to our lifestyles and to our economic goals are most likely large and potentially underestimated. The God-given gifts of human innovation and resourcefulness, as well as a renewed commitment to stewardship, need to be applied in a concerted manner to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

5. Urgent action is required to address climate change.

Action is needed at the personal, community, and political levels toward reducing human causes of climate change and mobilizing ourselves in urgent assistance to those who are forced to adapt to its negative effects.

We have an opportunity now to reduce the future impact of climate change by reducing the emission of greenhouse gases. These emissions are increasing at an exponential rate. Waiting to act until more data accumulate limits our ability to reduce future impacts and ensures that future climate change will be greater rather than smaller.

D. Walking the talk

1. Reflection

Moving forward from our position statement to concrete actions requires that we all begin with prayer, individually and communally, asking God for forgiveness for the sins of arrogance, pride, and greed that cause us to fail in our roles as stewards of creation, consume more than we need or ought, and ignore the plight of the poor and vulnerable. We must all pray for discernment regarding the answers to the difficult questions that the issue of global warming raises and for loving spirits that allow us to seek a right path together.

In this spirit, we commend item 8 of the *Micah Declaration* to the churches for reflection and commitment:

Before God we commit ourselves, and call on the whole family of faith, to bear witness to God's redemptive purpose for all creation. We will seek appropriate ways to restore and build just relationships among human beings and with the rest of creation. We will strive to live sustainably, rejecting consumerism and the resulting exploitation. We will teach and model care of creation and integral mission. We will intercede before God for those most affected by environmental degradation and climate change, and will act with justice and mercy among, with and on behalf of them.

2. A first step: awareness, appreciation, and stewardship³³

What does it mean to act with justice and mercy among, with, and on behalf of those most affected by environmental degradation? The simple yet profound response to this question is this: "Love God as Redeemer

³³ This section on awareness, appreciation, and stewardship is excerpted from *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care* (Faith Alive, 2011), pp. 122-23, with permission.

and Creator, acknowledge God's love for all creation, and act upon this by following Jesus—the one who created, upholds, and reconciles all things."

But a serious problem remains: it is difficult to love, uphold, and care for a world that we really do not know. Thus many will first have to become aware of creation and its God-declared goodness. As believers in Christ, we are called to share this good news and invite others to come to know the one true personal God and Savior, and to have them join us in working to live rightly and to spread the joy of right living. Once we are aware of creation and God's love for the world, we can move on to appreciation and stewardship.

Our ultimate purpose is to honor God as Creator in such a way that Christian environmental stewardship—caring for creation—is part and parcel of everything we do. Our goal is to make "tending the garden"—our striving to safeguard and renew the life of all creation—an unquestioned and all-pervasive part of our service to each other, to our community, to God's world.

We can move in our response from awareness to appreciation to stewardship, as follows.

a. Awareness

In a time when so much calls for our attention—international affairs, local politics, our work or schooling, family needs, church commitments, and other busyness—we might only barely notice the natural and environmental aspects of creation in our surroundings. We might take time to notice and learn things about creation only when we have a day off or when we take a vacation trip—and even then our impressions may be seriously obscured. We must consciously make ourselves aware of what is happening in God's creation.

Awareness involves seeing, naming, identifying, and locating different parts of God's creation. It means taking off blinders that we or society may put on us to keep us focused on our pursuits in life. It means providing ourselves with enough quiet, reflection, and learning time that we can notice and identify a tree or mountain, bird or river. It means entering the natural world intentionally in order to locate and find God's creatures that we sing about in a favorite doxology: "Praise God . . . all creatures here below."

b. Appreciation

From awareness comes appreciation; we cannot appreciate something we are unaware of. At the very least, appreciation means tolerating what we are aware of. We may tolerate, for example, worms and hyenas. But appreciation can also involve respect. We certainly respect a large bear, but we can also develop respect for a lowly worm as we learn of its critical importance to the rest of creation. We can move, as well, from toleration to respect to valuing. The earth and everything in it has value because God made it so. As we become aware of the order of creation, we will image God's valuing of all his works. And this will build even further until we even esteem and cherish much of what we discover.

c. Stewardship

Appreciation must lead to stewardship. Stewardship takes us beyond appreciation to restoration. We now work for the restoration of what has been degraded in the past. Beyond restoration, stewardship means serving. As we understand that God through creation is in so many ways serving us, we grow to willingly return this service with our own. This service includes a loving and caring keeping of what God has given us to hold in trust. And our service in creation will eventually involve entrusting others with what we have served, kept, and restored.

Christian environmental stewardship—our loving care and keeping of creation—is a central, joyful part of the human task. As communities of God’s stewards—as the worldwide body of the one who redeems and reconciles all things—our churches and our lives can and must be vibrant testimonies to our Redeemer and Creator. “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11).

3. Getting your congregation talking and walking

Each congregation is different. There may already be things that you are doing for other reasons that are helping care for creation by default, or you may be a congregation that has integrated creation care into all aspects of your church life. No matter where you are on the awareness, appreciation, and stewardship continuum, the following suggestions will help you become better caretakers of the place where God has planted you. One of the best places to start is to take an inventory of where your church is at, then brainstorm ideas of where you could go from there; choose one or two activities that you can implement and finally go about the work of doing it. Remember, environmental stewardship is not talk. Environmental stewardship is action.

a. Take an inventory

Take some time to look at your creation care activities in the context of the following:

- Worship
- Theology
- Education programs
- Property management
- Finance and purchasing
- Church activities
- Church grounds
- Personal lifestyle
- Community outreach
- Global outreach

The Office of Social Justice has created a simple church checklist to help with this process, and it is reprinted in its entirety in Appendix E.

b. Brainstorm ideas

Once you have a sense for where your church is at, have a brainstorming session of what you could do to become better stewards. Remember that this is a time to dream and share every crazy idea you have. Do not block ideas because of perceived roadblocks; just get it all down on paper. You will have time to narrow things down later. The mini-workshop printed in Appendix E is an excellent tool for skimming ideas from your group.

c. Choose one or two actions

Choose a couple things or maybe one area that you would like to work on for the next twelve months and start putting together a plan for how you will go about accomplishing that action. This may include finding more people to be involved in the process (council, the congregation, the education committee, and so forth), learning more about a certain topic or the area where you live, or even finding others in your church who are interested in joining you. Be careful not to try to do too much at once, but do something!

d. Get cracking

Do the work you have set out to do. Pray. Gather with other like-minded people. Encourage each other, share your stories, and keep going. Remember that each step you take glorifies your Creator and helps reconcile you and others to the creation, no matter how big or small the action.

4. What are others doing?

There are many examples of individuals, congregations, and denominations that are doing wonderful work on caring for creation. Appendix E lists many ideas that were gleaned from churches who did the brainstorming activity outlined there. You can also look at the eco-justice group at www.justiceseekers.ning.com to find out what CRC congregations are doing around the world. Join in and share your ideas, support each other, and ask questions about eco-justice.

X. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Dr. Calvin B. DeWitt, chair, and Dr. Thomas Ackerman, member of the task force, when the report of the Creation Stewardship Task Force is addressed.

Ways of Knowing

B. That synod declare that both Scripture and continually emerging scientific knowledge are necessary and valid ways of knowing that should guide our response to creation stewardship issues, including climate change.

Grounds:

1. God reveals himself through Scripture and creation. As creation suffers, God's revelation is diminished.
2. God's revelation in Scripture and creation has integrity and compatibility. These revelations are complementary and mutually supportive if understood correctly.
3. The ability to learn through science and personal observation is part of God's gift of general revelation.

Affirmation of Biblical Principles

C. That synod declare that an important way in which Christians reflect their love of God and neighbor is through their expression of creation care. Caring for creation, therefore, becomes an integral part of the church's evangelical witness to the world.

Ground: 1 Peter 2:12 urges us to remember that all our actions should lead others to glorify God.

D. That synod affirm the biblical principles of earthkeeping, fruitfulness, Sabbath, discipleship, kingdom priority, contentment, praxis, and conservancy (see section IV, B) and that it urge congregations, denominational staff, leaders, and members to strive to live by these principles.

Statements on Climate Change

E. That synod affirm the following findings (see section IX, C) concerning climate change and that it commend them to the churches as guides to prayer, discussion, direct action, and advocacy:

1. Climate change³⁴ is occurring and is very likely due to human activity.
2. Human-induced climate change is a moral, ethical, and religious issue.
3. Human-induced climate change poses a significant threat to future generations, the poor, and the vulnerable.
4. Human-induced climate change poses a significant challenge to us all.
5. Urgent action is required to address climate change. This includes actions at the personal, community, and political levels toward reducing human causes of climate change and mobilizing ourselves to urgent assistance of those who are forced to adapt to its negative effects.

Call to Action

F. That synod call upon the churches and their members to examine our energy choices in our homes, lives, businesses, farms, and institutions from a perspective of stewardship, challenging ourselves to use less energy and to use it more wisely in order to reduce our individual and collective carbon footprint on the environment. (Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the first step; ultimately, control of climate change will likely require low or zero net emissions.)

³⁴ Climate change here refers to global warming.

G. That synod call upon the churches, their members, and appropriate denominational agencies and institutions to respond with generosity and compassion to people and places affected by climate change, as well as to make efforts to mitigate it. This includes advocating with our governments to commit the necessary financial resources in an effective global framework to assist populations that are bearing the brunt of the negative effects of climate change while being the least able to cope.

H. That synod call upon the churches, members, and denominational bodies to be voices for justice and public examples in the effort to live sustainably within our God-given resources, to promote stewardship in our own communities and our nations, and to seek justice for the poor and vulnerable among us and for future generations.

I. That synod direct the BOT to ensure that educational resources and programs are developed and made widely available to congregations, schools, and other groups in order to promote participation in the urgent global conversation concerning care for the creation. This particularly includes how we can, now and in the future, significantly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, including the need for energy conservation and efficiency, the need to substitute cleaner fuels for dirtier fuels, and the need for publicly supported investment to replace fossil fuels with better alternatives.

J. That synod request the BOT to review the operational practices of major CRC agencies and institutions in the light of this report's conclusion concerning the urgent need to exercise robust leadership in caring for the creation and addressing a changing climate, including the need to reduce our denominational carbon footprint.

K. That synod request the BOT to facilitate placing several appropriate creation care organizations on the list of those recommended for financial support.

L. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Creation Stewardship Task Force and dismiss the task force.

XI. Items for further study and action

In the course of its work, the task force noted at least two items that it believes merit further study, consideration, or implementation by appropriate denominational bodies:

1. The "Doctrine of Discovery" (see section V, D) should be examined in the light of its connection to injustice committed against indigenous peoples and how the church and the Reformation may have been involved in the process. This is not just an issue of past injustices; in multiple, modified forms the doctrine continues to persist today. Although this is a large, complex, and difficult issue, the task force believes the integrity and unity of our CRC community of faith requires us to confront it.

2. The task force suggests that a type of “seed grant” program—from denomination to churches—would encourage small groups within churches to act creatively in responding to the findings and recommendations within this report. The best ideas often come from the local level. The availability of a small amount of concrete funding can catalyze local energy and support for creative and innovative projects. These in turn become the seeds for others.

Creation Stewardship Task Force

Thomas Ackerman

Tom Bruulsema

Ted Charles

Calvin B. DeWitt, chair

Anoushka Martil

Mary L. VandenBerg

Peter Vander Meulen, staff adviser

Amy Vander Vliet, reporter

Gerald K. Van Kooten

Cindy Verbeek

Joel Visser

Appendix A

A Climate Change Primer

Note: A full-color version of this Creation Stewardship Task Force report is available for download at crcna.org/synodresources in order to view the charts contained in Appendix A in color.

The science of climate change is complex and has been the subject of extensive investigation, discussion, and debate, particularly over the past three decades. It is impossible to do full justice to the extent of this subject in a few pages; the intent here is to provide an overview of the principal scientific issues. For each issue, multiple scientific papers could be cited, but here references are provided to a few seminal papers, reports, and books that are intended for a more general audience. Interested readers are strongly encouraged to read these reports and books to extend the discussion presented here.

A. *Earth's greenhouse effect*

All warm bodies emit electromagnetic radiation. If the temperature of the body is high, such as that of a star like our sun, radiation is emitted at wavelengths that our eyes can see, as well as at wavelengths both shorter and longer than what is visible to us. If the temperature of the body is lower, similar to the normal range of temperature on earth, then this radiation is emitted at infrared wavelengths (also referred to as longwave radiation). Human bodies, the earth surface, clouds, and the atmosphere all emit infrared radiation.

The average temperature of any planet is maintained by a balance of incoming and absorbed solar radiation and outgoing radiation emitted

to space. The solar radiation reaching earth is a function of the average surface temperature of the sun (approximately 5,700 degrees Kelvin) and the distance of earth from the sun. About 30 percent of this energy is reflected by earth and its atmosphere, and the remainder is absorbed, primarily at earth's surface (see Fig. 1). In the absence of an atmosphere, the amount of solar radiation absorbed by earth would be only enough to heat the planet (surface plus atmosphere) to an average temperature of about -18°C (0°F), something we can learn from straightforward physics and satellite observations. In order to maintain a stable planetary temperature, absorption of incoming solar energy needs to be balanced by outgoing thermal radiative energy. The outgoing thermal energy is radiated primarily from the middle levels of the atmosphere, typically 5 to 10 km (3 to 6 miles) above the surface. The atmosphere, like any warm body, emits thermal radiation in all directions, both upward toward space and downward toward the earth surface. The earth surface, because it is warmed by both absorbed solar radiation and emitted thermal radiation from the atmosphere, is much warmer—about 15°C (60°F)—than the average temperature of our planet.

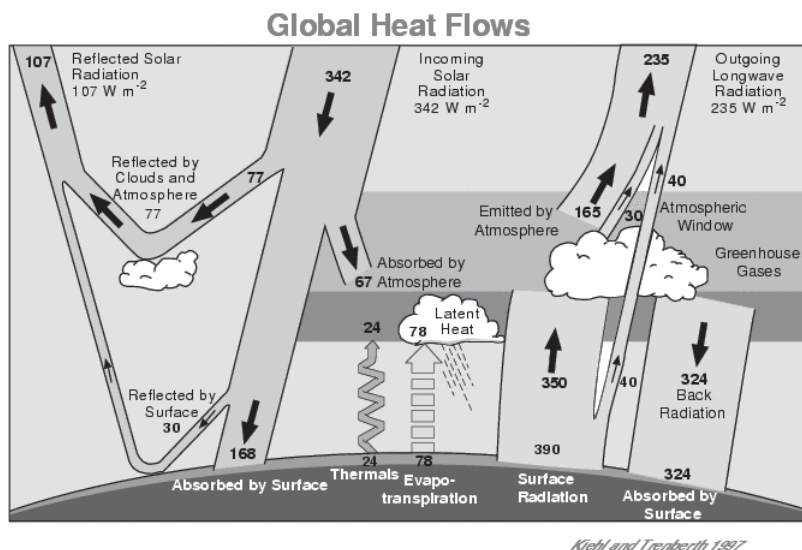


Figure 1. Globally averaged heat flow in the earth climate system expressed in units of Watts per square meter. This figure was taken from an article on the greenhouse effect (http://www.windows2universe.org/earth/climate/greenhouse_effect_gases.html) at Windows to the Universe, an educational website operated under the auspices of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research. This is an excellent site from which to obtain information about the science of weather and climate.

The warming of the earth surface by downward radiation from the atmosphere has been named the “greenhouse effect,” even though the physics of what keeps a greenhouse warm is quite different. The term “greenhouse

effect” does capture the fact, however, that the earth surface is kept warm due to the presence of an overlying, absorbing atmosphere. Atmospheric greenhouse effects occur on both of our neighboring planets. Venus has a far larger greenhouse effect and a very hot surface, while Mars has a much smaller greenhouse effect and colder surface.

The physics of the greenhouse effect has been known for more than 150 years, beginning with the work of John Tyndale in 1861 and Svente Arrhenius in 1896.¹ Given knowledge of the composition of an atmospheric column, the downwelling infrared radiation, or greenhouse effect, can be calculated by standard computer codes to an absolute accuracy of better than 1 percent when compared with measurements.² Perhaps surprisingly, this accuracy is better than the absolute accuracy with which solar radiation transmitted through the earth atmosphere can be calculated.

The primary constituents of the atmosphere are nitrogen (78%), oxygen (21%) and argon (about 1%). Nitrogen and oxygen each occur naturally as a “diatomic” molecule consisting of two identical atoms, and argon is a single atom. Single atoms and diatomic molecules are very poor absorbers of thermal radiation, and thus none of these three contributes to the greenhouse effect. The greenhouse effect is due entirely to molecules consisting of three or more atoms, and for our atmosphere, these are principally three different molecules: water vapor (H₂O), carbon dioxide (CO₂), and ozone (O₃). Water vapor absorption and emission is by far the most important contributor to greenhouse warming, with carbon dioxide second, and ozone a distant third. There are other naturally occurring greenhouse gases (e.g., nitrous oxide and methane), the concentrations of which are augmented by human activity, as well as some greenhouse gases produced only by human activity (e.g., Freon and related compounds).

Although water vapor is the most important greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide is the key regulator of the magnitude of earth’s greenhouse effect because of its long residence time in the atmosphere. Earth’s carbon cycle is complex, and processes operate on time scales that are very short (seasonal)

¹ An excellent history of global warming had been compiled by Spencer Weart under the auspices of the American Institute of Physics and is available on line at <http://www.aip.org/history/climate/summary.htm>.

² In general, it is much more difficult to make an absolute measurement than to make a comparison measurement. For example, a radar gun can easily be used to determine with high precision which of two cars is traveling faster down the highway. Determining the exact miles per hour that a car is traveling is considerably more difficult because the radar gun accuracy must be determined by calibration. The 1 percent accuracy mentioned here applies to the agreement of a computed quantity vs. a measured quantity, in this case the downwelling thermal radiation.

Absolute accuracy is limited by accurate knowledge of the properties of the atmosphere (for example, the amount and distribution of water vapor in the atmosphere), the accuracy of the instrument itself (typically on the order of 0.5 percent for thermal radiometers), and the accuracy of the radiation model. The absolute accuracy of the radiation model can be estimated in a variety of ways, but can ultimately be determined only by comparison with observations. The precision of the model (e.g., the ability to correctly calculate the *change* in the downward thermal radiation when the amount of CO₂ in the column is increased) is much better, typically hundredths of a percent, and is due only to the small uncertainties in the basic physics of the radiation model.

to very long (millennia and beyond). During the present interglacial period (the past 10,000 years) but prior to the industrial revolution, the carbon content of the atmosphere (primarily as carbon dioxide) was approximately constant at about 280 parts per million by volume (ppmv).³ This concentration was maintained for more than 10,000 years by a balance between increases due to volcanic out gassing and decreases due to biological activity, primarily the formation of calcium carbonate shells by small ocean animals. When additional carbon dioxide is added to the atmosphere, roughly half of it dissolves into the upper layer of the ocean on the time scale of a few years. This process creates carbonic acid in the ocean and leads to an increasing acidification of the upper 100 meters (about 300 feet) of the ocean. (The harmful impacts of this acidification on ocean life are discussed briefly at the end of this section.) The remaining carbon dioxide stays in the atmosphere for periods ranging from many decades to millennia.

Atmospheric water vapor concentrations are strictly controlled by temperature. Think of a parcel of air as in a balloon (but without the actual balloon membrane) containing some amount of water vapor. If we slowly cool the parcel, condensation will occur at some point, and the water vapor will be converted to liquid water (or possibly ice). This occurs regularly in the atmosphere and produces clouds and, sometimes, precipitation, because air parcels cool as they rise in the atmosphere. The point at which condensation occurs is known as the dewpoint temperature; the dewpoint is only a function of temperature and can be predicted very accurately.⁴ Consequently, the atmosphere cannot hold an unlimited amount of water vapor because the water vapor concentration is controlled by atmospheric temperature. Since the ocean provides an unlimited source of water vapor for the atmosphere, one can see that, on a global average, the amount of water vapor in the atmosphere is held constant by an equilibrium between evaporation from the ocean (and from the land surface, to a lesser extent) and condensation and precipitation.

Since the maximum amount of water that can be held in an air parcel increases with temperature, the amount of water vapor in the atmosphere will increase if the average atmospheric temperature increases. But, since water vapor is a greenhouse gas, adding water vapor to the atmosphere increases the absorption and emission of thermal radiation by the atmosphere, which increases the downward thermal radiation from the atmosphere and further warms the earth surface. This process is called a *positive feedback*, *positive* in the sense that the initial direction of change (warming of the surface and atmosphere) is further enhanced by the initial change itself, and *feedback* in the sense that the initial response (more water vapor) actually drives a larger change.

The role of carbon dioxide as the regulator of earth climate therefore becomes clear. When carbon dioxide is added to the atmosphere, some fraction of that increase remains in the atmosphere from decades to centuries.

³ 1 ppmv of carbon dioxide means that there is one molecule of carbon dioxide in a million molecules of dry air.

⁴ Dewpoint temperature, the temperature at which condensation occurs, can be calculated from the Clausius-Clapeyron equation with great accuracy. This relationship was deduced in the early 1800s and can be derived from the equations of moist thermodynamics.

Because carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas, the surface warms. Because the surface warms, the atmosphere warms as well, and more water vapor is added to the atmosphere. Because water vapor is a more efficient greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, the surface warms further, warming the atmosphere still more, allowing more water vapor to be added to the atmosphere. This process of positive water vapor feedback amplifies the initial change due to carbon dioxide. However, the carbon dioxide itself is the regulator because of its long lifetime in the atmosphere.

Two additional subjects need to be addressed. The first is the annual biological cycle of carbon dioxide. Each year, earth's vegetation "breathes" carbon dioxide in during the summer growing season and releases it to the atmosphere by plant respiration and material decay during the full year. Because most of the earth's land mass and forests are in the northern hemisphere, there is an observable annual cycle in carbon dioxide concentrations, with a minimum in the northern hemisphere summer and a maximum in its winter. This annual change in carbon dioxide is actually quite large but is a process in which the amount of carbon dioxide "breathed" in during the summer is very nearly the same amount "breathed" out in the winter, because the amount of vegetation is very nearly the same from year to year. However, deforestation in the tropics in recent years has partially upset the balance, leading to a small overall increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations.

The second subject is clouds and cloud feedback. As air parcels rise in the atmosphere, they cool until condensation occurs, at which point liquid water condenses onto small particles that are always present in the atmosphere. Small water droplets coalesce into larger droplets, which eventually become large enough to become rain drops. Cloud processes are far more complex than what is described in these few sentences; nonetheless, a great deal is known about cloud properties and the processes that form them. From a climate perspective, the problem is that many cloud processes occur on very small spatial scales (micrometers, or tiny fractions of an inch) so, although they can be understood at this small scale and models of individual clouds can be created, it is not possible to model all cloud processes on a global scale. Thus, a detailed knowledge of how clouds will respond to a warmer world is uncertain.⁵

However, some clear statements about global cloud response can be made. A warmer atmosphere with more water vapor is not necessarily an atmosphere with more clouds because cloud formation depends on air motions and relative humidity,⁶ not on the actual water vapor concentration. So, why do we care if there are more or fewer clouds in a warmer world? Clouds both cool and warm the atmosphere simultaneously. They cool by reflecting solar radiation and they warm by absorbing thermal infrared radiation radiated from the surface of the earth, thereby adding to the atmospheric greenhouse effect (Fig. 1). If cloud properties change in a warmer world, then the question is, Will they change to produce a net negative feedback

⁵ "Uncertain" does not mean "unknown" but, rather, "known with less certainty." See discussion below.

⁶ Relative humidity is the ratio of the actual water vapor concentration to the water vapor concentration required for saturation (at which point condensation occurs). Since the saturation vapor pressure increases with temperature, warming an air parcel actually lowers its relative humidity, all other things being equal.

(more reflection than absorption) or a net positive feedback (more absorption than reflection)? Answering this question is complicated and can only be determined using global climate models, because there are no data that provide a definitive answer.⁷ The consistent answer from a variety of modeling studies is that cloudiness increases slightly in a warmer world but, more significantly, the changes in cloud properties produce a positive feedback, further warming an already warmer world. The uncertainty about cloud response to a warmer world is the leading cause of differences among model projections of future earth temperature.

Much more can be said about the current understanding of climate and the role that the greenhouse effect plays in maintaining earth's climate. Detailed discussions are available in the references cited at the end of this appendix for readers who may wish to pursue the topic in more detail.

B. Greenhouse gas concentrations over time

Human activity is increasing the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide and many other greenhouse gases, such as methane, nitrous oxide, and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). All these gases have similar effects on thermal infrared radiation and the greenhouse effect, but they play a lesser role than carbon dioxide, so our discussion here focuses only on carbon dioxide. Detailed discussions of the life cycle and concentrations of these other gases can be found in the 2007 IPCC report.

In 1957 Charles David Keeling began making measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations at an observatory located at about 12,000 feet above sea level on Mauna Loa on the island of Hawaii. Keeling chose the Mauna Loa observatory because of its elevation and lack of any significant local sources of carbon dioxide at that altitude.⁸ These measurements, which are continued to the current day by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), are shown in Fig. 2. The two obvious features are the annual cycle produced by the "breathing" of the biosphere, discussed earlier, and the consistent upward trend of the record. The values measured at the start of the record in 1957 were about 315 ppmv, while the most recent measurements are nearing 390 ppmv. Similar records, but shorter in time, are available from a worldwide set of sites ranging from Pt. Barrow, Alaska, to American Samoa to the South Pole. All records show the same consistent increase in carbon dioxide concentration, but with differing annual cycles, depending on location.

⁷ Directly observing climate feedbacks requires watching (i.e., collecting useful data on) the climate system for a sufficiently long period that both the changing conditions (increasing CO₂ concentrations) and the response (changes in cloud properties) can be seen unambiguously. Global cloud records of sufficient accuracy only exist for about the past decade, and the natural climate variability in the earth system is too large for the response to be measured over such a short time. One can try to estimate cloud feedbacks from the response of clouds to internal variability (such as the annual cycle of warming and cooling), but this approach is fraught with difficulty because system responses to internal variability are not the same as responses to external variability. This is an area of current research and discussion within the scientific community.

⁸ Some may find this confusing because Mauna Loa is an active volcano, and active volcanoes emit carbon dioxide. The vents on Mauna Loa, however, are on the lower flanks of the volcano, far below the observatory. Care is taken to avoid contamination of the measurements by up-slope winds that might carry natural or local human emissions of carbon dioxide.

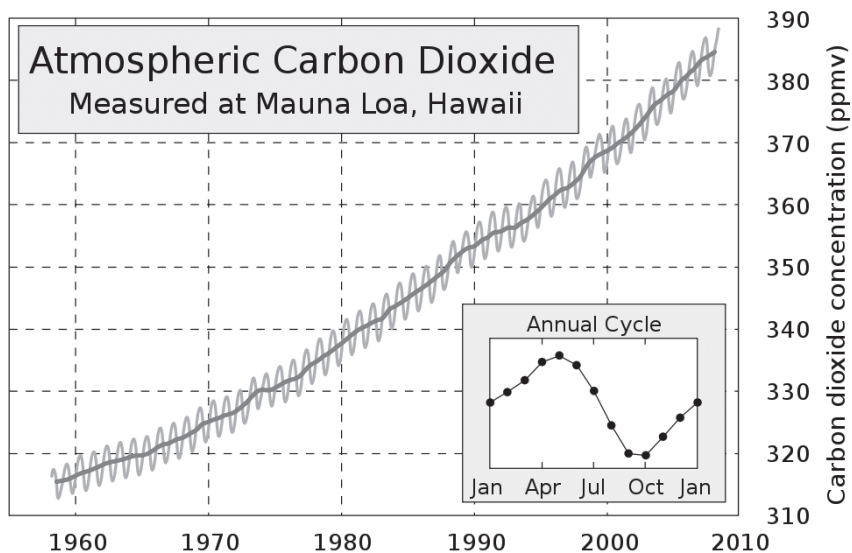


Figure 2. Measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide taken at Mauna Loa Observatory since 1957. This measurement series was begun by David Keeling and continued to the present day by NOAA. Data may be obtained at <http://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/ccgg/trends/>. The figure is taken from the Wikipedia Commons.

A longer trend of carbon dioxide concentration can be obtained by extracting ice cores from glaciers on Greenland and Antarctica and measuring the carbon dioxide concentration in air bubbles trapped in the ice. The ice core can be dated exactly over the past few millennia by counting annual layers (much like tree rings) and by other means. Because carbon dioxide and nitrogen molecules are large relative to the crystal dimensions of ice, they cannot escape, meaning that their concentration is unchanged with time. Data for the last millennia (Fig. 3) show that carbon dioxide concentrations were constant at about 280-285 ppmv until about 1850, which is approximately the start of the industrial revolution. The annual rate of change has steadily increased since that time, which simply means that, each year, the change in carbon dioxide ppmv is greater than that of the year before.

The data suggest that the increase in carbon dioxide concentrations is associated with human activity. But can that be proven? Chemically, all carbon-based fuels are made up of some combination of carbon and hydrogen, as well as, in some cases, oxygen. When burned in the presence of oxygen, the chemical end product of carbon-based fuel combustion is water vapor and carbon dioxide. Gas, oil, and coal producers keep very accurate records of fuel production and usage. Thus, one can make an accurate calculation of the carbon dioxide produced by combustion and how that production would alter observed atmospheric concentrations over time.

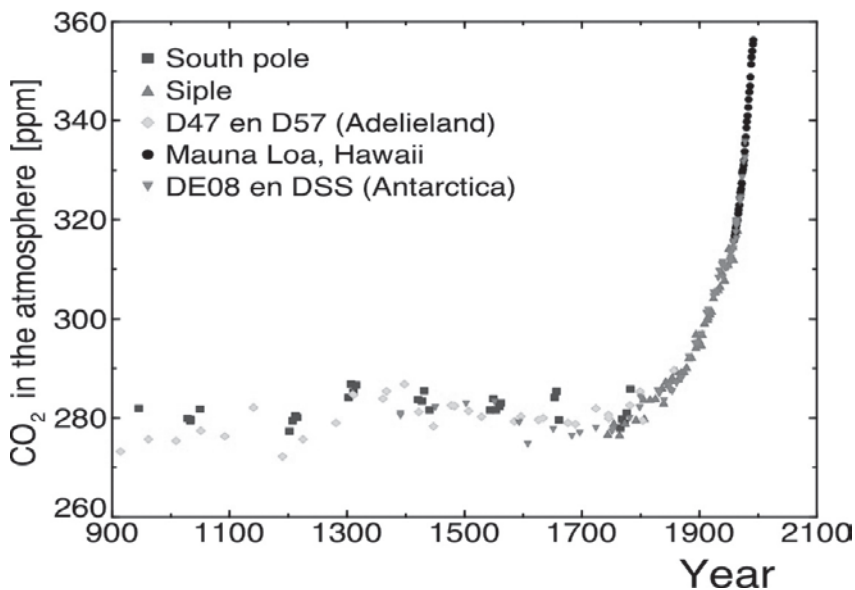


Figure 3. Atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations obtained from ice core measurements taken in Antarctica. Ice core data are available from a number of locations, such as <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/paleo/icecore.html>.

Fig. 4 illustrates the fluxes of carbon into and out of the atmosphere. The two primary sources are emission from fuel combustion and from land-use changes, the latter being essentially the burning of forests. The sinks are atmospheric storage (increasing carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere), solution in the ocean, and storage in the biomass. It is interesting to note that the land-use source and the land storage terms are comparable and, over the past decade, the latter is twice the former. The land storage term is the most uncertain term in the budget. It represents carbon stored in standing biomass, including root systems (e.g., trees), and stored as organic carbon in soils. While tropical biomass burning has introduced carbon into the atmosphere, regrowth of forests in North America, particularly in suburban areas and areas once logged for fuel, has removed carbon at a nearly comparable rate.

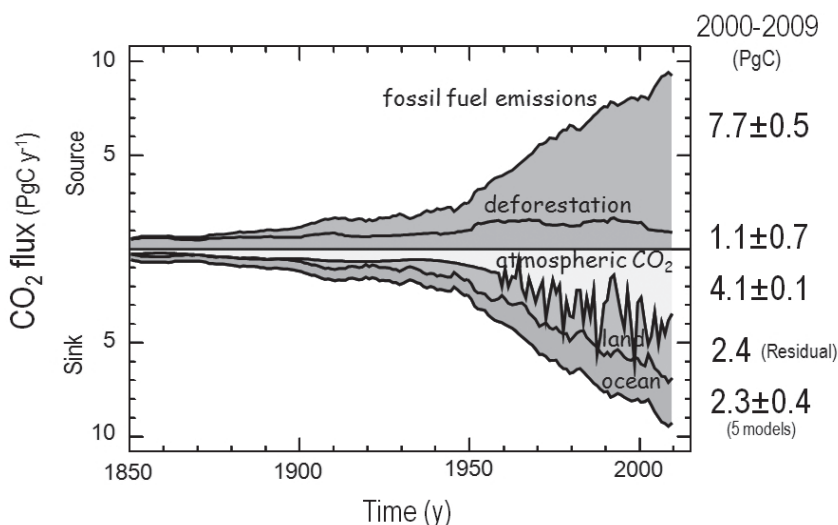


Figure 4. Carbon dioxide fluxes into (source terms) and out of (sink terms) the atmosphere for the past 150 years. Units are petagrams of carbon per year. (See Glossary for definitions.) Budget data are supplied as follows:

Atmospheric CO₂: Data from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Earth System Research Laboratory. Accumulation of atmospheric CO₂ is the most accurately measured quantity in the global carbon budget, with an uncertainty of about 4 percent.

Emissions from CO₂ fossil fuel: CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel and other industrial processes are calculated by the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center of the U.S. Oak Ridge National Laboratory. For the period 1958 to 2007 the calculations were based on United Nations Energy Statistics and cement data from the U.S. Geological Survey, and for the years 2008 and 2009 the calculations were based on BP energy data. Uncertainty of the global fossil fuel CO₂ emissions estimate is about ± 6 percent (currently ± 0.5 PgC). Uncertainty of emissions from individual countries can be several-fold bigger.

Emissions from land-use change: CO₂ emissions from land-use change are calculated by using a bookkeeping method with the revised data on land-use change from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Global Forest Resource Assessment 2010. Uncertainty on this flux is the highest of all budget components.

Ocean CO₂ sink: The global ocean sink is estimated using an ensemble of five process ocean models. Models are forced with meteorological data from the U.S. national Centers for Environmental Prediction and atmospheric CO₂ concentration. Current uncertainty is about 0.4 PgC y⁻¹.

Land CO₂ sink: The terrestrial sink is estimated as the residual from the sum of all sources minus the ocean+atmosphere sink. The sink can also be estimated using terrestrial biogeochemical models as in previous carbon budget updates.

More information on data sources, uncertainty, and methods is available at http://lgmacweb.env.uea.ac.uk/lequere/co2/carbon_budget.htm. Figure from the Global Carbon Budget, <http://www.globalcarbonproject.org/carbonbudget/>.

Over the past decade, the average emission into the atmosphere from burning carbon-based fuels was 7.7 Pg of carbon⁹ per year. This is a very large amount of carbon; it is perhaps helpful to understand that burning 1 U.S. gallon of gasoline produces about 5.3 lbs. (2.4 kg) of carbon in the form of carbon dioxide. An additional 1.1 Pg of carbon was added to the atmosphere by land-use changes. The observed increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide averaged over the decade from 2000 to 2009 is about 1.9 ppmv per year, which is about half of what would be expected from the source terms in Fig. 4. Thus, about 50 percent of the carbon dioxide produced by human activity is now in the atmosphere. The remainder of the emitted carbon dioxide is either dissolved in the surface ocean layer or taken up by the biosphere.

The final piece of the argument is based on carbon isotopes. Carbon in our atmosphere exists as ¹²C, ¹³C, or ¹⁴C. (The small numbers indicate the atomic weight of a carbon atom, the sum of its protons [6] and neutrons [the remainder, either 6, 7, or 8].) The vast majority of atmospheric carbon (about 99%) is the stable isotope ¹²C, with most of the remaining 1 percent being ¹³C. ¹⁴C is a naturally occurring radioactive form of carbon produced by cosmic ray radiation in our atmosphere. Its concentration is very small, about 1 out of a trillion carbon atoms in the atmosphere, and it decays with a half-life of about 5,700 years.¹⁰

Plants have a preference for using lighter isotopes of carbon, so the ratio of ¹³C to ¹²C is lower in plants than in the atmosphere. Fuels derived from coal, oil, and natural gas have a reduced ¹³C/¹²C ratio as well. Measurements of the atmospheric ¹³C/¹²C ratio show that it begins to decrease at the same time that the overall concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide begins to increase—at the beginning of the industrial revolution. Thus the source of the increasing carbon dioxide must be relatively lacking in ¹³C and therefore must have come from the fuels we have burned.

A similar story comes from measurements of the ¹⁴C/¹²C ratio. Carbon-based fuels buried in the earth are devoid of ¹⁴C. Measurements of the ¹⁴C/¹²C ratio show that it is also decreasing with time, indicating that the source of the increasing carbon dioxide must be lacking in ¹⁴C. The only possible explanation is that this carbon dioxide comes almost entirely from burning carbon-based fuels. The conclusion, therefore, is that human activity,

⁹ A petagram (Pg) is 10¹⁵ grams or 1 billion metric tons. Carbon budgets such as shown in Fig. 4 typically refer to the amount of carbon by mass rather than the mass of carbon compounds. Since carbon has an atomic mass of 12 and oxygen has an atomic mass of 16, the ratio of mass of carbon to mass of carbon dioxide is $12 / (12 + 16 + 16) = 12 / 44 = 0.27$. Thus, the 7.7 Pg of carbon emission corresponds to 28 Pg of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

¹⁰ Half-life measures the rate of radioactive decay of a collection of radioactive atoms. If one starts with 100 radioactive molecules of ¹⁴C, in about 5,700 years 68 of them will have “decayed” (e.g., emitted a pair of neutrons) and become ¹²C atoms. In another 5,700 years, 68 percent of the remaining 32 will have decayed, etc. This rate of decay can be measured very accurately and is statistically certain.

principally the burning of carbon based fuels, is responsible for the bulk of the increasing carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere.

C. *Earth climate variability*

Discussions of earth's climate variability over time usually focus on surface air temperature (typically defined by meteorologists as the air temperature measured 4-6 feet above the earth surface) because long-term measurements are only available at the surface. Climate scientists consider the recent temperature record on three different timescales, the modern era of the past 50 years or so, the period of the past 150 years for which a measure of global temperature can be computed from thermometer measurements, and the past millennia or two, during which temperature can be determined from proxy measurements—measurements of other variables that are related to temperature. From roughly 1950 to the present, a variety of measurements in the atmosphere are available, first from balloon-borne instruments (which are still released twice daily all around the globe), then aircraft, and now satellites, that allow atmospheric scientists to construct the state of the atmosphere in three dimensions as a function of time. The quality and quantity of the data record, and hence the understanding of the atmosphere, has increased dramatically during this period but especially in the past two decades.

Sometime in the late 1800s, sufficient surface temperature measurements both on land and by ship became available to make it possible to construct an average global surface temperature record. Constructing this record requires a considerable amount of research because the measurements are not uniform in accuracy and are not uniformly distributed around the world. Several different research groups have ongoing research programs to construct this long-term record and provide independent checks on the overall record. The record developed by the Hadley Centre, a component of the British Meteorological Service, is shown in Fig. 5. The vertical axis in the figure represents the temperature anomaly¹¹ (difference) with respect to a 30-year average from 1961-1990. Each red bar marks the difference between the annual average temperature for that year and the 30-year average. The range (maximum minus minimum) of anomaly values is 0.8° to 1.0° C (about 1.5° to 2° F). While this may seem like a small value, it is large in climate terms. The change in global surface temperature from the end of the last ice age (about 20,000 years ago) and the current interglacial period is between about 5° and 8° C, so a change of 0.8° to 1.0° C in 100 years is a significant amount.

¹¹ *Anomaly* is a term regularly used by earth scientists to refer to the difference between some particular measurement and some long-term average of that quantity. Thus, an annual "temperature anomaly" is the difference between the annual average temperature and the temperature averaged over a longer period. For historical reasons, this longer period is conventionally taken to be a 30-year interval from 1961 to 1990.

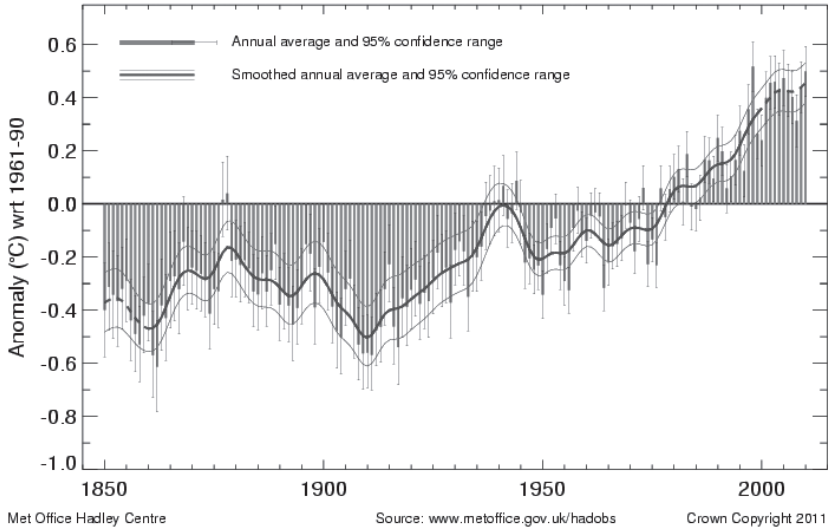


Figure 5. Global average surface temperature constructed by the Hadley Centre. The red bars represent annual average surface temperatures, and the gray extensions denote the 95 percent confidence level of the data. The dark blue line is a smoothed curve based on a running mean of between 1 and 2 decades. The light blue lines indicate the 95 percent confidence level of the smoothed data. “95 percent confidence” means that based on statistical tests, there is a 95 percent chance that the actual value of the temperature lies with the error bars and a 5 percent chance that it is either higher or lower. Typically as one averages longer periods, the confidence goes up and the error bars are reduced in size. The dotted portions at each end of the blue curve indicate that the smoothing curve is influenced by the treatment of the end-points. Additional information and figures can be found at <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/hadobs/hadcrut3/diagnostics/comparison.html>.

Over the past 1,500 to 2,000 years, temperature variability can be derived from proxy records. Proxies are measurements of some quantity that is proportional to temperature and is recorded in biological systems (e.g., tree rings), physical systems (e.g., oxygen isotopes in ice cores or bore holes in the earth crust), or mixed systems (e.g., pollen deposition in lake sediments). Converting these proxy measurements to equivalent temperature is challenging but can be done with careful research and comparison among proxies. A variety of proxy records have been developed in recent years and show comparable changes during the past 1,000 to 2,000 years.

A graphical summary of most of the available proxy data is provided in Fig. 6, a very complex diagram. The curves in this figure are based on a database of 1,209 proxy series that come from tree rings, marine sediments, stalagmites in caves (speleothems), lake sediments, ice cores, corals, bore

holes, glacier extent, and historical documentary series.¹² The curves are constructed from multiple proxy series, using a variety of statistical methods. The references for the various curves in the figure are not given here but are available in the paper by Mann, et al.

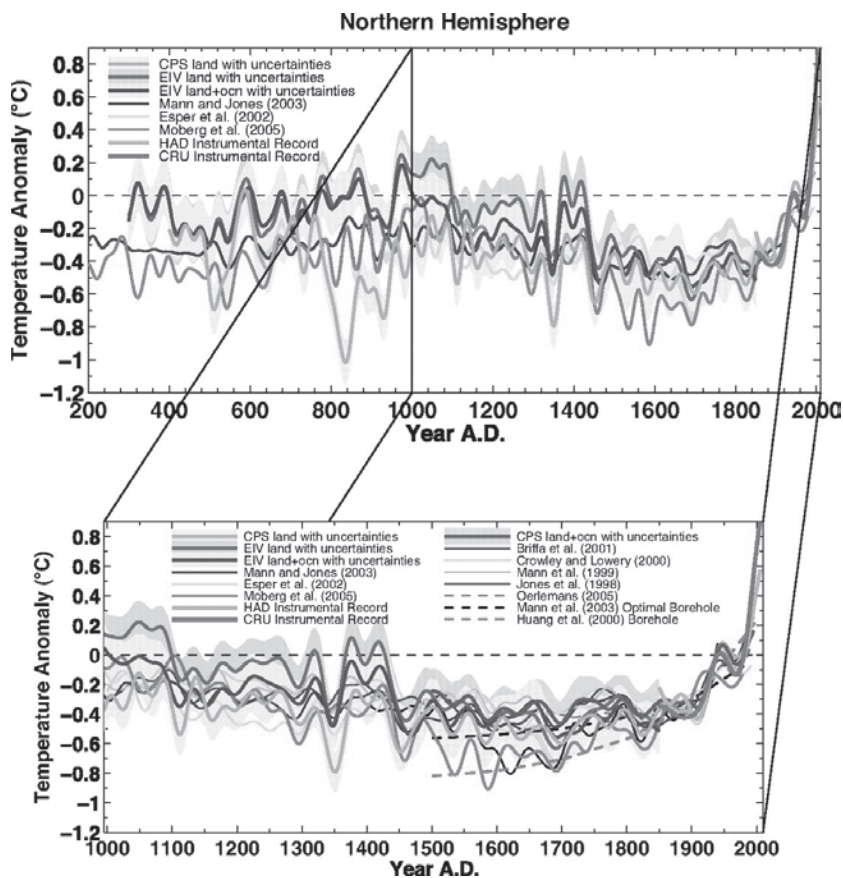


Figure 6. Temperature anomaly curves for the past 1,800 years (upper) and past 1,000 years (lower) based on proxy series from multiple sources. The shadings represent 95 percent confidence levels. The figure is from Mann, et al. (see footnote), and the references cited in the figure are given there. The instrument records (same as in Fig. 5) are shown in red and gray at the latter end of the curve. All curves have been smoothed using a 40-year period.

¹² M. E. Mann, Z. Zhang, M. K. Hughes, R. S. Bradley, S. K. Miller, S. Rutherford, and F. Ni, 2008: Proxy-based reconstructions of hemispheric and global surface temperature variations over the past two millennia, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, pp. 13252–57.

Several inferences can be drawn from these figures. As seen in Fig. 5, temperature varies a great deal from one year to the next. Even the smoothed curve shows variability on time scales of a decade or so, with extended periods of temperature increase and others of relatively little change. On the longer time period (Fig. 6), there is again a great deal of variability, and the different proxies do not always vary in the same way. Despite this variability, however, Fig. 5 shows that surface temperature has warmed considerably in the past 40 years compared to the previous 100 years; Fig. 6 suggests that it is now significantly warmer than at any other time in the preceding 1,000 years.

The two figures also show that climate change cannot be assessed using short period records. Some have argued that surface temperature has been constant in the past 10 years. If one looked only at the past 10 years, one might be tempted to agree. Looking at the longer period record, however, indicates that the temperatures in the past few years have been on a small plateau, similar to others that have occurred in the past, but that the longer-term trend continues upward.

Fig. 6 (or similar plots) has generated a great deal of confusion in the past few years, much of it due to a lack of clarity in understanding and interpretation. One should not read too much into the details of proxy records; they generally show relative change, not absolute change. The long-term variations that produced a warming around A.D. 1,000 and a cooling period around A.D. 1,500 are not well understood in terms of causation but are most probably due to variations in the amount of solar radiation reaching earth and, possibly, variations in volcanic activity. Lacking measurements of both long-term solar variations and atmospheric particles and lacking a well-understood mechanism make it difficult to provide a completely satisfactory explanation of these longer term features. The global extent of such features is also difficult to determine because proxy records are principally available in the northern mid and polar latitudes and on land; very few records are available in the tropics and in the southern hemisphere. As a result, proxy temperature changes may be exaggerated because they are only regional in extent. Thus there is considerable uncertainty about global temperatures over the past two thousand years, but the available evidence indicates that current global temperatures are higher now than they have been at any other time during this period.

Evidence for a warming climate is not limited to temperature and temperature proxy measurements. There is a wide range of additional scientific evidence, as well as correlative evidence from natural systems. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence for a warming climate comes from measurements of Arctic sea ice extent. Satellite measurements have been used to track the September minimum ice extent in the Arctic since 1979 (Fig. 7).¹³ Sea ice extent has decreased steadily, reaching an all-time minimum in 2007. It recovered somewhat in 2009 but reached a near-record low again in 2011. Sea ice extent is an integrator of many factors, including atmospheric and oceanic temperature and circulations. The approximately 40 percent decrease in minimum sea ice extent since 1979 is strongly indicative of an overall polar warming.

¹³ National Snow and Ice Data Center, Boulder, Colo., <http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/>.

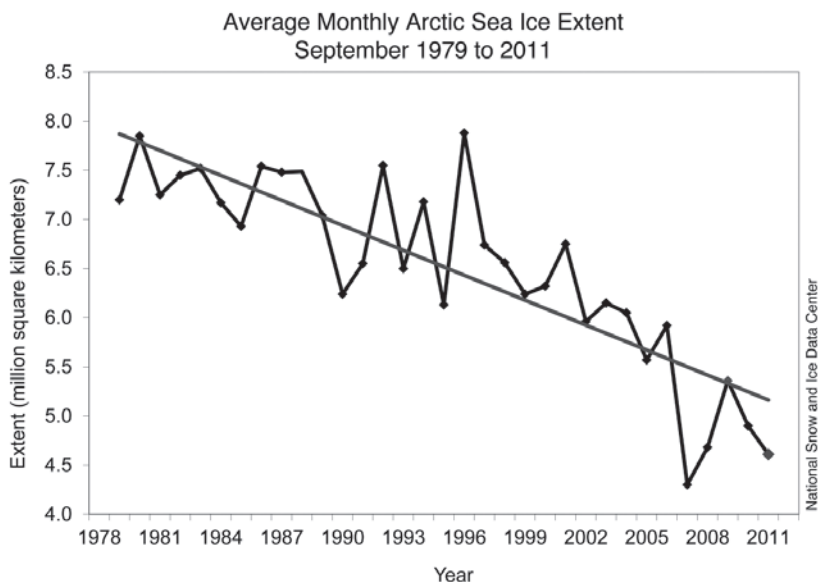


Figure 7. Monthly September ice extent for 1979 to 2011 measured by satellite. The data show a decline of 12.0% per decade.

The National Climate Data Center cites evidence of warming from sea level rise, global ocean heat content, decreasing snow cover in the northern hemisphere, and shrinking glacier volume.¹⁴ Sea level has been rising slowly since measurements began in the late 1800s, but it has accelerated in recent years. Current rates of rise are small (3.5 mm/year, or about 1/8 inch/year) but are expected to increase as the ocean warms. The heat content of the upper ocean provides a way to measure its average temperature. The heat content has increased steadily since the mid-1980s, although it has been on somewhat of a plateau for the past five years. The rise in heat content is consistent with increasing sea level rise.

Ecological systems provide another way of identifying a warming climate. The observed behavior of these natural systems is important because they integrate multiple climate parameters into a single observable result. For many of us, these natural systems are easier to understand and are more compelling than the results of complex climate models which by their nature include assumptions and complicated calculations.

There are many examples of ecological change that have been observed in the past 50 to 100 years. Many of the records come from amateur enthusiasts who record bird and butterfly migration patterns, the time of spring flowering for plants, or the appearance of new species. Other studies relate to the appearance of warm-water fish species at more northerly latitudes along the Pacific Coast and the poleward migration of mammals. Another evidence of change is the upward migration of plant and animal communities in alpine areas.

¹⁴ NOAA National Climate Data Center, Asheville, N.C., <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/indicators/>.

Summaries of these changes can be found in review articles,¹⁵ and we summarize a few here. Spring arrival of migratory birds in Europe and North America has advanced by 1 to 5 days per decade over the past 30 to 50 years. During the same period, plants are flowering and unfolding leaves earlier at a rate of 1.5 to 3 days per decade. Alpine vegetation is moving upward in the Alps at approximately 1 to 4 meters (3 to 12 feet) per decade. Although any one of these indicators may not be conclusive, they collectively testify to an earth climate that has warmed significantly over the past 40 years.

D. *The causes of climate variability and change*

It is useful to consider earth climate records in terms of climate variability and climate change. Climate variability, the short-period oscillating behavior seen in climate records, is principally the result of internal interactions in the climate system that occur because the physical links among ocean, atmosphere, and ice sheets are complex and happen at different timescales. This internal variability is largely unpredictable on a year to year basis (at least at present), but analyzing past variations provides estimates of the expected magnitude and frequency of the variations. Trends or changes in climate cannot be detected using short-term measurements but must be considered on longer time scales (typically more than a decade) because of this internal variability. It is incorrect to argue that a very warm year such as 1998 demonstrates that global warming is occurring; it is equally incorrect to argue that a relatively cool year such as 2008 demonstrates that it is not occurring.

Some climate variability can occur due to external forces on the climate system, some of which are episodic and some of which are oscillatory. Volcanic eruptions produce episodic change. Mount Pinatubo erupted in the Philippine Islands in 1991, and the resulting cloud of volcanic particles produced a noticeable cooling of the earth surface in the following two years. When the particles disappeared after a couple of years, the surface temperature recovered quickly to pre-eruption levels. This response is typical of volcanic eruptions and is predictable, given knowledge of the time and size of an eruption. Solar radiation varies very slightly in intensity on an 11-year cycle, driven by internal behavior of the sun, and drives small oscillations in climate (see discussion below).

Climate change is the climate response to changes in external forces on the earth system that occur on timescales that are longer than decades. For the time period of a century to a millennium, there are only a handful of potential causes of climate change: (1) solar variability, (2) atmospheric particles or aerosol, and (3) greenhouse gases. Climate scientists have considered these forcings in great detail and conclude that all three play a role in understanding climate change on this timescale.

It is important in this context to distinguish between *climate forcing* and *climate feedbacks*. *Climate forcing* refers to a process that affects the long-term radiation balance of the planet, but the forcing agent is somewhat isolated

¹⁵ See, for example, G. Walther, E. Post, P. Convey, A. Menzel, C. Parmesan, T.J.C. Beebee, J.M. Fromentin, O. Hoegh-Guldberg, and F. Bairlein, 2002: "Ecological responses to recent climate change," *Nature*, vol. 416, p. 389; available at <http://eebweb.arizona.edu/courses/Ecol206/Walther%20et%20al%20Nature%202002.pdf>. This article summarizes numerous studies and contains a reference list of over 90 articles on the subject.

from the climate system itself. This is easy to understand in the case of the sun, where changes in the solar output are not affected in any way by earth climate. It is a little harder to understand in the case of a greenhouse gas like carbon dioxide. An increase in the atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration is essentially unaffected by any climate change that it may force, because carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for long periods of many decades to centuries and millennia. This statement is not correct, however, for changes covering much longer periods because carbon dioxide can be removed from (or added to) the atmosphere by geological activity on timescales of tens and hundreds of thousands of years. *Climate feedbacks* are responses within the climate system to external forces that in turn affect climate. For example, a warming climate will increase the melt rate of snow and ice sheets, which makes earth less reflective and more absorbing, thus amplifying the original warming. A feedback process requires an initial push to the system, however, from an external forcing, and then it responds to that push.

The fundamental driver of earth climate (or the climate of any planet) is the absorption of incoming solar radiation, which is in turn a function of the amount of solar radiation reaching the planet. Thus, it is logical to assume that variations in the solar energy reaching earth may be responsible for recent variations in earth climate. Solar energy emitted by the sun varies in two ways. There is an 11-year cycle associated with magnetic field activity and sunspot movement on the surface of the sun, and there are longer term aperiodic fluctuations that modulate the actual number of sunspots at any given time. Specific measurements of the solar radiation reaching earth are available only since the advent of satellites in the late 1970s. Prior to that, solar radiation variations can be estimated only by counting sunspots and correlating that number with expected variations in solar energy. The satellite measurements of solar variability show that the solar energy varies by only 0.1 percent during an 11-year cycle.

Trends in sunspot number, carbon dioxide concentration, and surface temperature are shown in Fig. 8. Some fraction of the warming between 1910 and 1940 is likely related to an increase in solar irradiance associated with the increased number of sun spots. The fact that solar irradiance continued to increase (based on sunspot correlation) until 1960, while temperatures decreased slightly, and then solar irradiance decreased from 1960 to the present, while temperatures increased substantially, indicates that surface temperature is not driven by solar irradiance alone. Satellite measurements of total solar irradiance at the top of the atmosphere confirm that total solar irradiance has decreased during the period from 1970 to the present, while it has oscillated during the sun spot cycle with a variation in received energy of about 0.1 percent. Calculations show that the time lag (the amount of time between a variation in solar heating and a corresponding change in earth temperature) in heating due to these small variations is less than a decade. Hence, solar variability cannot account for the temperature rise since 1960.

Temperature, CO₂, and Sunspots

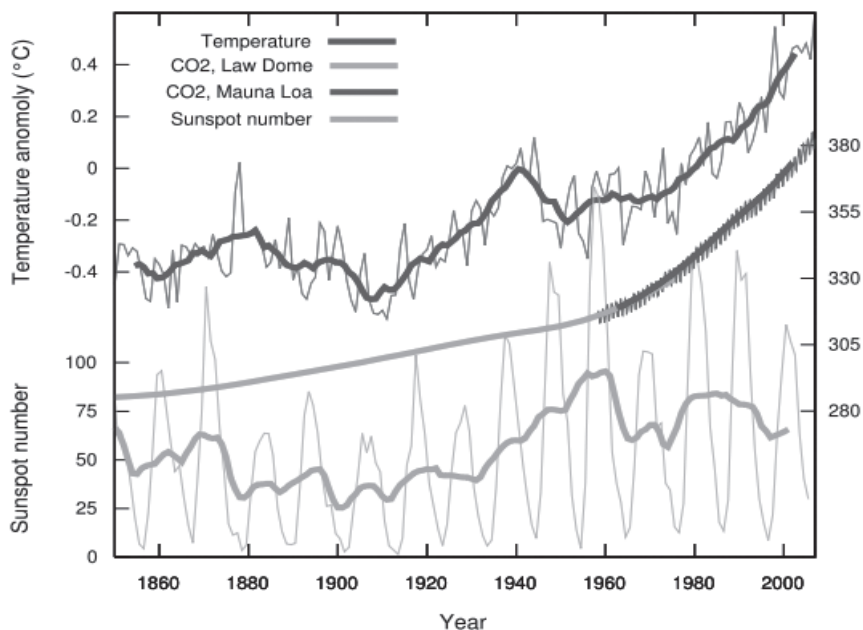


Figure 8. Variations in earth surface temperature (red lines), atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration (blue lines), and sunspot number (gold lines). The thin red and gold lines show annual averages, while the thicker lines are decadal moving averages. The 11-year sunspot cycle is clearly evident in the thin gold line. Plot taken from the Stanford Solar Observatory, Stanford University.

Atmospheric particles result from both natural and human causes. Natural causes include catastrophic events like volcanic eruptions, as well as more routine events such as dust storms and sea spray and certain types of biological emissions. Human causes are primarily related to combustion and industrial processes. Biomass burning, whether natural or human caused, is also a major contributor. Reliable records of particle amount in the global atmosphere are available since the advent of satellite measurements in the mid-1970s. Prior to that, global estimates can be constructed from a variety of ground-based measurements made by astronomers and atmospheric scientists and by estimates of production by industrialization and burning. Since particles have a relatively short residence in the atmosphere, typically a few days to a month in the lower atmosphere and a year or two in the stratosphere, estimates of production can be used to estimate concentrations as well. As a general rule, an increasing number of particles leads to a cooling of the climate system because the particles reflect solar energy back to space.

Particle concentrations, particularly in the northern hemisphere, increased following World War II due to rapid industrialization of North America and the rebuilding of Europe and Japan. Air quality concerns in the 1960s and 1970s led to regulations on vehicle emissions and industrial plants that

reduced particle concentrations thereafter. Satellite measurements show no trend in global particle concentrations since 1980 and very little variation other than the spike associated with the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippine Islands in 1991 (see Fig. 9).

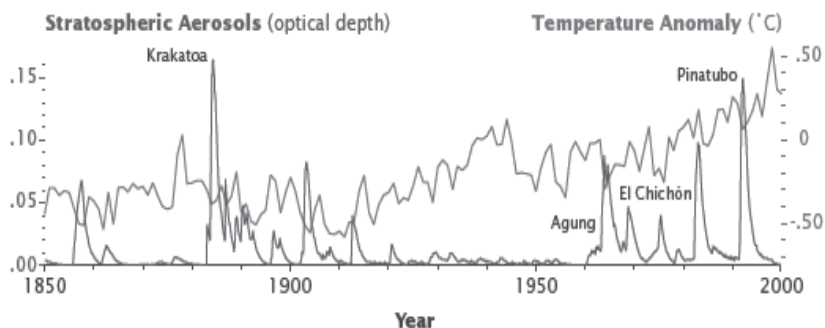


Figure 9. The optical depth of stratospheric aerosol (particles) and the global temperature anomaly as a function of time from 1850 to the present. Optical depth is a measure of the amount of aerosol expressed in terms of its potential to scatter sunlight. A greater optical depth means a greater ability to reflect sunlight and cool the earth. The record since 1950 identifies several known volcanic eruptions but no long-term trends. The global temperature tends to decrease after each eruption and then recover to pre-eruption level in a year or two. Data are from <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Features/Aerosols/page3.php>, which includes a more detailed discussion of aerosol effects.

As seen in Fig. 2, carbon dioxide concentrations have been increasing since the mid-1800s with an accelerating rate of increase in the past several decades. The concentrations of other greenhouse gases are also increasing. These increasing concentrations lead to an increasing thermal opacity of the atmosphere, with a corresponding increase in absorption of thermal radiation emitted from the earth surface and increased thermal emission by the atmosphere, resulting in a warmer surface. The physics of this process is well understood and measured. The surface warming that has occurred since about 1960 matches well with the observed rise in the concentration of carbon dioxide and other related gases, leading to the conclusion that the most likely cause of recent warming is greenhouse gas forcing. Additional support for this conclusion comes from climate modeling, which is discussed below.

E. Climate change on short geologic timescales

Ice cores from Antarctica can be used to infer the climate of earth for at least the past 800,000 years, using their long record of measurements of carbon dioxide concentrations and temperature variations, the latter based on oxygen isotopes as a proxy thermometer. During this period the earth experienced ice ages with durations of about 100,000 years. The record shows long, slow temperature decreases as ice sheets grew to their maximum extent, followed by very rapid (in geological terms) warming to an interglacial period

(Fig. 10). Global temperature in the Holocene, our current interglacial period, began warming about 15,000 years ago and reached its current value about 10,000 years ago.

Temperature and carbon dioxide concentrations are obviously correlated in the long-term ice-age record (Fig. 10). In the original analyses of these records, the time resolution of the record (the shortest period of time that could be resolved in the record) was poor, and many people made the assumption that carbon dioxide changes were forcing (or *leading*) the temperature change. Better analytic methods have allowed scientists to improve the time resolution of the record, and it now appears that temperature begins to change before the carbon dioxide concentrations change. In other words, carbon dioxide changes lag *behind* temperature changes. This has led some to argue that carbon dioxide concentration changes do not cause temperature changes, which cannot be true according to the laws of physics. The explanation of the geologic record in Fig. 10 is actually much more complex and interesting than a simple lead or lag theory.

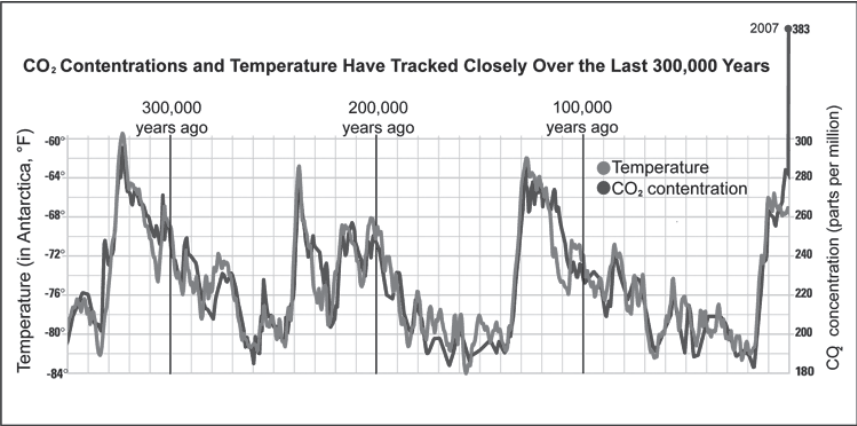


Figure 10. Carbon dioxide concentrations and temperature changes over the past 300,000 years, deduced from ice core measurements. The data show a similar relationship going back at least 800,000 years. The 2007 carbon dioxide concentration value of 383 is from current atmospheric measurements. Image is modified and courtesy of the Marian Koshland Science Museum of the National Academy of Sciences.

In earth’s climate, carbon dioxide and temperature are tightly coupled due to feedback processes. The coupling occurs through a complex set of processes that include volcanism, carbon dioxide solution in the ocean, biological uptake of carbon dioxide in the ocean, and weathering. A detailed explanation of these processes is beyond the scope of this discussion, but a few summary points are helpful.

- The amount of carbon dioxide dissolved in seawater depends on the temperature; warmer water contains less carbon dioxide than colder water.

- Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere very rapidly comes into equilibrium with carbon dioxide dissolved in sea water on timescales of months to a few years.
- Annual volcanic emissions of carbon dioxide are very small and are balanced by biological uptake of carbon dioxide in the ocean via shell and coral building. These are slow processes that balance each other on long timescales of centuries to a millennium.
- Weathering of minerals is an extremely slow process that controls carbon dioxide concentrations on very long time scales of millennia to ice ages.

So what does this mean for ice ages? The best current explanation for these long-term cycles is that small changes in the orbital relationship between the earth and sun (the so-called Milankovitch cycles) produce a small warming or cooling. In the case of a small warming, the ocean warms and carbon dioxide is pushed from the ocean into the atmosphere, because carbon dioxide is less soluble in warmer water. An increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations increases the downward thermal radiation from the atmosphere, which then further warms the surface. This positive feedback is then amplified by increased water vapor concentration in the atmosphere. As the earth warms, the ice sheets begin to melt, allowing additional solar radiation to be absorbed by a now darker planetary surface. The interaction of biological processes with this physical feedback cycle is complex; the interested reader may refer to one of the introductory textbooks listed in the references for additional explanation.

The onset of an ice age is similarly related to changes in the orbit of the earth. We think that when changes in the tilt of the earth's axis coincide with its month of closest approach to the sun, which together produce cooler northern hemisphere summers, winter snow fails to melt during the cooler summers and ice sheets grow slowly across the northern land masses. The growing ice sheets reflect more sunlight, reinforcing the direction of change—cooling in this case. Cooling water dissolves more carbon dioxide, thus drawing down atmospheric concentrations and further cooling the surface. It is readily apparent in Fig. 10 that the time required to grow ice sheets is much longer than the time to melt them. This is consistent with the idea that ice sheets can only grow by the amount of snowfall in a year, but melting can occur at a much more rapid pace. It is important to note that the timescale for ice sheet melt is still long. It took between 5,000 and 10,000 years to go from the last glacial maximum (the period of greatest ice sheet extent) to the current interglacial period (the period of minimum ice sheet extent), which began about 10,000 years ago.

The recent rise in carbon dioxide concentration is depicted at the very right of Fig. 10. In the past 150 years, mostly in the past 100 years, the carbon dioxide concentration has increased by more than 100 ppmv. Coincidentally, this is very similar to the range of carbon dioxide concentration variations between glacial and interglacial periods. To put this in slightly different terms, the rate of increase in carbon dioxide concentration for the past 40 years has been greater than 1.5 ppmv per year (Fig. 2); for the past 150 years, the rate of increase has been about 0.67 ppmv per year (Fig. 3). About 15,000 years ago, the carbon dioxide concentration was close to 200 ppmv, so the

rate of increase between then and 1850 (prior to the industrial revolution) was about 0.005 ppmv per year. Most of this change in carbon dioxide concentration occurred prior to 10,000 years ago, so changes over the past 10,000 years have been even smaller (on the order of only 0.002 ppmv per year). During such long periods of stability, biological feedback processes work to maintain relatively constant carbon dioxide levels.

How much can past climate relationships between temperature and carbon dioxide tell us about the response of current climate to current carbon dioxide increases? The answer, unfortunately, is not all that much. During the past ice ages, temperature changes and carbon dioxide changes occurred together, with temperature changes due to changes in earth's orbit and carbon dioxide changes in response to warming or cooling ocean water (as well as weathering, which we have not discussed). The result is that temperature change occurred first, and carbon dioxide changes amplified the temperature change. The changes occurred rapidly on geological timescales but slowly relative to human history. Today, we have introduced a new player into the climate equation—namely, the large amounts of carbon dioxide produced from the burning of carbon-based fuels. This additional carbon dioxide from combustion has overwhelmed the ability of biological and geological processes to moderate carbon dioxide concentrations. In the past 800,000 years, these processes have limited the buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to less than about 290 ppmv, but it is now above 380 ppmv and growing every year. Predicting climate and climate change over this century requires understanding the impact of this growing concentration from combustion. The lagged feedback relationship between temperature and carbon dioxide on geological timescales, while certainly of great interest to climate scientists, is largely irrelevant in the context of current climate change. Increasing carbon dioxide concentrations must act to warm the earth, as they have done in the past and are doing now. Geological processes may either moderate or enhance that warming, but only on very long timescales of millennia.

E. Projecting future climate change

One very important way that scientists try to understand complex system behavior is by constructing mathematical models of the system that can be solved by either analytical or computational means. In order to be useful, these models must (a) incorporate the important processes that control system behavior, (b) simulate the way the system currently behaves as determined from observations, and (c) predict the future behavior of the system. Weather models provide a useful example. National and international weather centers have been working on improving numerical atmospheric weather models for more than 50 years. These models continue to grow in complexity as new processes are added and the representation of existing processes is improved through greater understanding. The output of these models is compared with observations on a daily basis, which helps scientists understand both how the weather system works and where a specific model may require improvement. And, of course, the models are used to predict the weather.

Climate modeling follows this standard scientific strategy. Starting in the 1960s with rudimentary computer models based on simple physics, climate

scientists have now developed sophisticated models based on the best current understanding of climate physics; these models are able to simulate the large-scale features of atmosphere and ocean climate with excellent fidelity. Interested readers may refer to the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (AR4; 2007), which devotes an entire chapter to discussions of current models and their ability to simulate current climate.

Ideally, one would like to emulate weather model evaluation by making multiple climate forecasts and then comparing them to actual climate. Unfortunately, the currently unpredictable features of natural climate variability add “noise” to climate observations and models, so evaluation of prediction requires periods well in excess of a decade. Thus, the only real opportunity available to evaluate climate models is to ask how well they do in simulated climate change over the past century or so. (The lack of data going back more than 100 to 150 years makes it difficult to evaluate model performance over longer periods.)

A useful strategy to evaluate climate models is to apply the same climate forcing history to multiple independent models and to ask how well the simulations agree. The result of such a test is shown in Fig. 11, taken from IPCC AR4. Panel a shows a set of thin yellow lines, each one representing the surface temperature from a climate model run for the 20th century, and a thicker red line that is the average of those runs. The black line is the observed temperature (same as Fig. 5). The spread in the yellow lines gives an indication of the differences among models due to model internal variability and model differences. This is not the same as a traditional measure of scientific uncertainty but is as close as can be achieved for climate models. The fact that the average of the models agrees well with the observations is a strong indication that the forcing (including increasing carbon dioxide concentrations) applied to the models and the model responses is correct. The model runs in panel b (in blue) are identical to those in panel a, except that the carbon dioxide concentration in each model run is held constant, rather than being allowed to increase as observed. The resulting model average (dark blue line) no longer agrees with the observations in the latter part of the time series.

The results in Fig. 11 show that the current generation of climate models successfully reproduces global surface temperature changes over the past century when observed climate forcings, including solar variability and aerosol changes, are applied. When observed carbon dioxide changes are not included, the models cannot reproduce the warming of the past 40 years. These models are built on fundamental physical relationships that are well understood, expressed mathematically, and solved computationally. While uncertainties remain, as evidenced by the spread in model runs, the overall model trend matches very well with the observations, giving us confidence in the understanding of climate physics.

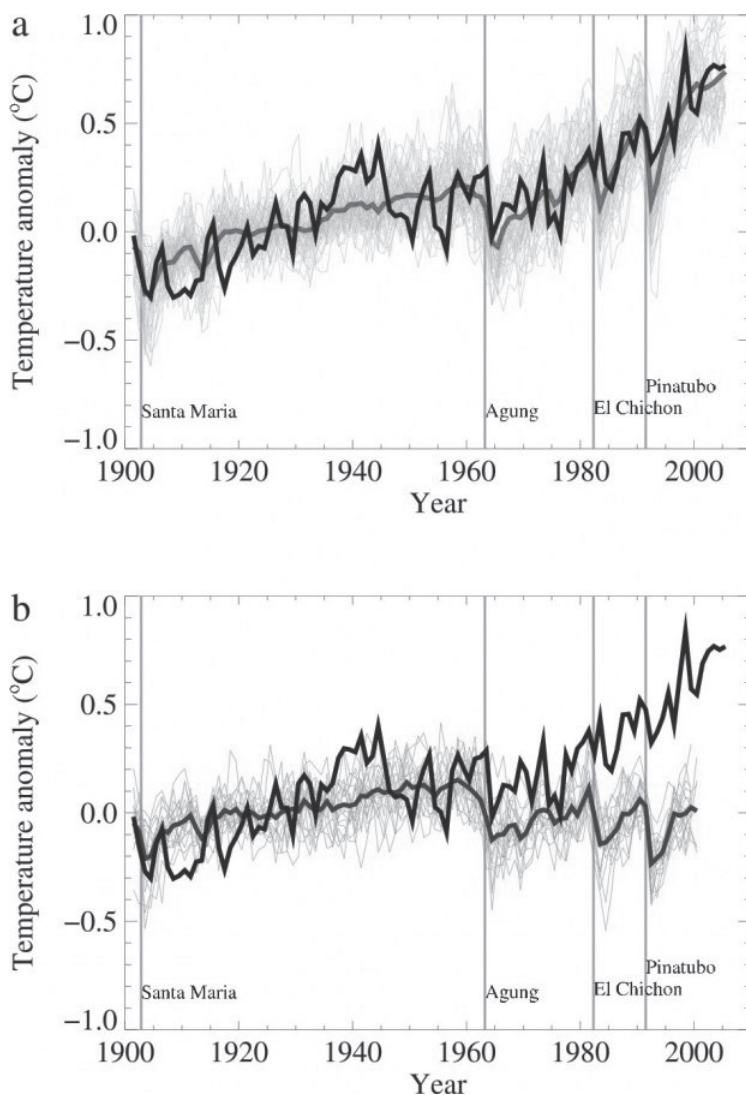


Figure 11. Climate model runs for the 20th century using (a) all forcings and (b) all forcings except for increasing greenhouse gas concentrations. The “all forcings” case includes solar activity, aerosol variations from volcanic eruptions and human activity, land-use changes, and greenhouse gas concentration changes. The vertical axis of temperature anomaly is simply the change in temperature measured against a 30-year average temperature from 1960 to 1990. It is a simple way of understanding temperature change.

These same models have been run through the 21st century using estimates of carbon dioxide emissions and consequent atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations. The emissions estimates are based on estimates

of population growth, energy consumption per capita, and projections of energy emissions. Since the estimates of these factors vary, the estimated atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations also vary. Current estimates of the carbon dioxide concentration in the year 2100 range from a low of about 550 to a high of about 1,000 ppmv. The lower number assumes drastically reduced carbon-based fuel usage over time, while the higher number assumes “business as usual,” where energy consumption per capita and population continue to increase rapidly with time. We are aware that the assumptions employed in developing these scenarios are open to criticism. It is, however, the impacts of generally increasing greenhouse gas concentrations that we wish to understand. Fine details of the scenarios and the resulting impacts should not be considered because of their large inherent uncertainty.

G. What are the projected changes and what confidence do we have in the projections?

Climate model projections based on the estimated carbon dioxide emissions produce a range of average model changes in global surface temperature of about 2° to 4° C (4° to 8° F). For the lowest estimated carbon dioxide concentrations, no model shows changes less than 1.5° C (3° F); for the larger carbon dioxide estimates, projected changes can be as large as 6° C (11° F). This asymmetry in projected changes is often unappreciated. Based on even modest greenhouse gas emission scenarios and our current understanding of the climate system, there is virtually no chance that the warming by the end of this century will be less than 3° to 4° F, globally averaged. While the median value of expected temperature changes for high end emissions is 7° to 8° F, there is a real possibility that the changes could be as high as 10° to 11° F! When thinking about risk and response, this asymmetry is an important factor.

Because of the sensitivity of polar environments to warming, the Arctic in particular is expected to warm about twice as much as the average global warming. Thus, global average warmings of 4° to 8° F are expected to produce warmings of 8° to 15° F in the Arctic. These changes will result in large changes in summer ice extent, most probably producing extended summer periods of an ice free Arctic, unprecedented stresses on the Arctic biosphere, and significant changes in the traditional lifestyles of indigenous people. Arctic warming will also begin to melt permafrost, which is everywhere extensive at high latitudes. Melting permafrost allows additional greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide and methane, to escape into the atmosphere.

Global warming is expected to produce important changes in large scale atmospheric and oceanic circulations. Due to circulation changes, wet regions in the tropics are expected to get wetter (more precipitation), while dry regions are expected to receive even less precipitation. Expected consequences include increased erosion and landslides in tropical regions and additional water stress in the dry subtropical regions such as the African Sahel. Changes in the mid-latitudes are expected to be somewhat less stressful, with warmer winters and hotter summers. Areas such as much of the Pacific Coast that depend heavily on winter snowpack and summer melt for fresh water will see reduced winter snow and thus more competition for reduced summer runoff. Warmer summers may increase crop productivity in the American

northern plains and Canadian plains, depending on the availability of rain, which is difficult to predict.

Sea level is expected to rise by at least 2-3 feet by 2100, based simply on the warming of the ocean, since water expands as it warms. Additional warming due to melting of land-based ice, such as the Greenland ice sheet or the West Antarctic ice sheet, is expected to add at least another foot and quite possibly more. Although the current understanding of ice sheet dynamics is limited, sea levels have been much higher during past interglacial periods, with only modestly warmer temperatures. Increased sea level will result in increased flooding of low-lying areas, coastal erosion, and damage to coastal infrastructure from storms and storm surge.

Increasing carbon dioxide emissions will inevitably lead to increased ocean acidity. Roughly half the carbon dioxide emitted to date resides in the ocean mixed layer, reducing the measured pH from 8.2 to 8.1.¹⁶ Small increases in ocean acidity can prevent ocean organisms from producing carbonate and aragonite shells because the shells dissolve in the slightly more acidic water. The impact of increasing acidification on ocean food chains and coral communities is currently largely uncertain. Over longer times (centuries), one might expect ocean communities to adjust to a more acidic environment. Over short times, it is likely that there will be extensive damage to the bottom end of the ocean food chain, with corresponding damage to larger predators. Given severe existing stresses to ocean predators due to overfishing and pollution, the resulting damage to ocean fisheries may be devastating.

The uncertainty in these predictions is significant and difficult to express quantitatively because of uncertain emissions and possible ranges of climate responses. This is not to say, however, that the predictions are incorrect or useless. The direction of change in each case is clear and the mid to upper range of predictions is large and represents significant risk. Increasing carbon dioxide must result in a warmer world. A warmer world will result in a considerably warmer Arctic and a significant reduction in Arctic sea ice and land ice. Warming of the ocean and melting of land-based ice will result in sea level rise. Increased carbon dioxide will result in increasing ocean acidification. All of these statements are true and based on well understood physics. The only argument is about the magnitude of response in each case. All climate models, from the simplest to the most complex, predict that estimated carbon dioxide concentrations of 500 ppmv by the end of this century will result in a *minimum* of 3° F global warming by 2100. Upper end estimates of the warming for this same low carbon dioxide estimate are 7° to 8° F. Higher carbon dioxide emissions will result in increased warming. Future research may well reduce the range of predicted responses and provide better estimates of uncertainty. It is highly unlikely, however, that future research will change the direction of the responses or reduce the magnitudes to a trivial amount.

¹⁶ Because the pH scale is logarithmic, pH 7 is ten times more acidic than pH 8, and 100 times more acidic than pH 9. This translates into an increase in acidity of 30 percent when the pH shifts from 8.2 to 8.1.

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This is the most comprehensive discussion available on climate physics, climate change, and potential impacts. While some of its contents are intended for the scientific community, summaries are available for the educated layperson.

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An unusual pairing of imagery and explanatory text that explores the extent of current climate change. It is not intended to be a text or

comprehensive discussion but provides a striking visual catalog of what is happening in our world today.

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A very readable discussion of current environmental issues, including the greenhouse effect; this book was written by an eminent scientist and professor and used in his introductory university classes.

Appendix B

Refereed, Gray, and Popular Literature

The material in this appendix is excerpted and adapted with permission from *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*, third edition (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011), pp. 43-44.

In understanding how scientists come to know what they know about how the world works, it is helpful to explain the meaning of “refereed literature.” We know how referees are used in sports—they make sure the game is played by the rules. Similarly, refereed literature is read carefully by referees before it is published. Referees are carefully chosen for the depth and breadth of their knowledge and expertise, for their discernment and judgment, for their record of fairness, and for being free from the influence of sponsors and spectators.

The editors of refereed or “primary” literature normally use three referees to critically evaluate each article or “paper” (as professional research articles usually are called). For scientific literature, these referees are scientists who are peers of the scientist who is submitting a particular paper, have expertise in the particular field covered by the paper, and are not given the identity of the other two referees. After reading the paper, each of the three referees makes an independent and anonymous report to the editor and recommends whether to “reject,” “publish,” or “publish with revisions.” If the editor gets a mixed review, the paper may be sent to still other qualified referees. If the paper must be revised, each revision is again reviewed by three referees in the same manner. Articles that pass these peer reviews are published periodically in professional journals, usually by a professional society of scientists to whom the editor is responsible. This highly disciplined procedure is designed to keep researchers precise, honest, and thorough in reporting about what they discover, in how they interpret their findings, and in how they place these in the context of what is known and not known, as this is published by other scientists in their refereed publications. While mistakes and exaggeration can still occur in reviewed articles, the review process operates to minimize mistakes. Also, particularly early in an investigation as more information is discovered, accepted ideas on a topic may shift over time to reflect new data. Thus, over time, published articles can be used to track the evolution and progression of scientific ideas.

Despite this careful process, some deeply flawed, and perhaps intentionally misleading, articles do get published. A particular strength of the scientific process is that the work of a scientist is usually duplicated by another, often because the latter wishes to extend the work of the former. Flawed science is

found when the work cannot be duplicated or inconsistent results are found. A few years ago, several scientists announced the discovery of cold fusion, a process that if true would provide enormous amounts of cheap energy. The reported results, however, could not be reproduced by other scientists. The result was disgrace and loss of respect and positions for the scientists who initially reported the discovery.

There are two other kinds of literature we should know about: “gray literature” and “popular literature.” Gray literature consists of reports from government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and state departments of natural resources, from colleges and universities, from granting agencies, and from think tanks, institutes, and foundations. This literature also is important, but it is not considered as authoritative because it does not undergo the same kind of disciplined peer review as does primary literature. Gray literature often uses different standards and is more susceptible to outside influences, and it may have items on its agenda that go beyond reporting new knowledge. As a result, it generally is not relied upon by professional researchers for a basic understanding of how the world works and what is happening to it. Popular literature consists of newspapers, magazines, leaflets, and brochures. Like the gray literature, it also is important, but while it may be useful, it is not normally considered to be authoritative.

Many people use the gray or popular literature to learn about scientific issues and to inform their opinions. This literature is often easier to read and understand, and may be written in a less technical or a nontechnical way. This literature is fine as long as it accurately reflects the primary literature and accepted scientific conclusions based on the primary literature. However, gray or popular literature is often biased by political or financial agendas, and the data are spun to support their position. For instance, tobacco companies for many years denied the health effects of smoking. Pro-nuclear interests may seek to minimize the effect of radiation on health and environment. At the same time, anti-nuclear interests may overstate the risks associated with small doses of radiation or long-term storage of nuclear waste.

Appendix C

Declarations on Creation Care and Climate Change

A. The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation (<http://www.creationcare.org/blank.php?id=39>)

The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof — Psalm 24:1.

As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the full authority of the Scriptures, and aware of the ways we have degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems.

Because we worship and honor the Creator, we seek to cherish and care for the creation.

Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator’s work.

Because in Christ God has healed our alienation from God and extended to us the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things, we commit ourselves to working in the power of the Holy Spirit to share the Good News of Christ in word and deed, to work for the reconciliation of all people in Christ, and to extend Christ's healing to suffering creation.

Because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honor and glory of the Creator—whom we know dimly through creation, but meet fully through Scripture and in Christ. We and our children face a growing crisis in the health of the creation in which we are embedded, and through which, by God's grace, we are sustained. Yet we continue to degrade that creation.

These degradations of creation can be summed up as (1) land degradation; (2) deforestation; (3) species extinction; (4) water degradation; (5) global toxification; (6) the alteration of atmosphere; (7) human and cultural degradation.

Many of these degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation. With continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe. Our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth. We respect the institution of marriage as the way God has given to insure thoughtful procreation of children and their nurture to the glory of God.

We recognize that human poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation.

Many concerned people, convinced that environmental problems are more spiritual than technological, are exploring the world's ideologies and religions in search of non-Christian spiritual resources for the healing of the earth. As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe that the Bible calls us to respond in four ways:

First, God calls us to confess and repent of attitudes which devalue creation, and which twist or ignore biblical revelation to support our misuse of it. Forgetting that "the earth is the Lord's," we have often simply used creation and forgotten our responsibility to care for it.

Second, our actions and attitudes toward the earth need to proceed from the center of our faith, and be rooted in the fullness of God's revelation in Christ and the Scriptures. We resist both ideologies which would presume the Gospel has nothing to do with the care of non-human creation and also ideologies which would reduce the Gospel to nothing more than the care of that creation.

Third, we seek carefully to learn all that the Bible tells us about the Creator, creation, and the human task. In our life and words we declare that full good news for all creation which is still waiting "with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19).

Fourth, we seek to understand what creation reveals about God's divinity, sustaining presence, and everlasting power, and what creation teaches us of its God-given order and the principles by which it works.

Thus we call on all those who are committed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to affirm the following principles of biblical faith, and to seek ways of living out these principles in our personal lives, our churches, and society.

The cosmos, in all its beauty, wildness, and life-giving bounty, is the work of our personal and loving Creator.

Our creating God is prior to and other than creation, yet intimately involved with it, upholding each thing in its freedom, and all things in relationships of intricate complexity. God is transcendent, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and immanent, while wholly other than creation and not to be confused with it.

God the Creator is relational in very nature, revealed as three persons in One. Likewise, the creation which God intended is a symphony of individual creatures in harmonious relationship.

The Creator's concern is for all creatures. God declares all creation "good" (Gen. 1:31); promises care in a covenant with all creatures (Gen. 9:9-17); delights in creatures which have no human apparent usefulness (Job 39-41); and wills, in Christ, "to reconcile all things to himself" (Col. 1:20).

Men, women, and children, have a unique responsibility to the Creator; at the same time we are creatures, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical, chemical, and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures.

Men, women, and children created in God's image, also have a unique responsibility for creation. Our actions should both sustain creation's fruitfulness and preserve creation's powerful testimony to its Creator.

Our God-given, stewardly talents have often been warped from their intended purpose: that we know, name, keep and delight in God's creatures; that we nourish civilization in love, creativity and obedience to God; and that we offer creation and civilization back in praise to the Creator. We have ignored our creaturely limits and have used the earth with greed, rather than care.

The earthly result of human sin has been a perverted stewardship, a patchwork of garden and wasteland in which the waste is increasing. "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land . . . Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away" (Hosea 4:1,3). Thus, one consequence of our misuse of the earth is an unjust denial of God's created bounty to other human beings, both now and in the future.

God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross" (Col. 1:19-20).

In Jesus Christ, believers are forgiven, transformed and brought into God's kingdom. "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (II Cor. 5:17). The presence of the kingdom of God is marked not only by renewed fellowship

with God, but also by renewed harmony and justice between people, and by renewed harmony and justice between people and the rest of the created world. “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isa. 55:12).

We believe that in Christ there is hope, not only for men, women and children, but also for the rest of creation which is suffering from the consequences of human sin.

Therefore we call upon all Christians to reaffirm that all creation is God’s; that God created it good; and that God is renewing it in Christ.

We encourage deeper reflection on the substantial biblical and theological teaching which speaks of God’s work of redemption in terms of the renewal and completion of God’s purpose in creation.

We seek a deeper reflection on the wonders of God’s creation and the principles by which creation works. We also urge a careful consideration of how our corporate and individual actions respect and comply with God’s ordinances for creation.

We encourage Christians to incorporate the extravagant creativity of God into their lives by increasing the nurturing role of beauty and the arts in their personal, ecclesiastical, and social patterns.

We urge individual Christians and churches to be centers of creation’s care and renewal, both delighting in creation as God’s gift, and enjoying it as God’s provision, in ways which sustain and heal the damaged fabric of the creation which God has entrusted to us.

We recall Jesus’ words that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, and therefore we urge followers of Jesus to resist the allure of wastefulness and overconsumption by making personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self restraint and frugality.

We call on all Christians to work for godly, just, and sustainable economies which reflect God’s sovereign economy and enable men, women and children to flourish along with all the diversity of creation. We recognize that poverty forces people to degrade creation in order to survive; therefore we support the development of just, free economies which empower the poor and create abundance without diminishing creation’s bounty.

We commit ourselves to work for responsible public policies which embody the principles of biblical stewardship of creation.

We invite Christians—individuals, congregations and organizations—to join with us in this evangelical declaration on the environment, becoming a covenant people in an ever-widening circle of biblical care for creation.

We call upon Christians to listen to and work with all those who are concerned about the healing of creation, with an eagerness both to learn from them and also to share with them our conviction that the God whom all people sense in creation (Acts 17:27) is known fully only in the Word made flesh in Christ the living God who made and sustains all things.

We make this declaration knowing that until Christ returns to reconcile all things, we are called to be faithful stewards of God's good garden, our earthly home.

B. *The Oxford Declaration on Global Warming*
(<http://www.jri.org.uk/news/statement.htm>)

Human-induced climate change is a moral, ethical and religious issue.

- God created the earth, and continues to sustain it. Made in God's image, human beings are to care for people and all creation as God cares for them. The call to "love the Lord your God and love your neighbour" (Matthew 22:37–39) takes on new implications in the face of present and projected climate change. God has demonstrated his commitment to creation in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ who "reconciles all things" (Colossians 1:20) calls his followers to the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19).
- Human induced climate change poses a great threat to the common good, especially to the poor, the vulnerable and future generations.
- By reducing the earth's biological diversity, human induced climate change diminishes God's creation.

Human induced climate change, therefore, is a matter of urgent and profound concern.

The earth's climate is changing, with adverse effects on people, communities and ecosystems.

- There is now high confidence in the scientific evidence of human influence on climate as detailed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and endorsed by 18 of the world's leading Academies of Science.
- Human activities, especially the burning of coal, oil and natural gas (fossil fuels) are rapidly increasing the concentrations of greenhouse gases (especially carbon dioxide) in the global atmosphere. As a result the global climate is warming, with rising sea levels, changes in rainfall patterns, more floods and droughts, and more intense storms. These have serious social, economic and ecological consequences.
- The harmful effects of climate change far outweigh the beneficial ones:
 - In many arid and semi-arid areas, the quantity and the quality of fresh water will continue to decrease.
 - Although agricultural productivity may increase in temperate northern latitudes, it will decrease throughout the tropics and sub-tropics.
 - A greater incidence of diseases, such as malaria, dengue fever and cholera, is expected.
 - Sea-level rise and increased flooding is already displacing people and will eventually affect tens of millions especially in low income countries. Some island states are likely to disappear altogether.
 - Important ecosystems, such as coral reefs and forests, will be destroyed or drastically altered, undermining the very foundation of a sustainable world.

Action is needed now, both to arrest climate change and to adapt to its effects.

- We must take immediate steps to stabilize the climate. This means reducing global emissions of carbon dioxide (the most important greenhouse gas) to below 1990 levels well before the middle of the 21st century.
- While industrialized nations have largely caused the problem, its most severe effects fall upon the peoples of developing countries. Industrialized countries need therefore to make much greater reductions in emissions in order to allow for economic growth in developing countries.
 - We urge industrialized nations to take the lead in reducing their emissions. They have the technical, financial and institutional ability to do so now.
 - We urge industrialized countries to assist developing countries in gaining access to cleaner and renewable forms of energy
 - We urge that actions be taken to increase energy efficiency, in transportation, buildings and industry. Many actions can produce savings or be taken at little or no net cost. Examples were presented to the Forum of such actions by 38 major multinational companies.
 - We urge greater use and development of renewable sources of energy.
 - We urge increased financial investment and that banking initiatives be grasped to enable the necessary changes.
- The cost of inaction will be greater than the cost of appropriate action.
- Adapting to the impacts of climate change (e.g., droughts and flooding) is not an alternative to mitigation, but is essential given that the climate is already changing and further change is inevitable.

Christian denominations, churches and organizations need to take action to:

- increase awareness of the facts of global climate change and its moral implications;
- set an example through individual and collective actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- increase demand for technologies and products that produce less emissions of carbon dioxide;
- urge immediate and responsible action by national governments, in cooperation with other governments under the Framework Convention on Climate Change. This should be, first, to ensure the successful operation of the Kyoto Protocol (which some countries, including the United States, Canada and Australia, have not yet ratified) and, second, to establish an effective programme of emissions reductions in the period immediately following that covered by that Protocol.

C. *An Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming* from the Cornwall Alliance (<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/articles/read/an-evangelical-declaration-on-global-warming/>)

Preamble

As governments consider policies to fight alleged man-made global warming, evangelical leaders have a responsibility to be well informed, and then to speak out. *A Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Examination of the Theology, Science, and Economics of Global*

Warming demonstrates that many of these proposed policies would destroy jobs and impose trillions of dollars in costs to achieve no net benefits. They could be implemented only by enormous and dangerous expansion of government control over private life. Worst of all, by raising energy prices and hindering economic development, they would slow or stop the rise of the world's poor out of poverty and so condemn millions to premature death.

What We Believe

1. We believe earth and its ecosystems—created by God's intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence—are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting, admirably suited for human flourishing, and displaying His glory. Earth's climate system is no exception. Recent global warming is one of many natural cycles of warming and cooling in geologic history.
2. We believe abundant, affordable energy is indispensable to human flourishing, particularly to societies which are rising out of abject poverty and the high rates of disease and premature death that accompany it. With present technologies, fossil and nuclear fuels are indispensable if energy is to be abundant and affordable.
3. We believe mandatory reductions in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions, achievable mainly by greatly reduced use of fossil fuels, will greatly increase the price of energy and harm economies.
4. We believe such policies will harm the poor more than others because the poor spend a higher percentage of their income on energy and desperately need economic growth to rise out of poverty and overcome its miseries.

What We Deny

1. We deny that earth and its ecosystems are the fragile and unstable products of chance, and particularly that earth's climate system is vulnerable to dangerous alteration because of minuscule changes in atmospheric chemistry. Recent warming was neither abnormally large nor abnormally rapid. There is no convincing scientific evidence that human contribution to greenhouse gases is causing dangerous global warming.
2. We deny that alternative, renewable fuels can, with present or near-term technology, replace fossil and nuclear fuels, either wholly or in significant part, to provide the abundant, affordable energy necessary to sustain prosperous economies or overcome poverty.
3. We deny that carbon dioxide—essential to all plant growth—is a pollutant. Reducing greenhouse gases cannot achieve significant reductions in future global temperatures, and the costs of the policies would far exceed the benefits.
4. We deny that such policies, which amount to a regressive tax, comply with the Biblical requirement of protecting the poor from harm and oppression.

A Call to Action

In light of these facts,

1. We call on our fellow Christians to practice creation stewardship out of Biblical conviction, adoration for our Creator, and love for our fellow man—especially the poor.
2. We call on Christian leaders to understand the truth about climate change and embrace Biblical thinking, sound science, and careful economic analysis in creation stewardship.
3. We call on political leaders to adopt policies that protect human liberty, make energy more affordable, and free the poor to rise out of poverty, while abandoning fruitless, indeed harmful policies to control global temperature.

D. Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action from the Evangelical Environmental Network (2006)

(<http://nuevangelicalpartnership.org/?q=node/10>)

Preamble

As American evangelical Christian leaders, we recognize both our opportunity and our responsibility to offer a biblically based moral witness that can help shape public policy in the most powerful nation on earth, and therefore contribute to the well-being of the entire world.¹ Whether we will enter the public square and offer our witness there is no longer an open question. We are in that square, and we will not withdraw.

We are proud of the evangelical community's long-standing commitment to the sanctity of human life. But we also offer moral witness in many venues and on many issues. Sometimes the issues that we have taken on, such as sex trafficking, genocide in the Sudan, and the AIDS epidemic in Africa, have surprised outside observers. While individuals and organizations can be called to concentrate on certain issues, we are not a single-issue movement. We seek to be true to our calling as Christian leaders, and above all faithful to Jesus Christ our Lord. Our attention, therefore, goes to whatever issues our faith requires us to address.

Over the last several years many of us have engaged in study, reflection, and prayer related to the issue of climate change (often called "global warming"). For most of us, until recently this has not been treated as a pressing issue or major priority. Indeed, many of us have required considerable convincing before becoming persuaded that climate change is a real problem and that it ought to matter to us as Christians. But now we have seen and heard enough to offer the following moral argument related to the matter of human-induced climate change. We commend the four simple but urgent claims offered in this document to all who will listen, beginning with our brothers and sisters in the Christian community, and urge all to take the appropriate actions that follow from them.

¹ Cf. "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility," approved by National Association of Evangelicals, October 8, 2004.

Claim 1: Human-Induced Climate Change Is Real

Since 1995 there has been general agreement among those in the scientific community most seriously engaged with this issue that climate change is happening and is being caused mainly by human activities, especially the burning of fossil fuels. Evidence gathered since 1995 has only strengthened this conclusion.

Because all religious/moral claims about climate change are relevant only if climate change is real and is mainly human-induced, everything hinges on the scientific data. As evangelicals we have hesitated to speak on this issue until we could be more certain of the science of climate change, but the signatories now believe that the evidence demands action:

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's most authoritative body of scientists and policy experts on the issue of global warming, has been studying this issue since the late 1980s. (From 1988—2002 the IPCC's assessment of the climate science was chaired by Sir John Houghton, a devout evangelical Christian.) It has documented the steady rise in global temperatures over the last fifty years, projects that the average global temperature will continue to rise in the coming decades, and attributes "most of the warming" to human activities.
- The U.S. National Academy of Sciences, as well as all other G8 country scientific Academies (Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, Italy, and Russia), has concurred with these judgments.
- In a 2004 report, and at the 2005 G8 summit, the Bush Administration has also acknowledged the reality of climate change and the likelihood that human activity is the cause of at least some of it.²

In the face of the breadth and depth of this scientific and governmental concern, only a small percentage of which is noted here, we are convinced that evangelicals must engage this issue without any further lingering over the basic reality of the problem or humanity's responsibility to address it.

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2001, Summary for Policymakers; http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/wg1/007.htm. (See also the main IPCC website, www.ipcc.ch) For the confirmation of the IPCC's findings from the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, see, Climate Change Science: An Analysis of Some Key Questions (2001); <http://books.nap.edu/html/climatechange/summary.html>. For the statement by the G8 Academies (plus those of Brazil, India, and China) see Joint Science Academies Statement: Global Response to Climate Change, (June 2005): <http://nationalacademies.org/onpi/06072005.pdf>. Another major international report that confirms the IPCC's conclusions comes from the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment. See their Impacts of a Warming Climate, Cambridge University Press, November 2004, p.2; <http://amap.no/acia/>. Another important statement is from the American Geophysical Union, "Human Impacts on Climate," December 2003, http://www.agu.org/sci_soc/policy/climate_change_position.html. For the Bush Administration's perspective, see Our Changing Planet: The U.S. Climate Change Science Program for Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005, p.47; <http://www.usgcrp.gov/usgcrp/Library/ocp2004-5/default.htm>. For the 2005 G8 statement, see <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page7881.asp>.

Claim 2: The Consequences of Climate Change Will Be Significant, and Will Hit the Poor the Hardest

The earth's natural systems are resilient but not infinitely so, and human civilizations are remarkably dependent on ecological stability and well-being. It is easy to forget this until that stability and well-being are threatened.

Even small rises in global temperatures will have such likely impacts as: sea level rise; more frequent heat waves, droughts, and extreme weather events such as torrential rains and floods; increased tropical diseases in now-temperate regions; and hurricanes that are more intense. It could lead to significant reduction in agricultural output, especially in poor countries. Low-lying regions, indeed entire islands, could find themselves under water. (This is not to mention the various negative impacts climate change could have on God's other creatures.)

Each of these impacts increases the likelihood of refugees from flooding or famine, violent conflicts, and international instability, which could lead to more security threats to our nation.

Poor nations and poor individuals have fewer resources available to cope with major challenges and threats. The consequences of global warming will therefore hit the poor the hardest, in part because those areas likely to be significantly affected first are in the poorest regions of the world. Millions of people could die in this century because of climate change, most of them our poorest global neighbors.

Claim 3: Christian Moral Convictions Demand Our Response to the Climate Change Problem

While we cannot here review the full range of relevant biblical convictions related to care of the creation, we emphasize the following points:

- Christians must care about climate change because we love God the Creator and Jesus our Lord, through whom and for whom the creation was made. This is God's world, and any damage that we do to God's world is an offense against God Himself (Gen. 1; Ps. 24; Col. 1:16).
- Christians must care about climate change because we are called to love our neighbors, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and to protect and care for the least of these as though each was Jesus Christ himself (Mt. 22:34-40; Mt. 7:12; Mt. 25:31-46).
- Christians, noting the fact that most of the climate change problem is human induced, are reminded that when God made humanity he commissioned us to exercise stewardship over the earth and its creatures. Climate change is the latest evidence of our failure to exercise proper stewardship, and constitutes a critical opportunity for us to do better (Gen. 1:26-28).

Love of God, love of neighbor, and the demands of stewardship are more than enough reason for evangelical Christians to respond to the climate change problem with moral passion and concrete action.

Claim 4: The need to act now is urgent. Governments, businesses, churches, and individuals all have a role to play in addressing climate change—starting now.

The basic task for all of the world's inhabitants is to find ways now to begin to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels that are the primary cause of human-induced climate change.

There are several reasons for urgency. First, deadly impacts are being experienced now. Second, the oceans only warm slowly, creating a lag in experiencing the consequences. Much of the climate change to which we are already committed will not be realized for several decades. The consequences of the pollution we create now will be visited upon our children and grandchildren. Third, as individuals and as a society we are making long-term decisions today that will determine how much carbon dioxide we will emit in the future, such as whether to purchase energy efficient vehicles and appliances that will last for 10-20 years, or whether to build more coal-burning power plants that last for 50 years rather than investing more in energy efficiency and renewable energy.

In the United States, the most important immediate step that can be taken at the federal level is to pass and implement national legislation requiring sufficient economy-wide reductions in carbon dioxide emissions through cost-effective, market-based mechanisms such as a cap-and-trade program. On June 22, 2005 the Senate passed the Domenici-Bingaman resolution affirming this approach, and a number of major energy companies now acknowledge that this method is best both for the environment and for business.

We commend the Senators who have taken this stand and encourage them to fulfill their pledge. We also applaud the steps taken by such companies as BP, Shell, General Electric, Cinergy, Duke Energy, and DuPont, all of which have moved ahead of the pace of government action through innovative measures implemented within their companies in the U.S. and around the world. In so doing they have offered timely leadership.

Numerous positive actions to prevent and mitigate climate change are being implemented across our society by state and local governments, churches, smaller businesses, and individuals. These commendable efforts focus on such matters as energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy, low CO₂ emitting technologies, and the purchase of hybrid vehicles. These efforts can easily be shown to save money, save energy, reduce global warming pollution as well as air pollution that harm human health, and eventually pay for themselves. There is much more to be done, but these pioneers are already helping to show the way forward.

Finally, while we must reduce our global warming pollution to help mitigate the impacts of climate change, as a society and as individuals we must also help the poor adapt to the significant harm that global warming will cause.

Conclusion

We the undersigned pledge to act on the basis of the claims made in this document. We will not only teach the truths communicated here but also seek ways to implement the actions that follow from them. In the name of

Jesus Christ our Lord, we urge all who read this declaration to join us in this effort.

E. The Micah Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change

Developed at the Fourth Triennial Global Consultation held in Kenya by the Micah Network from July 13-18, 2009

(http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/library/micah_network_global_consultation_declaration_0.pdf)

We, members of the Micah Network³, gathering together from 38 countries on all 5 continents, met at Limuru, Kenya from 13–18 July 2009 for its 4th Triennial Global Consultation. On the matter of Creation Stewardship and Climate Change, we sought God’s wisdom and cried out for the Holy Spirit’s guidance as we reflected on the global environmental crisis. As a result of our discussions, reflections and prayers, we make the following declaration:

1. We believe in God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit in community – who is the creator, sustainer and Lord of all. God delights in His creation, and is committed to it.⁴
2. In the beginning, God established just relationships amongst all of creation. Women and men – as image-bearers of God – are called to serve and love the rest of creation, accountable to God as stewards. Our care for creation is an act of worship and obedience towards the Creator.⁵
3. We, however, have not always been faithful stewards. Through our ignorance, neglect, arrogance and greed, we have harmed the earth and broken creation’s relationships.⁶ Our failure to be faithful stewards has caused the current environmental crisis, leading to climate change, and putting the earth’s ecosystems at risk. All creation has been subjected to futility and decay because of our disobedience.⁷
4. Yet God remains faithful.⁸ In Christ’s incarnation, life, death and resurrection, God is at work to reconcile all of creation to Himself.⁹ We hear the groaning of creation as in the pains of childbirth. This is the promise that God will act, and is already at work, to renew all things.¹⁰ This is the hope that sustains us.
5. We confess that we have sinned. We have not cared for the earth with the self-sacrificing and nurturing love of God. Instead, we have

³ Micah Network is a global network of Christian agencies and churches involved in relief, development and advocacy, and responding to poverty and injustice.

⁴ Colossians 1:15-16; Romans 11:36

⁵ Genesis 1:26-30; Genesis 2:15

⁶ Genesis 3:13-24

⁷ Romans 8:20

⁸ Romans 8:21

⁹ Colossians 1:19-20; Philippians 2:6-8

¹⁰ Romans 8:22; Revelation 21:5

exploited, consumed and abused it for our own advantage. We have too often yielded to the idolatry that is greed.¹¹ We have embraced false dichotomies of theology and practice, splitting apart the spiritual and material, eternal and temporal, heavenly and earthly. In all these things, we have not acted justly towards each other or towards creation, and we have not honoured God.

6. We acknowledge that industrialization, increased deforestation, intensified agriculture and grazing, along with the unrestrained burning of fossil fuels, have forced the earth's natural systems out of balance. Rapidly increasing greenhouse gas emissions are causing the average global temperature to rise, with devastating impacts already being experienced, especially by the poorest and most marginalized groups. A projected temperature rise of 2°C within the next few decades will significantly alter life on earth and accelerate loss of biodiversity. It will increase the risk and severity of extreme weather events, such as drought, flood, and hurricanes, leading to displacement and hunger. Sea levels will continue to rise, contaminating fresh water supplies and submerging island and coastal communities. We are likely to see mass migration, leading to resource conflicts. Profound changes to rainfall and snowfall, as well as the rapid melting of glaciers, will lead to more water stress and shortages for many millions of people.
7. We repent of our self-serving theology of creation, and our complicity in unjust local and global economic relationships. We repent of those aspects of our individual and corporate life styles that harm creation, and of our lack of political action. We must radically change our lives in response to God's indignation and sorrow for His creation's agony.
8. Before God we commit ourselves, and call on the whole family of faith, to bear witness to God's redemptive purpose for all creation. We will seek appropriate ways to restore and build just relationships among human beings and with the rest of creation. We will strive to live sustainably, rejecting consumerism and the resulting exploitation.¹² We will teach and model care of creation and integral mission. We will intercede before God for those most affected by environmental degradation and climate change, and will act with justice and mercy among, with and on behalf of them.¹³
9. We join with others to call on local, national, and global leaders to meet their responsibility to address climate change and environmental degradation through the agreed inter-governmental mechanisms and conventions, and to provide the necessary resources to ensure sustainable development. Their meetings through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process must produce a fair, comprehensive, and adequate climate deal. Leaders must

¹¹ Colossians 3:5; Matthew 6:24

¹² Matthew 6:24

¹³ Micah 6:8

support the efforts of local communities to adapt to climate change, and must act to protect the lives and livelihoods of those most vulnerable to the impact of environmental degradation and climate change. We recognize that among the most affected are women and girls. We call on leaders to invest in the development of new, clean technologies and energy sources and to provide adequate support to enable poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups to use them effectively.

10. There is no more time for delay or denial. We will labour with passion, persistence, prayer and creativity to protect the integrity of all creation, and hand on a safe environment and climate to our children and theirs.

For those with ears to hear, let them hear.¹⁴

17 July 2009

F. African Church Leaders' Statement on Climate Change and Water
(http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1758-6623.2010.00060_2.x/full)

We Church Leaders representing National Christian Councils and Churches from the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in Southern Africa [FOCCISA] and the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa [FECCLAHA] under the auspices of AACC [All Africa Council of Churches] met from 3rd–5th June 2008 to consult on the subject of climate change and water at the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Ecumenical Centre in Nairobi, Kenya.

1. [We] Affirm the reality and urgency of climate change and the adverse negative impact it has on all of humanity and particularly on poor and vulnerable communities in Africa. The current climate crisis is primarily spiritual and ethical with serious political, economic and justice implications. As human beings we have failed to appreciate the intrinsic worth of ourselves, other humans, other species and future generations. We have failed to acknowledge the fact that the earth sustains life because of the harmonious balance of the elements and all the creatures within it. Our pursuit of “happiness and high quality of life” need not endanger other peoples, nations, communities, species and future generations that are also entitled to survival and happiness. The earth has enough resources to satisfy everyone’s need, but not enough resources for anyone’s greed.
2. Believe that ecological sustenance can be assured only through the principle of being mindful of the welfare of others while we mind our own. That our survival is inextricably woven with that of others. And that in the long term, we cannot survive while others perish. (Do not wish for others that which you do not wish for yourself, nor promise that which you do not fulfill. Matthew 7:12.)
3. Believe, in line with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) principle of common but differentiated

¹⁴ Mark 4:23

responsibilities, that the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation must be borne based on historical and actual responsibility and the ability to pay. In other words, there is an obligation of the industrialized countries to pay their carbon debts but more urgently to stop the emission of greenhouse gases.

4. Recognize that climate change has primarily been accelerated by emissions of greenhouse gases due to human activities. That these global emissions are not only historical but also actual current emissions by industrialized countries, thus global warming. The negative consequences of which are felt largely in the global south. And that climate change affects the availability of domestic and agricultural water and food security.
5. Appreciate the role of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in responding to the global environmental crisis as it provides a common negotiation platform for all nations and offers access for participation of non-governmental actors.
6. Reason that the current environmental and development crisis cannot be overcome through voluntary action only. That legally binding commitments are critical for the different issues of mitigation, adaptation, finance, development of technology and afforestation. It is therefore our view that the next eighteen months preceding the UNFCCC climate conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 (COP 15) are crucial to improving and strengthening the existing mechanisms.
7. Recognize that the Kyoto Protocol is an important step towards ensuring that industrialized countries commit themselves to legally binding emission reductions to 1990 levels. However, its implementation and the political commitment of the industrialized nations is absent. Some countries, notably the USA and New Zealand, have not even ratified the protocol, while most of the other countries with mitigation commitments are lagging too far behind their reduction targets.

We therefore urge African governments to propose and support principles based on justice, equity and responsibility in the climate change debate. These will go a long way to secure fair and just commitments for the post-2012 period. Unless decisive action is taken immediately, climate chaos will lead to increased human suffering and social upheaval, condemning millions of people to hunger, disease, misery and death. A third of the African population has already fallen prey to droughts, floods and resource-based conflicts resulting from global warming.

We urgently therefore:

- A. Call on governments and industry in the industrialized countries, especially in the North, to:
 - Implement significant and immediate reduction measures of at least 80% on 1990 levels and at the same time secure the right of all people to reach a dignified level of human development.

- Rapidly execute emission reductions that they accepted in the Kyoto Protocol and to adopt new, more effective and legally binding post-2012 emission reduction obligations.
 - Support adaptation strategies in the South through adequate financial and technological support as a way of owning up to their responsibility for the climate crisis.
 - Avail new mechanisms for channelling significant sums of financial, technological and other support, in addition to the commitment made (and mostly not fulfilled) by developed countries to provide 0.7% of their Gross Domestic Product for Official Development Assistance (ODA).
 - Promote and implement low carbon strategies for sustainable human development.
 - Compensate developing countries for the damage already done and the lost opportunities based on the polluter-pays-principle.
- B. Observe that the contribution of African countries to the total global emissions is very low and call upon the African governments to:
- Affirm political will to address climate change and to allocate adequate public resources to education for increased resilience and adaptation initiatives.
 - Recognize the role of the churches and other civil societies, including other faith communities, in order to adequately respond to and support local efforts to adapt to the adverse consequences of climate change – particularly at community levels.
 - Define appropriate policy frameworks to support the innovation, contextualization and development of technologies for sustainable industrial development in their respective countries, giving priority to the promotion of indigenous inventions and innovations.
- C. Appreciate the efforts of churches and faith-based organizations in advocating for the rights of the poor and vulnerable communities in the continent and challenge them to:
- Recognize the reality of climate change and the urgency to create awareness, mobilize and promote their communities to engage in activities towards effective and sustainable adaptation to the crisis.
 - Stand in solidarity with communities that are currently suffering from the negative impacts of climate change and whose livelihoods have been compromised through encouraging diversified eating habits, homegrown long-term agriculture and food security programs.
 - Review curricula of theological institutions and develop in-service training for clergy and lay leaders to integrate the theme of climate change at all levels.
 - Engage faith communities in the North to demand binding commitments from their governments to pay their carbon debt, reduce emission of greenhouse gases and support adaptation initiatives in the South.
 - Continue to influence the UNFCCC negotiation process through joint lobbying and advocacy activities using equity-based frameworks like the “Greenhouse Development Rights” and other human rights-based approaches.

To collaborate with their partners in the North to establish eco-congregations that will also offer options for checking consumerism through behaviour change, thus reducing carbon emissions.

- Engage African governments to develop appropriate legislation and policy framework towards precaution, mitigation and adaptation against climate change.

We, church leaders present in this consultation, hereby commit ourselves to work, engage and challenge our constituents, African governments, partners, governments of industrialized countries, the African Union and United Nations and other stakeholders in ensuring that climate change and its adverse effects as already experienced or projected are reversed.

Appendix D

Background to the Cornwall Declaration

Because the declarations of the Cornwall Alliance are at variance with other declarations discussed in this report, we think it may be useful to provide a bit of background information on the Alliance and its members.

The Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship (ICES) was founded in April 2000 by Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant leaders promoting a public, theologically, and politically conservative religious agenda. These leaders argued that religiously informed moral action, rather than governmental controls, should guide behavior, and that the environment can best be sustained in a context of free market economics, strong property rights, and technological innovation. The ICES was conceived and established by the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, an advocacy and educational organization created in 1990 by Fr. Robert A. Sirico “to promote a society that embraces civil liberties and free-market economics.” The flagship publication and defining document of the ICES is *The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship*; its principal author is E. Calvin Beisner.¹ Beisner was involved in founding the ICES and is a founding member of the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance.

The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship had its origin in October 1999 at a meeting held in West Cornwall, Connecticut, and attended by some 25 theologians, economists, environmental scientists, and policy experts. Apparently the driving force behind this meeting was the Acton Institute and a group of like-minded individuals from other faiths.

¹ Beisner’s bio, available on his website, states that he is “general editor and a contributing author and reviewer of the Cornwall Alliance’s *A Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Examination of the Theology, Science, and Economics of Global Warming*, a scholarly study released in December 2009, and of *The Cornwall Stewardship Agenda*; author of *The Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming*; co-author, with climatologist Roy Spencer, environmental economist Ross McKittrick, and energy analyst and ethicist Paul Driessen, of *A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming*, a technical paper released in July 2006 by the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance (now Cornwall Alliance); and editor of the Cornwall Alliance’s electronic newsletter on environmental science, economics, theology, ethics, and policy; <http://www.ecalvinbeisner.com/bio.pdf>.

This group produced *The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship* and then released it in early 2000 in conjunction with the founding of the ICES. The declaration acknowledges that “as concerns about the environment have grown in recent decades, the moral necessity of ecological stewardship has become increasingly clear.” But it also claims that “certain misconceptions about nature and science, coupled with erroneous theological and anthropological positions, impede the development of a sound environmental ethic.” It also states that “some unfounded or undue concerns include fears of destructive manmade global warming, overpopulation, and rampant species loss.” *The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship* is largely a distillation of arguments made by E. Calvin Beisner in his book *Where the Garden Meets Wilderness* (1997), according to David Larsen, whose doctoral thesis addressed evangelicals and the environment.²

The authors of *The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship* then circulated it among church leaders and solicited signatures. While a number of evangelical, Jewish, and Catholic leaders have signed the document, they were not responsible for its drafting or content.

The Interfaith Stewardship Alliance (ISA) was formed in November of 2005. According to its website, it “formed to take the principles of the Cornwall Declaration and apply them to specific public-policy issues in the environmental dialogue. The group changed its name to the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation in May of 2007 to more clearly reflect the tenets of its flagship document.”

In 2009 in a media event at the Heritage Institute, the Cornwall Alliance released both *A Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor* and *An Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming*. Both documents were authored primarily by Beisner, but Roy Spencer, Paul Driessen, and Ross McKittrick were listed as contributing authors. Considering the limited number of authors and their lack of religious credentials, it is somewhat disingenuous to label these as evangelical documents. Once again, these documents have been circulated among church leaders for endorsements.

From all appearances, the Cornwall Alliance is the creation of E. Calvin Beisner and represents his views. He is the only person listed in association with press releases, media days, or other statements. Although the website lists an extensive Board of Advisors, there is no evidence that these advisors play an important role in its activities.

Appendix E

Recommended Publications and Resources for Action

A. Publications

Basney, Lionel. *An Earth-Careful Way of Life: Christian Stewardship and the Environmental Crisis*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1994. Practical ways of living out Christian stewardship.

² David K. Larsen, *God's Gardeners: American Protestant Evangelicals Confront Environmentalism, 1967-2000*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2001.

- Berry, R.J., ed. *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2000. A book-length commentary on the Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation by a wide variety of scholars, including an account of the origin of this declaration.
- Bouma-Prediger, Steven. *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001. Caring for creation as a vital feature of Christian discipleship.
- DeWitt, Calvin B. *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care* (third edition). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011. A study guide for churches and discussion groups, with suggestions for discussion leaders.
- Glacken, Clarence. *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*. University of California Press, 1976. A preeminent treatise for scholars.
- Granberg-Michaelson, Wesley. *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987. Biblical and theological insights on the relation of God, humanity, and creation.
- Houghton, John T. *Global Warming: The Complete Briefing* (fourth edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. A comprehensive treatment by a preeminent climate scientist and evangelical Christian.
- Koetje, David S., ed. *Living the Good Life on God's Good Earth*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2006. Essays on practical living, with discussion questions for small groups.
- White, Robert S. *Creation in Crisis: Christian Perspectives on Sustainability*. London: SPCK, 2009. The present state and future hope of the earth prepared by theologians, scientists, economists, and development experts as they together worked to address the root causes of unsustainability.
- Wilkinson, Loren, Peter DeVos, Calvin DeWitt, Vernon Ehlers, and Eugene Dykema. *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship and Natural Resources* (1980) and *Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation* (1991), Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

B. Other resources

A Congregational Checklist (from http://www.crcna.org/pages/osj_creationcareresources.cfm)

This checklist comes from the Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. For more information, see www.crcna.org/osj.

WORSHIP

How often during the year are environmental concerns included in sermons?

- ☐ never ☐ occasionally ☐ special services (Earth Day) ☐ frequently

In your church's prayer life, do you . . .

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> praise God as the Creator? | <input type="checkbox"/> give thanks to God for the gift of creation? | <input type="checkbox"/> ask forgiveness for the harm done to the earth? | <input type="checkbox"/> pray for the healing of creation? |
|---|---|--|--|

Yes	No	Potential to develop	THEOLOGY <i>Does your church . . .</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Include environmental issues in a teaching or preaching program? <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage practicing Sabbath as a community / individuals? <input type="checkbox"/> Educate parishioners re: Reformed eschatology as opposed to popular end-times beliefs?
Some-times	Never	Potential to develop	CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS: <i>Do the following programs include earthkeeping elements?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Kids church / children in worship / Sunday school <input type="checkbox"/> Cadets / GEMS <input type="checkbox"/> MOPS
Have done	Could consider		YOUTH PROGRAMS <input type="checkbox"/> Undertake a practical environmental/conservation project (trash pick-up, road adoption, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Assess how environmentally friendly the church is and make recommendations for action
Have done	Could consider		ADULT EDUCATION/FORMATION <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Bible study / Sunday school class / speaker <input type="checkbox"/> Organize / participate in a carbon fast <input type="checkbox"/> Organize carpool schedule for church services / activities
Have done	Could consider		PROPERTY MANAGEMENT <input type="checkbox"/> Switch to green electricity (if offered by the electric company) <input type="checkbox"/> Commission an energy / environmental audit (free with membership in Interfaith Power and Light) <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage switching off unnecessary lights / equipment not in use; not leave items on stand-by (copier, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Install low-energy light bulbs where appropriate, replace lighting fixtures with timed or motion-sensitive lights <input type="checkbox"/> Check water faucets – fix drips / leaks, install aerators <input type="checkbox"/> Collect downspout water in rain barrels, use in garden <input type="checkbox"/> Install a bike rack
Have done	Could consider		FINANCE & PURCHASING <input type="checkbox"/> Use environmentally friendly cleaning materials and paint <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase recycled paper and envelopes <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase fairly traded products <input type="checkbox"/> Use local suppliers where possible

Have done	Could consider	KITCHEN
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Use reusable cups / plates; corn-based rather than plastic
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Use farmers markets and other local suppliers for food
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Compost used coffee grounds / uncooked food scraps
Have done	Could consider	RESOURCE MINIMIZATION
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get a Paper Gator, www.papergatorrecycling.com
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reconsider the need to print materials (bulletins, mailings, etc.); ensure easy recycling for materials
Have done	Could consider	CHURCH GROUNDS
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Native landscape responsible to watershed (rain gardens, omit pesticide/fertilizer), promote wildlife flourishing (birds, bees)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trees planted for shade / wind protection, reducing the need to heat and cool building
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Environmental consideration of church improvements (carpet, paint, bathrooms, green space, drainage for parking lots, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Compost yard waste
Have done	Could consider	PERSONAL LIFESTYLE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Publish green tips in church newsletter
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Promote use of reusable shopping bags and coffee mugs
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage a Community Supported Agriculture, where local farmer provides weekly shares of crops
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Promote a "Green Challenge" for lifestyle changes
Have done	Could consider	COMMUNITY OUTREACH
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Participate in local environmental initiatives or policy formation (e.g., local watershed cleanup project, etc.)
Have done	Could consider	GLOBAL OUTREACH
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Support the work of development agencies (CRWRC) and campaigns (Micah Challenge)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Support the work of international conservation and environmental agencies (e.g., A Rocha, WWF, Friends of the Earth, Care of Creation, etc.)
<p><i>C. A mini-workshop</i></p> <p>This mini-workshop is excerpted and adapted with permission from <i>Earth-wise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care</i>, third edition (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011), pp. 100-11.</p> <p>The procedure described on the following pages will help you generate lots of ideas for making your church, household, or larger community a Creation Care Center. It then guides you to choose the best ideas to put into action.</p>		

This procedure enables people to bypass initial roadblocking debates about the validity of ideas or budget and time constraints. It also helps bring specific ideas into an organized, coherent statement to present to church or community leaders who have the authority to move ahead with an action plan. The group or community therefore benefits from the undiluted strengths, talents, and abilities of everyone involved.

The procedure works best with a group of five to fifty people who already share a concern for and an understanding of the various degradations of creation. A one-hour session usually is sufficient to identify and screen ideas. Following the session, results should be summarized and gathered into a document for further development and implementation by your group, church, or community leaders.

Because this process begins with particular local issues and uses available local talent, each resulting Creation Care Center will have its own personality, identity, and character.

Procedure

A. General Setting and Room Arrangement

Set up the room with chairs in a single circle. Once people are seated, remove extra chairs so that no empty ones remain (but keep extra chairs handy for any who might arrive after you've begun). Bring a supply of index cards or similar-sized sheets of recycled paper. You'll need three cards for each person in the group. Have pencils or pens available for everyone.

B. Generating Initial Ideas

When the group is seated, explain that a Creation Care Center is a community, large or small, that intends to honor God as Creator and Sustainer in every way. This mini-workshop aims to help people discover how best to accomplish this goal in the community and region in which they live.

To begin, give two blank cards to each person, noting that people should write on one side only. Then ask, "What specific idea can you think of to make our group (or larger community) a Creation Care Center?"

Have people reflect for a few moments and then write their idea on one of the cards. Help group members to think broadly and deeply by asking some additional questions while they are reflecting:

- What is our situation here?
- What local environmental problems need to be addressed?
- How can we become a kind of "window on creation care"—a model of how to care for God's earth?
- What do we have going for us that other groups (communities) do not?
- What special contributions could we make toward the care and keeping of creation?

The purpose of asking these questions at various points while people are reflecting is to help them think creatively. This process can help to free people from real or imagined constraints of having too little money, already full schedules, or the need to "be practical." It encourages them to come up with their best ideas.

When participants have finished writing (after 3 to 5 minutes), ask them to think of another best idea and to write that on the other card. Again ask

questions to help people think creatively. Urge them to move beyond the obvious.

C. *"Idea Skimming"*

After group members have finished recording their ideas, have them pass both cards to the person on their right. Repeat this step so that the cards have been passed twice. Then have everyone read both cards carefully. Tell the group that when you say "Pass," they should pass the card with the better idea to the person on their right. If both ideas have equal merit, they should select either one to pass.

Again give the signal to pass a card—the better of the two that each person is holding. Repeat this process from three to seven times, but not so often that people might receive a card they had earlier. Explain that this process sifts out best ideas by using a screen of different perspectives. The best ideas will naturally endure the screening of different viewpoints.

When you've decided as a group that you're done passing cards, each person should read aloud the better of the two ideas in his or her hand. Without making comments on the ideas, thank everyone as you collect each card that is read. Continue around the circle until each person has read one idea. Stack together the "better idea" cards, and set them aside.

D. *More Ideas*

Pass out another blank card to each group member. (Each person will now have a blank card and the card from the previous round.) Now ask everyone to take into account all the ideas they read as they passed cards around earlier. They should also reflect for a minute or two on additional ideas they could write down. Here are some additional idea categories you could mention:

- use of liturgy, sermon, songs, order of worship
- building, grounds, parks, streets
- region, state, nation, world
- animals, plants, woods, fields, wetlands
- earth's energy exchange, soil and land degradation, ecosystem dysfunction, habitat destruction, species extinctions, global toxification, human and cultural abuse

Again ask questions to encourage creative thinking while everyone is reflecting. When everyone has written an idea on a blank card, repeat the passing procedure from three to seven times and conclude with the reading of the better ideas. Again collect each card after it is read, making a second pack to set aside.

E. *Filling Remaining Gaps*

Ask if any of the remaining cards has a good idea that has not yet been read. If so, group members should read such cards and hand them to you so that you can make a third pack.

At this point you will probably be ready to end this session, having completed the groundwork of your mini-workshop.

F. *Preparing Results*

Together as a group (or having two or three persons assigned to this task), prepare a document based on the contents of the card packs. Identify major

topics and sort the cards into those categories. Typical categories that may emerge are Creation Care Committee, other congregational committees, administration, liturgy and worship, building and grounds, community, and so on. Arrange the categories in a logical order, with those that address the administration of your Creation Care Center at the top. Type up the ideas, organized by categories, suggest action plans for implementing the ideas, and add a descriptive title to the document.

G. Distribution of the Results and Follow-Up

After obtaining necessary approvals, distribute the document to all who should receive it. For example, you may consider printing the results in your church newsletter, if that applies. Follow this by examining each identified category and bringing the content of each category to the attention of leaders, committees, or task forces who can follow up on your findings with concrete actions. Use the document together as you take steps to become a Creation Care Center.

IDEAS GLEANED FROM VARIOUS GROUPS

The following list of ideas should not be consulted until after group members have generated their own ideas. For additional helpful ideas in your ongoing work as a Creation Care Center, you may wish to consult this list, compiled from churches and other groups who implemented the preceding mini-workshop.

A. Creation Care Committee

1. Form a committee of interested people to advise the church to raise creation awareness, build an understanding of God as Creator, and assist people to become better stewards of our Lord's creation.
2. Publish information on Christian environmental stewardship in your newsletter.
3. Include a selection of books and materials on Christian environmental stewardship in your library, including those with biblical principles, practical suggestions for action, and local natural history and ecology.
4. Provide creation-focused materials for homebound members and residents of nursing homes, including audiotapes of birds, running waters, and weather; provide bird feeders for people's windows, and set up a schedule for keeping the feeders filled.

B. Worship and Liturgy

1. Designate one Sunday each season for recognizing our commitment to God's earth.
2. Request a sermon on creation care and keeping.
3. Devote a portion of each worship service to creation awareness and care. (For example, have at least one family report on something they are doing to help take care of God's creation.)
4. Encourage leaders and members to extend the principle of compassion to all living things (human beings, flora, fauna, and the biosphere).

5. Hold a well-planned outdoor worship service on environmental stewardship in a park or in an awe-inspiring creation setting, followed by a picnic.
6. Plan a multigenerational half-day or even two-hour field trip to regain appreciation and concern for God's creation. Include such things as star viewing and delighting in the life of a river.
7. Plant a new church that emphasizes general (natural) revelation—that is, learning from the “beautiful book” of God's creation as well as from the Bible (special revelation). Its mission statement could direct that all members practice creation stewardship and promote and honor the Lord of creation in all respects.
8. Emphasize how each person can give others an impression of creation awareness and creation care in their everyday work and living.

C. *Building and Grounds*

1. Use a building sign that emphasizes the importance of caring for creation.
2. Have an energy audit to find out ways in which your buildings could use energy more efficiently. Become an “Energy Star Congregation” (Google “energy star” on the Internet).
3. Use energy-efficient lighting and switches that turn off automatically when people are not present and when window light is adequate.
4. Assign someone the responsibility to see that all lights, fans, and air conditioning are turned off when the building is empty.
5. Remodel to save energy, doing such things as insulating, adding solar units, putting in a heat-pump water heater, and installing dropped ceilings where appropriate.
6. Research and develop ways to generate your own electricity (using wind, solar, geothermal, or other energy) and perhaps send surpluses back into the power grid.
7. Set up recycling bins for sorting metal, glass, plastics, paper, and so on. Post signs to remind people of your group's recycling program.
8. Hang appropriate banners and wall-hangings in the halls and meeting area to help raise people's awareness of creation care.
9. Make provisions that encourage people to appreciate creation: windows that open, clear glass panes in appropriate locations for viewing creation's beauty, trees and flowers planted at points where they can be seen from inside the building.
10. Develop a naturally self-sustaining park (garden) where people of the community can come to enjoy peace, quiet, plants, trees, animals, and the Lord. Have a sign that states the purpose of the park. Plant berry bushes, trees, and flowers that will attract birds and other animals.
11. Add an open-air covered picnic area to your grounds.

12. Add a rain-filled irrigation tank for watering plantings on the property.
13. Encourage people to use alternate means of travel to gather at your building. Aim for a parking lot that has as many bicycles as cars. (Let it be known that in connection with this idea, casual clothing would be accepted and considered appropriate.)

D. Stewardship Education

1. Make use of books and articles in your church library that focus on creation care for different age groups.
2. Identify your church's connection to its environment by answering questions like these: What materials make up the products that we use? Where does our food come from? Where does our waste go?
3. Hold a six- or seven-week miniseries to explain the degradations of creation. Most people are unaware of the actual problems. Some sessions could be used to develop ideas for righting the wrongs that have been identified.
4. Provide pastors and teachers an opportunity to complete a special course of study dealing with responsibility to God's creation.
5. Develop service projects that involve families: flower and tree planting, recycling programs, adopting a highway stewardship program, speaking to other area groups about stewardship.
6. Serve as a host for children from an inner-city setting for a week. Focus together on the wonders of God's creation, aiming to learn from each other.
7. Involve members in activities that support local agricultural efforts in soil stewardship, such as contour cropping, intensive rotational grazing, reduced chemical inputs, and improved animal care.
8. Fund and support people to act as environmental stewards to debate and influence public policy in the interest of maintaining and restoring creation's integrity.
9. Invite people in your community to be part of your Creation Care Center.
10. Offer community education classes on the how, what, and where of recycling and energy conservation in your area. Become an information center for source reduction and all kinds of recycling.
11. Provide information on environmentally sound practices, such as the efficient use of home thermostats, air conditioners, and coffee makers; the safe disposal of home cleansers, batteries, plastics, petroleum-based products, organic matter—and so on.
12. Make an inventory of all plant and animal communities within a half-mile radius of your church. Display this inventory pictorially as an exhibit.

13. Organize annual or semi-annual “Creation Rehabilitation Workdays” for planting trees, cleaning up a stretch of highway, landscaping a vacant lot, or buying some land and protecting it.
14. Reclaim a piece of land—an urban park, a city block, or some other area, and take care of it, modeling stewardship and involving area residents. Or adopt a wetland or woodland, keeping it, caring for it, and using it to educate yourselves and others.
15. Take a field trip to a local landfill to show people the waste we generate in our society.

E. Study Groups, Youth, and Christian Education

1. With others in your church, approach Bible study with an openness to receive the message of the Creator on creation care and keeping.
2. Hold vacation Bible school at a local county park, or hold the final celebration of the Bible school at a park, hosting a potluck dinner afterward. Bring students on walks for the purpose of discovering creation, learning awe and wonder, and developing an understanding of caring for creation.
3. Start an environmental awareness and creation care program with Sunday school students, involving them in an environmental cleanup or appreciation project each month.
4. Make creation awareness part of the church school curriculum. Involve adults of all ages in teaching lessons for the children about the need to preserve our world, and provide practical instruction in how to do this. Help children understand animals through pets under their care.
5. Gather a forum of interested business and science professionals in your church or wider community to discuss and propose solutions for alternative energy sources, renewable energy concepts, and improved energy use in support of creation care and keeping.

F. Congregational Life and Response to Creation

1. As a congregation, commit to living out your faith through caring for the part of God’s creation in which you live. For example, commit to caring for a nearby creek or watershed, adopting a highway or endangered species, recycling the garbage you produce, and keeping your cars and homes as environmentally fit as possible.
2. Arrange for informal meetings of church families at a local park on a regular basis. Invite individuals who can give presentations on nature to help people notice and understand their natural surroundings.
3. Start a program that involves all family members in conducting whole-family environmental and conservation projects in and around their homes and neighborhoods.
4. Have each individual set a personal goal each month to transform talk into action.

5. Hold a Friday- or Saturday-evening retreat that includes nature study and star-watching.
6. Plan a multigenerational tree-planting event that involves entire families.

G. Resource Use and Conservation

1. Purchase glass or ceramic dinnerware and communion cups instead of throwaway paper and plastic products.
2. Arrange to have various meetings held at the same time to conserve heat and air conditioning.
3. Adopt a “no chemical use” policy for lawn and plant care.
4. Adopt a “no throwaway” policy for functions at which food and drinks are served.
5. Use cloth tablecloths for church functions.
6. Use recycled paper for church bulletins, publications, and correspondence.
7. Put timers on outside lights.
8. Put motion- and light-detecting wall switches in appropriate places so that lights automatically go out when people are not present or when natural lighting is adequate.
9. Develop a car pool or mass-transit arrangement for bringing members to church. Also include bicycle racks. This will reduce the need for a large parking lot and will allow you to turn part of it into a garden for trees, flowers, and other plants.

H. Personal Lives, Lifestyle, and Home

1. Encourage members to make their homes and workplaces into Creation Care Centers.
2. Provide opportunities for all members to commit themselves to stating what they will do as stewards of creation.
3. Arrange for a “pedal-power activity” and use it as a basis for discussing how you can help others, yourselves, and creation.
4. Adopt energy-efficient practices for the use of heaters, air conditioners, lights, and various appliances at home.
5. Continue to show and explain to others the importance of creation care displayed in your own life.

I. Cooperation with Other Groups

1. Search out other groups (churches, schools, businesses, neighborhood associations, community centers) and invite them to join you in forming a Creation Care Center. Publicize what you are doing to encourage others.

2. Form a team to glean from other groups the best ideas and approaches for developing a Creation Care Center, and share these concepts with your church leaders to stimulate thinking and response.
3. Plan a community-wide workshop on God's creation that involves all the organizations of the community. Follow up with projects on energy conservation, clean-up, materials use, and more.
4. Conduct a city-wide energy and waste audit of public-use buildings.

J. Providing Leadership in Society

1. Be leaders in speaking out against the degradation of creation.
2. Continue efforts with other groups in the community to form a task force to encourage concern about environmental issues, and work on things that the community as a whole can do to improve or properly take care of the environment (such as cleaning up a riverbank, lakeshore, or part of a highway).
3. Conduct a study of various occupations and how they affect creation, and then discuss these issues in a community forum, inviting businesses and workers and others to brainstorm about how to improve on or eliminate negative impacts.
4. Urge your community's or organization's governing bodies to make a statement about creation and the environment that offers practical application for daily living.
5. Use the connections you can make with websites to pull together statements on caring for creation that have been produced by other groups, and glean ideas for stewardship and action.

K. Yet More Ideas!

- Build window boxes, rooftop gardens, ground-level gardens; promote other environmentally conscious architecture.
- Build fish ponds with fluorescent night lights for insect feeding.
- Plant edible flowers (nasturtiums).
- Encourage or practice rotational grazing or regenerative gardening.
- Engage in native plant restoration, indigenous gardening, and forest garden techniques.
- Encourage seed and tree distribution.
- Reclaim creation terminology in liturgy, psalmody, hymnody, and sermons.
- Establish walking trails through woodlands, fields, and gardens; include signs that identify tree and plant varieties.
- Restore habitats around homes to provide for a large diversity of creatures.
- Develop lawns with biodiversity that fix their own atmospheric nitrogen and naturally recycle thatch.
- Assist on a farm; buy your meat "on the hoof" and have it processed.
- Purchase a hundred acres of tropical rainforest for preservation.
- Give environmental stewardship awards to deserving members of the community.

- Develop a paid summer stewardship mission experience for young people at the wages they might earn as a fast-food clerk.
- Make your setting a distribution center for native flowers and trees on Arbor Day.
- Make your setting a distribution center for vegetable seeds and related literature on food and the environment in late spring.
- Talk with a farmer about planting a crop for direct human consumption; help identify a market for it; direct any surplus food to a local food pantry.
- Develop a wheelchair nature loop at a retirement or nursing home.
- Conduct a food-source or hunger awareness dinner at church.
- Encourage a local restaurant to use placemats that show the relationship of menu items to the places where food is grown.
- Encourage a local newspaper to get involved in environmental issues.
- Organize the restoration of native vegetation along a stretch of roadside.
- Discuss the difference between tree planting and forest restoration and follow it with a restoration project.
- Buy a worn-out piece of land and redeem it for productive gardening or re-establishment of native species.
- Arrange for an “astronomy night” to help make Psalm 19 come alive.
- Spend a half-hour or more in autumn lying on a forest floor, listening to leaves fall and observing woodland creatures.

Appendix F

Glossary

Biosphere: The thin covering of our planet that contains all of life and is knit together by exchanges of material, energy, and information. It extends from the deepest parts of the sea upward to the outer limits of the atmosphere, but is concentrated within a few miles’ elevation at the surface of our planet.

Biota: The totality of living things in a particular area or ecosystem.

Ecosystem: A particular system of interwoven and interacting living things with their physical environment that can be distinguished from its surroundings. Examples are wetland ecosystems, lake ecosystems, prairie ecosystems, and urban ecosystems. The largest ecosystem is the biosphere.

Ecosystem services: The services provided by an ecosystem; for example, flood control by wetland ecosystems along rivers, purification of water by plants as they move water from the soil into the atmosphere, and food production by photosynthesis.

El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO): This is a back-and-forth variation of surface air pressure between the eastern and western tropical Pacific Ocean, with pressure being high in the eastern tropical Pacific when it is low in the western tropical Pacific, and vice-versa. When the surface low pressure develops near northern Australia and Indonesia and the surface high pressure develops over the coast of Peru, trade winds over the Pacific Ocean move strongly from east to west, carrying warm surface waters westward,

bringing convective storms to Indonesia and coastal Australia; at the same time, along the coast of Peru cold bottom water rises to the surface to replace the warm water that is pulled to the west, bringing with it an upwelling of deeper ocean life that strongly affects the fish catch there. This oscillation has profound effects on the climate of the southern hemisphere and is a principal driver of year-to-year climate variability in the Pacific Northwest of Canada and the United States. The name given to the development of warm surface waters at the edge of the sea in Ecuador and Peru by fishermen there is El Niño (Spanish for “Christ child”) because when it occurs, it is near Christmastime (for more information, see: <http://www.physicalgeography.net/fundamentals/7z.html>).

Exponential: Applied to something that is increasing (or decreasing) and does so by doubling (or halving) over a specific interval of time. An example is the population growth of the well-known bacterium *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) whose doubling time is 17 minutes when given the necessary combination of sugar and salt. The doubling time can be determined for any system by dividing the number 70 by the percent annual growth rate, meaning that a population, savings account, or GDP that is increasing at a rate of 1 percent annually will double in 70 years.

GDP (Gross domestic product): The market value of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given year.

Global south: Largely refers to the nations of Africa, Central and Latin America, and a majority of Asia. Although not divided solely by geographic boundaries (i.e., all countries south of the equator), most countries in the global south are located in the southern hemisphere. In general, these nations are less developed (socioeconomically) and may also bear the brunt of the challenges facing our world, including, but not limited to, climate change.

Units of Measure:

Mass (and weight):

Kilogram (Kg): 1,000 grams = 2.2046 pounds

Metric ton (tonne): 1,000 Kg = 1.102 tons (U.S.)

Petagram (Pg): 1 billion metric tons = 1 gigaton

Ton (U.S. measure): 2,000 pounds = 907 Kg

Pound (lb.): 454 grams

Area:

Hectare (ha): 10,000 square meters = 2.47 acres

Acre (ac): 4,840 square yards = 4047 square meters = 0.405 hectares

Appendix G

Biographies of Contributors

Dr. Thomas Ackerman is Director of the Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and Ocean (JISAO) and Professor of Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Washington. From 1999 through 2005, he served as the Chief Scientist of DOE’s Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM)

Program and was a Battelle Fellow at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Washington. Dr. Ackerman was Professor of Meteorology at Pennsylvania State University from 1988 to 1999, as well as Associate Director of the Earth System Science Center. He has authored or co-authored more than 175 peer-reviewed journal articles on a wide range of climate-related topics and received several awards for his research papers. He is the recipient of the NASA Distinguished Public Service Medal and the Leo Szilard Award for Science in the Public Interest, awarded by the American Physical Society. Dr. Ackerman is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union. He is a member of Sanctuary Christian Reformed Church in Seattle, Washington, and has served as a deacon and elder in CRC congregations and as elder in the Presbyterian Church of America and the Reformed Church of Australia. He has also served on and chaired a Christian school board. Further information available at <http://www.atmos.washington.edu/~ackerman/>.

Dr. Tom Bruulsema directs research and education programs in the Northeast region for the North American program of the International Plant Nutrition Institute, a not-for-profit, scientific organization dedicated to the responsible management of plant nutrition. Dr. Bruulsema is a Fellow in the American Society of Agronomy and the Soil Science Society of America, an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Plant Agriculture at the University of Guelph, and a Certified Crop Adviser. He has research experience in soil science with Cornell University and the University of Minnesota, and in Bangladesh agronomy with the Mennonite Central Committee. He is a member of New Life Christian Reformed Church in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, and has served for over nine years on local Christian school boards. Dr. Bruulsema holds a B.S. from the University of Guelph (1983, Agriculture), M.S. from the University of Guelph (1985, Crop Science), and Ph.D. from Cornell University (1994, Soil Science). For further information, see <http://nane.ipni.net/staff/Director-Tom-Bruulsema>.

Mr. Ted Charles is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John M. Charles, born into the Waters Flow Together clan and for the Bitter Water clan of the Navajo tribe on March 10, 1941, at Ft. Defiance, Arizona. Raised in Shiprock, New Mexico, he graduated from high school at Rehoboth Mission School in 1959. He attended Dordt College from 1959-1961; he subsequently joined the United States Marine Corps and served at home and abroad from 1961-1966. Mr. Charles returned to a degree program in 1966 and graduated from Biola College in 1970. He later received a M.A. from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. He went on to work at Rehoboth Mission for seven years and later taught for twenty more years in the Gallup McKinley County School system, retiring in 1999. Mr. Charles subsequently assumed the position of pastor of the Ft. Wingate CRC and retired from church work in July 2011.

Dr. Calvin B. DeWitt is Professor of Environmental Studies Emeritus, Nelson Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he is a member of the graduate faculties of Environment and Resources, Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development, Water Resources Management, and Oceanography and Limnology. Dr. DeWitt is a Fellow of the University of Wisconsin Teaching Academy, recipient of the Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Teaching, and teaches Environmental Science. He is a member of the Ecological Society of America, the International Science Society for Science and

Religion, a Corresponding Editor of *Christianity Today*, a member of the editorial board of *Christians in Science*, and a recipient of the Connie Award of the National Wildlife Federation for his work as “a world-class conservationist” in Christian environmental stewardship. He is an elder in Geneva Campus Church and lives south of Madison on the Waubesa Wetlands in the Town of Dunn, where in the mid-1970s he served as Town Chair (Mayor) and helped bring his town to receive the Renew America Award in 1995 and 2000. In 2002, he organized Climate Forum 2002 with his British colleague, Sir John T. Houghton, which produced the *Oxford Declaration on Climate Change*, a statement that has been particularly instrumental in bringing climate issues into the concerns of evangelicals and the wider public. His most recent book is *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*, third edition (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011). Another book, *Song of a Scientist* (Faith Alive), is scheduled for release in spring 2012.

Ms. Anoushka Martil works as an environmental scientist in the environmental assessment group at SENES Consultants Limited, Ontario, Canada. Her educational background includes a B.Sc. in Environmental Science and an M.A.Sc. in Environmental Applied Science and Management. Her thesis focused on environmental justice issues and its integration in project development, using case studies in Sri Lanka. Ms. Martil holds certificates in Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing and Greenhouse Gas Verification and is currently earning a certificate in Renewable Energy. She is also a Certified Environmental Practitioner-in-Training, Canadian Environmental Certification Approvals Board, Calgary. Her experience in Sri Lanka includes working with consulting firms and international donor agencies, such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. Born in the city of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Ms. Martil has lived in Canada since 2001. She is a member at Friendship Community Church, Toronto. She is also very involved with Youth for Christ ministries, where she has served as a volunteer for more than eight years.

Dr. Mary L. VandenBerg is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. She has taught as an adjunct professor at Kuyper College in Grand Rapids and at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Her graduate work focused on atonement theology, and she is currently working in the areas of theological anthropology and soteriology. She is also interested in topics dealing with the intersection of theology and science. She has been married for thirty years and has three grown children. She is a member of LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Mr. Peter Vander Meulen is the Coordinator for Social Justice and Hunger Action of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and previously worked for twenty-three years in managing community development projects in developing countries, including seven years in Africa with CRWRC. The focus of his work is with the agencies, congregations, and members of the Christian Reformed Church to help support and develop ministries to the poor and promote social justice through organizing and building social justice networks in CRC communities. Mr. Vander Meulen has served on the national board of Bread for the World, has been an elder in his local congregation, serves on the Immigration and Refugee Committee of Church World Service, and is recent Co-Chair of the Micah Challenge USA,

one of over 45 national anti-poverty coalitions rooted in global evangelical Christianity and inspired by Micah 6:8. He recently attended a CRWRC/ World Missions conference titled "Restoring Creation: A Seminar on Environmental Degradation and Creation Care for Christian leaders in Bangladesh." During heavy rains and higher-than-usual flooding he learned how local populations are coping with rising environmental problems.

Ms. Amy Vander Vliet is a web editor at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University. She joined the center in September 2006 as a research assistant, contributed to the report "Faith Communities Engage the HIV/ AIDS Crisis: Lessons Learned and Paths Forward," and has offered editing support for numerous other Berkley Center publications, including *Embryo Politics: Ethics and Policy in Atlantic Democracies* (2011) and *Religion and Global Politics of Human Rights* (2011). She is a member of Washington, D.C., CRC and is currently serving her first term as deacon. Ms. Vander Vliet was also a youth observer to Synod 2009 and Synod 2010 and is part of the Leadership Exchange's young adult leadership team. She received a B.A. in Political Studies and History from Dordt College and her M.A. in Security Studies from Georgetown University.

Dr. Gerald K. Van Kooten is Professor of Geology at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a consultant for energy issues, particularly in Alaska. Dr. Van Kooten has work experience as an exploration and production geologist in geothermal, coal, and oil and gas. Before coming to Calvin College in 2004, he worked for ARCO in Dallas, Denver, and Anchorage. He has lived full- or part-time in Alaska for twenty-six years and has conducted exploration and geological field activities throughout Alaska. He also participated in ecosystem impact studies of Prince William Sound, Alaska, after the Exxon Valdez oil spill. At Calvin College, Dr. Van Kooten teaches the "hard rock" geology courses, including mineralogy, petrology, structure, and geochemistry. He also supervises student research and gives talks in the area on energy issues. As a geological consultant, he has worked for many clients, including small and large oil companies, the Federal Department of Energy, Alaska State resource agencies, Alaska Public Utilities, and various Alaska Native Corporations. Dr. Van Kooten holds B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in geology from the University of Washington (1973), Arizona State University (1975), and the University of California at Santa Barbara (1980). He is a member of Shawnee Park CRC in Grand Rapids.

Ms. Cindy Verbeek has worked as a volunteer and board member and has been a staff member of A Rocha Canada since 1996. A Rocha is an international conservation organization working to show God's love to all creation. She is now working as the Northern British Columbia representative and community mobilizer. Ms. Verbeek volunteers as a streamkeeper, farmer's market manager, and secretary for Healthy Options for People and the Earth (HOPE). She worked with Earthkeeping in Edmonton, Alberta, to produce the "Caring for Creation" study guide, worked on the *Birds of the McKenzie Delta* with her husband, and is currently working on a children's book called *There's a Salmon in My Classroom*. Ms. Verbeek is a B.S. graduate of the King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta, and a Naturalist Certificate graduate of the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies in Michigan. She attends Houston CRC, where she leads C4, a weekly women's

ministry, helps out with vacation Bible school, and coordinates the church's community garden.

Mr. Joel Visser practices environmental law in Washington, D.C. He graduated from Calvin College with a bachelor's degree in Chemistry. He holds a master's degree in religion from Yale University Divinity School and a master's degree in environmental policy from the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and the Environment. Mr. Visser holds a juris doctor degree from the University of Michigan. He provides litigation and regulatory guidance with respect to a variety of environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (Superfund), and National Environmental Policy Act. Mr. Visser currently attends Silver Spring (Md.) CRC.

I. Background

A. Mandates given in 2007

This is now the fifth year that the Faith Formation Committee has been reporting to synod. The committee was appointed in 2007 in the context of synod's deliberations about the admission of children to the Lord's Supper. Synod 2006 had proposed changing the Church Order to grant admission to the Lord's Supper for all baptized children. However, Synod 2007 chose not to ratify that decision and instead appointed a Faith Formation Committee with the following mandate:

To deepen the integration of biblical teaching; confessional norms; church polity; and liturgical, educational, and pastoral practices in the CRC with respect to (1) participation in the Lord's Supper and (2) public profession of faith, by means of:

- a. Formulating a clear statement about the participation of baptized children at the Lord's Supper and the practice of public profession of faith for use in the churches. The statement should include, first, an explanation of 1 Corinthians 11 and other relevant Scripture texts in light of the principles of Reformed hermeneutics and, second, a discussion of the Reformed confessions with emphasis on the implications of the relationship between covenant and sacraments.
- b. Describing how Christian Reformed congregations in various contexts are experiencing intergenerational faith formation and sacramental practice and discerning which liturgical, educational, and organizational practices should be commended by synod to the entire denomination on the basis of their pastoral and theological integrity.
- c. Discussing with various agencies and organizations that work in the areas of faith formation, pastoral care, and worship (e.g., Calvin Theological Seminary, Home Missions, Youth Unlimited, Christian Schools International, the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship) what kinds of collaborative educational efforts best promise to support pastorally sensitive, theologically grounded work in these topics.
- d. Providing guidelines, liturgical materials, and pastoral advice on these topics in collaboration with Faith Alive Christian Resources.
- e. Serving as a resource for discussions of these topics at a congregational and classical level.
- f. Reporting to synod annually for the next five years.

Grounds:

1. Our approach to the question of participation at the Lord's Supper and public profession of faith must proceed on the basis of a clear statement of biblical and theological rationale.
2. A study committee on biblical and theological issues alone is insufficient. An ongoing discussion needs to take place at all levels of the church to link our theology with our practice within a whole cluster of issues that relate to the sacraments, the preached Word, faith formation, church discipline, and practices that sustain lifelong discipleship.
3. Our approach to children at the Lord's Supper and profession of faith needs to be part of a larger discussion of faithful and vital intergenerational faith formation in various contexts. Mutual accountability and learning among very different types of congregations is only likely to happen when there are intentional structures in place to promote it.

4. Several congregations are already asking for shared wisdom on this topic.
5. Given strongly held opinions on this issue and growing diversity of practices, this topic is likely to be discussed throughout the denomination for at least the next five years. A pastorally and theologically oriented committee, attuned to the diversity of ministry settings within the denomination, would be well positioned to shepherd a healthy theological dialogue within the denomination over time.
6. This approach would be a cost-effective means of shepherding this discussion, especially given the availability of the Internet to promote communication among committee members and to disseminate information to the denomination.
7. The work of such a committee would be a fitting way to carry forward the themes, insights, and energy developed during the denominational Year of Faith Formation (2007-2008).

(*Acts of Synod 2007*, pp. 655-57)

In addition, synod added this related mandate to our work:

That synod mandate the Faith Formation Committee to provide biblical and pastoral guidance for councils who are conversing with those members who are requesting infant dedication in place of infant baptism.

Ground: Covenantal theology is foundational for faith formation (Gen. 17:1-14; 1 Cor. 7:14; Acts 2:38-39).

That synod mandate the Faith Formation Committee to provide guidance concerning liturgical practices surrounding infant baptism.

Ground: Because liturgical practices teach doctrine, it is important that liturgical practices reflect the doctrinal standards of the denomination.

(*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 621)

We have made significant progress on these mandates. During the past five years we have presented materials to the churches and to synod on a number of key matters that are intended to serve the cause of faith formation ministries in our churches. We have written and presented the document "Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith," which Synod 2011 endorsed as a guiding document for the churches (see *Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 550-69; *Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 829). We have also written and presented "Children at the Table," which Synod 2011 accepted as fulfillment of that part of our mandate (see *Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 577-612; *Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 831). And we have created and maintained a website with a large number of documents and reports for the churches (see www.crna.org/faitformation). In addition, Synod 2010 adopted the committee's key recommendation concerning age- and ability-appropriate participation at the Lords' Supper.

All baptized members who come with age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to the Lord's Table and called to obey the scriptural commands about participation (e.g., to "examine themselves," to "discern the body," to "proclaim the Lord's death," to "wait for others") in an age- and ability-appropriate way, under the supervision of the elders. The elders have responsibility to nurture in the congregation grateful and obedient participation through encouragement, instruction, and accountability.

The following statements clarify the guiding principle above:

- a. A formal public Profession of Faith prior to participation in the Lord's Supper is not required by Scripture or the confessions.
- b. A formal public Profession of Faith is a vital practice for faith formation and is one pastoral approach to consider prior to participation in the Lord's Supper.)

- c. Professing faith regularly in and outside of corporate worship is a natural practice for lifelong faith formation which the church should encourage, enhance, and express.

Grounds:

1. This position honors the covenant status of all who are baptized and affirms their membership in the church.
2. This position is faithful to the instruction of 1 Corinthians 11, which calls for a response of obedience on the part of those who come to the table.
3. This position acknowledges that, though members of the body of Christ respond to the promises of God in ways that are shaped by their age and abilities, their responses are nevertheless valid responses.
4. This position implements the instructions of Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 81, that those who come to the table must be repentant, trusting, and desirous of growth in obedience.
5. This position honors the polity of the CRC, in which the sacraments of the church are to be celebrated under the supervision of the elders.
6. This position allows for diversity of local practice within a standard principle.
7. Adopting this principle will give the Faith Formation Committee sufficient guidance to continue to carry out its mandate by proposing Church Order changes and working with church agencies to develop pastoral resources for congregations.

(*Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 810-11)

Synod 2011 adopted the appropriate changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements to ratify and implement the above decision of Synod 2010 (see *Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 571-76; *Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 829-30).

Further, the committee's statement presented on infant dedication was endorsed by Synod 2011 (see *Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 831-32) and is presented for approval this year. The committee has also made substantial progress in communicating with a variety of stakeholders throughout the denomination, and various resources that have been posted on the committee's website are being developed into publications by Faith Alive Christian Resources.

The topic of faith formation and participation in the sacraments is immense, but we are grateful for the ways that churches are working creatively and faithfully to strengthen ministry in this area, and for the ways we have been able to function not merely as a study committee but as a "shepherding committee" to celebrate and encourage this good work.

B. Mandates given in 2011

The Synod of 2011 extended our term by one year and gave the Faith Formation Committee an additional mandate out of concern for a continued focus on faith formation matters after our committee work is done, as follows:

That synod extend the term of the Faith Formation Committee for one more year with the following additional mandate:

- a. To identify appropriate models for developing a denomination-wide mechanism for promoting continued learning, reflection, and training on the topic of faith formation and discipleship. This is to be done in consultation with other denominational ministries and related agencies.
- b. Provide quarterly reports on this work throughout 2011 and 2012 to the interim executive director, with a final report to Synod 2013.

Grounds:

- 1) Faithful discipleship and faith formation are urgent and ongoing concerns for our churches.

- 2) While the Faith Formation Committee will complete its original mandate at the meeting of Synod 2012, the tasks of training, learning, and mutual accountability are ongoing.
- 3) The work of the Faith Formation Committee in shepherding the denomination in this topic has raised awareness of the hunger for resources and leadership to support faith formation at the classical and local levels. This movement toward stronger faith formation practices needs to be supported and encouraged.
- 4) While there are denominational ministries and other related agencies that support faith formation, there is currently no agency or office mandated to coordinate or oversee matters of faith formation.

(Acts of Synod 2011, p. 832)

We have begun discussion of this topic in earnest, and we will offer reflections on this work, below. We anticipate presenting a final report to Synod 2013 about our work.

Finally, Synod 2011 referred questions to the Faith Formation Committee regarding the best way to shape denominational work related to worship. Faith Alive Christian Resources requested that synod reconstitute the CRC Worship Committee to provide leadership and support to churches in the crucial area of worship. They also proposed that Faith Alive Christian Resources be designated as the administering agency for the reconstituted CRC Worship Committee (see *Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 176-77). Synod referred this proposal to the Faith Formation Committee for consideration in conjunction with the committee's mandate for finding a mechanism for continued faith formation leadership, as follows:

That synod refer the tasks listed below (as presented for a proposed CRC Worship Committee—see *Agenda for Synod 2011*, p. 177) to the Faith Formation committee for information and urge the committee to consider how these tasks might be fulfilled.

- a. Writing, updating, and e-publishing a variety of liturgies, prayers, and forms that can be used in worship and on other occasions (e.g., forms for sacraments, ordination, weddings, and so forth).
- b. Providing leadership in worship by offering guidelines and principles for worship in the churches.
- c. Overseeing a denominational worship website that would include suggestions for worship specifically related to the CRC (seasonal liturgies, sacramental liturgies, prayers, litanies, music resources, advice on worship planning, links to helpful articles, and other resources). This website would complement the work of the websites of Reformed Worship, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, and the Network.
- d. Coordinating the worship resources of all the agencies, thus using expertise wisely and saving resources.
- e. Providing a place for churches to contact with questions about and resources for worship.
- f. Maintaining ecumenical contacts related to worship (in consultation with the CRC Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee), especially with other Reformed bodies.

Grounds:

- 1) The CRC needs to provide better leadership and resources for the churches in the crucial area of worship.
- 2) While worship is central to church life and mission, there is no designated agency or office to support that ministry in the CRC.

- 3) While the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship can certainly be an important partner in this endeavor, it cannot devote its resources exclusively to the CRC, as it is funded as an ecumenical institute.

(Acts of Synod 2011, p. 855)

We have also begun to review this matter, and we anticipate addressing these concerns in our final report to Synod 2013.

In light of these varied and interrelated mandates, this report to synod includes summaries of significant committee discussions (section II) which are not yet ready for synodical action, as well as several recommendations for synodical action in 2012 (section III).

II. Committee deliberations

A. Profession of faith

Throughout the past year, the committee has been in regular communication with a number of church councils, classes, and individuals. One recurring theme in these conversations has been a strong desire—which we affirm—to see the practice of profession of faith thrive in our churches as a significant milestone event. These conversations arise out of a deep desire to love the youth of our congregations and to search for ways to include, embrace, and enfold them more deeply into the life of the church. These conversations also point to a set of practices that churches have been using to strengthen this practice.

1. Proactive encouragement—Instead of waiting for young members to take the initiative, many congregational leaders are taking the initiative to come alongside their youth and actively encourage them to think about taking this important step, respecting and affirming the unique story of each person's journey with faith.
2. Timeframe—Instead of waiting until young people are about ready to graduate from high school—and often leave the congregation for college or work—congregations are discovering the value of encouraging a profession of faith milestone at age 14, 15, or 16. This timeframe provides a year or two before high school graduation in which young people may put into practice in the congregation the learning and growth that are part of their journey toward profession of faith. This timeframe also challenges congregations to provide significant ministry opportunities for young people.
3. Rigorous and relevant training—Preparation for profession of faith has usually included systematic biblical study, as well as a study of church history and the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church. In the strongest and most vital congregations, we sense a growing—not weakening—enthusiasm for this kind of training, as well as interest in providing instruction in spiritual disciplines and encouraging lifelong habits of prayer, Bible reading, and worship. We also see creativity in how this is provided, especially in congregations that offer this training in retreat or camp settings and link learning with opportunities for service and participation in several aspects of congregation life.

4. Family involvement—In many vital congregations, we see renewed attention to encouraging parents and entire families to be involved in faith formation activities. Faith Alive Christian Resources' recent innovative work on an intergenerational curriculum and materials for parents can strongly assist this approach.
5. Mentoring—We have heard from many congregations that use mentoring as a way to prepare youth for making profession of faith. Matching individual teens with mature Christian adults who pray for them and come alongside them during their preparation for professing their faith (and beyond!) can be a life-changing experience for both mentor and mentee.
6. Meeting the elders—We are grateful for creative ways that congregations have made meetings between elders and those professing their faith a deep and meaningful experience. Some congregations encourage those making profession of faith to prepare a letter or song that expresses their faith. Some shape the conversation with the elders in ways that mirror the public celebration of profession of faith (see Appendix B).
7. Liturgical celebration—Congregations are working to make the ceremony of profession of faith a significant and meaningful liturgical moment in the life of the congregation. To mark this significant milestone in the lives of young people, some churches present them with a handmade memento or even a scrapbook or portfolio detailing their faith journeys to that particular point. Others look for ways to include those making profession of faith in shaping or leading part of the service, perhaps by reading Scripture, sharing a testimony or song, or choosing music or artwork that will be used in worship.
8. Ongoing discipleship—Some congregations are becoming more intentional about what happens after profession of faith, whether through a class, quarterly follow-up meal, or an "internship" with one or more congregational ministries. This helps to challenge the idea—still persistent in some places—that profession of faith is a kind of "graduation" exercise.

We encourage every church council to review these practices, to discern how best to strengthen local practice, and to share ideas with the committee.

B. Available resources

Perhaps the most common request that we receive from churches is that we provide them with meaningful resources on a variety of these matters. We applaud the local efforts of pastors, church staff, and ministry teams who are writing materials for their congregations for pastoral, educational, and liturgical use. We see the abundance of such efforts as a sign of vitality and vibrancy in our churches.

In addition, we are continuing to collaborate with Faith Alive Christian Resources so that our collaborative efforts with them will result in meaningful, high-quality resources for the churches. Several new resources are being developed related to children's participation at the Lord's Supper.

In the light of the of Synod 2011's decision to welcome covenant children to the Lord's Supper, the committee has revamped its website (www.crcn.org/faitformation) to make it more user friendly to congregational leaders and parents looking for resources. Visit the site for resources that focus on new

ways of studying and practicing the sacraments of baptism and communion, as well as reflections on what synod's decision means for the important faith milestone of profession of faith. Following are some key resources developed by the committee and offered to churches for study and consideration:

- Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith
- Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith: Sermon/Worship Series Suggestions
- Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith: A Study Guide for Small Groups
- Infant Dedication and the Christian Reformed Church
- Children at the Lord's Table: Toward a Guiding Principle for Biblically Faithful Celebrations of the Lord's Supper
- A Practice of Christian Unity: A Small Group Study of 1 Corinthians 11

We are also in the process of adding additional resources from congregations across the CRC.

Faith Alive Christian Resources also offers a number of resources that directly relate to the committee's work. Check out their website (www.faithaliveresources.org) for these and other titles:

- *We: Gathering the Whole Church around the Whole Story* (an intergenerational faith nurture curriculum)
- *Home Grown: Handbook for Christian Parenting*
- *The Baptism of Children: A Guide for Parents*
- *Celebrating the Milestones of Faith: A Guide for Churches*
- Nurture blog at www.NurtureKidsFaith.org
- *Children's Profession of Faith Kit*
- *I Believe: Getting Ready to Profess My Faith*
- *Quest of Faith: Understanding What You Confess*
- *Shaped by God: 12 Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults*
- *Disciples: A Multi-year Faith Formation Program for Adults*
- Several recent articles in *Reformed Worship* and *The Banner*

Other CRC-related resources are available at the following websites:

- Back to God Ministries International (<http://backtogod.net/global-ministries/english>)
- CRC Home Missions (www.crcna.org/pages/crhm_smallgroups.cfm)
- Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. (www.calvin.edu/worship)
- Christian Schools International, and especially the CSI "nurturing faith" blog (www.csionline.org/resources/community/nurturing_faith_blog and/or nurturingfaith.wordpress.com)
- Dynamic Youth Ministries (www.calvinistcadets.org; www.gemsgc.org; and www.youthunlimited.org)
- The Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary (<http://cep.calvinseminary.edu>)
- Calvin Theological Seminary publications, such as *The Forum* (www.calvinseminary.edu/pubs/forum)
- The CRC Year of Faith Formation resources available at www.crcna.org/pages/fa_walkon_resources.cfm.

C. Early considerations for faith formation in denominational structures

The committee has begun work on its mandate to develop models for strengthening the denomination's work on faith formation. To this end, we have studied the structure of other denominational bodies, consulted with a variety of persons, and provided quarterly reports to the executive director of the CRCNA as required. We are currently developing a variety of potential models for consideration, and we plan to discuss these models with representatives of denominational agencies prior to completing our report to Synod 2013. Here are several considerations that have emerged as significant in our preliminary discussions.

First, there is widespread interest, passion, and concern about vital faith formation and discipleship ministry in the whole spectrum of CRC congregations—large and small, older and brand new, across every ethnic and cultural group.

Second, there is widespread gratitude for the remarkable ways we are served by a variety of CRC agencies and other closely related organizations. There are significant, creative, and thoughtful faith formation efforts at several CRC agencies and affiliated agencies, including Faith Alive Christian Resources, Back to God Ministries International, Calvin Theological Seminary, Christian Reformed Home Missions, and Dynamic Youth Ministries.

Third, we encounter a widespread sentiment that in spite of denomination-wide financial constraints, this area will require additional financial resources.

Fourth, any approach to structuring a ministry in this area must overcome the unfortunate tendency in many congregations and in a variety of trans-denominational conversations to inadvertently disconnect public worship, including the sacraments, from discipleship and faith formation. Congregations may, for example, hire a "discipleship coordinator" or "faith formation" expert, and then insist, "Other people take care of worship; your job is to focus on education and service opportunities," rather than say, "As you shape learning opportunities here, be sure to collaborate with those who plan and lead worship so that what we learn together in church education programs will deepen our participation in worship." This split can also be felt when most of a congregations' discipleship work is focused on strengthening private practices (Bible study or prayer) rather than helping people see how their private prayers or Bible reading and participation in worship can be mutually strengthening activities. It can be felt when children's ministry leaders or youth leaders downplay the significance of a public profession of faith, or fail to include teaching about baptism and the Lord's Supper, assuming that this is the responsibility of the pastor. This split can also be felt denominationally. While many agencies have programs or initiatives related to discipleship, most efforts focus on worship and the sacraments only tangentially.

In contrast, part of what has been invigorating about our work over the past four years has been in seeing worship and the sacraments as both a source and result of discipleship. Worship forms us as disciples, and the learning and serving we do outside of worship in turn strengthens our participation in worship. Worship and discipleship are inseparable. The main pitfall we see with potential organizational structures in the CRC around

faith formation is the potential of reinforcing rather than overcoming this split.

We are grateful that this more integrated view is receiving attention in a number of conversations both within and beyond the CRC. Faith Alive Christian Resources has been a leader in this area with publications like *Reformed Worship* magazine, the new *We* intergenerational curriculum, and *Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith*, ed. Robert J. Keeley. (See also Robert Keeley's *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith* published by Baker Books and available through Faith Alive). This more integrated approach is also richly attested in the Reformed tradition. Scholars have recently been focusing on the ways in which John Calvin's ministry, in a context of widespread biblical illiteracy, focused the energies of pastoral care and catechetical instruction on strengthening both faithful Christian living and participation in worship and the sacraments.

Our specific mandate is to present models to Synod 2013 for consideration, in close communication with the executive director's office and the CRC Board of Trustees. This work immediately places us in a much larger conversation about the unique calling and ministry of denominational agencies and the most effective structures for organizing ministry—a conversation that extends well beyond the CRC.

As we study recent publications in this area and review various ministry models from other denominations, we are struck by eagerness—across the spectrum of Christian traditions—to find models that strengthen a shared theological (and not just organizational) unity, that are catalytic rather than coercive, that create synergy rather than a heavy infrastructure, that create space for people to hear each other's testimonies and to support each other in difficult times. As many experts are quick to point out, no single structural approach can guarantee this. So much depends on finding catalytic, synergistic leaders to shape a ministry like this. At the same time, patient work on structures can make it more likely that these values guide the selection of potential leaders.

To date, we have reviewed several models: (1) establishing an office of discipleship or faith formation as an independent but collaborating entity, (2) establishing an office of discipleship or faith formation within an existing agency, and (3) establishing either a permanent or time-limited task force or synodical committee to continue the work we have begun.

We continue our work in assessing the merits of these approaches and are eager to link our work with the proposals from the BOT task force on denominational structures. We welcome advice and suggestions for our work from the synodical advisory committee assigned to review our report, as well as from any other person reading this report.

III. Matters for synodical action in 2012

A. Church Order Article 59-b

The Faith Formation Committee recommended that Synod 2011 adopt a number of changes to pertinent articles of the Church Order in order to implement the decision of Synod 2010 about age- and ability-appropriate participation in the Lord's Supper. Among these changes was a new proposed reading of Article 59-b, as follows (*Agenda for Synod 2011*, p. 573):

b. Baptized members shall be encouraged to make a public profession of faith with the use of a prescribed form in a public worship service. *This public profession of faith includes a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church.* Before their profession of faith, they shall give an appropriate testimony of their faith, life, and doctrine to the elders. The names of those who will make a public profession of faith shall be announced to the congregation for approval at least one Sunday before their profession takes place. Upon their public profession of faith, they shall be designated as a “confessing member.”

During its deliberations, Synod 2011 adopted an amendment made from the floor to delete the italicized sentence (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 830). Representatives of the Faith Formation Committee had little time to reflect on the unexpected proposed deletion of that sentence but realized the following day that something significant had been lost from their proposal and from the Church Order of the CRCNA. A motion to rescind the deletion of the sentence was prepared, but the committee was advised by the officers of synod that it would be better to return to the issue in its report to Synod 2012. Accordingly, the committee recommends that the following second sentence be reinserted into Church Order Article 59-b as proposed by the Faith Formation Committee to Synod 2011:

“This public profession of faith includes a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church.”

Note: This sentence was deleted from Article 59-b on the denomination’s website but the deletion did not find its way into the printed version of the 2011 *Church Order and Its Supplements*.

B. Orders for baptism and professing and affirming faith from the RCA

Part of the committee’s mandate is to provide liturgical materials related to strengthening baptism and profession of faith. We have provided some of these materials on our website. Faith Alive Christian Resources also provides a wealth of materials, especially those featured in *Reformed Worship* and *The Worship Sourcebook*. These materials are consistent with the confessions and church order of the Christian Reformed Church, and we commend them to the churches.

At the same time, we judge that there is great value in asking synod to expand the number of liturgical forms that have been explicitly approved by synod. Our Church Order requires that baptism, profession of faith, and the Lord’s Supper be celebrated using a “synodically approved form.” Many congregations interpret this broadly to include approaches that are consistent with previously approved forms. Other congregations choose to interpret this by only using the forms that have been explicitly approved.

We do not believe that it is wise or helpful to ask synod to take action to specify which approach is best. But we do believe it is crucial for synod to ensure that we have the best possible range of explicitly approved forms. This creates the conditions under which congregations who only use explicitly approved forms will have access to the best possible materials, and under which congregations who develop materials will have access to the strongest possible material to compare their work.

As we have reviewed a wide range of recently developed materials and discussed the pastoral needs of the denomination, we have been grateful and impressed by several newly developed forms by the Reformed Church in America (see Appendix B). They are consistent with the Reformed confessions, with prior synodically approved forms, and with the work of our committee. They feature a noble simplicity that allows them to be adapted easily to a variety of cultural contexts. We ask synod to recommend these to our churches for review and to communicate any suggested modifications to us so that we can evaluate the possibility of preparing them for presentation to Synod 2013.

C. *Infant dedication*

Synod 2007 mandated our committee to “provide biblical and pastoral guidance for councils who are conversing with those members who are requesting infant dedication in place of infant baptism.” In response to this mandate, our committee developed a document titled “Infant Dedication and the Christian Reformed Church: Preliminary Report” and presented it to Synod 2011. Synod affirmed the work, taking the following action:

That synod affirm the following principle regarding infant dedication to guide the continuing work of the committee (see also *Agenda for Synod 2011*, pp. 612-21):

When parents request infant or child dedication in public worship, the pastor and elders of local congregations should (1) engage in pastorally appropriate ways to celebrate the birth or adoption of the child, pray for the child and parents, and call for the commitment of the parents to nurture their children in the Lord; (2) engage in convicted and winsome teaching on the subject of infant baptism; and (3) refrain from leading rituals of infant or child dedication in public worship services.

(*Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 831-32)

We are grateful that during both the advisory committee discussion and during the plenary discussion at synod, the principle and our attached report were warmly and widely affirmed. Several delegates testified to the importance of strengthening our commitment to teach about the importance of infant baptism and to the importance of a warm embrace of those who choose not to present their children for infant baptism. We have heard no substantial disagreement with this approach either at Synod 2011 or since then, and thus we present this same principle for final approval.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Dr. Howard Vanderwell, secretary; Dr. Syd Hielema; and other members of the committee who may be present when the work of the Faith Formation Committee is being discussed.

B. That synod restore the following as the second sentence of Church Order Article 59-b and as proposed to Synod 2011 by the Faith Formation Committee: “This public profession of faith includes a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church.”

Grounds:

1. The second sentence was intended to maintain the provision of the pre-2011 Church Order that read as follows (Art. 59-b): “Confessing

members who have reached the age of eighteen and who have made a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and the responsibilities of adult membership in the church shall be accorded the full rights and privileges of such membership.”

2. The matter of a commitment to the creeds and confessions made at the time of a public profession has been specifically included in the Church Order since the sixteenth century.
3. Churches of the Reformation have always insisted on a mature membership. Those who become “confessing members” not only profess their personal faith but embrace the faith of the church as expressed in its creeds and confessions.
4. An embracing of the faith of the church as expressed in its creeds and confessions is a major goal of congregational efforts in discipleship and faith formation. That goal should be clearly stated in the Church Order article (Art. 59) on profession of faith under the subtitle “Worship Services” just as it is also clearly stated in Article 63-b under the subtitle “Faith Nurture”: “Each church shall instruct the youth in the Scriptures and in the creeds and confessions of the church, especially the Heidelberg Catechism.”
5. Representatives of the Faith Formation Committee were advised by the officers of Synod 2011 not to present a motion to rescind to Synod 2011 but, instead, to bring a new proposal to Synod 2012. At the time of that advice, the officers were aware of the synodical rule that “rescinding applies to decisions taken by the synod in session” and “does not apply to decisions taken by previous synods,” and of the rule that “a succeeding synod may alter the stand of a previous synod” and that in that case “the most recent decision invalidates all previous decisions in conflict with it.”
6. The Faith Formation Committee was able to recommend that Synod 2011 *adopt* the revisions of articles of the Church Order instead of merely *proposing* them because it met the November 1 deadline to give churches and classes prior opportunity to respond (see Supplement, Article 47). The amendment made from the floor to delete the second sentence of proposed Article 59-b obviously did not meet the deadline for prior opportunity and should therefore be eligible for reconsideration by Synod 2012.

C. That synod request congregations to assess the forms for baptism and profession of faith as found in Appendix B and respond to the Faith Formation Committee about the advisability of presenting them to Synod 2013 for approval as “synodically approved forms.”

Grounds:

1. These forms are consistent with scriptural teaching about the sacraments and with the Reformed confessions.
2. The attached forms strengthen our existing set of explicitly approved forms by, for example, providing ways of linking the profession of faith before the elders and the public profession of faith and by providing a model for how to celebrate profession of faith and baptism in the same service.

3. Strengthening the pool of explicitly approved synodical forms is valuable both for congregations that only use the exact text of approved forms and those that more freely adapt them.
4. Any synodical action on proposed liturgical forms should happen only after the churches have sufficient time to review them.
5. Approving these forms developed by the RCA would further strengthen organic unity and collaboration with our sister denomination.

D. That synod affirm the following principle regarding infant dedication and commend the attached report (Appendix A) to the churches:

When parents request infant or child dedication in public worship, the pastor and elders of local congregations should (1) engage in pastorally appropriate ways to celebrate the birth or adoption of the child, pray for the child and parents, and call for the commitment of the parents to nurture their children in the Lord; (2) engage in convicted and winsome teaching on the subject of infant baptism; and (3) refrain from leading rituals of infant or child dedication in public worship services.

Grounds:

1. Congregations should minister to those who will not present their children for infant baptism with a spirit of gratitude to God for the gift of these children, offering encouragement and accountability to parents as part of faithful, pastoral ministry.
2. A faithful, encouraging, pastoral response to parents promises to reduce unhelpful ambivalence toward members who do not affirm infant baptism.
3. Many people do not embrace infant baptism because they do not understand how it is consistent with Scripture. Teaching on the subject offers a rich opportunity to promote greater biblical understanding and may lead the parents to present their children for baptism.
4. A ritual of an infant or child dedication in public worship is not required by the Bible and is not consistent with the Reformed confessions.
5. A ritual of infant or child dedication in public worship could easily create confusion about the meaning and purpose of the sacrament of baptism.
6. This principle is consistent with the Reformed confessions and with the past decisions of Synods 1888, 1964, 1973, 2007, and 2011.

Faith Formation Committee

Irene Bakker

Joel R. Boot, *ex officio*

Peter Choi

Jill Friend

Syd Hielema

Pat Nederveld

H. David Schuringa

Howard Vanderwell, secretary

John D. Witvliet

Appendix A

Infant Dedication and the Christian Reformed Church

As a result of an overture from Classis Alberta North to Synod 2007, the question of whether and how to handle the practice of infant dedication in the Christian Reformed Church was assigned to the Faith Formation Committee. Synod affirmed “the church’s commitment to the practice of covenant baptism,” noting that “the practice of infant dedication can never replace the beauty of the expression of God’s covenant of grace communicated in the sacrament of baptizing infants,” and that “the practice of baptizing infants is the normative practice prescribed by the Reformed confessions (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 74; Belgic Confession, Art. 34; and Church Order, Art. 56).” Synod discouraged “the practice of infant dedication” but also mandated “the Faith Formation Committee to provide biblical and pastoral guidance for councils who are conversing with those members who are requesting infant dedication in place of infant baptism,” noting that “more than forty years have passed since synod last addressed infant baptism. We live in a different day than when synod last addressed these matters, and the churches would be well served by carefully considering together questions not previously raised surrounding infant dedication, as well as be provided with a fresh articulation of the practice of infant baptism” (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 659).

I. Historical and pastoral reflections

As we have studied both academic and pastoral resources on the subject of infant baptism and have received communications from pastors, elders, and members across the Christian Reformed Church, we take note of several recurring themes that inform our work on this subject.

A. Multiple sources of requests for infant dedication

- In one situation, a given town has only one Protestant church. Welcoming those with disparate views on infant baptism is agreed upon by all to be matter of Christian hospitality. It won’t work to say, “If you want believer’s baptism, then there is a church down the street,” when, in fact, there isn’t such a church down the street.
- In another situation, a new congregation or small congregation is eager to embrace every potential member—in part because it is struggling. Why bother fussing about infant baptism when survival is at stake?
- In yet another situation, one parent wants infant baptism, while the other parent wants believer’s baptism. The parents might even compromise by baptizing some but not all of their children. Whatever else happens, the church wants to encourage these parents and ensure that the issue does not harm their marriage.
- In another case, a congregation has always practiced infant baptism, but a few years ago it reluctantly welcomed some members who do not agree. Despite this effort, the newer members still feel ambivalence. They feel like second-class citizens in the congregation. This leads the pastor and elders to identify inhospitable attitudes as the primary spiritual problem that needs to be addressed.

- In yet another case, the congregation and council of a congregation may be enthusiastic about infant baptism, but the pastor may have enough reservations to be more open to infant dedication than the congregation or council.

One reason that the CRC's past responses to the topic of requests for infant baptism do not seem sufficient is that they do not address these underlying contexts effectively. The committee agrees with synod's clear mandate that we affirm infant baptism and discourage infant dedication. The committee also believes that we need to reflect together on the underlying contextual challenges of ministry today.

B. Notes on credobaptists and the Dutch Reformed tradition

The committee has benefited by reviewing the history of credobaptism (believer's baptism; insisting on a profession of faith at baptism) and the Dutch Reformed tradition.

While it appears that believer's baptism emerged quite late in church history, not long after the Reformation there were baptistic influences in England and on the European continent, and the Dutch Reformed churches worked hard to fend off their impact. Church Order required the reading of the form for baptism each time children were baptized, and that included a clear explanation of the biblical rationale for baptism. The baptism questions to the parents and the prayers in the form also contained a strong defense of the practice. It appears that the Reformed churches have always felt the pressure of credobaptists.

However, while officially "detesting" Anabaptists in the Belgic Confession, a soft spot for baptists by those in the Dutch Reformed churches can be traced at least back to the seventeenth century, especially as that baptist movement progressed through England and Holland. Our spiritual forefathers shared an understandable attraction to baptist emphases such as the necessity of personal repentance and faith, discipleship, and zeal for evangelism and missions. The popularity of the writings of John Bunyan, a Reformed Baptist, is a case in point.

Without actually converting to the baptist position, there were experiential pastors of the *Nadere Reformatie* (a period from about 1600-1750 that is often called the Dutch Second Reformation or the Further Reformation) like the prominent Rev. Joducus VanLodenstein, who wrestled with the meaning of infant baptism. Toward the end of his ministry, he changed the wording of a question (to parents) in the baptism form from "our children *are* sanctified in Christ" to "our children *will become* sanctified in Christ." Messing with the approved forms could be a risky venture in those days.

The *Nadere Reformatie* emphasis on personal experience was rediscovered in the *Afscheiding of 1834* as believers read from the *Oude Schrijvers* (Old Writers) in their small group Bible studies. Some baptist tendencies tagged along on this spiritual renaissance, which also followed the church to the formation of the Christian Reformed Church in North America in 1857.

So it comes as no surprise that already in 1888, only 31 years after the denomination was founded here in the United States, there were questions in the church regarding the necessity of baptizing infants. When asked, synod responded unequivocally that year that parents who failed to present their

children for baptism were to be “instructed and admonished patiently” and, that failing, were to be *disciplined*.

Synod’s act indicates how seriously as a Reformed church we took the doctrine. Denying baptism to a covenant child was paramount to violating his or her covenant rights. Efforts to restrain baptist tendencies in the denomination were bolstered over the years by an influx of Kuyperian immigrants who leaned toward the teaching of presumptive regeneration (based on the presumption that the covenant child is already regenerated or sanctified in Christ, and should thus be baptized).

While there has never been an explicit prohibition in the confessions or Church Order against infant dedication, it was always understood as a practical denial of infant baptism.

Due to our experiential DNA and the North American evangelical environment, however, the issue refused to disappear. Seventy-six years later, in 1964, the question again came to synod. This time synod significantly softened its stance by deciding that parent couples who did not want to baptize their children could be members in good standing as long as they were willing to be instructed and they promised not to propagate views in the church contrary to its official position. Synod 1973 went a step further when it determined that even adults who had themselves *rebaptized* could, at the discretion of their consistory, remain members of the church but would not be permitted to hold ecclesiastical office.

These decisions of the past generation opened the door to where we find ourselves today. Now we have many baptists who are members in good standing in the Christian Reformed Church. While many baptist members of the CRC have become convinced by the infant baptism position, others would still prefer to have their covenant children dedicated. While synod hoped it could maintain authority on the issue by having the parents promise not to propagate their views, the presence of unbaptized covenant children in our churches speaks volumes and is now demanding attention. It is important to acknowledge that our official position can lead these members to feel a degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, they have been accepted as members in good standing for more than a generation, but, on the other hand, their decision to not baptize children is frowned upon. It is no small wonder there are some who are pleading their cause, others who are simply ignoring the official position of the church, and still others, like Classis Alberta North, asking for guidance.

Somehow the church needs to account for a situation it has itself fostered over the years, and at the same time the church must maintain the priority of the confessional position that promotes the blessedness of covenant theology.

C. Multiple approaches to infant dedication, complex historical developments

There are many different practices of infant dedication across the spectrum of Protestant churches. In churches that do not practice infant baptism, there is broad diversity in the practice of infant dedication, ranging from a ceremony that sounds and looks much like a “dry baptism” to a ceremony that distances itself from having anything directly to do with the children and, instead, dedicates the *parents* to instructing their children in the Lord. Some ceremonies implicitly refer back to Old Testament accounts of the dedication of Samuel; others make a point of resisting this comparison,

noting that few parents feel comfortable making commitments on behalf of their children. Some ceremonies center on a celebration of birth; others focus on the commitment of the parents; others focus on prayers for the blessing of the children. Some include the laying on of hands over the parents, and some over the infants, and some not at all. There is no one theology of infant dedication.

D. Changes in the landscape of Christian practice

One mistake we must avoid is to think that this topic is basically unchanged, and that all we are doing is rehearsing arguments about this topic that have been going back and forth for nearly 1,700 years. While it is true that many of the core scriptural arguments do recur throughout church history, it is also important to note the following recent developments.

1. Greater mutual recognition—British Baptists are more likely than North American Baptists to recognize infant baptism. Reformed and Catholic Christians have been working toward greater mutual understanding and recognition of each other's baptisms.
2. Resistance to mutual recognition—At the same time, there is in some places greater resistance to mutual recognition. Many people who grew up CRC but now are members in various believer's baptism churches have had to be rebaptized in order to join those churches.
3. The rise of Baptist sacramentalism—Quite often the split between infant baptism and believer's baptism congregations corresponded with a difference in symbolic understanding. Most churches who baptized infants thought of baptism as a sacrament; most believer's baptism churches thought of baptism as a symbol. Today some churches that practice believer's baptism are attempting to recover the language of *sacrament*.
4. The growth of Reformed Baptists and *covenantal* dedication—Large numbers of the recently identified "young, restless, and Reformed" (New Calvinism) movement belong not to Reformed but rather to believer's baptism churches. Some of these congregations have developed rituals of "covenant dedication" that emphasize God's covenantal promises but refrain from using the term *baptism*.
5. The rise of *mixed practice* congregations—It is instructive that a recent volume titled *Baptism: Three Views* (IVP, 2009) includes a case for infant baptism, believer's baptism, and *mixed practice*—something that denominations like the Evangelical Covenant Church have practiced for some time.
6. Post-Christendom—Some of the most prominent critics of infant baptism in Europe were motivated by the demise of a genuinely baptismal spirituality in the contest of state churches and "Christendom" in Europe. Families presented infants for baptism, whether or not they had genuine faith, treating baptism as a superstitious ritual practiced simply because it was tradition.
7. Individualism and post-modern views of symbol—On the one hand, post-modernism has created a kind of "anything goes" approach to symbolism and a greater appreciation of how symbols are not merely

received but can be invented (for example, “Can we make up a ritual that is somewhere between baptism and dedication?”). On the other hand, we find some congregations that embrace post-modern sensibilities in almost every way but remain rather firm in their views on baptism (usually “baptism is required”).

All of this means that while many of the basic arguments for and against infant baptism are similar to those voiced by sixteenth-century Reformed and Anabaptist theologians, there are also many unique contextual dynamics to this conversation that do not remain static.

II. Renewed teaching about infant baptism

As our committee listens to conversations across the denomination, we have repeatedly heard both significant testimonies and renewed calls regarding effective teaching on covenant infant baptism.

The reasons for our commitment to infant baptism are not simply that “our confessions say so” or that “we do this because we belong to a CRC,” but because we are convinced this practice is faithfully obedient to the Word of God. For this reason, we believe it is crucial that we strengthen each other for the ministry of patient teaching on this theme. When a family asks for infant dedication, two of the *least helpful* approaches are simply to accommodate their request without significant conversation or to hastily deny their request without opportunity for conversation. The most helpful approaches nearly always see the request as an opportunity to promote learning and growth, as congregational members gather around God’s Word for instruction.

We have repeatedly heard accounts of people who once were reluctant to embrace infant baptism but later become enthusiastically grateful for it, because a pastor or elder or church education class took the time to patiently consider the Scriptures.

We have heard other accounts of how candid and constructive discussions within congregations are beneficial to proponents of each view: those who defend infant baptism can be grateful for the clear intention of credobaptists to challenge their children to state their own faith commitment; those who defend credobaptism can learn about the beauty of covenant promises.

To this end, it has been helpful for us to rehearse again the rationale for infant baptism and to glean from a number of resources that local congregations and pastors have provided regarding this teaching ministry. A number of these offer succinct, biblically grounded replies to some of the most common objections to infant baptism. The following is a relatively brief, composite statement of these concerns, which may be helpful for use in a variety of pastoral settings.

III. Answering objections to infant baptism

A. Objection 1: The Bible says that faith comes first, then baptism

According to Mark 16:16, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (see also Acts 2:38-41; Gal. 3:26-29). This text suggests that faith comes first, then baptism. Infants should not be baptized until they grow up and come to faith. Paedobaptists wholeheartedly agree that those passages do indeed teach that adults should not be baptized until they come to

faith, because baptism is for *believers* (and their children). Passages like this are speaking to and about adults, not covenant children. Of course, when it comes to adults, it is the one who believes and is baptized who will be saved. Whether or not you see a link between circumcision and baptism, to say that such texts exclude children would be like reading Romans 4:11 and concluding that children were not circumcised, or to assume that Jesus is not God based on his maintaining that “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). For adults who are saved, baptism follows faith. For the children of believers, faith follows baptism, though the relationship of trust and faith between a child and his or her covenant God should not be underestimated (see Ps. 22:9-10; 71:5-6).

B. Objection 2: There is no explicit command in Scripture to baptize babies

Sometimes there are no explicit proof texts for important doctrines in the Bible. For example, there is no one text that articulates the doctrine of the Trinity. We come to that doctrine by reading Scripture in its entirety and by piecing together the biblical evidence. So too with the doctrine of infant baptism. We study Scripture in its entirety and connect the dots. We recognize who is in the covenant and should receive the sign of the covenant, indicating their relationship with God in Christ. Scripture tells us that the covenant promises belong to believers and their children (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). That covenant children have a relationship with God is indisputable (Ps. 22:9-10; 71:5-6). In fact, the children of a couple that includes just one believer are to be considered as holy (1 Cor. 7:14). Baptism is for those whose sins are washed away in Christ, the only way to have a relationship with God (Acts 22:16). If the Red Sea crossing is a symbol for baptism (1 Cor. 10:2), it would be impossible to imagine that the children would have been left on the beach to cross when they were old enough to make their own decision. It is also noteworthy that Jesus did not tell parents to wait to bring their little children (Mark 10:14-16) and babies (Luke 18:15) to him until they grow up. In fact, he commands his disciples to permit the parents to bring them to him. If the circumcision/baptism link can be established, however (see below), the command to circumcise (Gen. 17:10) would be tantamount to an explicit command to baptize infants in the New Testament era.

C. Objection 3: There is no explicit example of a baby being baptized in the New Testament

The burden of proof for this argument falls back on those who deny infant baptism. There are three examples in Scripture of entire households being baptized: the households of Lydia (Acts 16:15), the Philippian jailer (16:33), and Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16). It is possible there were no children in any of those households, but if baptizing babies is wrong, you would think the New Testament writers would have gone out of their way to point out that there were no infants or young children in those households. Also, there is an interesting covenant principle occurring in household baptisms that supports the “believers and their children” notion of covenant inclusion found elsewhere in Scripture. Nothing is said about the faith of the other members of the household; only the faith of the head of the household is mentioned. In 1 Corinthians 10:2, in anticipation of baptism, it is said that *all* Israel was baptized as it crossed the Red Sea. The fact is, there is no example in Scripture of a child of baptized parents who had to be baptized later as an adult.

D. Objection 4: What if they grow up and are not believers?

It is possible that a baptized child could grow up and reject the faith in which he was raised. But is that a potential problem only for infant baptism or for *all* baptisms? Does a profession of faith and baptism *guarantee* that a person will never backslide or even reject the faith? No. The fact that many who were baptized as adults get baptized more than once, if not frequently, indicates the opposite. And the likelihood of lasting faith probably lies within the context of the benefits a being raised in a covenant family. True faith is guaranteed only by the Spirit of God. And the fact remains that all believing parents are obligated to train their children in the way they should go (Deut. 6:4-7; Prov. 22:6).

E. Objection 5: Circumcision is merely an Old Testament Jewish-ethnic badge, not a precursor to baptism

The circumcision/baptism link can be severed only if one fails to read Scripture as a whole, within the context of the grand sweep of redemptive history and the unity of the one covenant of grace. To say that circumcision is merely a Jewish badge and has nothing to do with baptism is to miss the fact that the Jews were called to circumcise their *hearts* (Deut. 10:16) and that they are referred to in Scripture as the “church” in the wilderness (Acts 7:38, where the Greek text has *ecclesia*). In both the Old Testament and New Testament, promises are made to believers and their children (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). The fact is that circumcision, like baptism, was never to be merely an external ethnic symbol but a sign and “a seal of the righteousness” that faith brings (Rom. 4:11). All of this comes together in Colossians 2:11-12, where Paul describes baptism as *the circumcision of Christ*. This is where it was all heading, as all those who belong to Christ are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promises (Gal. 3:27-29). When reading the Bible as a whole, one must also ask, Would God be less generous with his grace in the New Testament than in the Old Testament by now excluding the children from the covenant (that is, from having a relationship with him)?

F. Objection 6: Baptizing babies presumes they are regenerate

There have been those who have appeared to “presume” the salvation of children who are baptized. This seems to be true in Roman Catholic circles and their *ex opera operato* view of the sacraments. Ideas of baptismal regeneration are likely what many Baptists fear when they see infants baptized. Indeed, there have been proponents of so-called “presumptive regeneration” among Reformed folk, though it would be difficult to imagine that this presumption meant not caring for the faith and nurture of their covenant children. Baptism, whether for children or adults, should never be about human *presumption* but about God’s *promises* and living in accord with those promises. The faith of adults who are baptized ought also not to be taken for granted but nurtured continually within the context of the faith community. Actually, many of those who reject infant baptism are among those who presume salvation; this occurs when the believer’s baptism position is accompanied by a doctrine of the universal salvation of those who die in infancy, which is nowhere taught in Scripture.

G. Objection 7: Baptism is a sign of faith, which babies cannot exercise

We have established that the relationship between God and covenant children is much closer than we can imagine (Ps. 22:9-10; 71:5-6; 1 Cor. 7:14). However, whether you see baptism first of all as a sign of something that a *person* is doing or a sign of what *God* is doing will make a difference in how you come out on this issue of whom should be baptized. If you see baptism first of all as a sign of a person's faith, you cannot help but end up with believer's baptism. You will have a radically different outcome if you understand baptism first of all as a sign of the washing away of sins in Christ—what God is doing. Even the oft-quoted baptism text of Romans 6, being buried and raised with Christ in baptism, is in the passive voice, meaning it is something that God has done. Salvation is first of all about what *God* is doing, and how we *respond* in faith. In this way infant baptism is a precious symbol of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in *any* person's salvation. "It was not I that found, O Savior true; no, I was found, was found of thee" (*Psalter Hymnal*, 498).

H. Objection 8: Believer's baptism is a more emotional and memorable event for the candidate than infant baptism

If objections 1-7 have been biblically answered, to still choose for believer's baptism, based on the desire for an emotional experience, would be questionable. No one remembers their birth, but most have successfully claimed that event as their own and its memory has become one of their most treasured days of the year. If receiving the sign of the covenant promise in infancy is right, the candidate will be reminded of this wonderful occasion in his or her life on a regular basis and, with every baptism that is witnessed, learn to claim the event as his or her own. Besides, how emotional and singularly memorable is an event when it is well known that many who hold to believer's baptism are apt to experience it more than once? It would, however, be entirely legitimate to celebrate in memorable ways the event of one's public profession of faith as it is grounded in the promise of one's baptism.

The committee views this summary of responses as provisional, and it welcomes feedback about other common objections and other helpful pastoral responses.

IV. Additional pastoral responses

The Faith Formation Committee recognizes that a sufficient response to this topic will involve more than preaching and teaching. Even after patient and effective teaching on the subject, CRC councils still receive requests for infant dedication or for ministry with people who choose not to present their children for infant baptism. What kinds of pastoral responses are most appropriate?

The committee is grateful for—and stands in agreement with—synod's prior decisions to discourage infant dedication ceremonies. Having two ritual actions (both baptism and infant dedication) can easily create confusion about the meaning of each, particularly when infant dedication itself can be understood in so many different ways.

We also have been grateful to hear testimonies from several congregations and pastors about thoughtful, pastoral responses to requests for infant dedication. In some congregations, the pastor and elders have scheduled a

special home visit to celebrate the birth or adoption of a child, offer prayers of thanksgiving to God for the child, to pray for parents, and to listen to their concerns and commitments in the Lord. In some congregations, a special prayer of thanksgiving and welcome is offered for all newborn or newly adopted children in public worship independent of celebrations of infant baptism. Some congregations have taken special care to invite children who have not yet been baptized to profess their faith at a young age and receive baptism. We sense that these kinds of responses both honor the confessional commitments we hold as Reformed churches and respond in pastorally appropriate ways to members who do not present their children for baptism. We sense that these approaches are marked by conviction and hospitality as well as consistency and graciousness.

The committee is eager to hear from congregations about additional practices or suggestions along these lines, and we anticipate presenting a more complete document on this topic to Synod 2012.

Addendum

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Appendix B

Forms for Baptism and Profession of Faith

The following forms are closely based on those recently approved for use in the Reformed Church in America. The Faith Formation Committee asks Synod 2012 to recommend these to our churches for review and to communicate any suggested modifications to us so that we can evaluate the possibility of preparing them for presentation to Synod 2013.

ORDER FOR THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

PREPARATION

The minister addresses the congregation:

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father

and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:18-20

The minister continues, using one or more of the following:

Hear also these words from Holy Scripture:

There is one body and one Spirit,

just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,

one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

one God and Father of all,

who is above all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

Or

As many of you as were baptized into Christ
have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.
Galatians 3:27-28

Or

Do you not know
that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?
Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death,
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
so we too might walk in newness of life.
Romans 6:3-4

Or

But to all who received him,
who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man, but of God.
John 1:12-13

Or

I will establish my covenant between me and you,
and your offspring after you throughout their generations,
for an everlasting covenant,
to be God to you and to your offspring after you.
Genesis 17:7

Or

And if you belong to Christ,
then you are Abraham's offspring,
heirs according to the promise.
Galatians 3:29

Or

For the promise is for you, for your children,
and for all who are far away,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.
Acts 2:39

The minister continues:

Baptism is the sign and seal of God's promises to this covenant people.
In baptism God promises by grace alone:
to forgive our sins;
to adopt us into the Body of Christ, the Church;
to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us;
and to resurrect us to eternal life.

This promise is made visible in the water of baptism.

Water is poured into the font at this time.

Water cleanses;

purifies;

refreshes;

sustains:

Jesus Christ is living water.

Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience:

to love and trust God completely;

to forsake the evil of the world; and

to live a new and holy life.

Yet, when we fall into sin, we must not despair of God's mercy,

nor continue in sin,

for baptism is the sign and seal

of God's eternal covenant of grace with us.

PRESENTATION

An elder presents the adult candidates or the parents of children for baptism:

On behalf of the elders

I present (*using full names*)

[who bring their *child/children*]

to receive the sacrament of baptism.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

The minister addresses the parents or candidates:

Beloved of God,

you stand before us [having brought *this child/these children*]

to receive the sacrament of baptism.

I ask you, therefore, before God and Christ's church

to reject evil,

to profess your faith in Christ Jesus,

and to confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce sin and the power of evil

in your life and in the world?

I renounce them.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

At the baptism of adults:

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation,

and through worship and service

seek to advance God's purposes here and throughout the world?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

At the baptism of infants or young children:

Do you promise
to instruct *this child/these children*
in the truth of God's Word,
in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ;
to pray for *them*, to teach *them* to pray;
and to train *them* in Christ's way by your example,
through worship, and
in the nurture of the church?

I do, and I ask God to help me.

The congregation shall rise; the minister or elder addresses the members of the congregation:

Do you promise to love, encourage, and support
these brothers and sisters
by teaching the gospel of God's love,
by being an example of Christian faith and character, and
by giving the strong support of God's family
in fellowship, prayer, and service?

We do.

The congregation and the candidates (or their parents) join in affirming the faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed. The questions may be omitted.

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The minister says:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks, O holy and gracious God,
for the gift of water.

In the beginning of creation your Spirit moved over the waters.

In the waters of the flood you destroyed evil.

You led the children of Israel through the sea
into the freedom of the promised land.

In the river Jordan, John baptized our Lord
and your Spirit anointed him.

By his death and resurrection Jesus Christ, the living water,
frees us from sin and death and opens the way to life everlasting.

We thank you, O God, for the gift of baptism.

In this water you confirm to us
that we are buried with Christ in his death,
raised to share in his resurrection,
and are being renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Pour out on us your Holy Spirit,
so that those here baptized may be washed clean and receive new life.
To you be all honor and glory, dominion and power,
now and forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

The baptismal covenant shall be repeated for each person receiving baptism.
At the baptism of children, the minister may ask the parents of each child:

What is the name of this child?

The parents shall give the Christian name.

The minister may hold infants or small children, addressing each:

Name of child,

For you Jesus Christ came into the world;
for you he died; and for you he conquered death.

All this he did for you, little one,
though you know nothing of it as yet.

We love because God first loved us.

The minister shall either immerse or pour or sprinkle water visibly and generously at the declaration of each name of each person of the Trinity, saying:

Name of child,

I baptize you in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The minister may place a hand on the person's head and may mark on the forehead the sign of the cross, saying to each:

Name, child of the covenant
in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit
and marked as Christ's own forever. Amen.

DECLARATION, BLESSING, AND WELCOME

When all have been baptized, the minister may make the following declaration:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the only King and Head of the church,
this child/these children of God *is/are* now
received into the visible membership of the holy catholic church,
engaged to confess the faith of Christ, and
to be God's faithful servant(s) until life's end.

The minister shall offer the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Gracious God,
we thank you that you cleanse and renew
these your *children* through your grace alone.
Bless and strengthen *them* daily
with the gift of your Holy Spirit;
unfold to *them* the riches of your love,
deepening *their* faith,
keeping *them* from the power of evil,
and enabling *them* to live a holy and blameless life
until your kingdom comes.

At the baptism of children:

Look with kindness upon these parents.
Let them ever rejoice in the gift you have given them.
Grant them the presence of your Holy Spirit,
that they may bring up *these children*
to know you, to love you, and to serve you. **Amen.**

The congregation shall stand.

Welcome our new brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Joyfully we receive you into the body of Christ.
Join with us as we give witness in the world to the good news,
for we are all one in Christ Jesus.
Alleluia.**

The following blessing may be said or sung by the congregation while the elders may greet the baptismal group:

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;**

**the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. Amen.**

Numbers 6:24-26

The congregation may be seated.

ORDER FOR PROFESSION OF FAITH

The following form includes material for both the visit to the elders and for the public celebration of profession of faith, an approach that encourages strong links between the two events and strengthens the pastoral nature of the conversation with the elders.

PART I: BEFORE THE ELDERS

At the meeting of the elders, the pastor or the presiding elder shall present each person by name. After the presentation, the order proceeds:

SCRIPTURE PROMISES

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and
believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart and so is justified,
and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

The Scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

Romans 10:9-11

Let us pray.

O Lord, source of all light and life,
illumine us with your wisdom,
that what we do at this time may be pleasing in your sight;
that your church may be strengthened and increased; and
that your name be glorified among your people
in both the church and the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

FAITH SHARING

The elders shall engage in a conversation with the people, inquiring concerning their acceptance of the Christian faith and the sincerity of their desire to live as confessing members of the congregation. If personal credos (written faith statements) have been prepared, they shall be presented at this time.

THE QUESTIONS

The minister or presiding elder continues:

Dearly beloved in the Lord,
in baptism, we are grafted into Christ,
received into the household of faith, and
made inheritors of the covenant of which baptism is the sign and seal.
In grace and mercy,
God, by the Holy Spirit,
has implanted faith through Word and sacrament.
You have come now before God and the church
to profess your faith in Christ.

The following questions are written for unison response. If individual responses are desired, the minister or presiding elder may ask all questions and then address each person, "What is your response?"

Do you believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

I do.

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only rule for faith and life?

I do.

Do you, relying on the grace of God, promise to confess Christ publicly before others, to serve Christ daily, and to walk in Jesus' way?

I do.

Do you promise to exhibit the joy of new life in Christ; to share fully in the life of the church; to be faithful in worship and service; and to offer your prayers and gifts?

I do.

Do you promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church; to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation; and to seek those things which make for unity, purity, and peace?

I do.

BLESSING

Be assured that as you declare your faith,
God will be faithful
to strengthen you, and
to renew you by the Holy Spirit,
that you may grow in grace and knowledge, and
may keep this covenant faithfully all your days.

The meeting shall conclude with the following or another suitable prayer offered by the presiding minister or one of the elders, with all joining in the Lord's Prayer.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we praise you
that by the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ,
you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself; and
that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit
you have bound us to Christ and his service.
We thank you for the baptismal covenant you make with all your servants.
As your grace has drawn Name(s) of candidate(s) to you,
continue to strengthen and sustain *them*.

By your Holy Spirit, daily increase in *them* your gifts:
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the reverence of the Lord,
the spirit of joy in your presence,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who has taught us to pray, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

The elders will reach their decision and may establish the date for the public reception of the new confessing members.

PART II: BEFORE THE CONGREGATION

PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION

The minister addresses the congregation from the font:

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit, and
teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
And remember, I am with you always,
to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:18-20

Hear also these words from Holy Scripture:

There is one body and one Spirit,
just as you were called
to the one hope of your calling,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is above all and through all and in all.
Ephesians 4:4-6
And/or *Galatians 3:27-28; Romans 6:3-4; John 1:12-13; Acts 2:39*

Baptism is the sign and seal of God's promises to this covenant people.
In baptism God promises by grace alone:
to forgive our sins,
to adopt us into the body of Christ, the church,
to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us, and
to resurrect us to eternal life.

This promise is made visible in the water of baptism.

Water may be poured into the font at this time.

Water cleanses,
purifies,
refreshes,
sustains;
Jesus Christ is living water.

Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience:
to love and trust God completely,
to forsake the evil of the world, and
to live a new and holy life.

Yet, when we fall into sin,
we must not despair of God's mercy,
nor continue in sin,
for baptism is the sign and seal
of God's eternal covenant of grace with us.

PRESENTATION

An elder shall present the candidates for baptism and/or profession of faith, using the following statements as appropriate; candidates shall come forward as their names are read.

The elders of (*name of congregation*) have welcomed these persons who appeared before them and made profession of their Christian faith.

Naming all candidates for baptism and initial profession of faith:

Names (using full names), come before us to make public this profession of faith and to receive the sacrament of baptism;

Naming all baptized persons, including those making initial profession of faith, those reaffirming faith, and those transferring membership from another congregation:

Names (using full names) have been baptized into the body of Christ.
In making public this profession of faith, they affirm the meaning of their baptism.

If it is the congregation's desire to note the congregations from which transferring members are being received, there may be an additional statement, "Names are received from (*church name and location*)."

We ask them now to declare their faith before God and Christ's church,
that we may rejoice together and
welcome them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

The minister addresses the candidates:

Beloved of God,
I ask you before God and Christ's church
to reject evil,
to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and
to confess the faith of the church.
Do you renounce sin and the power of evil
in your life and in the world?

I renounce them.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation and,
through worship and service,
seek to advance God's purposes
here and throughout the world?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

If children of those being received are also to be baptized, the parents are asked:

Do you promise
to instruct *these children/this child*
in the truth of God's Word,
in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ;
to pray for *them*, to teach *them* to pray; and
to train *them* in Christ's way by your example,
through worship, and
in the nurture of the church?

I do, and I ask God to help me.

The congregation shall rise; the minister or elder addresses the members of the congregation:

Do you promise to love, encourage, and support
these brothers and sisters
by teaching the gospel of God's love,
by being an example of Christian faith and character, and
by giving the strong support of God's family
in fellowship, prayer, and service?

We do.

The minister or elder addresses the candidates:

Do you promise
to accept the spiritual guidance of the church,
to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation, and
to seek those things that make for unity, purity, and peace?

I do.

The congregation and the candidates shall join in confessing the faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed. The questions may be omitted.

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The congregation may be seated; the minister continues. If baptism is not to be celebrated, proceed to the blessing and welcome.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks,
O holy and gracious God,
for the gift of water.

In the beginning of creation your Spirit moved over the waters.
In the waters of the flood you destroyed evil.
You led the children of Israel through the sea
into the freedom of the promised land.

In the river Jordan, John baptized our Lord
and your Spirit anointed him.
By his death and resurrection
Jesus Christ, the living water,
frees us from sin and death
and opens the way to life everlasting.
We thank you, O God, for the gift of baptism.
In this water you confirm to us
that we are buried with Christ in his death,
raised to share in his resurrection, and
are being renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pour out on us your Holy Spirit,
so that those here baptized
may be washed clean and receive new life.
To you be all honor and glory, dominion and power,
now and forever,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

If children are to receive baptism, the minister may ask the parents of each child:

What is the name of this child?

The parents shall give the Christian name; the minister may hold infants or small children, addressing each:

Name (use Christian name; omit surname),
for you Jesus came into the world;
for you he died and conquered death;
all this he did for you, little one,
though you know nothing of it as yet.
We love because God first loved us.

The baptismal covenant shall be repeated for each person receiving baptism. Using Christian name(s), omitting surname(s), the minister shall immerse, pour, or sprinkle water visibly and generously at the declaration of each name of the person of the Trinity, saying:

Name (use Christian name; omit surname), I baptize you
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead, saying to each:

Name (use Christian name; omit surname), child of the covenant,
in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and
marked as Christ's own forever. **Amen.**

When all have been baptized, the minister may make the following declaration:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the only King and Head of the church,
these children of God are now
received into the visible membership of the holy catholic church,
engaged to confess the faith of Christ, and
to be God's faithful servant(s) until life's end.

BLESSING AND WELCOME

The minister may continue by laying hands on the heads of all those being received, offering the prayer of blessing. The elders may join in the laying on of hands.

Defend, O Lord, this your servant, Name (*use Christian name; omit surname*),
with your heavenly grace,
that *he/she* may continue to be yours forever, and
daily increase in your Spirit more and more,
until *he/she* comes to your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The minister invites the congregation to stand:

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry
to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and
to love and serve those with whom they live and work.

We are ambassadors for Christ,
who reconciles and makes whole.

We are the salt of the earth;
we are the light of the world.

Welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Joyfully we receive you.

**Join with us as we give witness in the world to the good news,
for we are all one in Christ Jesus.**

Alleluia.

The following blessing may be said or sung by the congregation while the elders greet the new confessing members:

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. Amen.**

Numbers 6:24-26

I. Background

Prefatory note: Much of the first part of this report is a duplication of the report in the *Agenda for Synod 2011*. The committee presents its report this way in order to provide readers with all necessary information about the committee's work without having to consult the previous report.

A. History

In 2003, Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, British Columbia (Classis B.C. South-East), overtured Synod 2004 to study the efficacy of the Form of Subscription (FOS) on the grounds that many churches in that classis no longer used the FOS because many individuals had difficulty signing it. Classis B.C. South-East wrote, "When a tool such as the Form of Subscription becomes ineffective in our culture and time, a study into the reasons and attempts to once again make it effective are justified" (*Agenda for Synod 2004*, p. 435).

Synod 2004 did not accede to the overture but, in response to it, instructed the Board of Trustees (BOT) to inquire regarding the methods by which the churches comply with the provisions of Church Order Article 5 and to refer the results of such inquiry to Synod 2005 for appropriate action.

In late 2004, the general secretary's office sent a survey to the CRC churches concerning the current use of the FOS. The BOT referred the results of the survey to Synod 2005, and, based on its review of the survey data, made several recommendations. In response to the BOT's report and recommendations, Synod 2005 adopted the following recommendations:

That synod adopt the following recommendations with reference to the Form of Subscription (BOT Supplement, section I, H):

1. That a revised edition of the Form of Subscription be presented to Synod 2007 for consideration and possible adoption, with the understanding that the purpose of the revision is to clarify the meaning of the Form of Subscription.
2. That the proposed revision of the Form of Subscription be drafted by a committee appointed by the Board of Trustees.
3. In their work, we encourage the committee to take note of the guidelines as to the meaning of subscription in the Church Order Supplements (2004 edition, p. 26).
4. That the draft of a proposed revision be sent to the churches no later than January 1, 2007. . . .

Grounds:

- a. The survey conducted among the churches indicates that a substantial number of churches believe that an update is desirable.
- b. The present Form of Subscription contains statements that are subject to misinterpretation.
- c. A more contemporary expression of agreement will make the requirements more meaningful.

(*Acts of Synod 2005*, p. 735)

In response to the recommendations adopted by Synod 2005, the BOT appointed a task force with the mandate of clarifying the FOS, articulating the meaning and significance of subscription, and proposing a possible replacement to the FOS. This study committee reported to Synod 2008.

The advisory committee of Synod 2008 responded to the Form of Subscription Revision Committee report (see *Acts of Synod 2008*, pp. 473-78) by commending the work of the study committee in several ways. First, the Form of Subscription Revision Committee understood that the mandated clarification of the FOS required a more thorough restatement rather than a minor update of the language. The proposed Doctrinal Covenant for Officebearers in the CRCNA was the study committee's contribution toward faithfully and thoroughly carrying out its assigned mandate. The Doctrinal Covenant for Officebearers in the CRCNA that the study committee proposed raised critical questions and produced vigorous conversations, not only about the FOS, but also about the role of the confessions in our denomination. The study committee correctly discerned that the foundational issue was not merely the rewriting of a document but the revitalization of confessional conversation within the church.

Second, the FOS Revision Committee observed that one of the issues at stake in clarifying the FOS was the issue of encouraging rather than discouraging significant theological discussion. In its report, the committee wrote that "any regulatory instrument that is adopted by the church ought to be regarded as an invitation to the officebearers of the church to participate in this ongoing reflection rather than a document that precludes or hinders such reflection" (*Agenda for Synod 2008*, p. 247). The advisory committee endorsed this view because it reflects both the will of previous synodical decisions (see *Acts of Synod 1976*, pp. 67-70, 550-91 and *Acts of Synod 2005*, p. 735) and the purpose of the FOS.

Third, the study committee's work highlighted the need to address how the FOS functions within our increasingly diverse church family. An FOS, no matter how well crafted, is useful only if it functions to enhance the faithful ministry of the local church. The FOS, in whatever form, must offer a clear and compelling statement of Reformed Christianity, to which officebearers can readily subscribe, as well as bridge barriers of language and ethnicity. This is an especially relevant concern for our emerging and ethnic minority churches and their leaders.

Despite these strengths of the Form of Subscription Revision Committee's work, the advisory committee noted concerns expressed about the clarity and accuracy of language and the need for broader engagement between the study committee and the churches.

Believing these challenges presented a unique opportunity to educate our denomination regarding the importance and usefulness of the confessions in the life of the church, the advisory committee advised a more comprehensive approach than was originally mandated to the Form of Subscription Revision Committee.

B. Committee composition and mandate

In order to address these concerns and to fulfill the original mandate of Synod 2005, the advisory committee recommended and Synod 2008 adopted the recommendation to recommit the original mandate and the work of the Form of Subscription Revision Committee to a reconfigured study committee. In addition, the new study committee was to present a revised version of the Form of Subscription to Synod 2011 and to communicate annually to synod prior to the study committee's report in 2011.

The new Form of Subscription Revision Committee II (FOSRC II) was given the mandate to continue the work of the original FOS study committee to revise the FOS and to present a revised FOS to synod for possible adoption. In addition, FOSRC II was mandated to engage a broad cross-section of the denomination in a process of discussion regarding the meaning of confessional subscription, as well as to develop a process of communication and education regarding the FOS and the Reformed confessions, particularly in emerging and ethnic minority contexts, with the goal of clarifying the meaning of the FOS and increasing adherence to it, and encouraging robust engagement with the Reformed confessions.

II. The committee's work

The Form of Subscription Revision Committee II began its work with a meeting in October 2008. At that meeting the committee wrestled with some foundational issues with respect to its mandate, such as the purpose of a FOS and how the committee's work might best proceed in crafting a document to replace the present FOS. We committed ourselves to a process of engagement: first, with the confessions themselves and with significant questions about what it means to subscribe to them, and, second, to guide a conversation about the confessions and their vital place in the life of the church.

Throughout our meetings, through correspondence and in conversation with many classes, congregations, and individuals who honored synod and the church with their responses, it became clear that revising the FOS would be an extremely delicate undertaking. In that sense the new study committee's experience replicated that of the preceding committee, though with more responses as expected, given the larger number of study committee members and the expanded scope of denominational engagement.

Together the committee examined documents equivalent to the CRC's Form of Subscription from a number of other confessionally Reformed denominations to begin to immerse themselves in the nature and significance of confessional subscription in the Reformed tradition. The committee discovered that the position it found itself in was not entirely unique. Many of the concerns regarding confessional vitality and veracity of subscription were shared by denominations with confessional sensitivities similar to our own. The committee also grappled with what it means to subscribe, both theoretically and practically, to confessions, as well as how and to what degree one is bound to these confessions. The committee honestly engaged and weighed the concerns expressed and tried to discern how we can best live and minister together.

In preparation for Synod 2009, the committee developed a "working document" as a potential revision of the Form of Subscription, a background document that briefly explains the reasoning behind the potential revision, as well as a discussion guide designed to encourage reflection in large and small groups that may gather to discuss matters within the study committee's mandate. While at Synod 2009, members of the committee led a roundtable discussion of the proposed revision and background document over a meal in small groups. In addition, representatives of the study committee reported to advisory committees at both Synods 2009 and 2010 (*Acts of Synod 2009*, pp. 570, 593; and *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 803-804), and the committee was encouraged to continue in its work, following the direction it was taking.

Leading up to and following Synod 2009, members of the committee met with various groups within the denomination, making presentations to the Black and Reformed Conference, the Multiethnic Conference, and nearly all of the classes within the denomination. From these presentations, the committee received many positive responses as well, as suggestions and constructive criticism for improving the proposed revision of the FOS. In order to facilitate positive interactions and widespread engagement across a broad spectrum of congregations within the denomination, the committee has translated the proposed revision into Korean and Spanish for those whose first language is not English. A significant component of Synod 2008's mandate to the study committee was to craft a document in language that is easily transportable across cultural and linguistic barriers and will "function well across the various constituencies within the denomination" (*Acts of Synod 2008*, p. 476). Native Korean and Spanish speakers, including those who have participated in the committee's work, have confirmed that the language of the proposed revision of the Form of Subscription indeed travels well across linguistic and cultural barriers. In addition, we have received numerous responses from individuals and have appreciated the depth of engagement obvious in many of these reflections.

In preparation for Synod 2010, members of the study committee engaged numerous classes in discussions of the committee's work and about the nature of confessional subscription, soliciting responses from the classes. From these encounters, we received several helpful recommended revisions, as well as a good deal of positive feedback for the winsome tone of the proposed revision, the explicit inclusion of Scripture and ecumenical creeds, and the simplicity of the language in the document. From these discussions and its own ongoing reflection, the committee then prepared a proposed revision of the FOS and submitted it, along with a brief background report, to the churches through the Office of Synodical Services, requesting feedback from the churches.

Although it is impossible and inadvisable in the body of a report to catalogue exhaustively the responses received, we can highlight some major issues recurring in the correspondence and conversations held at various venues. The committee is grateful for each response received, and even more so for the renewed engagement with the confessions that these discussions have prompted in many churches. We wish to assure all those who took the time to engage the committee's work that although we have not adopted every recommendation, each one was received in a spirit of openness and sincerity and was thoughtfully and critically considered.

As is often the case when a committee must present its work apart from the context of shared discussion among the members, the understanding of certain word choices is not immediately clear to the reader. Nevertheless, in discussions at classis meetings and in correspondence with councils and individuals, the committee was often able to reach strong consensus regarding the definition and nuance of much of the language in question.

We often noticed that many of the concerns, appreciations, and even dissonances raised from throughout the denomination were also those expressed by committee members. Thus the committee appears to be broadly representative of the denomination as a whole.

We thank God for the confessions and pray that our denomination's attentiveness to them and to our attempts to engage them faithfully will continue to bear fruit. To that end the committee presented the following Covenant for Officebearers to Synod 2011 as the revised Form of Subscription in fulfillment of the mandate given by Synod 2008.

Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church (2011)

We, [the undersigned], believe the inspired Word of God as received in the Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture, which proclaims the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ and the reconciliation of all things in him. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, we submit to it in all matters of life and faith.

We affirm three creeds—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—as ecumenical expressions of the Christian faith. In doing so, we confess our faith in unity with followers of Jesus Christ throughout all ages and among all nations.

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith. These confessions 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.

Grateful for these expressions of faith, we promise to be formed and governed by them, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also affirm the witness of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context.

We also promise to present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel. Should we at any time come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is irreconcilable with God's Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements. Further, we promise to submit to the church's judgment and authority.

We honor this covenant for the well-being of the church to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At Synod 2011, following a unanimous endorsement by the advisory committee, concerns regarding some of the language of the Covenant for Officebearers rose from the floor, expressed by both advisers and delegates to synod. In response, synod voted to

continue the work of the Form of Subscription Revision Committee II for one more year so that it can consult with representatives of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary and propose a revised version of the "Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church" to Synod 2012, addressing the following concerns:

1. The need for positive, declarative commitments to teach, defend, and actively promote the confessions and Reformed doctrine of the CRCNA.
2. The need to strengthen the scope and binding nature of the commitment.
3. The need to include a provision for accountability for those who sign this covenant, requiring them to answer requests for explanation of their views.
4. The need to reword the description of the gospel in a way that avoids the impression of universalism.

5. The need for a provision that those who sign this covenant will communicate their views to the church if they believe that a doctrine is not the teaching of God's Word (instead of saying that a teaching is irreconcilable with God's Word).

(*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 871)

With this expansion and further articulation of its mandate given by Synod 2011, the committee met again in September 2011. In keeping with synod's recommendations, additional representatives of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary were present to further address concerns and to engage in dialogue with the study committee. At this meeting the study committee addressed the above mandate and revised the Covenant for Officebearers. To that end the committee offers the following revision in faithfulness to our mandate and the directives of Synod 2011:

Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church (2012)

We, [the undersigned], believe the inspired Word of God as received in the Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture, which proclaims the good news of God's creation and redemption through Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, we submit to it in all matters of life and faith.

We affirm three creeds—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—as ecumenical expressions of the Christian faith. In doing so, we confess our faith in unity with followers of Jesus Christ throughout all ages and among all nations.

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith. These confessions 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.

Grateful for these expressions of faith, we promise to be formed and governed by them. We heartily believe and will promote their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also affirm the witness of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context.

We also promise to present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel. Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is irreconcilable with God's Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements. Further, we promise to submit to the church's judgment and authority.

We honor this covenant for the well-being of the church to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We are honored by the confidence and trust granted to us by synod, and we are heartened by the continuing vitality of confessional conversations within our denomination. The study committee considered the recommendations of synod and made a number of changes to the Covenant for Officebearers. Paragraph 4 has been revised to address the “need for positive declarative commitments to teach, defend, and actively promote the confessions and Reformed doctrine of the CRCNA” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 871). In addition, the reworded language of paragraph 4, along with paragraphs 1 and 6, “strengthen the scope and the binding nature of commitment” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 871). Finally, the description of the gospel in paragraph 1 has been reworded in such a way that it “avoids the impression of universalism” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 871).

The committee also considered the request of synod to “include a provision for accountability for those who sign this covenant, requiring them to answer requests for explanation of their views,” as well as “a provision that those who sign this covenant will communicate their views to the church if they believe that a doctrine is not the teaching of God’s Word (instead of saying that a teaching is irreconcilable with God’s Word)” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 871).

After lengthy consideration and discussion of synod’s requests, the study committee concluded that such provisions are adequately articulated in paragraph 6 of the Covenant for Officebearers (both the 2011 and 2012 drafts). Further, the Covenant for Officebearers clearly directs the signatory to the appropriate articles of the Church Order and its supplements, which specify the procedures for requesting explanation of a signatory’s views and for appropriately communicating confessional questions to the various ecclesiastical assemblies (consistory, classis, and synod). A document such as the Covenant for Officebearers, by its nature, is not designed to nor can it articulate such details to the degree of specificity seemingly requested by Synod 2011. Such detailed points are best dealt with on the occasion when they arise through the channels articulated in Church Order and according to the processes for the disposition of such matters as articulated in Church Order.

III. Clarifications

Through the years of its activity and by way of its discussions and engagement with various groups, the committee has been able to clarify its mandate in significant ways. The committee realized that the task before it was enormously demanding and complicated. Further, the committee also recognized that the FOS or any proposed revision of it was not the real issue. Rather, the deeper issue was that we begin what we hope will become an ongoing process of discussion and reflection on the confessions, the nature of confessional subscription, and the renewal of confessional vitality.

As the committee carried out its work, it reached agreement that the purpose of any revision should be unity with a secondary concern for purity. Though the concern for unity was primary, it was not to be achieved at the expense of purity. The committee also agreed that the FOS revision should be written in clear, compelling language that is easily transportable across cultural and linguistic barriers. We are grateful for the confirmation we have received that the Covenant for Officebearers indeed meets such a standard. The committee was concerned to write a document in language that “sings”

rather than “plods along.” Any document that calls people to covenant together should be stated in simple yet profound language so that it might be widely understood and embraced. The committee further desired that the tone of the language be understood as encouraging open, honest, respectful dialogue over questions that arise. Besides using language easily transportable across cultural and linguistic barriers, the committee also aimed to use language meaningful to those who did not grow up in the Reformed tradition (or in any Christian tradition) and who may not be familiar with our particular theological dialect or accent.

There are a number of significant matters to highlight with regard to the proposed revision of the FOS. First, the committee chose to use the word *covenant* within the title (Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church) because of the obvious biblical and theological weight the word *covenant* carries.

The language of *covenant* is communal rather than individualistic. Further, it suggests that the document is not just an affirmation of one’s personal beliefs but an agreement on how we are called to live together as sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ. Such language also implies a reciprocal understanding of obligations. There is a commitment on the part of an individual to the broader community, but also from the church to the individual, to approach questions in a spirit of mutual love and commitment. The language of *covenant* conveys a promise to work through disagreements and to openly and honestly deal with questions that arise, rather than to have the first reaction be to stifle dissent. The committee was concerned to propose a document that encourages discussion and an ongoing process of deeper understanding and discernment, as well as more faithful living. *Covenant* suggests promise-making and a binding together of parties. A covenant is binding and therefore not to be taken lightly. The language in both the 2011 and 2012 drafts holds signatories tightly to the doctrines of the creeds and confessions while also providing strong community tools to keep thoughts, conversations, publications, and teaching within mutually agreeable boundaries. Covenantal language implies a concern for the ethical as well as the doctrinal. It suggests depth as well as periodic renewal. Covenantal language draws us into the work of God in the world. *Covenant* is a liturgical and even missional concept.

In summary, the committee has taken a significant step away from the mere signing of a fixed document—as some have claimed that signing the current Form of Subscription has become. Instead, signatories promise to engage in committed, candid, and loving conversation as a community about the doctrines we hold dear and their confessional articulations.

Most who responded were pleased with the new suggested name “Covenant for Officebearers” for the document the committee was mandated to present. The deep resonance of covenantal language, thought, and action, both with the Bible and with the Reformed tradition, appealed to many respondents. Included in *covenant*, of course, is not only first responsibility to God for initiating covenants, but also the communal responsibility incumbent on individuals and institutions to hold each other accountable to commitments and doctrines.

Second, the committee wanted to make clear the logical flow of authority in the document from Scripture to creeds to confessions and finally to *Our*

World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony. The committee agreed that the FOS revision should be precise in identifying the relationship of Scripture, creeds, confessions, and other documents which many affirm as useful contemporary expressions of Reformed Christianity, but have not been granted confessional status (i.e., *Our World Belongs to God*).

The committee chose to explicitly include the ecumenical creeds in recognition of the changed cultural context in which the church finds itself in the 21st century. We increasingly realize that we are part of a broader body of Christ and are working toward greater unity with our brothers and sisters in various places and that our common creedal heritage connects us to a deep historical reality that gives strength and breadth to our witness of Jesus Christ in the world.

The Covenant for Officebearers intentionally places the creeds and confessions in their respective positions in order to acknowledge their primacy and to distinguish them from *Our World Belongs to God*.

We struggled to define the status of *Our World Belongs to God* because while it has a comparatively short history within the denomination, it enjoys a certain level of official recognition, as well as widespread acceptance and much contemporary relevance. Further, the committee wondered about the continuing veracity of the reasoning that has thus far prevented *Our World Belongs to God* from becoming a fully recognized confessional statement of the church.

Questions about the status of *Our World Belongs to God* may be particularly pertinent at this time in light of Synod 2009's commendation of the Belhar Confession to the churches for reflection and study at the same time that the Form of Subscription is being revised.

The committee has concluded that *Our World Belongs to God* has the potential to revitalize confessional identity and engagement within the Christian Reformed Church. Thus, we strongly urge synod to consider what implications the adoption of *Our World Belongs to God* as a confession might have toward helping the Christian Reformed Church to be and to remain a confessional denomination.

The committee received many responses—both critical and affirmative—commenting on our decision to mention and include *Our World Belongs to God* within a document that addresses subscription to official creedal and confessional documents recognized as such within our communion. Our own committee engaged in energized, committed discussions regarding this very point. In the end we were unanimous that in order to honor the continuing liveliness of confessional discussion, it was not only fitting, but necessary, to include *Our World Belongs to God*.

Some respondents argued that *Our World Belongs to God* should not be included at all in a revised FOS, for various reasons. Some consider it to be not of the same character, depth, or weight as the doctrinal standards. Others believe that as a *contemporary testimony* it is by nature malleable and open to regular review and revision (as occurred as recently as 2008). To include it, thus, would be to bind signatories to a document that can change again and again.

In this regard, our committee reiterates that *Our World Belongs to God* finds an appropriate place in the Covenant for Officebearers simply because it speaks with confessional language while not being acknowledged as a

confessional standard. It is a fitting contribution to our denomination's conviction to be a Reformed church that is always reforming.

Third, the committee wishes to highlight some of its deliberations regarding the nature of the language of conformity in the proposed revision. Within the document itself, the strength of the word *irreconcilable* in paragraph 6 is significant (see the proposed 2012 Covenant for Officebearers). It implies previous, long-term discussion about a matter in dispute. Its application is also limited to the doctrine under dispute. The supplement to Church Order Article 5 already grants that one does not subscribe to the particular formulation of a doctrine as that formulation is expressed in the confessions, but only to the doctrine itself. We do not envision frequent cases of this nature but wish to provide the means necessary to communicate such difficulties in the event they could arise and to articulate that there remain clear doctrinal boundaries with regard to confessional commitment.

Throughout history the Form of Subscription has been perceived as unduly intimidating for individuals who presented gravamina. The committee and many respondents considered that *covenant* both encouraged discussion and respected the honest confessional questions raised by those who might otherwise have been discouraged by the thought of facing a council, classis, or synod in a long process. Mutually entering into a *covenant* promises respect and also subscribing to the document, whereas merely signing a *form* of subscription appears to be affixing a signature to a static document and leaving little recourse for discussion.

As the committee wrestled with the challenge of holding officebearers accountable to abide by the doctrines articulated in the confessions, it desired to affirm the necessity of such boundaries but also wished to balance that necessity with the freedom to engage in candid discussion of matters in question. Some respondents held that the draft covenant did not hold officebearers to sufficiently defined boundaries. With the recommendations of Synod 2011 in mind, the committee revised the Covenant for Officebearers to strengthen perceived weaknesses with regard to strength of confessional commitment and the degree of accountability expected of signatories.

The language of submitting to Scripture in paragraph 1 and of conforming to the confessions in paragraph 4 of the Covenant for Officebearers by definition includes not contradicting the doctrines contained in the confessions. Further, paragraph 6 commits the signatory to submit to the church's judgment and authority in such matters. Some respondents wished to have procedures for accountability clearly articulated in the Covenant for Officebearers. The committee weighed these concerns and seriously considered the requests, but ultimately concluded that procedures for the discipline of an officebearer based on deviation from sound doctrine are provided for by Church Order Article 83, to which all officebearers agree to submit. Thus to include these in an explicit way in the proposed revision to the FOS would be redundant.

Regarding the matter of whether current officebearers would be obligated to sign the new Covenant for Officebearers, the committee looks forward to the day when, in keeping with the biblical character of *covenant*, officebearers eagerly recommit themselves by signing the Covenant for Officebearers.

IV. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. James C. Dekker, chair; Rev. Michael Borgert, reporter; and Rev. Mark A. Davies, committee member, when the report of the Form of Subscription Revision Committee II is discussed.

B. That synod adopt the revised Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church and commend it to the churches as a means to encourage ongoing, vital engagement of officebearers with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions.

C. That synod adopt the recommended changes to Church Order Articles 5 and 83 and Church Order Supplement, Article 5 to reflect the adoption of the Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church (see Appendix).

D. That synod set aside time during a plenary session prior to the address of the report recommendations for representatives of the study committee to make a presentation to the delegates.

E. That synod dismiss the committee.

Form of Subscription Revision Committee II (2012)

Michael Borgert, reporter

Mark A. Davies

James C. Dekker, chair

Eduardo A. Gonzalez

Sheila Holmes

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Kristen Van Engen

John Van Schepen

Wilma Vander Leek

Uko Zylstra

Appendix

Proposed Changes to the Church Order and Its Supplements

Article 5

All officebearers, on occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations, shall signify their agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the ~~Form of Subscription~~ Covenant for Officebearers.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 5

Supplement, Article 5

*Form of Subscription** (document to be replaced by text of the Covenant for Officebearers)

We, the undersigned,

servants of the divine Word

in the _____ Christian Reformed Church

in Classis _____,

by means of our signatures
declare truthfully and in good conscience before the Lord
that we sincerely believe
that all the articles and points of doctrine
set forth in the Belgic Confession,
the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort
fully agree with the Word of God.

We promise therefore to teach these doctrines diligently,
to defend them faithfully, and not to contradict them, publicly or
privately,
directly or indirectly, in our preaching, teaching, or writing.

We pledge moreover not only to reject all errors that conflict with
these doctrines but also to refute them, and to do everything we
can to keep the church free from them.

We promise further that if in the future we come to have any
difficulty with these doctrines or reach views differing from
them, we will not propose, defend, preach, or teach such views,
either publicly or privately, until we have first disclosed them to
the council, classis, or synod for examination.

We are prepared moreover to submit to the judgment of the council,
classis, or synod, realizing that the consequence of refusal to do
so is suspension from office.

We promise in addition that if, to maintain unity and purity in
doctrine, the council, classis, or synod considers it proper at
any time—on sufficient grounds of concern—to require a fuller
explanation of our views concerning any article in the three
confessions mentioned above, we are always willing and ready
to comply with such a request, realizing here also that the
consequence of refusal to do so is suspension from office. Should
we consider ourselves wronged, however, by the judgment of the
council or classis, we reserve for ourselves the right of appeal;
but until a decision is made on such an appeal, we will acquiesce
in the determination and judgment already made.

*To be signed by professors, ministers, ministry associates, elders, and
deacons when ordained and /or installed in office.

(*Acts of Synod 1988*, pp. 530-31)

Guidelines and Regulations re Gravamina

Synod declares that gravamina fall into at least two basic types:

1. A *confessional-difficulty gravamen*: a gravamen in which a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision of the confessions, and
2. A *confessional-revision gravamen*: a gravamen in which a subscriber makes a specific recommendation for revision of the confessions.

A. Guidelines as to the meaning of subscription to affirming the confessions by means of the Form of Subscription Covenant for Officebearers:

1. The person signing the Form of Subscription Covenant for Officebearers subscribes affirms without reservation to all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church, as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God.
2. The subscriber signatory does not by subscription affirming to the confessions declare that these doctrines are all stated in the best possible manner, or that the standards of our church cover all that the Scriptures teach on the matters confessed. Nor does the subscriber signatory declare that every teaching of the Scriptures is set forth in our confessions, or that every heresy is rejected and refuted by them.
3. A subscriber signatory is only bound by subscription to those doctrines that are confessed, and is not bound to the references, allusions, and remarks that are incidental to the formulation of these doctrines, nor to the theological deductions that some may draw from the doctrines set forth in the confessions. However, no one is free to decide for one's self oneself or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards. In the event that such a question should arise, the decision of the assemblies of the church shall be sought and acquiesced in.

B. Regulations concerning the procedure to be followed in the submission of a confessional-difficulty gravamen:

1. Ministers (whether missionaries, professors, or others not serving congregations as pastors), elders, or deacons shall submit their "difficulties and different sentiments" to their councils for examination and judgment. Should a council decide that it is not able to judge the gravamen submitted to it, it shall submit the matter to classis for examination and judgment. If the classis, after examination, judges that it is unable to decide the matter, it may submit it to synod, in accordance with the principles of Church Order Article 28-b.
2. In all instances of confessional-difficulty gravamina, the matter shall not be open for discussion by the whole church since this type of gravamen is a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession. Hence this type of gravamen should be dealt with pastorally and personally by the assembly addressed.

C. Regulations concerning the procedure to be followed in the submission of a confessional-revision gravamen:

1. The basic assumption of the church in requiring subscription to affirmation of the Form of Subscription Covenant for Officebearers is that "all the articles and points of doctrine" the doctrines contained in the confessions of the church "do fully agree with the Word of God." are faithful reflections of the Word of God. The burden of proof, therefore, rests upon the subscriber who calls upon the church to justify or revise her its confessions.

2. Ministers (including missionaries, professors, or all others not serving congregations as pastors), elders, or deacons shall submit their gravamina calling for revision of the confessions to their councils for examination and judgment. Should the council decide that it is not able to judge the gravamen submitted to it, it shall submit the matter to classis for examination and judgment. If the classis, after examination, judges that it is unable to decide the matter, classis may submit it to synod, in accordance with the principles of Church Order Article 28-b.
3. If the gravamen is adopted by the council and the classis as its own, it becomes an overture to the broader assemblies and therefore it is open for discussion in the whole church.
4. If the gravamen is rejected by the classis, it may be appealed to synod; and when the constituted synod declares the matter to be legally before it for action, all the signers of the Form of Subscription Covenant for Officebearers shall be free to discuss it together with the whole church until adjudicated by synod.
5. Since the subscriber has the right of appeal from the judgment of a council to classis and from classis to synod, the mere fact that the matter is being appealed shall not be a reason for suspending or otherwise disciplining an officebearer, provided other provisions of ~~the Form of Subscription~~ and the Church Order are observed.
6. A revision of the confessions shall not be adopted by synod until the whole church membership has had adequate opportunity to consider it.

Grounds:

- a. The history of the functioning of the Form of Subscription shows that if such guidelines and regulations had been available and followed, considerable delay and confusion might have been avoided.
- b. These guidelines and regulations will make the signing of the Form of Subscription more meaningful and will remove some common misunderstandings that now exist on the part of many officebearers.
- c. These guidelines and regulations will prove helpful to council, classis, and synod in dealing with matters submitted to them for examination in accordance with the Form of Subscription.

(Acts of Synod 1976, pp. 68-70)

Article 83

Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Form of Subscription Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.

OVERTURES, COMMUNICATIONS, AND PERSONAL APPEAL

Overture 1: Approve the Transfer of the Cerritos WooRi CRC, Artesia, California, from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Pacific Hanmi

Classis Greater Los Angeles overtures Synod 2012 to approve the transfer of the Cerritos WooRi CRC (formerly Spirit Filled Church of Artesia) to Classis Pacific Hanmi.

Grounds:

1. Spirit Filled Church amalgamated with an emerging Korean congregation from Classis Pacific Hanmi called Hope of the World Church.
2. The established merged church and their leaders are unable to function in an all-English-speaking classis.
3. The WooRi Church has been participating in Classis Pacific Hanmi for several years and has no connections with Classis Greater Los Angeles.
4. This action was taken at the February 28, 2012, Classis Greater Los Angeles meeting upon the advice and direction of the CRC Korean ministries director.

Classis Greater Los Angeles
Sid Sybenga, stated clerk

Overture 2: Approve the Transfer of the Cerritos WooRi CRC, Artesia, California, from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Pacific Hanmi

Classis Pacific Hanmi overtures Synod 2012 to approve the transfer of the Cerritos WooRi CRC from Classis Greater Los Angeles to Classis Pacific Hanmi.

Grounds:

1. Classis Pacific Hanmi approved the transfer of Cerritos WooRi Church from Classis Greater Los Angeles at their September 2010 meeting, contingent upon the completion of future transfer procedures from Classis Greater Los Angeles and the synodical office.
2. The Cerritos WooRi Church leaders have been participating in the Classis Pacific Hanmi meetings and events as informal members and have been contributing significantly.

3. Classis Greater Los Angeles has approved the transfer of Cerritos WooRi Church to Classis Pacific Hanmi.

Classis Pacific Hanmi

Hyung Ju Park, stated clerk

Overture 3: Commission a Study of Church as *Institution* and *Organism*

I. Background

Just as so-called parachurch organizations were perceived to have invaded the domain of the institutional church some decades ago, the CRCNA is now being perceived, including by many of its own members, as invading the domains of other societal institutions, especially including those that are involved in political and political-economic matters.

The CRCNA is an active member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). In turn, the WCRC is extremely active, both in terms of declaration and action, as to political and political-economic matters. Having moved beyond the Belhar Confession, the WCRC has also adopted the Accra Confession which, for example, condemns the United States' political economic system (called "neo-liberalism" by the Accra Confession) as idolatry ("worship of Mammon"), and understands *unity* and *reconciliation* to consist largely of a common willingness to lament and confess the purported sins of free market economics, and then agree to politically advocate for specified alternatives.

But this is not only a trend of our ecumenical brothers and sisters in the WCRC. We in the CRCNA now have an Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action that takes positions on political policies, often including pending legislation concerning immigration, foreign aid, voting rights of felons, debt relief for foreign countries, and so forth. We have a Hope Equals project as part of our World Missions agency that encourages CRC members to press their government representatives to cast specific votes on specific legislation in response to Israeli actions concerning the Palestinians. And we have an official church publication (*The Banner*) that has seen fit to declare to its readers what the true answers are in the arguments about climate change, the most complex web of scientific, economic, and political questions ever faced by the human race.

How did the CRCNA get to this new place? In part, out of a good motivation. Reformers of the Kuyperian bent believe that indeed, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!" And if we believe that, we (setting aside who *we* are for the moment) must involve ourselves with all (not just some) of the issues that affect human society.

At the same time, however, it would seem the CRCNA has lost sight of another, equally important articulation of Abraham Kuyper, known as "social sphere sovereignty," which, simply stated, suggests that various institutions within human society have jurisdictional boundaries ("spheres of authority"), which both prescribe and proscribe each institution's activities. Focusing in on the church in particular, this perspective distinguishes between the church as *organism*, by which is meant all children of God,

whatever our tradition, and the church as *institution*, by which is meant that institutional structure that is defined by certain rules (e.g., Church Order) in order to operate in a certain way and accomplish certain (limited) purposes. The CRCNA is, and has always understood itself to be, a church as *institution*.

Indeed, this idea of sphere sovereignty was responsible for, beginning centuries ago, a clear way-of-life difference between Protestant (in particular, Reformed) and Roman Catholic societies. The Roman Church was largely unconstrained in its jurisdiction, the Pope sometimes deciding to directly take on even the full power of government itself. Society was, in the power days of Romanism, largely *undifferentiated*; which is to say that all of society's affairs were subject to the authority of the institutional church. There was no understanding of a sphere sovereignty principle that would curb (proscribe) the church's authority. Rather, the church had whatever authority it decided it wanted and had the brute power to take.

The issues of centuries ago are sometimes still the issues of today. For most of its existence, the CRCNA regarded itself, although without specific words inscribed into any of our confessions or Church Order, as having a limited jurisdiction that reflects our communal sense of sphere sovereignty. For example, in the 1970s, some CRC members began the Center for Public Justice, a Reformed-perspective political advocacy organization, neither a part of nor controlled by the CRCNA. All sorts of such organizations have been created by CRC members. Some dealt with politics, others with poverty, others with education, others with disabilities, others with health. But for the most part at least (Calvin College being an exception), it was understood that although the CRCNA, as *institution*, might inspire the formation and continuance of these institutions, it would not *be* those institutions, nor control them.

That is, until now. Now, if a CRC member takes a political position about, say, immigration, or the Middle East, or carbon taxes, he may find himself contradicted by his own church's lobbying, political education, or advocacy efforts. Now, especially as to political (including economic) matters, the CRCNA is increasingly not seeing fit to merely inspire members to be politically involved, but rather is deciding to be the political authority itself.

It seems we are coming around full circle to the Roman Catholic way-of-life perspective from which we departed centuries ago. If this is so, and we believe it is, we at least need to study this change in a focused way and decide whether we really want to go down this road. Thus, this overture.

II. Overture

Classis Columbia overtures Synod 2012 to commission a study of

A. The difference between the mission of the church *as institution* and *as organism*.

B. Whether, and if so the extent to which, the CRCNA at its **denominational level**, as *church institution*, should declare truths about political matters to its members and others, lobby governments as to particular political (including economic) or legal positions, or advocate for certain political (including economic) or legal results.

C. Whether, and if so the extent to which, the various **classes** of the CRCNA, as *church institution*, should declare truths about political matters to its members and others, lobby governments as to particular political (including economic) or legal positions, or advocate for certain political (including economic) or legal results.

D. Whether, and if so the extent to which, **congregations** within the CRCNA, as *church institution*, should declare truths about political matters to its members and others, lobby governments as to particular political (including economic) or legal positions, or advocate for certain political (including economic) or legal results.

Grounds:

1. The extent to which the CRCNA, at the denominational level, as *church institution*, engages in essentially political (including economic) activity has increased exponentially in the last two decades.
2. This political activity has caused significant disunity and disaffection within the CRC membership and will continue to do so in an even greater degree.
3. Engaging in political education, posturing, and advocacy are relatively new activities for the CRCNA, but its doing so has never been the subject of a focused, synod-directed study.
4. Local CRC churches are finding it increasingly necessary to “apologize for,” or at least “explain away,” political positions taken or political advocacy conducted by their denomination to its own members or others who are evaluating the church.
5. It is inevitable, if there is no change in the trend toward political involvement by the CRCNA (denomination), that various classes and congregations will also make political (including economic) pronouncements and engage in political advocacy, sometimes to mimic the denomination’s positions/advocacy and other times to counter and negate the denomination’s positions/advocacy.
6. If there is no change in the trajectory toward increased political involvement by the CRCNA (denomination), the CRCNA will inadvertently create a complex set of new “faith requirements” for our CRC churches. *Being CRC* will mean, as a practical matter, adherence to certain political (including economic) theories in addition to our confessional standards.
7. Even if it were the case that engaging in political (including economic) activity was appropriate for (within the jurisdiction of) the denomination, classes, or congregations of the CRCNA, there would remain the problem of incompetency, given that the governance structures at all levels of the CRCNA are not designed to competently derive political (including economic) wisdom or engage in political (including economic) or legal advocacy. Just as having a political science, economics, or law degree does not particularly qualify one to occupy the pulpit on Sunday morning, having a theology degree does not particularly qualify one to discern, pronounce, or advocate as to legal, political, and economic matters.
8. When the church as *institution*, at whatever level (congregational, classical, or denominational), ignores the proper proscription of its

authority, it usurps authority (jurisdiction) of others, including its own members and local churches. That violates, in a very real sense, Church Order Article 85, which provides that “No church shall *in any way* lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer” (emphasis added).

Classis Columbia

Roger D. Kramer, stated clerk

Overture 4: Call the Denomination to Increased Effort toward Inclusivity

I. Background

In 2003 the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC), now called the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, indicated that the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) was asking churches in ecclesiastical fellowship with it to study the Belhar Confession to determine what place the confession might take among the faith statements of the respective denominations. The IRC informed synod that it had committed itself to review and study the Belhar with a view to making a recommendation to synod about its status sometime in the future. The IRC also informed synod of conversations it was having with the Reformed Church in America regarding this matter.

In 2006 the IRC recommended that synod instruct the IRC

to initiate a formal process of discussion and consideration of the Belhar Confession with a view toward making a recommendation to a future synod concerning its applicability to, and compatibility with, the confessional basis of the CRC.

Grounds:

1. In our ecumenical conversations with the Reformed Church in America, the CRC was asked to study the Belhar Confession simultaneously with the RCA.
2. It fills in a gap in our confessions; we do not have a strong confession on race relations.
3. The several Reformed Churches in South Africa have asked the member churches of REC (Reformed Ecumenical Council) and WARC (World Alliance of Reformed Churches) to study this confession and respond to it.

(Agenda for Synod 2006, p. 273)

Synod 2006 adopted that recommendation and its grounds.

In Appendix C to its report to Synod 2009 (*Agenda for Synod 2009*, pp. 269-82) the IRC reviewed the history of the Belhar Confession’s development and reviewed related matters in our denomination. The related matters were “the racial tensions and the flagrant violation of the scriptural principle of equality occurring in society and the church both in America and in the world” and our denomination’s adoption of “God’s Diverse and Unified Family,” an articulation of biblical and theological principles for the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God.

The committee also gave an overview of the Belhar and addressed questions as to whether the Belhar was biblical and whether it would enrich our confessional basis. The IRC considered three options concerning the Belhar:

(1) propose it as a fourth confession, (2) adopt it as an ecumenical confession, or (3) approve it as a statement of faith.

After careful review of the options considered, the IRC decided unanimously to recommend option 1 because it is the most consistent with our understanding of the core of the gospel and previous synodical declarations on racial justice, unity, and reconciliation.

(*Agenda for Synod 2009*, p. 280)

The committee recommended “that synod propose to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession).” A three-year period was proposed so that the churches would have time “to adequately study and reflect on the proposal and be better prepared for response” (p. 281). This recommendation was adopted.

The committee also asked synod to “authorize the IRC to promote the study of the Belhar Confession in the churches during this three-year period, and designate the IRC to represent Synod 2009’s proposal to adopt the Belhar Confession at the meeting of Synod 2012” (p. 281). This recommendation was also adopted.

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee reported to both Synods 2010 and 2011 that classes, councils, and congregations were studying the Belhar, that many agencies and offices of the denomination were using the Belhar in their work, and that study materials and a devotional booklet were available through Faith Alive Christian Resources. In its report to Synod 2012 the committee reviews much of the material presented to previous synods, states that “the CRC has not spoken *confessionally* to the issues of injustice and racism” (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 235), and recommends that synod adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession.

II. Observations

The above history adequately reveals that much discussion and study have taken place as our denomination considered a response to the Belhar. What was evident early in this discussion is that the Belhar was identified as addressing race relations. Already in 2006, the IRC encouraged synod to examine the Belhar because “we do not have a strong confession on race relations.” In its 2009 report the IRC referred to “racial tensions” and synod’s adoption of “God’s Diverse and Unified Family.” As mentioned above, the 2012 report states that “the CRC has not spoken *confessionally* to the issues of injustice and racism.” To talk about the Belhar in terms of race is understandable because of the context in which it was written, but a focus on race relations is narrower than the “unity, reconciliation, justice” description typically used to describe the Belhar.

Talking about the Belhar in terms of race relations has had some unfortunate consequences among us. Some have made negative statements about Synod 2011’s decision to establish a goal of 25 percent racial minority leaders in our denomination’s positions of senior leadership and have encouraged our members to reject that strategy and also to reject the Belhar as a fourth confession. Some have regarded the coupling of these two matters as an indication of racism.

Others have labeled any opposition to the Belhar as an indication of racism, not as an indication of legitimate misgivings about adopting the Belhar

as a fourth confession, saying publicly and repeatedly that opposing the adoption of the Belhar as a fourth confession is simply an unwillingness by Anglos to accept anything written by people in the southern hemisphere. In an article in the *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, Dr. John Cooper observed, “Those who challenge adopting it risk suspicion of racism or indifference” (Fall 2010, p. 10).

Thus, even while we consider a document that we hope will improve race relations among us, racism is evident in the comments both of Anglos and of ethnic minorities.

It is possible that our denomination will adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession for very good reasons. It is possible that our denomination will not adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession for very good reasons. It is possible that our denomination will adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession simply because it does not want to be perceived as racist. It is possible that our denomination will adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession, believing that by doing so it has significantly addressed the matter of race relations. The latter would be a mistake. As many synodical decisions well illustrate, adopting words on paper, though necessary, does not necessarily result in tangible actions that reflect those words.

No matter what we do with the Belhar, our very discussion of it reveals how insidious and pervasive the matter of racism among us is. Synod 2012 is called to make a decision on the Belhar, but synod also needs to call all of us, Anglos and ethnic minorities, to repent of the ways that we hold each other at arm’s length, and call us to strive to love each other as God, in Christ, has loved us.

Synod also needs to call the denomination to respond affirmatively to the specific recommendations that previous synods have made to assist us in becoming a racially and ethnically diverse family of God. For example, Synod 2005 encouraged each classis to delegate at least one ethnic minority person to synod, beginning with Synod 2006. Less than one-third of our forty-seven classes do that. It also instructed the Board of Trustees to report in the annual *Agenda for Synod* and to make recommendations, if necessary, on the denomination’s progress in attaining its goal of at least one ethnic minority synodical delegate from each classis. No agenda since 2005 had included such reports or recommendations. Synod also requested all classes to develop a strategy to intentionally incorporate ethnic minorities into the life and government of the local church and broader assemblies and to submit their plan to the denominational Board of Trustees by March 15, 2007. That did not happen. Someone must hold us accountable to what we have said in the past so we are continually creating a different present and future.

III. Overture

Classis Lake Erie overtures Synod 2012 to

A. Call the denomination to repent of the personal and institutional racism that causes separation between fellow members, excludes some from full participation in the life of our denomination and hinders the denomination in achieving the diversity goals it has set for itself.

B. Encourage the churches to use the “Facing Racism” video program in their education and small group programs within the next two years. (A copy of this program, created in a collaborative effort by the Office of Race Relations, Christian Reformed Home Missions, and the Christian Reformed Church Foundation, was sent to all congregations in September 2011. “The sessions offer ways to challenge both personal and institutional racism, and they include, among other things, the stories and personal experiences of a variety of people, dramatic readings of Scripture, the perspective on diversity developed by the CRC in a 1996 synodical study, and pertinent portions of our denominational history.”)

C. Encourage individual members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA to review the recommendations adopted by Synod 1996 regarding the “Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse and Unified Family of God” and the recommendations adopted by Synod 2005 regarding the “Practice of Appointing Ethnic Advisers to Synod” (see Appendix) and to implement the recommendations that are still relevant in our current context.

D. Instruct the denominational Board of Trustees to review all synodical recommendations concerning diversity and to report to each synod, making recommendations if necessary, on the denomination’s progress in attaining these goals.

Classis Lake Erie

Robert A. Arbogast, stated clerk

Appendix

I. Recommendations adopted by Synod 1996

The following recommendations were adopted by Synod 1996 regarding the “Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse and Unified Family of God” (*Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 616-19):

A. That synod recommend the revised report to the churches for study.

B. That synod adopt the following biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse and unified family of God:

Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse and Unified Family of God

Creation

1. *The world as God created it is rich and God glorifying in its diversity.*
2. *The created world with all its diversity has its unity in the one God, who created it through Jesus Christ.*
3. *The unity and diversity of the human race and of created reality reflect the unity and diversity of the triune God (namely, his oneness and threeness).*

Fall

4. *A fundamental act of sin is the breakdown of community.*

New Creation

5. *The uniting of all things in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God's eternal plan for the ages.*
6. *Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God's saving work.*
7. *Already in the old covenant the scope of God's mission is racially and ethnically inclusive.*
8. *In Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church, God gives new power to the church, power to break down walls of separation and create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture.*
9. *The church is God's strategic vehicle for embodying, proclaiming, and promoting the unity and diversity of the new creation.*
10. *God calls Christians to find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Jesus Christ.*
11. *Obedience in matters of racial reconciliation calls us, individually and corporately, to continually repent, to strive for justice, and to battle the forces of evil.*
12. *Christians live and work in the hope that one day the reconciliation of all things will be fully realized.*

C. That synod, on the basis of the above principles, declare that to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people and that to ignore his calling to turn this principle into experienced reality is sinful according to God's Word and the Reformed confessions.

Grounds:

1. The above report demonstrates that the Bible declares this reconciled community to be God's will.
2. The confessions declare that the catholicity of the church means that Christ "gathers, protects, and preserves" the church "out of the entire human race" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).

D. That synod call the **whole church**—individual members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA—to respond to the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God by committing themselves

1. To pray and work for the increased enfolding of ethnic-minority persons into the CRCNA in order to reflect more fully the racial and ethnic diversity of Canada and the United States.
2. To ensure the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence at all levels of denominational life.

Note: The total estimated ethnic-minority membership of 5 percent in the CRCNA compares to an ethnic-minority population of approximately 20 percent in Canada and the United States.

E. That synod call the **churches**

1. To articulate the biblical vision for a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God by means of the preaching, teaching, and study of the above biblical and theological principles.
2. To evaluate their life and ministry with regard to their racial and ethnic composition, the social factors contributing to their composition, the selecting and training of their leaders, their worship style, and their ministry to congregational members and to their community in light of their sense of God's vision and call for them as congregations.
3. To develop racially and ethnically diverse congregations by all appropriate models and strategies, such as
 - a. Established churches becoming more inclusive ethnically and culturally.
 - b. Planting and developing multiethnic congregations.
 - c. Sponsoring new congregations that are ethnically and culturally different from the parent congregation, in the same or separate facilities.
 - d. Developing relationships (e.g., joint worship, workshops, and work projects) with congregations from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
 - e. Supporting persons and programs at home or abroad that are committed to racial reconciliation.
4. To witness publicly *against* racism, prejudice, and related unemployment, poverty, and injustices and *in defense* of all people as imagebearers of God.
5. To call individual members to promote and establish interracial and cross-cultural relationships in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities.

F. That synod request the **classes**, with the assistance of the CRCNA offices and agencies

1. To arrange during the next twelve months for the careful classis-wide study of this report and its implications for the churches and their ministries.
2. To provide to the churches and ministries of classis guidance in support of racial and ethnic diversity (and unity) by means of public forums and learning events, multicongregational worship celebrations, and joint cross-cultural ministry ventures.
3. To assist the churches in developing and supporting new churches and other outreach ministries that are committed to ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation.

4. To recruit and assist persons from ethnic-minority groups to participate in the ministries of classis, including representation to synod, agency boards, and other ministries of the CRCNA.

G. That synod mandate the **Board of Trustees**, under the leadership of its CRCNA staff and with the assistance of the Race Relations division of Pastoral Ministries and other CRCNA agencies,

1. To coordinate and monitor the role and response of the agencies in providing guidance and assistance to the churches and classes in support of ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation as outlined above.
2. To serve Synod 1998 with advice and recommendations for ensuring the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence with the classes and synod, the Board of Trustees, denominational agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA. The recommendations should include transitional and long-term strategies, training and support needs, financial implications, and periodic reporting to synod on efforts and progress.
3. To continue to explore ways whereby the biennial Multiethnic Conference can assist the churches, classes, and synod to respond more completely to God's call for ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation in the CRCNA.
4. To review CRCNA policies and practices in relation to the training, credentialing, and compensating of ethnic-minority pastors and to give recommendations and advice as indicated.

H. That synod respectfully urge **future synods**

1. To include in their worship times the articulation and celebration of the biblical vision for a racially and ethnically diverse and unified family of God.
2. To encourage the development of specific recommendations and specific practical guidelines for supporting ethnic diversity in all aspects of denominational life, including interchurch relations in general and ministries of the Reformed Ecumenical Council in particular.
3. That denominational response to the above decisions be reviewed by Synod 1998 on the basis of an interim progress report by the Board of Trustees.

I. That denominational response to the above decisions be reviewed by Synod 2000 in the light of another progress report with advice and recommendations by the Board of Trustees to Synod 2000.

J. That synod recommend that the Board of Trustees ask representatives of various language groups in the denomination to translate the document into the languages of their groups.

K. That synod ask Calvin Theological Seminary's Morren Conference Committee to consider organizing a conference on "racial and ethnic reconciliation with repentance and justice" to explore the theological meaning of racial

reconciliation and the implications for ministry, pastoral care, ecclesiology, and social justice.

Grounds:

1. Racial reconciliation with repentance is urgent in the light of the above report.
2. Reformed theologians are well positioned historically and theologically to address this issue.
3. The Reformed churches of South Africa are presently experiencing such a process.

II. Recommendations adopted by Synod 2005

The following recommendations were adopted by Synod 2005 regarding the "Practice of Appointing Ethnic Advisers to Synod" (*Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 748; 755-56):

2. That synod encourage each classis to include at least one ethnic minority person in its synodical delegation beginning with Synod 2006.

Grounds:

- a. Although synods have repeatedly encouraged classes to delegate ethnic minorities to synod, the response of most classes has been minimal.
 - b. There are classes that can achieve this goal by 2006 because a number of ethnic minority officebearers already serve in their member congregations.
3. That synod request all classes to develop a strategy to intentionally incorporate ethnic minorities into the life and government of the local church and broader assemblies and submit their plan to the BOT by March 15, 2007.

Grounds:

- a. Submitting strategy plans provides an intentional accountability to one another by way of a denominational board that can report such plans to synod.
 - b. Sharing classical plans has the benefit of classes' learning from one another.
4. That synod encourage ethnic minority members of the denomination to participate in the meetings and activities of their classes.

Ground: Such participation gives people familiarity with how the denomination functions and helps members of classes become better acquainted with each other's gifts.

5. That synod encourage classes to specifically invite ethnic minorities to participate in the meetings and activities of classis.

Ground: Such participation gives people familiarity with how other cultures function and helps members of classes become better acquainted with each other's gifts.

6. That synod remind councils and classes that the CRC Office of Race Relations is available to assist with leadership development and other services to incorporate ethnic minorities into the ongoing work of the church.

Ground: The Office of Race Relations is the agency mandated to assist councils and classes in this work.

7. That synod continue the position of ethnic adviser as long as the number of ethnic minority delegates is fewer than twenty-five, after which time it shall be discontinued. The Board of Trustees should appoint as many ethnic advisers as are needed to reach twenty-five, except that no more than seven (and no fewer than two) shall be appointed.

Ground: Continuing this position only to the point where the number of ethnic minorities at synod is comparable to current levels reflects synod's desire that this position be a temporary catalyst to encourage classes to delegate ethnic minorities.

8. That synod instruct the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA to report in the annual *Agenda for Synod*, and to make recommendations if necessary, on the denomination's progress in attaining its goal of at least one ethnic minority synodical delegate from each classis and on the denomination's progress in incorporating ethnic minorities on denominational boards.

Ground: Because our Board of Trustees acts for synod between sessions and because it supervises all denominational ministries, this Board is uniquely qualified to measure denominational progress and to encourage us in it.

Overture 5: Take an Active Stance Against Pornography

I. Background

In 1987 Classis Grandville overtured synod to take a position against pornography. Synod referred the matter back to the classis, asking it to further research and revise its suggested statement. In 1988 the overture containing a revised statement on pornography and a resolution concerning that issue was adopted by synod.

As a result of that resolution, Synod 1988 urged all members who use pornographic material to arouse sexual desire to recognize that doing so is a sin. It also urged churches to teach their members the biblical perspective on human sexuality and encourage them to become involved with decency organizations, working to stem the tide of pornography. Such involvement includes prayer for those involved in pornography, education regarding the impact of pornography on society, withholding patronage from establishments supporting pornography, and holding forth biblical standards for sexuality in the public debate over pornography.

Since that time very little has been done on a denominational level to address this issue and assist the churches in providing healing, while pornographic material has become much more readily available with advances in technology.

II. Overture

Classis Eastern Canada overtures synod to actively tackle the use of pornography within our churches by

- A. Urging each congregation to actively address the damage being done through the use of pornography and to promote a biblically healthy view of human sexuality.
- B. Appointing an individual within the staff of the Christian Reformed Church in North America to assist churches in confronting pornography use within their congregations and to provide healing for those who have participated in its use.
- C. Preparing and distributing a list of available resource materials to further equip clergy, councils, and laity to promote confession and healing within their congregations.
- D. Making the churches aware of “Shore to Shore with a Roar,” a motor-cycle rally across North America designed to raise awareness of the damage pornography is causing within our communities.

Grounds:

1. Synod 1988 urged all of our churches to recognize that using pornographic material to arouse sexual desire is a sin, to repent of that sin, and to seek forgiveness and healing from Jesus Christ, our Lord. However, very little has been done within our congregations to bring this sin into the light.
2. Due to this lack of support, many churches are left struggling to find a way to create healing after a breakdown in ministry rather than attempting to avert any breakdown by actively confronting those who use pornographic material and directing them to the forgiveness and healing available in Christ Jesus.
3. The widespread availability and use of pornographic material within our wider society creates an unbiblical view of sexuality that needs to be corrected.

III. Objections

Some may argue that the decision made by Synod 1988 is enough and no further action needs to be made. While we agree that the statement on pornography need not be changed, we do not think that enough has been done to assist churches in implementing its resolution.

Some may argue that this overture does not go far enough and that a task force needs to be created to address this issue. However, since real healing works best on a local level, where real relationships and accountability can be developed, we think it best for synod to find ways to actively support local congregations in their ministry.

Classis Eastern Canada
Jean Lauziere, stated clerk

Overture 6: Instruct the Board of Trustees and Agencies of the CRCNA to Refrain from Addressing and Making Pronouncements on Issues That Lie Outside of the Mission of the Church as Institution

I. Background

Historically, Reformed churches have drawn a distinction between the church as *institution* and the church as *organism* (i.e., true followers of Christ—the white robed multitude of Rev. 7:9 from every nation, tribe, language, and people). The Belgic Confession speaks to the task of the former when it identifies the marks of the church as the pure preaching of the Word, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the practice of church discipline (which, as the confession makes clear, is necessary for helping both the flight from sin and the pursuit of righteousness). We have agreed, however, that the mission of the church as *organism* is much broader, encompassing every conceivable area of life. In keeping with this distinction, Abraham Kuypers emphasized that the instituted church has the responsibility of proclaiming God's special grace to the world and enabling its members to fulfill what we agree is a more broadly defined role, as Christians in society.

In recent years, however, synod, the Board of Trustees, CRWRC, and the Office of Social Justice have pushed back this boundary by making specific declarations on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church with regard to numerous political, social, and scientific questions. These involve government budgets, environmental policies, immigration policy, taxation, education, and foreign aid, just to name a few. In addition, these bodies have increasingly called on members of the Christian Reformed Church to join in advocating for these particular policies by lobbying their representatives in Congress, letter-writing campaigns, and numerous other activities. There are three major problems with the actions of these agencies, the Board of Trustees, and synod in this regard.

First, they create the impression that the specific policy provisions for which these agencies advocate are the only Christian policy. This puts people in a position of having their faith questioned simply because, in the course of their own study or review of these issues, they have come to different conclusions as to how a more just society might best be achieved—conclusions that are equally compatible with the Christian faith and the Reformed confessions. To have the church as institution moving into areas that properly belong to the church in society causes needless division in the former, setting brother and sister against each other in spite of a common faith, on the basis of temporary, worldly concerns. It also has the effect of watering down the gospel proclamation itself, since the church comes to be seen not as a harbinger of the kingdom of heaven, but as merely one more political, lobbying organization. Our objectivity in regard to the things of this world is compromised, and trust in the testimony of the church is weakened.

Second, many of these specific policy pronouncements are in fact far beyond the competence of the church as an institution¹. For instance, how

¹ See *Acts of Synod 1985*, pp. 463-73, 714-16; although this report refers primarily to resistance to specific government policies, its statements regarding the purpose and competence of the church apply equally well to advocacy of specific government policies.

is it possible for a group of 150-200 minister and elder delegates to synod to make a definitive pronouncement as to the facts, causes, and implications of global climate change? Do these men and women really understand the intricacies of climate science to the point where they can adjudicate disputes in the field? Hardly. Yet, in signing on to the Micah Network Declaration on Creation Care and Climate Change, the church has in fact claimed that it can. Immigration policy, similarly, is an incredibly intricate and complex issue. Can the church really claim such competence as to make definitive policy proscriptions on the matter? By boldly declaring *truth* on matters beyond the institutional competence of the church, these agencies and bodies of the CRCNA make us vulnerable to manipulation by factions and organizations outside the church who not only may not share our primary objective of bearing witness to Jesus Christ, but may even be opposed to it.

Furthermore, as science or experience develop these issues over time, the church also risks finding itself overcome by such developments and embarrassed when it turns out our boldly pronounced *truth* was wrong. The church—Protestant and Catholic—still pays for the negative impression made in the time of Galileo by similar declarations. Again, trust in the testimony of the church is weakened.

Finally, these pronouncements and declarations have the effect of confusing ends and means. The purpose for which the church was instituted is to bear witness to Jesus Christ (Acts 1), and to make disciples of all nations by teaching and administering the sacraments (Matt. 28). Caring for the poor, the dispossessed, the suffering, and all who labor under the burden of sin is both a testimony to the grace of God at work in us, and a means to carry out Christ's mandate; it is not the end itself. We do not claim, or rather, ought not claim that we can eradicate injustice (as a December 2011 email from CRWRC claimed we are doing), or that we can eliminate world hunger (as one of CRWRC's partner organizations says is possible if we but put our minds to it). We do not make all things new. Jesus is doing that and will culminate that work in the last days (Rev. 21). Our efforts at ministering in the name of Jesus are intended to direct the world to Jesus, to the Lord who alone can heal our diseases and redeem our lives (Ps. 103; 146). We do not "bring the kingdom," for the kingdom is already here. We bear witness to it with words and deeds, and direct people toward it. This is why the marks of the true church, as outlined in Belgic Confession Article 29, are preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, and disciplining one another—not writing congressmen, political agitation, and lobbying.

No one will deny that the church has a legitimate interest in supporting the ministry of gospel proclamation with appropriate deeds, or that an important part of our task is to exhort one another to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Neither is this overture meant to hamper such forums as provided by *The Banner* and CRC's Network; in fact, we as individual Christians seeking to live out our faith do well to stimulate each other to reflection and discussion of differences on these matters. This is a necessary facet of the church as organism. But according to Church Order Article 28-a, the assemblies of the church are to limit their focus to ecclesiastical matters only. This does not mean that we may not or should not address issues that violate biblical standards of morality. However, let us in the CRC refrain from official statements on contestable social, political, and scientific

matters where such statements needlessly divide the body of Christ, or which claim for the church as institution an omniscience and competence she does not possess.

Classis Grandville overtures Synod 2012 to instruct the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA and the CRC agencies to continue to encourage all of us in the body of Christ to live all of life in the service of Christ, but at the same time to refrain from addressing and making pronouncements on issues that lie outside of the mission and competence of the church as institution, and to make such statements as they must, in a way that avoids embroiling the church in fractious political questions, weakening our witness to the King of kings.

Grounds:

1. Such statements can create the false impression that there is a single, valid Christian political position, unnecessarily polarizing the church.
2. Such statements assume a competence and authority the institutional church does not possess.
3. Such statements confuse ends and means. That is, the undoubted end we all have in view is to bear witness to Jesus Christ; however, we may have different opinions about the ways or means by which that is best done.
4. These tendencies work together to weaken the effectiveness of the church in its given mission as summarized in the Belgic Confession as the pure preaching of the Word, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the practice of church discipline.
5. This overture is consistent with Church Order Article 28-a: "These assemblies [council, classis, and synod] shall transact ecclesiastical matters only, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner."

Classis Grandville
Daniel B. Mouw, Stated Clerk

Overture 7: Do Not Require Delegates to Submit a Motion in Writing Before Synod Considers It

I. Background

A. Is synod losing its deliberative character?

Over the past decade or so there have been a number of comments made and articles written asserting that synod is losing its deliberative character. Most of this conversation has focused on the assertion that there is not enough time in synod's schedule to adequately discuss the many issues on its agenda. The flavor of such observations is illustrated by a recent *Banner* editorial on church governance that said

In 1997, synod went from being two weeks long to one week, primarily to allow for a younger and more varied delegation of elders than was possible with a two-week synod. In the decade and a half since, many delegates have complained that synod is now too rushed and that they don't have sufficient time to provide due diligence for many items on synod's agenda. High profile topics such as women's ordination and the church's position on various ethical issues tend to occupy synod's time. With the shortened schedule, synod depends

more and more on the Board of Trustees to run the shop. A phrase now heard often at synod is "We just have to trust our leaders."

(*The Banner*, June 2011, p. 9)

The lack of time to address matters is an ongoing concern. However, a *new* practice recently used by synod also raises the concern that discussion at synod is being actively discouraged. The new practice is this: On the first day of synod, delegates are told that they must submit a motion in writing to the officers of synod before it will be discussed.

B. Is synod's new practice really an old one?

Some assert that this *new* rule should not alarm us because it's really an *old* one. After all, our Rules for Synodical Procedure indicate that one of the ways a motion is properly before synod is "If, at the request of the president, the motion has been presented in written form" (*Rules for Synodical Procedure*, section VIII, B, 1, d).

Indeed, this statement has been in our synodical rules for decades. However, the way this rule is now applied is a significant and seriously detrimental departure from the way this rule was used previously. Synod has always been concerned that delegates know precisely what they are voting on and has always given the president the prerogative of asking that a motion be put in writing to ensure that. Then the written motion was read to the body by one of the officers who said something like, "Does everyone understand what the motion is?"

With the advent of modern technology, we have been able to do even better than we did in the past. We can easily project the motion on a screen so delegates not only hear the motion read by an officer but can also see the motion as it is read. Synod 2011 took another step to make this easier than before when it provided each delegate with a computer. Thus, any delegate can type out an amendment or a motion which can be displayed as they come to the microphone to speak.

All of this helps facilitate a focused discussion and should be encouraged. But the way synod is now applying the rule about written motions violates the rule itself. Synod adopted this rule not to throttle discussion, but to facilitate it. Synod adopted this rule not to prevent delegates from making motions, but to assist delegates as they made motions. This is important anytime but is especially important when we recognize that, over our recent past, more than half the delegates are attending synod for the first time.

Previous synods discussed motions and amendments when they were made in the flow of the discussion, and the presidents asked that motions and amendments be written only when they judged that the delegates were not clear on what the motion was. Current synods are now saying something that previous synods never said: Before synod will discuss a motion, you must write/type it out so it can be displayed.

C. The effect of this new practice

This new practice, designed to facilitate a focused discussion, hinders the deliberative character of synod. Imagine that a delegate goes to the microphone to speak on an issue, and an idea for an amendment is triggered by something the speaker immediately before them says. When the delegate attempts to make an amendment, the chair rules them out of order and says, "Please return to your seat, type out the amendment on your computer, and

then come back to make it.” The discussion moves on and perhaps the main motion is adopted or defeated before the delegate is able to type out the amendment. Worse yet, perhaps the delegate is so intimidated by a process that is so different from what they experience in council or classis that the delegate does not bother to offer their insight.

D. Comments from recent delegates

This new application of an old rule was discussed on the denominationally sponsored Synod 2011 online blog (cf. www.network.crcna.org). A delegate to Synod 2010 wrote, “Delegates were told, ‘Please write out your motion and give it to one of the clerks, and then we’ll consider it.’ Some did; some didn’t. Naturally, the discussion moved on while delegates so instructed wrote out their motion and synod, in essence, had to ‘back up’ to consider it when it was finally submitted.”

Another delegate to Synod 2010 wrote, “While I sympathize with the desire to get the wording of an amendment just right, I too thought that requiring delegates to write motions out and get them to the clerk BEFORE being able to talk about them was disruptive and hindered the actual discussion.”

A delegate to Synod 2011 emailed a friend saying, “Some motions from the floor were made today, amendments for the most part. That worked fine, with the chair being generous about the ‘turn it in in writing first’ rule.” The question, however, is not how generous the president is or is not. The question is *Does this new application of an old rule violate the rule itself?* The bigger question is *Does this new application of an old rule further or hinder the deliberative character of synod?*

E. The new application of an old rule is disruptive and intimidating

It is hard to know why some delegates who attempted to make a motion and were ordered to write it out did not do so and did not return to the microphone. Perhaps when they returned to their seat, they thought better of the motion and decided not to submit it. Perhaps another delegate made a similar motion and theirs became unnecessary. But perhaps this very different procedure intimidated them into silence, thereby restricting their participation in the process and perhaps also robbing synod of an excellent motion.

It is easy to understand the intent of this new application of our old rule. If delegates know they’re going to make a particular motion, it is very helpful to have the motion on a screen as soon as possible so all delegates can see its precise wording. Computers now used by each delegate make that easy to do. However, any delegate should feel free to make a motion at any time during a discussion no matter how easy or hard it is to get to a computer and no matter how computer-literate a delegate may or may not be. In some cases it may take a minute or two to get the motion on a screen, but synod has four officers and a very competent director of synodical services who can quickly facilitate that process.

II. Overture

Classis Lake Erie overtures Synod 2012 to declare that synod may not apply *Rules for Synodical Procedure* section VIII, B, 1, d in such a way that delegates are required to submit a motion in writing before synod considers it.

Grounds:

1. Such an application of this rule violates the rule's intent, namely to facilitate and clarify a motion, not to disallow it.
2. Such an application of this rule has the possibility of intimidating delegates and discouraging their active participation in the discussion of matters before synod.

Classis Lake Erie

Robert A. Arbogast, stated clerk

Overture 8: Initiate an Independent Review of the CRCNA Ministers' Pension Program

Classis Minnkota overtures synod to initiate an independent review of the CRCNA ministers' pension program in order to arrive at a more sustainable and flexible system.

Grounds:

1. As members of our denomination, we have a responsibility to provide for the financial needs of those who have served in our denomination. This goal can be achieved best when the pension system is equitable, flexible, and, most importantly, sustainable.
2. The dynamics of service are becoming more diverse and fluid, with ministers and staff working across denominational, cultural, and national lines.
3. Many professional people would prefer to manage their own financial affairs, rather than being limited to an inflexible, mandated program. More flexibility would give them the freedom to accommodate various career and life plans, investment preferences, insurance needs, housing or education, and travel opportunities.

Classis Minnkota

LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 9: Recommit the Proposed Covenant for Officebearers to a Newly Composed Committee

I. Background

Synod 2011, in considering the proposed "Covenant for Officebearers," decided to recommit that proposal back to the Form of Subscription Revision Committee II for further revision. The Revision Committee II is now proposing a revised Covenant for Officebearers (to replace the current Form of Subscription) and is seeking its approval by Synod 2012.

II. Overture

In light of this proposed revision and in further study of it, Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2012 to recommit the proposed Covenant for Officebearers to a newly composed committee, created by the delegates of Synod 2012, to continue the work of rewording the present Form of Subscription,

incorporating as a baseline the observations and recommendations of Synod 2011.

Grounds:

1. The current proposal, while making some important changes from the previous draft, still regretfully falls short in addressing all of the concerns raised by Synod 2011. A new committee needs to be established, because sending the proposed Covenant for Officebearers back to the same committee yet again would be counterproductive in making the necessary changes to a document that is at the core of what it means to be a confessionally Reformed denomination.
2. The opening sentence of the proposed Covenant for Officebearers is worded in a disjointed manner, lacking clarity regarding what, exactly, we believe about the Word of God. While there is great wisdom in beginning the Covenant by mentioning the Word of God (for authority flows from God's Word), it seems to create more confusion than clarity about God's Word. And as it is presently worded, someone who believes the Bible is full of erroneous human teaching could sign the Covenant simply by believing God's single message of love is still visible despite all the human judgmental attitudes that get in the way. Perhaps a newly composed committee would propose better wording (e.g., "We believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible Word of God, as received in the Old and New Testaments. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, we submit to it in all matters of faith, life, and doctrine.").
3. The proposed Covenant still omits the word *defend* in reference to our obligation as officebearers to our heritage and the confessions, even though Synod 2011 instructed the committee to insert that word.
4. While the proposed Covenant states that the confessions are "historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith," more needs to be said about these confessions. What appears to be lacking is that these "historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith" do "fully agree with the Word of God." Such wording is present in our current Form of Subscription (to which officebearers have all subscribed) and has great wisdom in its affirmation of the veracity of our Reformed confessions as shaped and molded by God's Word.
5. While the committee gives rationale in their report regarding why they have included the *Contemporary Testimony* in the proposed Covenant, and while we applaud the committee for their desire to reinvigorate our confessional identity as a denomination, we are concerned about the following:
 - a. The word *affirm*, which the Covenant uses for what officebearers must do for the creeds and confessions (that we *affirm* them) is the same word now used for the *Contemporary Testimony* and therefore could be interpreted as putting this testimony on the same level of authority as the creeds and confessions. If the *Contemporary Testimony* is to be included, another word ought to be used in order to avoid confusion about its role in the life of the church.
 - b. The presence of the *Contemporary Testimony* in the proposed Covenant will be problematic in that it is a "moving target," designed to be changed and updated every decade or two with

greater ease than it takes to change our confessions. While in 2012 officebearers might be able to “affirm” this testimony as presently written, many of these same officebearers might not be able to do so in 2022 when it could be rewritten. Would such officebearers therefore be unable to sign a Covenant when they changed classes or are delegated to synod? And would the weightiness of elevating the *Contemporary Testimony* actually harm this testimony in that there would be more vigorous disagreement and even division over future revisions? Affording too much weight to this testimony (as the proposed Covenant now does) would actually do greater harm to the role the *Contemporary Testimony* was designed to play, and would prevent the church from making ongoing revisions.

6. The committee in their report states that they crafted the Covenant to be something which now “encourages discussion and an ongoing process of deeper understanding and discernment” (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 455). However, the wisdom of such a desire to encourage discussion about the fundamental teachings of Reformed doctrine needs to be questioned and challenged, for what is intended by such discussion? Do we not presently have structured discussions about our Reformed confessions, and have we in our more recent past made significant changes to them? What more is being looked for, then? Is a loosening up of the wording designed to create a greater openness in the church to “discuss” in a challenging way the at-times controversial teachings of the Canons of Dort? Do we *really* wish to have ongoing questioning of the fundamentals of the Reformed faith, which our confessions currently spell out? Or what of the Christian faith? Do we *really* wish to have thick synodical agenda study reports on a regular basis that call on the church to continually re-fight old doctrinal battles? Do we *really* wish to encourage such wearying and sometimes divisive discussions with their twin study committees? Would the overall consequence of such a loosening of the wording of our current Form of Subscription with the presently proposed Covenant be not greater unity but greater division?

Classis Zeeland

Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

Overture 10: Do Not Adopt the Proposed Covenant for Officebearers

Classis Hudson overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the proposed Covenant for Officebearers that is under consideration to replace the current Form of Subscription.

Grounds:

1. The proposed Covenant for Officebearers fails to achieve its stated purpose of helping councils and officebearers clarify the meaning of subscription to the Reformed confessions. In particular, the document falls short of the Form of Subscription’s clear statement that we believe our confessions because they “fully agree with the Word of God,” which is the only ultimate reason to believe any statement of faith.

The shortcomings of the Covenant for Officebearers in this regard are particularly evident in two areas:

- The ambiguous language of the Covenant for Officebearers, in particular its affirmation of the Reformed confessions as “historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith,” fosters confusion rather than clarity about what it means to serve faithfully as an officebearer in our denomination today.
 - *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* has never been adopted by synod on par with the historic statements of faith, yet its inclusion in the Covenant for Officebearers with the words, “a current Reformed expression of faith that forms and guides us,” adds confusion about the central truths to which CRC officebearers must subscribe. Had the Christian Reformed Church intended its officebearers to hold the teachings of *Our World Belongs to God* on par with the other confessions, it would have been helpful to have such a discussion separately from the debate about the Form of Subscription revisions.
2. Even with the addition of wording that speaks of “heartily believ[ing]” the doctrines of our creeds and confessions and a promise to “promote” them in their work, the Covenant for Officebearers does not do justice to the calling of an officebearer to refute false teaching in addition to promoting sound doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:25). The revised document submitted this year fails to achieve the mandate assigned by Synod 2011 to add “positive, declarative commitments to . . . defend . . . the confessions and Reformed doctrine of the CRCNA” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 871; emphasis added).
 3. By the committee’s own admission, the document submitted to Synod 2012 is a replacement document for (see *Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 450) rather than a revision to the Form of Subscription. The assumption that the Form of Subscription cannot function as a tool of confessional vitality within the Christian Reformed Church features large in the committee’s reasoning for replacing the Form of Subscription with a new document. Yet this assumption was not part of the original mandate to the committee, which only called for it to “revise” the Form of Subscription (*Acts of Synod 2005*, p. 735). Before adopting a new document, synod would do well to debate whether a replacement form rather than a revision is actually needed.

Classis Hudson

Joel D. Vande Werken, stated clerk

Overture 11: Uphold Synod 2011’s Recommendation by Amending the Proposed Covenant for Officebearers

I. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2012 to uphold Synod 2011’s adopted recommendation to “strengthen the scope and binding nature of the commitment” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 871) by adding the phrase “which fully agree with the Word of God” to paragraph 3 as follows:

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, *which fully agree with the Word of God*. These confessions 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.

Grounds

1. The Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church (2012) as presented by the Form of Subscription Revision Committee II does not strengthen the scope and binding nature of the commitment.
2. The binding nature of the commitment would be strengthened by including the phrase “which fully agree with the Word of God.”

Classis Minnkota

LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 12: Mandate the Form of Subscription Revision Committee II to Amend the Covenant for Officebearers

Classis Columbia overtures Synod 2012 to give the synodical Form of Subscription Revision Committee II the following mandates: to amend the third paragraph of the proposed Covenant for Officebearers to read as follows:

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, *which fully agree with the Word of God*. These confessions 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.

Grounds

1. The inclusion of this historic phrase is the only way to satisfy the mandates of Synod 2011 in regard to the revised Form of Subscription, specifically,
 - a. The need to strengthen the scope and the binding nature of the commitment.
 - b. The need for a provision that those who sign this covenant will communicate their views to the church if they believe that a doctrine *is not the teaching of God’s Word* (instead of saying that a teaching is irreconcilable with God’s Word) (emphasis added).¹
2. The proposed revision of the Covenant for Officebearers makes no attempt to address the above mandates besides the mechanism synod previously considered, which remains unchanged:

Should we at any time come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is *irreconcilable* with God’s Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements (emphasis added).

¹ Acts of Synod 2011, p. 871.

Many heretical teachings can be *reconciled* with Scripture, yet the ability to *reconcile* a doctrine with Scripture does not mean it *is* the teaching of God's Word. In the same way, a person could vehemently disagree with a confessional teaching, yet have no obligation to communicate his view to the broader church.

3. Explicitly stating that our confessions fully agree with the Word of God does not mean that the confessions are infallible or inerrant, but that they contain the best expression of doctrinal truth to which we all can agree. Such agreement is the foundation of our denominational unity.

Classis Columbia

Roger D. Kramer, stated clerk

Overture 13: Amend the Proposed Covenant for Officebearers

Classis Iakota overtures Synod 2012 to delete the following paragraph from the proposed Covenant for Officebearers:

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also affirm the witness of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context.

Ground: Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony is, by intent and practice, a document bound to a particular time and place. It is designed to change as the time and place changes. Indeed, there is considerable confusion regarding what the *Contemporary Testimony* actually says, since synod adopted a major revision in 2008 and that revision has not been thoroughly promulgated in the churches. Most members are still using the original version that was published in the 1987 *Psalter Hymnal*. Given this confusion, and the unsettled text of the document in question, it is inappropriate to bind the consciences of officebearers to it.

Classis Iakota

Marvin Van Donselaar, stated clerk

Overture 14: Adopt the Covenant for Officebearers; Amend Guideline 1 in the Covenant for Officebearers

Classis Lake Superior overtures Synod 2012 to adopt the proposed Covenant for Officebearers (2012), and it requests that synod amend "Guidelines as to the meaning of affirming the confessions by means of the Covenant for Officebearers" by adding a statement that signatories will not knowingly contradict the doctrines confessed in the creeds mentioned in the Covenant.

Classis Lake Superior overtures Synod 2012 to amend Guideline 1 by adding the underlined portion as follows:

The person signing the Covenant for Officebearers affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the standards of

the church, as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God and understands that the language of this covenant by definition includes freedom to discuss and explore but not to contradict these doctrines contained in the confessions.

Grounds:

1. Concerns raised at previous synods indicated that serious problems can arise when churches or institutions allow persons to be or become members or serve on staff who at the same time are allowed to contradict the creedal foundations. It is not enough to ask for agreement alone. One needs also to spell out that which is prohibited.
2. In order to preserve the positive tone of the Covenant, it is suitable to put this understanding in the guidelines just as other provisions for accountability are kept out of the Covenant and instead spelled out in the Church Order.
3. The committee itself indicates that this is their understanding of the meaning of the Covenant when it says, "The language of submitting to Scripture in paragraph 1 and of conforming to the confessions in paragraph 4 of the Covenant for Officebearers by definition includes not contradicting the doctrines contained in the confessions." However, since the body of a report is not adopted by synod, but only the recommendations, for future reference this understanding ought to be included in a guideline that carries official acceptance and which can be consulted when issues of interpretation arise.

Classis Lake Superior
Harold de Jong, stated clerk

Overture 15: Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, Equal to the Three Forms of Unity

I. Foreword

Synod 2009 called for a three-year period of reflection by churches to "adequately study and reflect on the proposal" of the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) on its study and assessment of the Belhar Confession. Since that time, the CRCNA has encouraged and promoted study of the Belhar by individual churches in preparation for Synod 2012. As a result of its consideration and study, the council of Madison Square CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, in September 2010 passed a resolution endorsing the Belhar Confession as being on par with the three forms of unity. The Belhar has been incorporated into the worship, preaching, adult education, leadership training, and antiracism programs of Madison Square CRC and has been an effective tool and faith builder in the church's vision to be a diverse people being transformed by Christ. Madison Square is aware that other churches in the classis have also been studying the Belhar, and it invited them to join Madison in affirming this overture for Synod 2012.

II. Background

The Belhar Confession was drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa. It was written during the struggle against apartheid and in the context of terrible injustice and racism, as well as brokenness and hostility within the church itself and the world. It was formally adopted in 1986 and has become one of the forms of unity for the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, formed by the 1994 merger of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa. A full history of the development of Belhar is laid out in the 2009 IRC report to synod and is incorporated herein by reference.

The Belhar Confession has been offered as a gift to the church of Jesus Christ by the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), which have encouraged its consideration among the Reformed community worldwide. The Belhar Confession has been adopted by the Evangelical Reformed Church of Germany, the United Protestant Church of Belgium, and the Reformed Church in America. It has been under formal consideration by our own denomination since 2009.

Synod 2007 mandated the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) to study and assess the Belhar Confession and to present recommendations concerning it to Synod 2009. The IRC after completion of its mandate submitted its report and made recommendations to Synod 2009 that included embracing the Belhar Confession as the fourth confession of our church, equal to the three forms of unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) with its subsequent reaffirmation at Synod 2012 as is required by our Church Order. In response, Synod 2009 called for a three-year period of reflection to allow churches to “adequately study and reflect on the proposal and be better prepared for response” (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 604). Since that time, the CRCNA has encouraged and promoted study of the Belhar by individual churches in preparation for Synod 2012.

III. Overture

Classis Grand Rapids East overtures Synod 2012 to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, equal to the historic three forms of unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

Grounds:

1. Excellent grounds have been brought before synod in support of adopting the Belhar Confession, including the overture to Synod 2009 submitted by Classis Pacific Northwest (*Agenda for Synod 2009*, pp. 464-67), the overture to Synod 2009 submitted by Classis Grand Rapids East (*Acts of Synod 2009*, pp. 531-33), and the Interchurch Relations Committee Report (*Agenda for Synod 2009*, pp. 269-313). We would like to incorporate their grounds in support of the respective overtures herein. Additionally, we would like to incorporate herein the Synod 2009 affirmation of the substance, biblical consistency, and current relevance of the Belhar Confession (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 604).
2. The three themes developed within the Belhar Confession—the unity of the church, reconciliation of people in Christ, and God’s justice and care of the suffering and poor—are foundational biblical principles that

lie at the core of our Christian faith. These themes, extremely relevant today, are not fully developed within the current standards of unity.

The three standards of unity of the CRC were born of the persecutions of the Western Reformed church within a specific historical context. Those confessions, however, failed to check the sin of racism and ethnic oppression that so seriously plagued the church as it moved beyond its white European context. Nevertheless, Reformed Christianity spread far beyond its European base, bringing into its fold many non-white individuals and churches and, along with it, racial divisions and discrimination within the church itself. The white Reformed church failed to condemn, and in fact participated in, this racial and ethnic discrimination by society, church, and state. While the three standards of unity serve us well in the articulation of Reformed Christianity, their failure to speak prophetically against the sin of racism and to promote reconciliation and unity in the church as a response to these injustices evinces their limitations. The Belhar Confession comes to us from our brothers and sisters in Christ who speak with a different voice, borne of an experience of racial oppression, ultimate freedom through faith in Jesus Christ, and reconciliation and unity in the body of Christ. Their insight and steadfast faith come to the Western church as a great gift and a prophetic word in these times and for generations to come.

3. Our existing standards of unity failed to check the sin of white Reformed Christians in South Africa, and they also proved inadequate to call out the sin of racism in North America. While embracing these confessions, Reformed Christians in America justified colonial oppression of Native Americans/First Nations, race-based slavery, and racial segregation and discrimination supported with Scriptural interpretation. Ethnic minorities in North America still suffer from the effects of ethnic oppression rooted deeply in our institutions and culture, and *de facto* racial segregation remains evident in our churches. The Belhar Confession, in its straightforward condemnation of such injustice and call for unity in the body of Christ, provides an invaluable tool to identify those structures in our cultural institutions that have not been built on God's "plumb line" (Amos 7), resulting in a "crookedness" that hampers the CRC's vision for "God's Diverse and Unified Family." Further, the Belhar's equally clear call for reconciliation and unity emphasizes the way forward to godly repentance, forgiveness, and unity.
4. The Belhar Confession offers the opportunity for a shared Christian commitment against racial injustice and for reconciliation throughout the world as we stand together as the "righteousness of God in Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 5:21). The church of Jesus Christ has become global in a way that our forefathers and foremothers could not have imagined or addressed. Through missionary efforts, the gospel goes out to the four corners of the earth, to cultures in which racial and ethnic oppression are ongoing experiences. Those injustices are made public at an almost instant rate, and the church must respond in accordance with Scripture and in unity with Christians throughout the world, working together for God's justice and spreading the good news of freedom in Jesus Christ. While the sin of racial and ethnic oppression has been present throughout human history, the Belhar's call for justice, reconciliation,

and unity makes it increasingly prophetic and relevant in the twenty-first century. As demographics change rapidly throughout the world, our children prepare for a world very different from our own, and we must pass on to them a vigorous faith that meets the challenges they will face. We have an opportunity to leave them a legacy of four confessions that can frame their faith journey and facilitate our shared call to the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18) in this rapidly changing, diverse world.

5. Adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of unity would acknowledge the diversity of the traditions that contribute to the CRC family, extending it beyond those whose primary identities are rooted in a northern European identity. Those among us who are members of ethnic minority groups, based on our own historical and cultural experience and reflection, strongly support adoption of the Belhar as it arises from a faith struggle within a familiar context. Synod, in its 1996 report “God’s Diverse and Unified Family,” declared that “to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people and that to ignore his calling to turn this principle into experienced reality is sinful according to God’s Word and the Reformed confessions” (*Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 617). While we celebrate the spirit of the declaration, it is not always the “experienced reality” of those of us non-whites in the CRC, and we do not always feel like full-fledged members of the extended family. The Belhar Confession calls for unity in the church, that we might be a testimony to the world: “so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered.” For those of us who are ethnic minorities, the story of the Belhar is *our* story, the story of peoples who have suffered the injustices of colonial oppression, slavery, apartheid, disfranchisement, and racial oppression, and who have witnessed the unifying power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Adopting the Belhar Confession would be adding our stories to those stories out of which came the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.
6. Synod 2009, in its call for a three-year reflection period, not only affirmed the substance and importance of the Belhar Confession but also recommended that it be adopted as our fourth confession. We appreciate the fact that some who oppose the Belhar Confession as a *confession* still believe it is important enough to be included as a *testimony* of the church. However, the status of a testimony—and subordinate to the three standards of unity coming out of northern European tradition—would be an unfortunate parallel to how at times people of color already experience their status within the CRC. Rather, let us *confess* together our unity in the body of Christ.

IV. Summary

We are deeply thankful for the CRC’s commitment to “God’s Diverse and Unified Family,” and we pray that Synod 2012 will recognize the Belhar Confession as a gift from our African brothers and sisters to facilitate the vision of that document. The CRC, which for so long has invited people of all backgrounds to join them at their table, is now being invited to the table

of its African brothers and sisters, a table set with the unique gifts granted by the Holy Spirit, arising from their specific struggles, distinguished longsuffering, faith, and hope in Jesus Christ. Adopting the Belhar represents the CRC's opportunity to accept that invitation and acknowledge that the sufferings of brothers and sisters of color have borne the fruit of righteousness. It casts a light for us to see more clearly the injustice of racism among us everywhere, and to respond with both humility and a prophetic voice that rejects attempts to justify or rationalize racial discrimination here or anywhere in the world. Such a response will, through the grace of God, facilitate reconciliation and unity in the body of Christ. We pray that you will recognize the importance of this historic moment and adopt the Belhar Confession as the fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Classis Grand Rapids East
Al Mulder, stated clerk

Overture 16: Adopt the Belhar Confession; Appoint a Synodical Task Force

I overture synod to not only support the adoption of the Belhar Confession but to also appoint a synodical task force that will develop a framework by which the Belhar can and will be lived out in the life of the CRCNA as we seek healing and renewal.

Grounds:

1. The issue of apartheid moved South African Christians to look for a remedy and a call to faith and action. Issues in our church are moving us to also look for a remedy as we seek racial reconciliation, loving people who identify sexually differently from heterosexuals, understanding those of differing socioeconomic status, awareness of abuse as we pursue safe churches, and necessarily in other areas where we long for the application of truth and grace. It seems responsible to propose a plan reflecting both depth of vision and purpose related to the receiving of this gift of the Belhar. This is about movement and advancement of the kingdom. Movement in the area of justice will require sacrifice and suffering, and, in addition, pain and risk. We will make mistakes, but our learnings will continue to reshape and reform this work so that it may more effectively speak into the lives of others who have been separated, alienated, marginalized, and disregarded. To that end, let us move forward with boldness, believing and trusting that the Lord of the universe will continue to be glorified as we seek "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).
2. Any framework must be accountable in being faithful to the Word of God. Let us trust that the confession of biblical principles in the Belhar would be guarded to avoid misuse or misinterpretation. It is time to defend the faith and engage the battle in regard to the three sections of the Belhar:
 - a. In regard to unity, not only for *each* congregation to come together to discuss, reflect, plan, and implement a new direction, but for *all* to move in the power of the Holy Spirit as we are led into repentance,

humility, and hope, knowing that our unity shows the power of Christ that sin has been conquered.

- b. In regard to reconciliation, to address “bitterness and enmity” and speak out courageously against a separation from others on the “grounds of race and color” that “thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.”
 - c. In regard to justice, that “then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power,” acknowledging this “treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us,” and that it is time to turn the page of the Old Testament with the last word being “curse,” and move into the coming of the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24; 2 Cor. 4:7).
3. In Luke 4, Jesus begins his ministry, setting the framework, with these words: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Given our courage to follow the Lord Jesus, this overture requests a task force that will define a process and potential resources by which each congregation can answer his call and carry out his plan. May the Lord grant us his grace and peace for such a time as this.

James A. Panozzo, St. Joseph, Michigan

Note: This overture was submitted to the council of St. Joseph CRC, St. Joseph, Michigan, and to Classis Holland at its meeting in January 2012, but neither the council nor the classis adopted it. Therefore it is being forwarded to synod by the author.

Overture 17: Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Confession

I. Background

The Madison Avenue CRC, within Classis Hackensack, studied and reflected on the Belhar Confession in response to the request of Synod 2009 that the churches do so with a view toward making a decision in 2012, regarding its place as a fourth confession of the CRC alongside the three forms of unity. As the council and congregation studied the Belhar, they rediscovered afresh God’s command to love our neighbor deeply, to pursue justice, and to eliminate all barriers within us which are at odds with God’s vision for his diverse church.

Revelation 7:9

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne, and in front of the Lamb.

The three forms of unity—our confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Canons of Dort (1618-19), and the Belgic Confession (1561, 1618-19)—have been in use by Reformed Christians since the early 17th century. The three confessions each arise out of the context of specific historical

instances of oppression and persecution in the 16th and 17th centuries in the Netherlands. In the same way, the Belhar Confession arises out of the oppression and persecution in South Africa. But the persecution of Dutch Christians in the 17th century and the persecution of Black people in South Africa are not two isolated stories about man's inhumanity to man. Apartheid was not an isolated world event; it was the latest in a series of acts of injustice—especially impacting people of color, and people of other races and cultures—dating back over 400 years.

Even after the three forms of unity were adopted by the church, the injustice of racism prevailed. As a matter of history, in the 1800s, the slave who called herself Sojourner Truth was born (1787) in Swartekill in upstate New York, and was owned by Dutch Christians in the region of New York and New Jersey, parts of which would later become Classis Hackensack of the Christian Reformed Church.

Our three forms of unity predated the active practice of slavery in America and the brutality of the Slave Trade—they predated the dissolution of rights for Black Americans following the gains achieved after Reconstruction—they predated Jim Crow laws in the United States and apartheid in South Africa. Our three forms of unity are obviously not, as far as this particular issue is concerned, sufficient as a guide for us as Christians, or as a deterrent to resist the urges of slavery, segregation, and apartheid.

Proverbs 29:7

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

Without the Belhar (or a like confession) there is a hole in our gospel that allows for, or at least does not condemn, the sin of racism and all that may follow from that, as we can clearly see from our history.

Rather than bemoan the fact that we need to discuss the Belhar, we must repudiate all situations that caused the need for the Belhar in the first place, that is, injustice. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (Martin Luther King Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963"; U.S. pastor and civil rights leader [1929-1968]).

We do not have any confessions that expressly and specifically deplore and condemn the sin of racism. If we did (and if South Africa did), there would be no need for the Belhar. The South African churches saw the gap, and the need, and are responding. We have a gap and a need—a need no less real than that faced by South Africans past and present. What will be our response?

Some argue that the Belhar should not be adopted because it is imperfect, that it appears to allow for certain behaviors that are at odds with the Word of God. We should note, however, that in many of the arguments against the Belhar, we are applying a standard that even our existing confessions (in their original forms) cannot match. The argument that it is encouraging of the homosexual lifestyle implies that we expect the Belhar to be a stand-alone and self-sufficient document that expressly forbids or allows certain behaviors—we do not expect that of the Canons of Dort or of the Belgic Confession because if we applied that standard, it could be said that these confessions 'allowed' the practice of slavery, and black oppression, and discriminatory behavior against Catholics. In God's Word we read that even

in the midst of the many sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, God is really focused on the issues of justice and care for the poor and needy.

Ezekiel 16:49

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy."

When adopted as a confession, the Belhar will join the other three and all will be viewed and used as a unit so that our (hopefully) *four* forms of unity, all standing on the solid foundation of the Word of God, can be read together to more fully express our understanding of God's direction and will for us all.

The time is now to affirmatively declare to the world the answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?"

II. Overture

Classis Hackensack overtures Synod 2012 to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, equal to the historic three forms of unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession is a concise statement of what we believe biblically about justice, unity, and reconciliation and therefore fits the traditional definition of the character of a confession. It addresses important biblical beliefs that are not addressed in the other confessions. All confessions provide a foundation of belief that then informs how we act. It is more vital now than ever that we teach the world and the next generation what we believe as Christians about God's concern for justice, unity, and reconciliation among races and nations. This is especially relevant in teaching this to the younger generations who are concerned about justice, care for the poor, and racial reconciliation. Since the Belhar is a confession and fits the traditional definition of a confession, we should accept it as a confession.
2. Our church order clearly states that the Christian Reformed Church confesses "its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds [confessions understood] as a true interpretation of this Word" (Church Order Art. 1). Some of the things the confessions say have made us cringe and require interpretation or even change. Q & A 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism was not in the first edition but in shorter form in the second edition. After a 1998 synodical study of this question Synod 2004 declared that "Q&A 80 can no longer be held in its current form as part of our confessions" (footnote to Q&A 80 in the 2011 translation of the Heidelberg Catechism, p. 29). In 1985 we removed the end of Article 36 from the Belgic Confession about the reason "we detest the Anabaptists and other anarchists" and placed it in a footnote. This demonstrates that no confession is perfect or infallible. However, the Belhar Confession is currently our best summary of biblical doctrine about unity, justice, and reconciliation.
3. The Belhar Confession promotes a biblical perspective on racial diversity that does not even address homosexuality. It is disturbing that whenever discussions and statements about unity and diversity

in the body of Christ take place there is an automatic assumption that this includes sexual diversity. We realize that many in our society have compared the homosexual struggle for equality to the civil rights struggle. We believe this is a false comparison.

4. The Belhar Confession addresses one of the greatest unconfessed sins of the Christian church. It was over ten years ago that Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith wrote *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Faith and the Problem of Race in America*. Their conclusions reaffirmed that Sunday morning is one of the most segregated times of the week in America among Christians. The book served as a wakeup call that concluded that “despite the best intentions of evangelical leaders and some positive trends, real racial reconciliation remains far over the horizon.” The CRC has had its own anti-racism training among denominational staff and has developed an experience called DORR (Dance of Racial Reconciliation) and “Widening the Circle” for congregations. However, in the CRC as a whole we are still unable to safely talk about race and remain very much divided from each other. Most members of color or minority groups are much more aware of this than the white members of the CRC because they have to live with it. Many white people are unaware of many of the prejudices they believe and hold. Adopting the Belhar as a confession will make a strong statement about this and should force us to have an honest discussion about race and racism.
5. The Belhar Confession is biblical in stating “that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” This is biblical theology. From Jesus’ inaugural address in quoting Isaiah 61 to his statements in Matthew 25 about the “least of these,” the Bible is full of God’s special concern for the poor and oppressed. Ezekiel 16:49 clarifies that the sin of Sodom was that they were “arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.” Jesus challenged the religious leaders that they had “neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23). These important biblical doctrines remain a huge “hole in the gospel” today that the Belhar Confession fills. In addition the word *poor* is used in various ways in Scripture that are more than economic, and we are all in poverty except for the grace of God.
6. The Belhar Confession clearly expresses foundational beliefs that will help God’s vision for the Christian Reformed Church unfold as we seek to be a church that “is a diverse family of healthy congregations, assemblies, and ministries expressing the good news of God’s kingdom that transforms lives and communities worldwide.”

Classis Hackensack

Sheila E. Holmes, stated clerk

Overture 18: Receive the Belhar Confession as a Statement of Faith on Par with the Contemporary Testimony

I. Background

After much study Synod 2009 proposed that Synod 2012 adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The churches have been given three years to study and reflect on the Belhar Confession and this proposal. Classis Georgetown has taken that recommendation seriously. We have heard arguments both for and against adopting the Belhar as a fourth confession in the CRC. We believe this debate is healthy for the church. The discussions have led us to think more clearly and precisely about the sin of racism, the need to encourage reconciliation, and the nature of our confessions.

Scripture tells us that all people, regardless of color or ethnicity, are imagebearers of God. It is upon this theological foundation that we stand in opposition to slavery, oppression, injustice, and sinful policies such as apartheid. The CRC has clearly articulated this opposition to racism, as well as the need for racial reconciliation. One can find these convictions in the 1996 report "God's Diverse and Unified Family," as well as in *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*. We affirm the value of the Belhar Confession insofar as it also speaks prophetically against the evil of racism and calls us toward racial reconciliation.

Why then are we opposed to adopting the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession alongside the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort? In part, the answer to that question depends on our understanding that there is a fundamental difference between the three forms of unity and the Belhar Confession.

First, we in our congregation use the three forms of unity in our teaching and preaching. We do so because they are gospel centered. They speak to what it means to be reconciled to God through the blood of Christ. Their emphasis is on the vertical relationship between God and humanity. They summarize for us the key doctrines of God's gracious salvation and our response of faith.

It is our belief that the Belhar stands in a different category from the three forms of unity. The Belhar Confession is, by contrast, ethics centered. Its emphasis is horizontal, addressing relationships among people. In fact, it speaks quite narrowly to one aspect of human relationships. In light of all this the questions become "What will we include, or exclude, from the confessional canon next?" and "How will that affect our identity as Christians in the Reformed tradition?"

Second, we are troubled by some of the language in the Belhar Confession that is vague and therefore open to a great variety of interpretations. In particular is the statement "We reject any doctrine . . . which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church" (Belhar Confession, para. 2). So, for example, regardless of original intent, this statement has been applied to marriage and homosexuality in a manner that runs counter to Scripture and the confessions. While nearly any statement can be wrenched out of context, our confessions must be declarations that we can say *together* with full confidence.

In summary, we wish to join with Christians around the globe to speak boldly and clearly against the sin of racism and for the need of reconciliation. Our great concern is for the unity of the church. Confusion always brings about disunity and strife. The confessions should function to elucidate what is unclear. The confessions are meant to promote unity—to unify us around central truths of the faith. However, the Belhar Confession, due to its ambiguity, has great potential to do the opposite.

II. Overture

Classis Georgetown overtures Synod 2012 to receive the Belhar Confession as a *statement of faith* on par with the *Contemporary Testimony* and not grant it the status of a fourth confession.

Grounds:

1. The limited nature and scope of the Belhar Confession should keep us from elevating this document to a level equivalent to the three forms of unity.
2. The goal of the Belhar Confession is unity but, due to some vague and worrisome language, it carries the potential for confusion and disunity.
3. The Belhar Confession does prophetically call us to stand against racism in all its forms and to work for reconciliation.
4. Formally receiving this document as a statement of faith on par with the *Contemporary Testimony* conveys respect to our sister churches in Africa.

Classis Georgetown
Harold Postma, stated clerk

Overture 19: Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Testimony, Not a Confession

I. Introduction

The Belhar Confession has been before us since 2009 when synod proposed “to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC [as a fourth confession].” As part of the suggested three-year period of reflection Blythefield CRC, through its Adult Education Class, has read through and discussed the Belhar Confession line by line over three consecutive weeks. In addition, some members of Blythefield CRC have benefited from articles in various publications and discussions in several settings. In light of its prayerful study and reflection, the council of Blythefield CRC offered to Classis Grand Rapids North the following observations and overture that was subsequently adopted by the classis and is being forwarded to Synod 2012.

II. Appreciation

We appreciate the Belhar Confession as a clear, strong voice from sister Reformed churches in South Africa on matters dear to them and to us, namely, the application of our faith to issues of social justice and racial reconciliation.

III. Value of the Belhar Confession

We value the contributions that the Belhar Confession makes. For example, we note the following:

- In a compelling manner and on the basis of Scripture and the Christian faith, the Belhar Confession addresses the evils of injustice and racial discrimination, leading to poverty and human suffering.
- The Belhar Confession testifies to the world as to where Reformed churches stand today on these issues, and it likewise challenges the churches to live up to this witness.
- Along with *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* and other synodical declarations on such issues as abortion and homosexuality, the Belhar Confession can become part of Reformed churches' witness to the world on vital, practical issues, and a tool for teaching upcoming generations how our faith applies to our lives.

IV. Problems with the Belhar Confession

- The wording of the Belhar Confession is contextualized to the conditions that existed in South Africa during the apartheid era, and in places it can be difficult for readers from elsewhere to understand how the Belhar Confession applies to them and their situation.
- Adopting the Belhar Confession as is, without editing and clarifications, especially if it is made our fourth confession, may cause its potential good to be lost. The conversation over the past three years adequately demonstrates the likelihood that it could divide rather than unite the churches.
- The Belhar Confession lacks doctrinal breadth and a clear presentation of the gospel. As a confession it does not have the stature needed to stand on a par with the Three Forms of Unity.

V. Overture

Classis Grand Rapids North overtures Synod 2012 to adopt the Belhar Confession as a testimony (with the same status as *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*), with adequate explanation of its origin and historical context, not as a fourth confession.

Grounds:

1. In a compelling manner and on the basis of Scripture and the Christian faith, the Belhar Confession addresses the evils of injustice and racial discrimination, leading to poverty and human suffering.
2. The Belhar Confession testifies to the world where Reformed churches stand today on these issues, and it likewise challenges the churches to live up to this witness.
3. Along with *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*, and other synodical declarations on such issues as abortion and homosexuality, the Belhar Confession can become part of Reformed churches' witness to the world on vital, practical issues, and a tool for teaching upcoming generations how our faith applies to our lives.

4. The Belhar Confession lacks doctrinal breadth and a clear presentation of the gospel message. As a confession it does not have the stature needed to stand on a par with the Three Forms of Unity.

Classis Grand Rapids North
William G. Vis, stated clerk

Overture 20: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Doctrinal Standard; Adopt the Belhar Confession as an Official Testimony

Classis Central Plains overtures Synod 2012 to affirm the Belhar Confession in the following manner:

- A. That synod not adopt the Belhar Confession as a doctrinal standard.

Grounds:

1. It does not have the necessary content to be a basic doctrinal standard.
2. It does not state the gospel or summarize the Christian faith.

- B. That synod adopt the Belhar Confession as an official testimony.

Grounds:

1. It will affirm our fellowship and solidarity with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, Reformed Church in America, and other denominations in the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
2. It will enable us to model how to remain faithful to the gospel and to sound doctrine while reforming the church and engaging the world.
3. It will promote racial reconciliation in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Classis Central Plains
John Gorter, stated clerk

Overture 21: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Standard of Unity; Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Statement of Faith

Classis Wisconsin overtures Synod 2012 of the Christian Reformed Church not to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of unity (a fourth confession) of the CRC. We recommend that synod adopt the Belhar as a statement of faith on par with *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*.

Grounds:

1. We consider the content of the Belhar to be biblical and especially pertinent to a first-world church such as the CRCNA.
2. At the same time, we believe clarity to be an essential measure of a standard of unity. The Belhar is most clearly read through the lens of the CRC's three current standards of unity, and when removed from that framework or lifted up on a par with these other three, the Belhar

falls prey to too much misinterpretation and fails to meet this measure of clarity.

3. As a result of this lack of clarity, we believe it will be difficult for some new and existing council members to, in good conscience, sign the form of subscription. In other words, it will be difficult to unify the church fully around the Belhar as a fourth confession within the CRC.

Classis Wisconsin

John Bylsma, stated clerk

Overture 22: Receive the Belhar Confession under a New Category of Ecumenical Affirmations

I. Overture

Classis Iakota overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession, nor as a testimony on par with the *Contemporary Testimony*, but to receive it under a new category of *ecumenical affirmations*. Such a designation would allow us to benefit from the valuable aspects of the Belhar while clearly subordinating its content to the three forms of unity and not requiring officebearers to affirm its full contents.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar is unnecessary.
 - a. The themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice are already present in our confessional standards (see Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 54, 55, 69-79, 94-115; Belgic Confession articles 27-30, 32-36; Canons of Dort, First Main Point of Doctrine, Articles 3 and 14 and Rejection of Errors IX; Second Main Point of Doctrine, Articles 5 and 9). The Belhar does not, then, add any qualitatively new material.
 - b. Neither the Christian Reformed Church, nor any subset of the Christian Reformed Church, nor any other Christian denomination of note in the United States or Canada currently advocates for disunity, injustice, racial segregation, racial superiority, apartheid, or any other such thing. Indeed, over the last forty years or more, the CRC has consistently spoken out for justice, racial harmony, and reconciliation (for example in the 1996 synodical report, "God's Diverse and Unified Family"). There is, therefore, no need for a confessional document that refutes such errors or differentiates the CRC from other denominations on these matters.
2. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) has not provided sufficient grounds to adopt the Belhar, specifically, as the best *confessional* articulation of the biblical themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
 - a. Adopting a fourth standard of unity after 400 years is a momentous decision and requires a high standard of proof. That has not been met (see position paper by Dr. John Cooper, "Affirm the Belhar? Yes, But Not as a Doctrinal Standard," August 2011).¹

¹ The article is available online at www.calvinseminary.edu/aboutUs/facultyStaff/cooj/Cooper-Affirm-the-Belhar-But-Not-as-a-Doctrinal-Standard.pdf.

- b. Much of the grounds the EIRC has given for the specific inclusion of the Belhar are really grounds for the general embrace of the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
 - c. No one has objections to those general themes. In fact, we join the EIRC in robustly affirming them as vital biblical tenets (see Ground 1, b above). But in its specific treatment of those themes, the Belhar does not have the necessary content to be a controlling doctrinal standard. It does not make clear the way of salvation or outline mere Christianity. It ignores the person and work of Jesus Christ as the mediator of salvation, and does not address such foundational ideas as substitutionary atonement, regeneration, justification, forgiveness, and eternal life. It speaks of sin, but does not indicate if the nature of human alienation from God is individual and spiritual or basically social. As such, it seeks to articulate laudable goals (unity, reconciliation, and justice), but with an insufficiently robust Reformed theological grammar.
3. Consequently, rather than clarifying, as a true confession should, the Belhar introduces ambiguity. While it is possible to read the Belhar as consistent with the three forms of unity, taken on its own terms, the Belhar does not require or even favor such an orthodox reading.
 - a. The Belhar alludes to God, salvation, true faith, and the church, but does not define what is meant by these terms and, in our current pluralistic context, opens itself to widely divergent readings. For instance, Article 2 states in the “We believe . . .” section that “true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.” A little further in that article, the Belhar states that “the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God” (emphasis added). If varying convictions are never sufficient basis for distinguishing who is or is not a member of the church, what is this “true faith” that is the basis of our unity?
 - b. The Belhar fails to define key practical terms as well. In Article 2 it states that “we reject any doctrine . . . which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation.” It is reasonable to believe, on the basis of the document’s history and context, that any structurally separate and distinct church—even a separate congregation—based on “natural diversity” violates the Belhar. This would seem to preclude the continued existence of specifically ethnic ministries such as a Hispanic or Laotian church, a Korean or a Navajo classis, or any other such church formation. Separate but equal congregations or classes within the same denomination would not, in any fair reading of the Belhar, satisfy its insistence on visible unity.
 4. The Belhar does not translate well into a North American context.
 - a. There are two key aspects of interracial relationships in North America: immigration and conquest. Immigration was both voluntary

and forced (slavery). For our purposes, we will consider forced immigration as a kind of conquest. These factors vary considerably from the context of South Africa in several particulars.

- 1) First, immigration into North America, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries, has been extremely diverse and varied. We are not largely the progeny of merely two European cultures interacting with a few native cultures, but of succeeding waves of immigrants from vastly different regions of the world, the most recent being from Hispanic cultures to the south of us. Successful integration and assimilation of immigrant communities often begins with a fairly robust assertion of cultural identity, frequently centered on the church. The Christian Reformed Church's own beginnings manifest this pattern, as can be seen from Dr. Herbert J. Brinks's *Write Back Soon* (CRC Publications, 1986) and Dr. James Bratt's *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Eerdmans, 1984). Classis Pacific Hanmi is yet another manifestation of the pattern and an attempt to affirm and accommodate Korean immigrant culture within the Christian Reformed Church. In such a context, a separate church formation is not oppressive of our Korean brothers and sisters in the United States, but welcoming of them.
- 2) Similarly with regard to conquest and forced immigration. To be sure, there is a mixture of conflicting emotions and responses to the reality of conquest and slavery. We cannot deny that European immigrants conquered and isolated the people they discovered already living on this continent, or that this conquest was characterized by a too-frequent brutality and near universal disparagement of Native American cultures. The pain inflicted by Black slavery and subsequent Jim Crow laws is well known. This oppression was keenly felt by its victims. It is difficult to see one's people conquered and not question the validity of one's own ways, along with the morality and justice of the conqueror's ways.

As this came to be seen by both conqueror and conquered, an effort was haltingly made to affirm the native cultures. Initially, however, this too was imposed on the conquered peoples so that it came to seem like an effort to "pickle and preserve [the Indian] as he is in a glass" for observation by white anthropologists, or so said J. C. Morgan, Navajo Tribal Chairman from 1938-42 and an interpreter for Rev. L.P. Brink in the 1920s and 1930s.² He came to see that, as painful as it might be, some accommodation to the culture of the conquerors was necessary for the health and survival of the Navajo. In this context, the reservation that was initially established as a tool of oppression became, at least for the Navajo, a base from which to engage the larger Anglo-European culture in a way that affirmed the validity of the Navajo culture

² Morgan, J. C., "A Voice from an Indian," papers of Rev. L.P. Brink, manuscript records, Heritage Hall, Calvin College (undated), cited in "Shifting Sands: Changing Views and Changing Policies in the Christian Reformed Mission to the Indians," Verhulst, E.B. (1986), student paper, manuscript records, Heritage Hall, Calvin College.

while adapting to—and challenging—the culture of the conquering power. The eventual formation of Classis Red Mesa was part of the Christian Reformed Church's participation in this path and again is both intended and practiced as an affirmation of the Navajo people within the church.

- 3) On a smaller scale, Christian Reformed ministries to African-Americans and to immigrants from Asia, South and Central America, Eastern Europe, and Africa are reflective of these experiences. While there are broad patterns, the particulars vary considerably depending on when they immigrated, where they settled, the circumstances that led to immigration (and whether forced or voluntary), and the history of the United States and Canada over the years between initial immigration and the present day.
 - b. As a denomination that straddles the border between two different nations, the Christian Reformed Church in North America must regularly adapt to different legal environments, different cultural pressures, different patterns of industry, migration, commerce, and culture. Ministering to one another in such a context requires a great deal of flexibility. The Belhar, however, locked in to the experience of the South African church with its history of apartheid, denies us that flexibility, and would *prima facie* deny us the freedom to act as we have in our ethnic ministries.
5. The Belhar does not meet the criteria of *confession* and would be ill served to be treated as such.
 - a. In its brevity (only two pages) and narrow focus, the Belhar is misnamed as a confession and is categorically unlike the other three forms of unity in their function as doctrinal standards. In length, purpose, and content, the Belhar belongs to a different genre of twentieth-century ecclesiastical statements, such as the Barmen Declaration (1934), the Korean Declaration (1973), and the Kairos Palestine Document (2009). It should be appropriately treated as such.
 - b. While we genuinely must repent of both the past and ongoing sin of racism, adopting the Belhar as a *confession* (articulation of enduring doctrinal truth) is neither a necessary nor sufficient *confession* (acknowledgment of particular wrong). We should not adopt the Belhar as a statement of doctrine if we are intending to make a statement of contrition. To do so would be ecclesiological equivocation.
6. There is a stiff breeze in North American Christianity blowing toward the social gospel. Churches are increasingly content to do “good work” apart from a clear call to belief in the “one name that saves.” (Note, for example, the failure of the WCRC to include proclamation of the gospel in its core principles or the tendency for mainline denominations to become, in the words of one *New York Times* columnist: “Boy Scouts in ecclesiastical drag.”) Even if the Belhar does not explicitly endorse liberation theology or social gospel, its ambiguity on those points, at the

very least, unfurls a further sail to those dangerous winds as ecumenical discussions about it have demonstrated.³

7. While formal adoption of the Belhar Confession would move us closer to a formal unity with the Reformed Church in America, it would move us further away from both formal and functional unity with a host of other Reformed denominations, ranging from the United Reformed Churches in North America to the PCUSA. As an aggregate witness of the Reformed community, even the Reformed Ecumenical Council declined to include the Belhar in its constitution.
8. We judge a tree by its fruit. The Belhar has not found deep resonance in our local churches in classis. To the contrary, it has engendered strong opposition by officebearers who could not, in good conscience, sign the form of subscription if it included the Belhar Confession.
9. The observed effect of the Belhar runs counter to its stated purpose. We must name an elephant in the room. While affirming a high ecclesiology in principle, we lament our frequently broken ecclesiology in practice. Church politics are a real affront to God and a real presence in our fellowships. Given the attempted use already by one of its leading authors, Allan Boesak, to politically leverage the Belhar in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa for progressive social agendas, combined with the Belhar's ambiguity at key points, it is a near certainty that it will find similar misuse in our context. Moreover, the very documents Synod 2009 clumsily stated as controls on the Belhar (Synods 1973 and 2002) will likely undergo further discussion in coming years (note the close vote against reexamining the 1973 report by Synod 2011). If the Belhar has already been adopted as a fourth confession, it is hard to imagine that it would not guide those future discussions rather than be guided by them. How could it do otherwise? We cannot expect to use nonconfessional documents as controls on a confessional document.

II. Conclusion

In summary, the Belhar is not necessary; where a confession should clarify, the Belhar is ambiguous and open to misunderstanding; in this it runs counter to its own purpose and would sow seeds of division rather than unity; it denies the church needed flexibility in its ministry in a North American context; it lends itself to social gospel and liberation theology and consequent politicization of the church; it has failed to resonate with much of the membership of the CRC; and it will add fuel to fires already smoldering in the part of the body of Christ that is the CRC. It is, therefore, precisely because we affirm the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice that the Belhar attempted to articulate for its own context, that we cannot affirm its confessional adoption in ours.

Classis Iakota

Marvin Van Donselaar, stated clerk

³ "Necessary Testimony – Flawed Confession," Dr. John Bolt, and "Context and Confusion: What Does the Belhar Confess," Dr. John Cooper, *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, Fall 2010; also "Affirm the Belhar? Yes, But Not as a Doctrinal Standard," Dr. John Cooper, online manuscript, August 2011, pp. 12-17.

Overture 23: Endorse the Belhar Confession as a Testimony, Not as a Fourth Confession

I. Observations

The Belhar Confession is an important document that should be affirmed by the Christian Reformed Church. Synod 2012 is being asked to affirm it as a fourth confession. Classis Illiana believes it would be more appropriate to affirm it as a testimony.

A confession should state the essential content of the gospel, summarize the foundational truths of the Christian faith, and state clearly what the Bible teaches on the issues it addresses. A testimony or declaration is usually a shorter statement that applies selected Christian doctrine to specific social, economic, or political situations. In our view, the Belhar Confession fits the category of a testimony rather than a confession.

II. Overture

Classis Illiana overtures synod to

A. Endorse the Belhar Confession as an important testimony regarding God's concern for the poor, racial reconciliation, and social justice.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession is an excellent declaration of the universal principles of biblical justice and racial reconciliation directed at the recent racial situation in South Africa. It does not affirm any particular political-ideological elaboration of these universal principles.
2. When understood subject to the doctrines of the three forms of unity of the Reformed faith and framed by the CRC's current testimony, *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*, the teachings of the Belhar Confession reflect the teachings of Scripture as it teaches about the unity of God's people, the church's message of reconciliation, and the Christian social responsibility.
3. The Belhar Confession provides the CRC an historic opportunity to join forces with a partner church from the Global South, to engage biblical truths that are muted in our confessions, to hold ourselves more accountable for sins of the past, to direct our behavior in the future, and to bear witness to our commitment to the visible unity of the church and the promotion of racial reconciliation and justice.
4. Endorsing the Belhar Confession will help to promote love and justice in the body of Christ, publicly declare our commitment to biblical justice and reaffirm our stand against racism, affirm our fellowship and solidarity with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, and help to promote racial reconciliation and ethnic diversity in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

B. Refrain from adopting the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession for the Christian Reformed Church on a par with our three Reformed doctrinal statements: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession makes no attempt to summarize the foundational truths of the Christian faith. The original prologue to the Belhar Confession states that it was not meant to be a doctrinal statement: “We make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand.”
2. The Belhar Confession does not elaborate on God’s plan of redemption. It does not make clear the basic gospel truths that all humans are sinners, that salvation is God’s gracious gift of eternal life extended without regard to social status, and that salvation comes only through repentance and faith. As a consequence, it is ambiguous and open to misinterpretation and falls short as a Reformed confession of faith.
3. The Belhar Confession lacks the theological precision that a confession requires, and results in a lack of clarity. We cite the following examples:
 - a. “We believe . . . that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged.” To be sure, the Bible is full of examples of God’s heart for the poor and the oppressed. But it goes too far to say he is in “a special way” a God to them. The covenant promise—“I will be your God and you will be my people”—is for those who put their faith in God, not simply those who are poor or oppressed.
 - b. Some writers, including an original sponsor, have used the Belhar Confession to affirm committed homosexual relationships. Synod 2009 adopted a statement introducing the Belhar Confession to the CRCNA. That statement included the following sentence: “Synod further observes that, as a faithful witness to Scripture, the Belhar Confession does not negate the biblically derived statements of synod on homosexuality, including those of 1973 and 1996.” The very fact that Synod 2009 felt compelled to add that clarifying sentence is another illustration of the lack of theological precision in the Belhar Confession.
4. Throughout the history of the Christian Reformed Church, office-bearers have been required to sign the Form of Subscription to ensure uniformity of doctrine on the essential teachings of the Reformed faith. In the first article of the Belhar Confession, which describes the unity of the church, we read that this unity “can be established only in freedom and not under constraint.” And in the next sentence, “in freedom and not under constraint” means that the variety of convictions that arise within the church must be seen as “opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.” If the Belhar is elevated to a fourth confession, it will weaken our historical practice of using the Form of Subscription to ensure uniformity of doctrine on the essential teachings of the Reformed faith.
5. The Belhar Confession is intended to promote unity, but adopting it as a fourth confession has the potential to result instead in divisiveness within the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Classis Illiana

Laryn G. Zoerhof, stated clerk

Overture 24: Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Contemporary Testimony of the CRC

Classis Lake Erie overtures Synod 2012 to reject the recommendation of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee and not approve the Belhar Confession as the fourth confessional standard of the Christian Reformed Church in North America but, instead, to adopt the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony of the CRC.

I. Background

Synod 2009 proposed “to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession).” Ground 8 of this proposal “allow[s] for a three-year period of reflection (2009-2012). . . . The additional time is given to the churches to adequately study and reflect on the proposal and be better prepared for response” (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 604). That “additional time” has now passed, and the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee recommends that “Synod 2012 adopt the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession) and authorize the executive director to implement the revision of Church Order Supplement Articles 5, 23-a, and 32-d and the Public Declaration of Agreement to reflect that adoption” (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 255).

II. Overture

Classis Lake Erie overtures Synod 2012 to reject the recommendation of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee and not approve the Belhar Confession as the fourth *confessional* standard of the CRC, but instead adopt it as a *contemporary testimony* of the CRC.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession contains doctrinal assertions regarding God’s opposition to injustice and his relationship to sinful man that are vague, and the Christian Reformed Church should not enable misconstruing of these statements. For example, the Belhar Confession states “that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” While it is true that God has commanded acts of kindness to the poor and wronged, it is not clear what “in a special way” means.
2. The Belhar Confession, which advocates the pursuit of social justice arising out of a particular historical context (South African apartheid), does not serve the essential function of a confession to unite the church universal around clear, unequivocal statements about “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), unlike the existing creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church (e.g., the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, and the three forms of unity).
3. As a confessional statement, the Belhar Confession will bind every officer of the Christian Reformed Church, under all circumstances to “stand by people in any form of suffering and need,” “witness against and strive against any form of injustice,” “stand . . . against injustice

and with the wronged,” and “witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others”—without acknowledging or identifying who are the “wronged” and what “need,” “suffering,” or “injustice” the Christian Reformed Church and her officers will be confessionally bound to oppose. These sweeping and inexact pronouncements are susceptible to abuse and manipulation. In one instance, a church leader reportedly insisted that the Belhar Confession demands the defense of the full rights of gay members of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). That leader was the chair of a URCSA synodical committee appointed to clarify the theological and moral status of homosexual unions and the ordination of practicing homosexuals into ministry (*The Banner*, Jan 1, 2009, World News: “Allan Boesak Quits Church Posts over Homosexuality Policy, Belhar”).

4. The current confessions of the Christian Reformed Church already speak generally to the duty of people toward others under the Ten Commandments and the role of government in societies. (See, e.g., Belgic Confession, Article 36; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 105-107, 110-113.)
5. The Belhar Confession enriches our understanding of injustice and focuses on the importance of opposing it in many forms, and while it may bind us liturgically to our brothers and sisters in South Africa who gave rise to the confession, nonetheless, the Belhar Confession does not rise to the level of a confessional standard for the reasons stated above. It can be used constructively as a contemporary testimony. *Our World Belongs to God*, adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1986, is a helpful precedent.

III. Conclusion

For the above-stated reasons, Classis Lake Erie asks that Synod 2012 reject the recommendation of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee and not approve the Belhar Confession as the fourth confessional standard of the CRC but, instead, adopt the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony of the CRC.

Classis Lake Erie
Robert A. Arbogast, stated clerk

Overture 25: Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Testimony

I. Background

In 2009, the synod of the CRCNA proposed to Synod 2012 “the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.”

II. Overture

Classis Arizona overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America,

but, rather, to adopt the Belhar Confession as a testimony similar to *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*.

Grounds:

1. The content of the Belhar Confession does not meet the standards of a form of unity. It neither summarizes the Christian faith nor does it elaborate God's plan of redemption.
2. The Belhar Confession lacks the gospel emphasis on repentance and forgiveness in the power of Christ as the heart of reconciliation and, really, the only real hope for it. Instead the focus seems to be on the social, economic, and political arenas as the way to achieve reconciliation and unity.
3. Adopting the Belhar as a confession despite the deficiencies mentioned above will undermine our confessional integrity.
4. The Belhar is potentially divisive. It is supposed to promote unity. If it becomes a confession, then all officebearers must subscribe to it. Those who cannot may leave office. Some may leave the CRC.
5. Adopting it as a testimony does give recognition to its value as a statement on the important issues of justice, reconciliation, and unity.

Classis Arizona

Derek G. Van Dalen, stated clerk

Overture 26: Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Descriptive Testimony

Classis Atlantic Northeast overtures Synod 2012 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America to adopt the Belhar Confession as a descriptive testimony and not as a defining confession.

Grounds:

1. In the polity and practice of the CRCNA, a testimony (such as *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*) declares and describes what the church generally believes, while a confession (such as each of the three forms of unity) defines and binds the doctrine of the church.
2. The Belhar Confession addresses important issues of unity, justice, and reconciliation. These should be part of our testimony and ministry even if the Belhar is not granted confessional status.
3. If the Belhar Confession is adopted as a binding confession, the individuals, councils, and classes who have reasonable disagreements with some of its points would be denied the freedom of continuing to voice their disagreements. This could harm the unity of the church, which contradicts one of the Belhar Confession's own goals.

Atlantic Northeast

Christopher A. Fluit, stated clerk

Overture 27: Do Not Adopt the Belhar as a Fourth Confession; Adopt It as a Statement with the Same Status as the Contemporary Testimony

I. Preamble

Synod 2009 proposed “to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession).” Ground 8 of this proposal “allow[s] for a three-year period of reflection (2009-2012). . . . The additional time is given to the churches to adequately study and reflect on the proposal and be better prepared for response.”

Classis Niagara of the CRCNA, in response to Synod 2009’s recommendation to study and reflect on the Belhar Confession, overtures Synod 2012 to not adopt the Belhar as a fourth form of unity, yet give it the status of a testimony like *Our World Belongs to God*.

II. Introduction

Racism is a terrible sin that has humiliated, belittled, and destroyed countless people through the ages. Throughout history racism has taken on many forms. It has appeared as slavery, oppression, apartheid, and in the Holocaust, to name a few. Regardless of its form, racism effectively denies that all people are created in the image of God. Scripture makes clear that in Christ there are no divisions of race. In Christ “there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11, NIV).

Unfortunately the church has not always proclaimed this truth. Some churches have remained silent about racism, while others have manipulated Scripture to make racism appear acceptable, even honorable. In both silence and endorsement, racism was perpetuated in Dutch Reformed churches—and not only in South Africa; it is a sin of our family. This pains our family and causes much regret.

We thank our brothers and sisters in South Africa who have done much hard work in promoting reconciliation and peace where there has been division. We are thankful for the time and efforts that they have poured into the Belhar Confession. We are grateful that they have shared the Belhar Confession with us, as it reminds us how easily racism can hide in our churches.

North American churches have also struggled with racism. We recognize our endorsement of slavery and continued mistreatment of people different from ourselves. This was predated by mistreatment and often outright slaughter of Native Americans. Both ways of treating people with different color skin are disgraceful and offensive to God. Furthermore, racism isn’t simply a historical problem. It continues today in how we treat people of Middle Eastern descent with fear, especially since the 9/11 attacks. We also note our disrespectful treatment of many legal and illegal immigrants.

A. History of racism in the CRC

The CRCNA, while not guiltless, has not remained quiet on the issue of racism and in numerous cases has put words into action. Synod 2007 recognized that the decision to send missionaries to China instead of Africa “was motivated in part by racist values.” For this reason we took time to pray and to confess our sin as a denomination.

This was not the only time our denomination has struggled with racist tendencies. The Timothy Christian School situation in Cicero, Illinois, in the 1960s is just one example of that. Another would be the white flight mentality as we moved our churches into the suburbs to avoid contact with the increasingly diverse community that moved into the cities.

In all of this we recognize that we cannot ignore the reality of racism in our churches and in our denomination. We must fight against this sin as we seek to love and embrace our fellow humans regardless of race or ethnic background.

B. The benefits of the Belhar Confession

Within this context we receive the Belhar Confession. This document does well to call us to unity and to love each other regardless of differences. Given our continent's, and our own denomination's, history, this important document forces us to wrestle with racism.

We recognize its desire to remain true to God's Word. It is very difficult to argue against its basic premise from a biblical basis. Thus we see value in this document within our context in the CRCNA. Yet we also note some significant concerns.

C. Undefined presuppositions

The Belhar confession cannot stand alongside the current three forms of unity because it presumes, but does not explicitly state, that which is fundamental to the faith. It is true that each of the three forms is incomplete and deficient, and that they do not fully summarize every doctrine of the Christian faith. However, each can stand on its own as a summary of God's plan of salvation, yet none depends on the others to be understood correctly. This cannot be said of the Belhar, as many terms used in the Belhar can be understood differently depending on the theological leanings of the reader.

The first term which is not clearly defined is the term *gospel*. This term ought to be clear, as it is what we are called to preach, teach, and defend. However, the Belhar confession simply refers to the gospel without explicit definition of what the gospel of Jesus Christ is. The word *gospel* first appears in the Belhar confession in article 3, where it states:

We believe . . . that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

This point could easily be understood and applied according to the ideology of the humanist gospel. As this point focuses on the reconciling power of the gospel, it should begin with the how the gospel of Jesus reconciles man to God. Yet, since it does not, the gospel can easily be diminished to nothing more than reconciliation between two people, and that the whole purpose of the incarnation of Jesus is to show people how to be reconciled to each other. This ambiguity is profoundly dangerous, especially in our North American context, which is saturated with the ideology of humanism.

A second term that begs greater clarification is the term *reconciliation*. No clear distinction is made between Christ reconciling us, and people reconciling with each other. When Christ reconciles us to himself, it is not reconciliation between equal parties. As fully God, it is only his power, strength, and

completed work that enables reconciliation. On our own, it is impossible to even begin to pursue this process of reconciliation. It is fully by God's grace. On the other hand, reconciliation between people is always between equals. Each party must take equal responsibility in pursuing reconciliation. We cannot assume that perfect reconciliation will ever take place, as sin will always stain thoughts and motives. Yet we must not equate Christ's reconciling us to himself with our being reconciled to each other.

The third term that needs greater clarity is the term *church*. Article 28 of the Belgic Confession makes a clear distinction between the active work of the triune God in establishing the church, and the subsequent obligations of the church. No such distinction is made in the Belhar, thus leaving it open to a humanistic interpretation, that the church is what we do, and not what God has established.

We could even argue that the Belhar focuses much more on what we do than on what God has done. Consider what is written in the rejection portion of point 2:

Therefore, we reject any doctrine . . . which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation.

Separate church formations and denominations are what people do, not what God does. Likewise, the Belhar also states:

Therefore, we reject any doctrine . . . which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

Determining membership of the church as phrased here is again about what people do, not what God does. The Belhar fails to make a distinction between the actions of God in establishing the church and the obligations of the members of the church. The Belhar appears to slide back and forth between usages of the word *church* in its unique points; this requires careful interpretation to prevent misinterpretation.

D. *Theological concerns*

As already noted, the word *gospel* is not explicitly defined in terms of the propitiatory and satisfactory reality that is accomplished by Christ alone. Therefore it is possible to conclude that salvation is a matter of proper behavior, good conduct, and social equality. To suggest, as the Belhar perhaps unwittingly does, that unity and other behavioral matters are the gospel is to undermine the gospel of Jesus Christ; in so doing, it provides a false hope. The timeless words of C. S. Lewis are instructive in this manner:

We must try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up 'nice'; just as we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat. But we must not suppose that even if we succeed in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content with their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world—and might even be more difficult to save.¹

¹ C.S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity" in *The Complete C.S. Lewis: Signature Classics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 169-70.

Every discussion about the new life of the believer must be fully grounded on the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as the efficient cause of the new life. If this foundation is not firmly set, the secondary implications of unity and reconciliation as a result of the new life will never come about. Unity is only achieved through the objective reality of the gospel, which necessitates regeneration. Without the “gospel as the power of God unto salvation” (cf. Rom. 1:16), there can be no interpersonal reconciliation.

According to Thabiti Anyabwile, author and pastor of First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman, it is this confusion that has limited efforts of racial reconciliation in the past:

So many well-intentioned racial reconciliation efforts . . . seem to major on race and minor on Christ and his work. . . . Some approaches seem to suggest that merely embracing the “others” ethnicity and culture somehow enhances our embrace of Christ. I think the opposite is the way forward. It’s as we tightly cling to Jesus that we find ourselves embracing other people clinging to the Savior. The cross reconciles [humanity] to God and [humanity] to each other.²

Unless our emphases are on the necessity of Christ’s life and death on behalf of the believer, our efforts at unity and interpersonal reconciliation are in vain.

The Belhar Confession states humanity’s need for unity in such strong terms that it renders unclear humanity’s greater need for reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. In John 17:21b Jesus emphasizes that the heart of evangelism is union with God the Father and God the Son when he says to the Father, “May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Christ’s followers are unified not first in how they act, but first as they know a more significant union with God through the blood of Christ. Union with each other serves as evidence of this more significant union with God. We fear that the Belhar is aiming only for the fruit of true conversion, not the root of the unity problem—being reconciled to God!

The preceding observation is evidence that the Belhar is theologically unclear. There is a confusion of theological emphasis as it appears to place primary importance on horizontal unity with man, as though this will strengthen our vertical unity with God. This emphasis appears to parallel a humanistic assumption that we can better ourselves through hard work—in this case the hard work of race reconciliation. Little emphasis is given to human depravity and our need to first be reconciled to God through Christ by means of Christ’s atonement and the Spirit’s power. Jesus evidenced this in his summary of the law in Matthew 22:34–40. Loving God above all must lead to love for his imagebearers. The Belhar’s human-centered theology will in the end fail to achieve its own stated goals because it is anthropocentric rather than theo/Christocentric. Therefore, when the Belhar Confession focuses only on the fruit of conversion—*viz.*, unity with humanity—it effectively bypasses a much more serious need for the perpetrators of racism to be reconciled to God through the blood of Christ.

Much has been said by Professors John Bolt and John Cooper regarding the claims of *status confessionis* in relation to the content of the Belhar

² Thabiti Anyabwile, “Bearing the Image” in *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2009), p. 74.

Confession. Such a confession must be made when the very gospel is at stake in the church. To say that an improper manifestation of Christian love in the life of the believer caused racism *is not the same as saying* the gospel itself is being denied or its objectivity being challenged.

The gospel is a declaration of an objective, true, reality. This reality is that in Christ, God has won victory over life and death and made possible our justification and sanctification. Daily, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to make that new reality our personal reality. The good news of the gospel is that our living into the new reality is not what saves us; nor is it the quality of our faith or the quality of our life that saves us; but it is Jesus Christ, the object of our faith, that saves us. Granted, the efficacy of the working of the Holy Spirit is indicated by our living; however, it is not determined by it. And so, we must ask, if *status confessionis* requires that the gospel be jeopardized, do we want to give racism, or any sin for that matter, that kind of authority to redefine or to limit the reality of the gospel's power? It seems clear that victory over sin and death implies that no amount of sin can overcome the new reality that is offered in Christ Jesus.

We are concerned with how the Belhar stands in relation to our current three forms of unity. Since the Belhar calls for a rejection of all theology that does not encourage unity, this appears to place the Belhar at odds with our other three confessions, given that these confessions themselves point to a division within the church itself. They were written to distinguish the beliefs of Reformed churches from other theological traditions of the day. In our current Reformed confessions we discover language referring to the Mass as "condemnable idolatry" and detesting the "errors of the Anabaptists."

While it is true that, historically, the CRCNA has taken issue with these statements, nevertheless we have opted not to change these confessions due to the historical nature of these documents. Rather, these oppositions have been noted as footnotes in subsequent printings of these documents. Since the CRCNA has chosen not to alter our existing confessions, these divisive words still stand. While the Belhar calls for unity in the church and for the end of all division, the climate in which our current forms of unity were drafted was one in which the church was seeking to make just a division for the sake of accurately representing the teachings of Scripture. We continue to use these confessions and catechisms as a marker of continental Reformed theology—in distinction from other ways of thinking. What's more, with humility, we teach that Reformed hermeneutics and theology are the most accurate way to understand and summarize the doctrines of Scripture.

This is done as a mark of contradistinction to other interpretations. It should be clear that subscribing to the three forms of unity is itself a point of distinction from other parts of the church. With this in mind, how are we to understand what the Belhar says regarding membership in the church? The Belhar states, "We reject any doctrine . . . which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church."

Since we should always admit that our human minds err and our systems cannot grasp the full measure of divinity, we must admit that our theological systems and hermeneutical principles are "human" and socially formed. However, are we unwilling to require a standard of right belief for membership in the institutional church? In early church history, right theology and

orthodoxy were marks of the church. This continues explicitly in the Belgic Confession (Art. 29). As we attempt to grasp the mysteries of Scripture, it is evident that this will always be done to the exclusion of some other ideas or doctrines.

There are some who will counterpoint the above by saying that the Belhar is subject to the theology of the other confessions and therefore must be interpreted and applied in accordance. For instance, Dr. Peter Borgdorff has said,

The Belhar is not a confession in the historic sense of “being like the others.” Not only because it arose out of a different historic context, but it’s the first confessional statement from a church in the global south, it is influenced by their form of expression and teaching and conviction, and it comes from a people who themselves have suffered the consequences of maltreatment. In that sense, it has a different flavor than a teaching instrument or an apologetic; it is more the expression of heart of a people who are now responding to a new age, who are speaking to their own history, who want to bear testimony to what their experience is as God’s people and as members in the Reformed community.³

Following that expressed statement, Borgdorff goes on to conclude that the Belhar “functions as a supplement to the other forms of unity.” Even in his own words Borgdorff acknowledges that the Belhar is less of a confession and more of a testimony. If, as we have stated, a confession is intended to clarify the gospel and summarize the teachings of Scripture, it should be able to stand on its own. What’s more, in the CRCNA the three forms of unity have always been our rule for interpretation. As a rule for interpretation the three forms of unity are express guidelines within which we do the task of the theology and through which we can properly understand the whole teaching of Scripture. What does it mean that the Belhar, if elevated to a confession, requires its own interpretive framework? Confessions in the CRCNA have always been the framework. If the Belhar requires a framework, it is evidently something other than a confession.

The Belhar is in an entirely different category than our current three forms of unity. The current three forms of unity serve mainly as a vertical description of who God is and how God interacts with humanity. The Belhar focuses on the horizontal relationship between people. This horizontal relationship serves as a testimony to who God is. Our current confessions are statements about God; the Belhar is a statement about how people should respond to each other in response to God. To this end, it seems appropriate for the Belhar to be accepted at testimonial status. A testimony is our response to the gospel. A testimony is a call for our actions to speak to who God is.

It has often been stated that the Belhar is incomplete as a confession and ambiguous in its definitions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Understanding the Belhar as a testimony, or even a call to reconciliation and action, removes these challenges from the integrity of the Belhar. Understanding the Belhar in this way frees the church to answer its questions of action and right doctrine. Submitting the Belhar as a testimony requiring interpretation through

³ Peter Borgdorff, *Adopt the Belhar? Pro & Con: A Discussion Between Peter Borgdorff and John W. Cooper*, November 3, 2011, Lansing, Ill.. Accessed from http://network.crcna.org/content/synod/belhar-panel?utm_source=CRC+Pastors&utm_campaign=cbf46acfea-For+CRC+Pastors&utm_medium=email on Nov. 17, 2011.

the content of the three forms allows us to approve of the general thrust toward justice and reconciliation, affirm the hardship and faithfulness of the church in South Africa, and encourage such efforts in our own contexts; all the while, we can avoid the inherent difficulties and ambiguities in the aforementioned aspects of the Belhar Confession.

III. Conclusion

We want to acknowledge the benefits and the limitations of the Belhar as a confession. It certainly has value for our denomination and our North American context, but its limitations make it impossible for us to receive it with confessional status. As a result, we move that the Belhar Confession be received in a manner and status similar to that of the Contemporary Testimony. Like the Contemporary Testimony, the Belhar Confession challenges us, as a denomination, to live out our faith in our specific social context.

IV. Overture

Classis Niagara overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession. We overture that Synod 2012 consider adopting the Belhar as a statement with the same status as the Contemporary Testimony.

Grounds:

1. Such action recognizes the limitations and ambiguities of the Belhar Confession as it requires the existing confessions to be interpreted properly.
2. Like the Contemporary Testimony, the Belhar challenges our denomination to live out our faith in our context.
3. Such action honors the importance of the Belhar Confession.
4. Such action recognizes our need for racial reconciliation.

Classis Niagara
John TeBrake, stated clerk

Overture 28: Affirm the Belhar Confession as a Declaration or Testimony

Classis Yellowstone overtures Synod 2012 to affirm the Belhar Confession as a declaration or testimony, but not as a doctrinal standard, making it subordinate to the three forms of unity.

Grounds:

1. The three forms of unity, while complementary to each other, are able to stand independent of each other as doctrinal standards on their own merits. The Belhar Confession is not.
2. The Belhar Confession was written with the three forms of unity as a necessary background to its explanation of Scripture. For example:
 - a. The Belhar Confession does not clarify the doctrine of the atonement, referring only to “Christ’s work of reconciliation” (Belhar, 2.1¹). The three forms of unity are needed to provide content to this otherwise ambiguous phrase.

¹ The subpoints of each article are numbered for easy reference, e.g., 2.2 = Article 2, 2nd bullet point.

- b. The Belhar Confession affirms “that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church” (Belhar, 2.6) but does not explain what knowledge is contained in true faith. The three forms of unity are needed to provide the content of our faith.
- c. The Belhar Confession talks of “the message of reconciliation” (Belhar, 3.1), but immediately addresses reconciliation between people. It skips over Christ’s primary reconciliation between God and humankind, which is necessary and foundational to any reconciliation between people. The three forms of unity are needed to explicate Christ’s primary reconciliation between God and humankind.
3. The Belhar Confession needs to be subordinate to the three forms of unity to keep it faithful to Scripture.
 - a. As a declaration or testimony subordinate to the three forms of unity, the Belhar Confession is a powerful statement affirming biblical principles of compassion, justice, reconciliation, and community that are universal.
 - b. Apart from the three forms of unity, parts of the Belhar Confession, in particular its statement “that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” (Belhar, 4.2), can be twisted to support unbiblical positions.
4. By affirming the Belhar Confession as a declaration or testimony, we embrace the good gift offered by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, helping us continue to confront injustice, racism, and disunity, while at the same time ensuring that we maintain our theological and biblical grounding by having the three forms of unity guide its interpretation and application.

Classis Yellowstone

Delbert D. VanDenBerg, stated clerk

Overture 29: Delay Decision on the Adoption of the Belhar Confession

St. Joseph CRC of St. Joseph, Michigan, overtures synod to delay the decision on the adoption of the Belhar Confession, as a fourth confession or any other official statement of faith, since its adoption threatens to lead the church into the formal advocacy of an activity, the morality of which is seriously in doubt and has not been officially determined by the church; namely, the forcible redistribution of wealth.

Grounds:

1. Adoption of the Belhar Confession would necessarily draw the denomination into a growing emphasis on economic and social justice issues, which almost always involve advocacy for some form of the forcible redistribution of wealth (the forcible taking of resources by the government, which legitimately belong to one person, and making them the “rightful” possession of another person).
2. While the Belhar Confession does not openly assert this (an issue addressed in Ground 3), it leads the church in this direction by being unclear about what exactly is meant in section 4, paragraph 2, when it

states, “that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.”

For one thing, it is unclear who is being referred to by “the destitute, the poor, and the wronged.” Following are the possible options:

- a. The Belhar is identifying three separate groups, all those who are destitute, all those who are poor, and all those who have been wronged. This seems unlikely since there is little difference between being destitute and being poor, and if all those who have been wronged were a group, that group would include the entire human race. Yet this is one possible understanding.
- b. The Belhar is identifying one group of people who share these three characteristics—they are destitute, poor, and have been wronged. This seems more likely, but even here there are two very different ways of understanding this:
 - 1) Those who have become destitute or poor specifically because they have been wronged (as opposed to those who have become destitute or poor for other reasons).
 - 2) All those who are destitute or poor, because all who are destitute or poor have been wronged.

If we take understanding 1 above, we simply find here a reminder that neither God, nor God’s people, can turn a blind eye to those who are being oppressed into poverty and destitution. We would be in strong agreement with that reminder, judging it to be clearly in line with God’s Word and will.

However, if we should take understanding 2 above, we find a significant problem. For one thing, understanding 2 is not faithful to Scripture, which in many places (such as Prov. 6:10-11; 11:24; 21:17; 23:21; and 28:19) shows us that the cause of poverty is not always injustice. Poverty can often be self-inflicted, or come to us through the fault of no one. But second, by linking all poverty to acts of injustice, the confession would essentially

- criminalize any ideology that allows for the creation of wealth, judging it to be an “unjust” system. (This notion would be bolstered in the minds of those who would understand the confession this way by the Belhar’s statement at the end of section 4, “Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.”)
- define the work of God in the area of poverty as an act of justice rather than mercy, placing it firmly within the realm of the state for official action rather than in the church.
- define the specific act of God’s justice with regard to poverty as the forcible taking from those who have wealth (those who have committed the perceived wrong, or have benefited from the perceived wrongs that have been committed by others) and giving it to those who are poor.

It is not hard to see how taking understanding 2, which the confession clearly allows for, due to its vagueness, leads us directly to a policy of the forcible redistribution of wealth.

This possible understanding only becomes a more likely conclusion for people to draw when we ask what the confession means when it says that God is the God of this group of people “in a special way.” Again, there are only a couple possible options:

- a. God has a *special concern* about the difficult situation that these people are in.

This would complement well understanding 1 above: that these people are poor and destitute, not for other possible reasons, but specifically because they have been wronged. And, like that statement, we would be in strong support. However, there is another, equally possible understanding of what it means that God is their God, “in a special way,” which would, again, lead us toward the redistribution of wealth.

- b. God is a God to these people in a *different* way than he is to others. This could mean many things, including that
 - He is more concerned about them than he is about others.
 - He has a preference for them over others.
 - They, in essence, are his chosen people.

It is this understanding that lies behind the Social Gospel and many other modern day distortions of the genuine gospel of Jesus Christ to which we have pledged our lives.

The point need not be made, or proven, that it is the stated intention of the Belhar Confession to lead us toward the advocacy of the forcible redistribution of wealth. We do not know if it is or is not. However, we believe it can clearly be demonstrated that the confession is sufficiently vague as to open itself up to this interpretation. Indeed, recent events within the Reformed world (as identified in Ground 3 below) trouble us greatly, as they show that this is in fact the understanding that many within the Reformed community have already embraced.

3. The Accra Confession (2004), which is the philosophical, theological, and political offspring of the Belhar Confession (1986) (see following Note), takes this position to its logical conclusion by making belief in this kind of public policy an element of true faith. It also proclaims that “neo-liberal” economics, which it defines, in part, by belief in private property rights and free market methods, must be rejected by all Reformed Christians, “in the name of the gospel.”¹

Note: The connection between the Belhar and Accra Confessions is well attested and cannot be ignored. In fact, the Colloquium on the Accra and Belhar Confessions, held January 15-17, 2010, outlined this connection, and their concluding document (see Appendix), approved by its participants, including CRC members Mr. Steve Kabetu, Rev. Esteban Lugo, and Mr. Peter Noteboom, makes this position a matter of public record within the Reformed community. Any assertion that we can adopt the Belhar without essentially adopting the Accra is short-sighted.

¹ Accra Confession, Number 25.

4. The notion of “economic justice” (as it is defined in our day as *redistributive* justice), does not have historically Reformed roots. In fact, the Belgic Confession in Article 36 declares that those who introduce the “common ownership of goods” (which a belief in economic justice essentially does by its reduction, or outright removal, of the concept of private property rights) actually work to subvert justice rather than to establish it.
5. In addition, Reformed theologians such as John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper clearly articulated that a firm belief in private property rights was necessary for a civil and peaceful society. Calvin, in his *Institutes*, in explaining what the proper role of civil government is, includes this central task, “that every man’s property be kept secure. . . .”²

And in his sermon on 1 Samuel 8, Calvin makes clear that this security of private property was not just a security from other individual persons, but also a security from the government. While acknowledging the magistrate’s authority to require certain taxes be paid by the people for certain tasks which benefited all the people, he added,

Their [the citizens’] subjection does not mean that it is ever legitimate for princes to abuse them willfully. . . . This authority [to exact taxes] is therefore not placed in the hands of kings to be used indiscriminately and absolutely. For what a confused state of affairs would be brought into the world if the distinction between property and goods [meaning the distinction between one person’s property or goods and those of another person] were not retained? Therefore, the goods of private persons are not placed under the power and will of kings.³

Calvin went on to explain that the King (government) must operate in full compliance with the law of God in all his doings. In other words, he is not a law to himself even in his official capacity as king, but he too, just like his subjects, must operate within God’s law in both his public and private activities. We will return to this matter in Ground 8.

Similarly, Kuyper, in reference to the power of the government to tax, explained

The decision [to tax] cannot, however, in these cases, unilaterally rest with the magistrate. The law here has to indicate the rights of each, and the rights of the citizens over their own purses must remain the invincible bulwark against the abuse of power on the part of the government.⁴

It is from this basic belief: that authority given to men is never absolute over other men, but must conform to the law of God, that Kuyper, building upon Calvin and many others before him, expounded the doctrine of Sphere Sovereignty.

Neither the life of science nor of art, nor of agriculture, nor of industry, nor of commerce, nor of navigation, nor of the family, nor of human relationship may be coerced to suit itself to the grace of government. The state may never become an octopus, which stifles the whole of life. It

² Calvin, John; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.xx.3.

³ Calvin, John. Sermon on 1 Samuel 8:11-22.

⁴ Kuyper, Abraham; “Lectures on Calvinism,” Hendrickson, p. 83.

must occupy its own place, on its own root, among all the other trees of the forest, and thus it has to honor and maintain every form of life which grows independently in its own sacred autonomy.⁵

The role of the state, based upon centuries of Reformed thinking is, in fact, to *secure* the private property of its citizens, and the free exercise of our God-ordained liberties, and not to force its will upon us in these spheres. In this way, the government provides an atmosphere where we can freely worship God with our whole lives.

6. With respect to God's law, and the requirement that even the government live within it, the spirit behind the redistributive model seems to be at odds with the 10th Commandment, and the practice of the forcible redistribution of wealth appears to be an offense against the 8th Commandment. Indeed, without a clear foundation of private property rights the entire second table of the law is undone.
 - a. "Honor your father and your mother." Children belong to their parents.
 - b. "You shall not murder." The lives of people belong to them and cannot be taken away.
 - c. "You shall not commit adultery." Husbands and wives belong to their spouses.
 - d. "You shall not steal." Each person's possessions rightfully belong to him/her and cannot be taken away.
 - e. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Even the reputation of your neighbor belongs to him/her and cannot be harmed/taken away.
 - f. "You shall not covet . . ." simply the desire to possess what someone else currently possesses is a sinful state of mind.
7. In addition to the redistribution of wealth's apparent direct conflict with the commandments, there is additional biblical support to substantiate the claim that private property rights are given to us by God (Gen. 1:26; Ex. 22:1-15; Acts 5:3-4), and that the failure to respect them (even by the government) is sin (1 Sam. 8:1-18; 1 Kings 21:1-19).
8. While God does continually call us to share what rightfully belongs to us with those who are truly in need, our obedience in this, if it is to truly please God, must be a matter of the heart and not a matter of compulsion. The Scriptures are very clear that God's intentions in our care for the poor are designed to achieve much more than the simple meeting of their material needs. The entire process of meeting those needs is intended to draw us closer to one another and to God, in love. Any coercion in this area fails to please God, for it creates an atmosphere of both animosity and entitlement, rather than compassion and accountability (2 Cor. 9:6-15).

Given all of these things, we ask that synod delay any decision on the adoption of the Belhar Confession in order that synod might study the theological record on this issue, and clearly articulate for the church, whether the forcible redistribution of wealth is a morally acceptable practice. Without doing this, synod may be leading the church

⁵ Kuyper, Abraham; "Lectures on Calvinism," Hendrickson, p. 83.

into a grievous sin (Matt. 5:19), and forcing many members of the denomination into a crises of conscience, which will create much pain and division in the body of Christ. Indeed, we already sense a great, and growing, division within the church surrounding this issue. We believe that now is the time to bring clarity, and with clarity, unity to the church on this very important issue.

Council of St. Joseph CRC, St. Joseph, Michigan
Randy Boersen, clerk

Note: The above overture was presented to Classis Holland in January 2012 but was not adopted.

Appendix

Message from Stony Point Colloquium – A Message from the Colloquium on the Accra and Belhar Confessions

Stony Point, New York, USA, January 15-17, 2010 (Martin Luther King Day Weekend)

To the Delegates to the Uniting General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) and member churches of the Caribbean and North America Area Council of WARC.

From participants of the Colloquium on the Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth and the Belhar Confession (which is being considered by several North American churches).

Grace and peace to you in the indwelling Spirit of love and justice, known to us in Jesus Christ.

Summary

Colloquium participants recommend support for the themes of both Accra and Belhar statements of confession of faith, seen as complementary treatments of race and class divisions in the church. We encourage members of the North American Reformed Churches to give attention to the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids this summer. This message lifts up our discussion of power and the empowerment of women in relation to the racism and poverty that challenge the democratic ethos of our tradition. We urge the new World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) to continue its covenanting, witnessing, and confessing heritage. We encourage reading the Accra statement or confession in the current “great recession,” affirming its stand against idols of de-regulation, unlimited consumption, and unlimited compensation for some. The words of the Belhar Confession came alive as we prayed at the news of the grievous earthquake in Haiti: “the church must stand by people in any form of suffering and need.” The group supports generous aid for re-building Haiti, cancellation of debt, and opening of US and other agricultural markets. With regard to the Kairos document recently put forth by Palestinian Christians, this also was seen, in the light of Accra

and Belhar, as a witness to be considered in the Uniting General Council's discussions.

1. This memorandum is written to recommend continued attention to the prophetic message of the 24th WARC General Council, meeting in Accra, Ghana, entitled, "The Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth." It also recommends support for the Belhar Confession, under consideration already by several WARC member churches in Canada and the United States. This Colloquium, or structured conversation, was designed to explore complementary elements in the Accra document and the Belhar Confession of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, and to relate both of these to the North American and Caribbean context, where matters of race and economic justice are closely intertwined. This conversation was not designed to yield a formal statement, but to help participants and those reading the papers presented (and to be published on-line) understand the meaning of confessing Christian faith and challenging idolatries in the current economic crisis.

2. We begin by encouraging members and congregations of our Reformed Churches in Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States to celebrate through local events and acts of fellowship and shared conversation the Uniting General Council to be held in Grand Rapids, hosted by Calvin College, on June 18-28, 2010, using the Accra and Belhar Confessions as part of their reflection on the shared mission of our churches.

3. In shortest summary of the Colloquium discussions, power was seen to be embedded in any consideration of race; repentance, restitution and more just relations in any treatment of reconciliation. Thus Accra was seen to address economic realities implicit in Belhar's justice commitment, as well as realities of power politics that also threaten the church's unity, and hence also call for resistance. Without claiming predictive power for Accra, its prophetic critique of the unsustainability of anti-regulatory or neoliberal capitalism is vindicated in considerable measure by the current worldwide economic downturn and the rewards still going to powerful economic interests, even those of bailed out banks and insurance companies in the US. (Clearly there is growing strength in China, India, Brazil and other developing countries of the South that do not follow the strict deregulatory model, although enormous poverty still exists in those contexts.)

4. Invitations to the colloquium were issued in the name of the Covenanting for Justice working group of Canada and the United States, with the support and endorsement of three committees of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and participation of ministers and members from eight churches: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Reformed Church of North America, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Canada, the United Church of Christ, and the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. One of the papers presented reviewed WARC's engagement with justice issues since the Seoul General Council of 1989, through the 1995 gathering in Kitwe, Zambia, and particularly the "processus confessionis" initiated at Debrecen in 1997. That process included a consultation at Stony Point in January of 2004 that several of this colloquium's participants attended. We

urge the delegates to the Uniting General Council to look ahead in proposing new stages in the narrative of the Reformed family as we face all church-dividing issues, racial, economic, and otherwise, and as our communion seeks to expand the horizon, vision and joyful engagement of every member and congregation.

5. This message from the participants is meant to be part of the larger conversation about the Accra Confession endorsed by the 24th General Council. It recognizes that our Reformed tradition itself is a continuing conversation that reflects the democratic ethos and ethical commitments linked so firmly to John Calvin's example in last year's 500th anniversary celebration of his birth. Because of the linkage of race and economic justice, it was appropriate to hold the colloquium on the Martin Luther King Jr. weekend. The words of the Belhar Confession came alive as we prayed at the news of the grievous earthquake in Haiti: "the church must stand by people in any form of suffering and need." This tragedy underlined part of the Caribbean context illuminated by Belhar, one of historic enslavement, colonialism, neo-colonialism, white racism, environmental degradation, and the extreme poverty that is in substantial measure traceable to the former identified realities.

6. Discussion of the "we" in the confessions led to greater awareness of how a dominant group's "we" can silence other views and deny others' perceptions. While the group is united in calling for the opening of trade barriers to Haitian goods and the cancellation of the remaining portion of Haiti's debt, participants in the colloquium perceive Haiti's situation with different senses of identification and shared danger or powerlessness. The US "we" is often impatient with self-examination of our assumed right to speak, even for others; the Canadian perhaps more grounded "we" feels sufficiently privileged to take sides and call for resources to be mobilized; our Caribbean participants felt some shared vulnerability and distrust of noble promises to rebuild that have often reinstituted previous inequalities and exploitation. Integrity requires us to acknowledge our relative privilege whenever we point to the enormous suffering structured into international economic relations. We confess (small "c") that our own humanity is diminished by our acceptance of advantages, advantages challenged rightfully, particularly in the Accra Confession. We participants in the colloquium call on delegates to the Uniting General Council to strive for the inclusive "we," testing the identifications, hopes, and responsibilities to be shared *through* the two confessions.

7. Reformed confessions strengthen the conscience of the Church at the same time as they seek to build its unity. The covenanting for justice process has not simply been about witnessing, but about implementing the concerns of Accra: resisting the inertia of empire and war, and challenging the domination of the market over all other aspects of life. Both the Belhar and Accra statements echo the Barmen Declaration, though participants in the colloquium differed on matters of tone and toughness in the two documents. "Family resemblances" are clear, but each statement does different things, together deepening the particularly Reformed address to corporate as well as personal justice, even in the non-creedal or less confessional parts of the Reformed family. In this regard, we were pleased to have two creative Disciples theologians with us, deepening conversation and analysis.

8. Neither confession directly addresses the issue of justice for women, a crucial concern as this new body is formed. The need for access to leadership positions and recognition and openness to the perspectives of women in the WCRC was emphasized by many at the colloquium. In particular, questions about recognition and openness to ordination crystallize when two bodies with different histories on this issue unite. The WCRC should, in the view of most participants, continue to help member churches address difficult topics by drawing on both experience and expertise and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

9. Participants from different US, Caribbean, and Canadian Reformed churches found great unity and mutual appreciation, even with differing theological approaches to racism, sexism, and the need to challenge “neoliberal” or anti-regulatory capitalism and globalization. Accra’s ability to illuminate economic injustice has only been strengthened by the credit meltdown and continuing crisis of unemployment, unequal rewards, and climate-distorting consumption. A paper by Rebecca Todd Peters helpfully distinguished several kinds of globalization. Moral analysis of globalization is done in statements by the Christian Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Canada, and the United Church of Christ, testifying to the rich range of responses to Accra and the realities it recognizes.

10. In the prophetic spirit of Accra and Belhar, many of the participants read and affirmed the brave statement by Palestinian Christians released on December 11 of 2009, entitled “*A Moment of Truth*.” This is a theologically strong call for solidarity to the whole Christian community, as well as a request for understanding to Jews and Muslims. Its spirit is nonviolent, as are the acts of solidarity it requests: boycott, divestment, sanctions. To seek freedom, to stand with a people oppressed: this is also the task of covenanting for justice. We ask the Uniting General Council to include consideration of this theological call in its docket. And we encourage all members of the Reformed family in CANAAC to read this document prayerfully and carefully. Have our denominations responded to this call?

11. While *A Moment of Truth*’s recommendations for nonviolent economic pressure will be criticized, it is important to see that they focus not on Israel’s existence, but on Israel’s occupation of Palestine. That 40 year military occupation creates tragedy and brings to mind too much the context of Belhar: the security or separation wall and checkpoints, the Jews-only roads, the inability of Christians to travel to worship in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the settlements encircling isolated, Bantustan-like pockets of poverty, the seeming collective punishment and then bombing of the biggest pocket, Gaza. We ourselves, especially the US Christians, acknowledge our own temptation to silence and support as taxpayers for actions illegal under international law, destructive of peace, and threatening to the survival of Christianity in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

12. Accra’s call for a covenantal, earth-friendly economy encourages—in fact requires—practices of personal rededication to justice; relinquishing and helping relocate preferential status, wealth, and power; forming

relationships of mutual support and equal regard within and beyond our communions; building sustainable communities and movements; embracing new green technologies and employment opportunities; teaching new generations of church leaders: may these communities of new practice that go beyond all statements truly reflect the Beloved Community of God named by Martin Luther King Jr.

This statement from the January 15-17, 2010, Stony Point colloquium on Accra and Belhar in Conversation is affirmed by the following participants:

David Cortes-Fuentes, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy,
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or PCUSA

Susan E. Davies, Bangor Theological Seminary, United Church of Christ
Sharon Davison, Esq. Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, NYC PCUSA

Robert Faris, Churches' Council on Theological Education in Canada,
Toronto, ON

Presbyterian Church in Canada

Krystin Granberg, Broadway Presbyterian Church, NYC PCUSA

Heidi Hadsell, President, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT PCUSA

Hans Hallundbaek, Croton Falls Presbyterian Church, NY PCUSA

Peter Heltzel, New York Theological Seminary, NYC Christian Church/
Disciples of Christ

Cynthia Holder Rich, Western Seminary, Holland, MI PCUSA

Victor W. C. Hsu, Warren, NJ PCUSA

Christian Iosso, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, Louisville, KY
PCUSA

Steve Kabetu, Office of Race Relations (Canada), Burlington, ON Christian
Reformed Church in North America

Andrew Kang Bartlett, Hunger Program, Louisville, KY PCUSA

Joy Kennedy, Poverty, Wealth & Environmental Justice Program, Toronto,
ON United Church of Canada

Marjorie Lewis, President, United Theological College of the West Indies,
United Church of Jamaica & the Cayman Islands

Esteban Lugo, Office of Race Relations (United States), Grand Rapids, MI
Christian Reformed Church in North America

Charles Marshall, Greenwich Presbyterian Church, Greenwich, CT PCUSA

Gilbert McKenzie, Mt. Vernon Presbyterian Church, Mt. Vernon, NY PCU-
SA / Affiliate: United Church of Jamaica & the Cayman Islands

David Moore, First/Greenbush Presbyterian Churches, Rensselaer, NY
PCUSA

Patricia Morse, Esq., Advocacy Committee on Racial-Ethnic Concerns
PCUSA

Sterling Morse, Fifteenth St Presbyterian Church, ret. Washington, DC
PCUSA

Rita Nakashima-Brock, Faith Voices for the Common Good, United Church
of Christ (UCC)/Christian Church/Disciples of Christ

Peter Noteboom, Commission on Justice & Peace, Canadian Council of
Churches, Toronto, ON Christian Reformed Church in North America

Rebecca Todd Peters, Elon University, Elon, NC PCUSA

Thomas Phillip, Brookhaven, NY PCUSA

Roger Powers, Light Street Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, MD PCUSA

Edith Rasell, Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ,
Cleveland, OH UCC
Annie Rawlings, Social Witness Office, Presbytery of New York City, PCUSA
Jill Schaeffer, Cincinnati United Church/New York Seminary, Cincinnati,
NY PCUSA
Cass L. Shaw, Albany Presbytery PCUSA
Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Geneva,
CH.
Donald W. Shriver, Jr., Union Theological Seminary, ret. NY PCUSA
Peggy L. Shriver, National Council of Churches of Christ, ret. NY PCUSA
Leslie Stansbery, Interfaith Association of Central Ohio, Columbus, OH
PCUSA
Margaret Stansbery, St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Columbus, OH
PCUSA
Catherine Surgenor, Developmental Disabilities Services Chaplaincy,
Wassaic, NY
George Todd, Presbytery of New York City, ret. NYC PCUSA
Kathleen Todd, National Council of Churches of Christ/WSCF, ret. NYC
PCUSA
Eugene Turner, Advocacy Committee on Racial-Ethnic Concerns, Fayette-
ville, NY PCUSA
Rick Ufford-Chase, Stony Point Conference Center, Stony Point, NY PCUSA
Robina Winbush, Ecumenical Relations Office, Louisville, KY PCUSA
Gerald Wondra, First Presbyterian Church, Chester, NY Reformed Church in
America.

Overture 30: Recommit the Belhar Confession to the Churches, Agencies, and Institutions for Further Study and Reflection; Form a Study Committee to Engage a Biblical and Theological Study of Liberation Theology

I. Introduction

How one is asked a question can greatly influence the answer. Synod 2012 has before it the question “Should the Belhar Confession become the fourth confession of the CRCNA?” In considering this question, it seems clear that the members of the CRC are not of one heart and mind on the matter. Given this, it seems clear that the answer to the question as stated should be “No.”

However, if we ask a different question, such as “What response to the Belhar Confession would help the CRC grow into the fullness of Christ?” then other important options become possibilities. Our response to the Belhar Confession ought to have the building-up of the church in Christ as its focus. It is in this spirit that Classis Toronto overtures synod.

II. Overture

Classis Toronto overtures synod to

A. Recommit the Belhar Confession to the churches, agencies, and institutions for further study and reflection in order to gain more understanding of

the document and the advantages and disadvantages of adopting the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession for a period of at least five years.

Grounds:

1. There have not been enough discussions by the congregations, classes, and entire denomination. The 2012 report from the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee indicates that workshops have been led in thirty (30) classes, three (3) regional gatherings, and twenty-two (22) congregations. This is less than two-thirds of the classes, one-quarter of the regions, and a small sampling of the congregations.
2. More time is needed not to squander this historic opportunity for reflection and spiritual growth. Time is needed to wrestle with the Belhar, not only in terms of its contents, but also for self-examination as individuals, congregations, and classes and as a denomination as a whole. If the Belhar Confession is to become our confession—a testimony of both our hearts and minds—more time of study and reflection is necessary.
3. Waiting five years or longer will not have a negative impact for the denomination. On the contrary, continued time of study and reflection will likely have positive influence on our congregations and the denomination as a whole, regardless of whether the Belhar Confession is ultimately adopted or not.
4. Additional time will allow greater consideration for the process of adopting a new confession. The addition of a new confession is a first for the CRC. Also, CRC polity does not appear to have in mind a special process for adding a confession. We believe this requires attention.
5. The denomination does not appear to be of one heart and mind in regard to the Belhar Confession. We deem such unity of heart and mind necessary to add a document as an additional form of unity and make it ours.

B. Form a study committee to engage a biblical and theological study of liberation theology, with special attention to issues raised in Article 4 of the Belhar Confession, and report to Synod 2014.

Grounds:

1. Objections have been raised against adopting the Belhar Confession, accusing it of promoting liberation theology. Yet the CRC has not corporately discussed this theological movement and its positive and negative attributes. We believe this study is necessary for a wise response to adopting the Belhar Confession.
2. There is a great deal of concern surrounding the statement in Article 4 of the Belhar Confession, “We believe that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” We believe that a study committee would be of significant help in clarifying the biblical and theological concerns related to this statement.

Classis Toronto
John Meiboom, stated clerk

Overture 31: Do Not Make a Decision re the Belhar Confession in 2012; Rather, Appoint a Study Committee

The council of Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, overtures the Christian Reformed Church Synod of 2012 to

1. Not render a final decision about adding the Belhar Confession as a fourth doctrinal standard for the Christian Reformed Church at Synod 2012.
2. Appoint a study committee to do the following:
 - a. Clarify the role and function of confessions in the CRC, especially in light of the discussions about the Form of Subscription/Covenant of Ordination.
 - b. Consider the objections that have been raised against adopting the Belhar as a confession, along with reasons for adoption; weigh them carefully in the light of Scripture and our three forms of unity; and prepare a recommendation for the church.
 - c. Indicate why and how the Belhar Confession, which was written in South Africa for the South African Reformed Church, is also directly relevant to North America (e.g., What is the false teaching in the CRC that corresponds with the theological defense of apartheid?).
 - d. Spell out clearly the concrete implications of adopting the Belhar Confession for the future of Classis Pacific Hanmi and Classis Red Mesa and for monolingual, monocultural minority congregations in the CRC.
 - e. Indicate and evaluate additional concrete social and political implications for the CRC that are suggested by adopting the Belhar Confession.
 - f. Keep the denomination closely informed about its progress, welcoming its input along the way, so that the church has ample opportunity to consider the implications of its recommendations.
 - g. Do an “ecological” assessment of the Christian Reformed Church that takes into account what the concrete consequences might be of adopting the Belhar Confession as a confession or, alternatively, not adopting the Belhar Confession, or accepting it as a “testimony” or “declaration.”

This committee should include members who are in favor of adopting the Belhar, as well as those who are opposed, along with key people with theological and historical knowledge of the Reformed confessional tradition.

The committee should be given five years to do its work and report to the CRC Synod of 2017.

Grounds:

1. Adding an entire confession as a doctrinal standard is a major responsibility that cannot be done in three years. It took the Christian Reformed Church 30 years and numerous study committees to come to a consensus position on women in ecclesiastical office. The CRC is being asked to come to definite decision on this momentous matter within a three-year time frame and without the benefit of an independent, synodically appointed study committee. Historically, such rushed

- decisions (as happened in 1924 with the “Common Grace” decision) lead to unhappy results for the church and its witness to the world.
2. There is significant division in the CRC about the Belhar, and this must be addressed before we can arrive at reconciliation and unity. Synod 2011 acknowledged that the church had not received a balanced presentation of the case for the Belhar when it instructed the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to “foster a balanced denomination-wide discussion” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 826). Unity in the CRC on this matter will only be realized when the perception of an honest, balanced examination of the Belhar becomes acknowledged by the members of the CRC.
 3. Synod 2009 was presented with only one option, namely adding the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of unity for the Christian Reformed Church. The church as a whole needs to have time to weigh other options, such as giving it the status of a “testimony” or “declaration.”
 4. The concerns that have been raised in the church about ambiguities in the Belhar Confession concerning key doctrines—such as clearly distinguishing the reconciliation of sinners with God in Christ from matters of injustice, reconciliation, and unity with fellow human beings—must be openly addressed and answered before the Belhar is adopted.
 5. The denomination needs to ponder the implications and consequences of adopting (or not adopting) the Belhar, or of making it a “testimony” or “declaration,” including but not limited to implications for our two ethic/minority classes and monolingual, monocultural congregations; thus far, these have not been addressed in our discussions about the Belhar.
 6. If the CRC decides to adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession, it is imperative that the church as a whole embrace it and “own” it; if it is not adopted, the CRC will face different challenges of maintaining unity, and the consequences of either decision need to be considered carefully and a path proposed that will lead the church forward. With the church as divided and unsure about the matter as it is now, neither adopting it nor rejecting it would be pastorally wise.
 7. The committee needs sufficient time to do its job well, and there is something symbolically appropriate about using the five-year lead-up to the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation as a period for the CRC to seriously engage the question of what it means to be a confessional church.

Plymouth Heights CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Ray Mulder, clerk

Note: The above overture was submitted to Classis Grand Rapids East at its meeting on January 19, 2012, but was not adopted.

Overture 32: Express Appreciation to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

Classis Yellowstone overtures Synod 2012 to instruct the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to communicate to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa the deep appreciation of the CRC for the valuable contribution made to the worldwide Reformed community and to the CRC in the Belhar Confession.

Ground: Although there has been critique and disagreement, the document has generated considerable reflection and discussion that was needed by the church and which will benefit the church in coming years. This contribution needs to be recognized and appreciation communicated.

Classis Yellowstone
Delbert D. VanDenBerg, stated clerk

Overture 33: Affirm the Belhar Confession as a Valuable Tool; Thank the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa for Their Gift; Decline Synod 2009's Recommendation to Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Confession

Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2012 to

- A. Affirm the Belhar Confession as a valuable tool for producing discussion and introspection among congregations;
- B. Thank the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) for their gift of the Belhar Confession, which has produced helpful discussion surrounding confessional church identity and healing wounds of racism; and
- C. Decline Synod 2009's recommendation to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession, alongside the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort.

Grounds:

- 1. The possibility of adopting the Belhar Confession has led to many needed discussions within the CRC.
- 2. Thanking the URCSA is appropriate for the self-assessment Belhar has brought to the CRC.
- 3. Adopting the Belhar would be a self-stultifying action by the CRC, whereby standing for unity and reconciliation would bring about division and alienation.
 - a. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) report on the Belhar states, "We cannot claim that all are of one mind" (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 242). Therefore, the Belhar as a form of unity would be unsustainable.
 - b. Adopting the Belhar would alienate the officebearers who are opposed to the Belhar as a fourth confession for what it does not clarify and cannot in good conscience sign the Form of Subscription (or

Covenant for Officebearers) if the Belhar were adopted as a fourth confession.

- c. Homosexuality has split three denominations since 2003, and the Belhar's link with homosexuality is unavoidable, particularly since the Belhar's principal author has used the Belhar to mandate ordination of practicing homosexuals and chosen to break unity with his own church when they did not see Belhar this way.¹
4. The Belhar makes important statements about unity, reconciliation, and justice, but sadly these important statements are insufficiently grounded in the gospel. The cross, forgiveness of sins, Christ's death and resurrection, and eternal life are all missing from the Belhar.
5. The Belhar proclaims church unity without mentioning unity in Christ, proclaims justice without mentioning the cross or final judgment, and proclaims reconciliation without mentioning the death or resurrection of Christ that reconciles believers with God. With this in mind, it is troubling that the EIRC declares, "The Belhar Confession's content is the gospel" (p. 250), when essential components of the good news are missing.
6. In part of Synod 2009's debate on the Belhar Confession, a few delegates made mention that congregants would not discuss it unless it appears as a potential confession. It may be the case that Synod 2009's recommendation was motivated by a desire for discussion and not necessarily that the Belhar indeed be adopted as our fourth confession.
7. Synods 2009 and 1990 stated that the Belhar "is in harmony with" the current confessions, but this is quite different from "on par with" or "at the same level of" the confessions.
8. The Reformed Church in America (RCA) polity and confessional identity presents a different situation from that of the CRC, so the RCA's adopting the Belhar provides inadequate impetus for CRC deliberation on adopting the Belhar.
9. The Belhar Confession is worded in such a way that it would create more problems than it would solve for the Christian Reformed Church in North America.
 - a. The Belhar declares, "Separation . . . between people and groups is sin" and requires rejection of "any doctrine . . . which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people." This implies that any ecclesiastical organization according to culture or ethnicity is necessarily contrary to the gospel of Christ, and so

¹ Allan Boesak announced his resignation from all church positions on October 3, 2008, accusing the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) of betraying the Belhar Confession in opposing homosexuality: "Based on Belhar, the church should fully accept gay members, should perform gay marriage ceremonies and allow ministers in gay relationships to serve in the church." On April 25, 2010, Boesak spoke on the Belhar Confession at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, saying its "demand for inclusivity goes well beyond the issue of race" to include "those whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual." (See "Boesak Quits 'Anti-gay' Church," 2008-10-06, <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Boesak-quits-anti-gay-church-20081005>; and "Apartheid Foe Boesak Speaks to Louisville Presbyterians about the Belhar," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, April 26, 2010, <http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20100426/NEWS01/4260376/1008/Apartheid+foe+Boesak+speaks+to+Louisville+Presbyterians>.)

undermines the existence of Classis Pacific Hanmi and Classis Red Mesa, which have been invaluable for encouraging diversity in the CRC.

- b. The Belhar makes implications that would confuse or undermine the practice of church discipline. It says “any form of suffering and need” is caused by “injustice” (section 4, bullet point 8), which excludes the possibility of someone suffering as a result of sinful choices and allows those who suffer from such choices to place blame elsewhere.
- c. The Belhar addresses a society with open racism, whereas North American racism is covert and subtle, as most would not admit to any racist tendencies. The North American racist would find little or no personal challenge from reading the Belhar.
- d. Instead of leading people to acknowledge racism and begin healing from it, adopting the Belhar Confession may push into hiding and denial all of those who most need reform. Adopting the Belhar as a full confession may make contraband what needs to be brought into the open.

Classis Zeeland

Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

Overture 34: Affirm the Belhar Confession as a Gift to the Church Universal Without Incorporation into the Standards of Unity

Classis Hudson overtures Synod 2012 to gratefully affirm the Belhar Confession as a gift to the church universal without incorporation into the standards of unity.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession is a gift to the church in that it prompts attention in the CRCNA and the church universal to the issues of racism, social justice, and the responsibility of Christ’s followers to live out what they confess.
2. The theological content of the Belhar Confession is ambiguous and potentially misleading. There is implicit support for liberation theology and a stress on visible unity in the church as the ultimate value, without acknowledging that genuine unity in the body of Christ is rooted in truth.
3. The Belhar Confession majors on a specific application of the gospel rather than offering a broad-based biblical teaching of the gospel, which is the core of our church’s confessions.
4. A document that has already demonstrated a propensity to create tensions and disunity among us should not be adopted on a confessional level as one of our official standards or “forms of unity.”

Classis Hudson

Joel Vande Werken, stated clerk

Overture 35: Recognize the Belhar Confession as Contributing Significantly to What It Means to Be the Holy Catholic Church Today

Hope CRC of Rapid City, South Dakota, presents this overture as an attempt to express appreciation for the Belhar Confession as a statement of faith having definite worth and authenticity for the Christian Reformed Church as a denomination, and particularly for congregations with ministries to Native Americans.

I. Introduction

The doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church are the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. Each was written in the context of a particular historical situation.

The 16th century was a time of religious persecution in the region that today forms the countries of Belgium and the Netherlands. Protestants were being martyred for their faith by the Roman Catholic government under the direction of King Philip II of Spain. To protest this cruel oppression and in an attempt to prove to the persecutors that adherents to the Reformed faith were not rebels as they were accused of being, Guido de Brès in 1561 wrote a thirty-seven article summary of the true Christian doctrine according to Holy Scripture that those who were being persecuted believed.

During that same time period Frederick III became ruler of the Palatinate, an influential German province. He was a committed protestant Christian who read his Bible daily. He was concerned that the members of his realm, who, like him, had once been adherents to Roman Catholicism, become well educated in biblical faith. To facilitate such an education Frederick commissioned the writing of a teaching tool that made its first appearance in 1563 and came to be known as the Heidelberg Catechism, after the city where it was produced.

The Canons of Dort did not appear until 1618-1619. They have a unique character because they were produced as a judicial decision ratified by the synod of Dort in response to a dispute about five points of doctrine raised by persons influenced by Jacob Arminius. The Canons have a limited character in that they do not cover the whole range of Christian doctrine, but focus only on the doctrinal points under dispute.

II. Historical comparison

Like the doctrinal standards presently accepted by the Christian Reformed Church, the Belhar Confession is also connected to a unique historical situation. It has its roots in the struggle against apartheid in Southern Africa. Its “outcry of faith” and “call for faithfulness and repentance” was first drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. This church took the lead in declaring that acceptance of governmentally sanctioned and authorized apartheid was a violation of the truth of the gospel.

The history of the abuses of racism perpetuated by the system of apartheid is well-known. As a political system in Africa, the waxing and waning of its influence parallels the time period of the 20th century. The effect of apartheid’s understanding of separateness upon churches was as pervasive

as its effect on other parts of life and society. Examples of killing, torture, economic deprivation, and dehumanization resulting from this system have been well documented in reports issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission convened by the government of South Africa in 1996. The statements of the Belhar Confession arise out of that context.

III. Specific focus

When comparing it to the present doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church, the brevity and the particular focus of the Belhar Confession make it perhaps more similar to the Canons of Dort than the other two doctrinal standards. While the Belhar Confession arises out of a historical situation replete with as much tension and anxiety as that which gave rise to the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism, it does not match them either in length or in theological scope. There is a very simple reason for this. The Belhar Confession is not intended to be either a replacement or a restatement of any of these documents. Rather, it assumes them with all their value and validity in the history for the church.

The specific and intended value of the Belhar Confession, as is evident from its opening words, which are virtually a restatement of the answer to Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism, are an effort to give concrete, contemporary focus to what it means to confess as we do in the Apostles' Creed that we believe in "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints."

In its explanation of this confession, Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism in questions and answers 54 and 55 states that this church is gathered, protected, and preserved by the "Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race from the beginning of the world to its end" and that as "members of this community" we "share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts" and should consider it our duty "to use these gifts readily and joyfully for the service and enrichment of the other members." It was while continuing to maintain this confession, as well as the one concerning the Holy Catholic Church in Article 27 of the Belgic Confession, that Reformed churches in Africa, nevertheless, accepted the principles and practices of separation unique to apartheid. It is from out of the history of the struggle to recognize and reverse the errors and evils of this experience that the Belhar Confession issues its statements of belief, as well as an identification of practices that it rejects.

An important theme of the Belhar Confession is reconciliation. It identifies the church "as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another," based on the message of Ephesians 2:11-22, where it says in verse 13: "But, now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ," and in verses 15-16, which point to the purpose of the death of Jesus as intending "to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."

Another important theme of the Belhar Confession is unity—a unity that is identified as both "a gift and an obligation" which must be "both earnestly pursued and sought; one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain." Biblical basis for this unity is found in Ephesians 4:1-16, where

verse 3 urges "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," and verses 4-6 state "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith . . . one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

The Belhar Confession maintains that the unity of the church "must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted." As it says in John 17:20-23:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . . May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

It is the painful reality of the experience and existential struggle with the racial separations sanctioned and required by the laws of apartheid as they were experienced in the daily lives of believers in Jesus that have produced the specific language of the Belhar Confession. The reconciliation between man and God and between human beings with each other, as well as the unity of the church for which Jesus prayed, is not to be thought of as just a spiritual reality. Reconciliation and unity must be and must be allowed to be given concrete expression. Therefore, this confession rejects any doctrine "which professes that . . . spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers . . . are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation." It also rejects any doctrine "which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church."

It is the credibility of the gospel message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ that the original writers of the Belhar Confession were concerned about. They had experienced the life-changing power of Christ in their lives. They knew something about reconciliation and unity. But they chafed for so long and suffered so much under rules of required separation that they were moved to testify concerning the gospel "that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred, and enmity." Likewise they were moved to reject as error any doctrine which "sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ."

The Belhar Confession might have ended after making just three statements of belief with accompanying rejections of error. If that had been the case, it might have been less controversial. But, based on their painful personal experiences and their appreciation for the testimony of Scripture in the midst of it, the writers of the Belhar Confession were moved to make a fourth statement of faith involving justice.

As Christians, we may find it easier or harder to identify the abuses of government sanctions and enforced separations as violations of what Jesus

Christ has done to promote unity and reconciliation. The non-Christian world cares little, if at all, about our concern for these issues. What did, however, eventually resonate with non-Christians throughout the world were the abuses of apartheid as violations of justice.

But justice is not merely a human ideal or a human invention. Justice finds its source and substance in God. Injustice is not merely an affront to human dignity; it is a violation of the will of God. God is concerned about “the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” God’s concern is unique. He has come into our sinful world in Jesus to stand beside them in a special way. For in his sermon in his home town of Nazareth Jesus did not hesitate to announce himself as the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah concerning one “anointed . . . to preach the good news to the poor . . . sent . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

Injustice and its economic effects that result in poverty and other forms of human suffering may be noticed and opposed by a godless world, but that is only because God in his grace has been there first. As it says in Psalm 146:7-9, which is also a reference cited by the Belhar Confession, the Lord “upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous, the Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.”

So, justice is God’s idea, and what God does God’s people are also called to do. As it says in Isaiah 1:17, “Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow,” or in Amos 5:24, “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.”

And so the Belhar Confession states “that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need . . . [and] . . . must witness against and strive against any form of injustice . . .” and “that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.”

We live in a world that is only too familiar with class struggles that result in violence. This violence is sometimes justified on the basis of the superficial and self-serving use of Scripture that is characteristic of liberation theology. Therefore, it is understandable that references to God as “standing with the poor” and being “in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged,” as well as a call being issued to the church to “stand where the Lord stands,” might raise some significant questions.

What it is important to keep in mind, however, is *how* the God who is the source of justice comes to stand with the oppressed. For, he does so, not only as the Lord who is head and king of his church, but as the Lord who stands with his people as the suffering servant, who by offering himself in a sacrificial and atoning death, also provides the model for steadfastness and patient endurance in doing good that is needed by those who suffer.

As it says in 1 Peter 2:18-25:

Slaves, submit . . . to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

IV. Contemporary significance

Thankfully, the political situation of apartheid that originally gave rise to the Belhar Confession has changed significantly. Unfortunately, the racial prejudice and injustice that threaten the credibility of our confession concerning "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints" has been perpetually present in the church and is still with us. Examples that can be cited go at least as far back as the neglect of Grecian Jewish widows mentioned in Acts 6:1. Something similarly troubling is, also, the fact that the abuses of apartheid came to expression, with little if any opposition, in a South African culture permeated by a religious life thoroughly familiar with the statements about the true nature of the church found in Article 37 of the Belgic Confession and Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Racial prejudice and the kind of injustice which the Belhar Confession identifies and opposes is sneaky stuff. Improper attitudes, whether toward Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, or Native Americans do not easily or immediately disappear.

That is why the Christian Reformed Church needs the Belhar Confession. It is needed to remind us of the shortcomings of the past in the United States and Canada with regard to such things as civil rights for Blacks and references by delegates on the floor of synod in 1896 that the Lakota Sioux of the Dakotas were to be considered as "beyond redemption" and "doomed to annihilation" as those known for eating the entrails of animals (*Navajo and Zuni for Christ*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1947, p. 16). It is needed to help us keep our eyes wide open and our focus properly on God in a world in which countries not only in Africa but also in the Middle East are struggling to find justice and freedom.

V. Overture

Therefore the council of Hope Christian Reformed Church in Rapid City, South Dakota, communicates to Synod 2012 its desire that the Belhar Confession be recognized as making a significant contribution to a contemporary understanding of what it means to be the holy catholic church that is a communion of saints as stated in Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism and Article 27 of the Belgic Confession.

Grounds:

1. Its confession concerning the evil of racism is rooted in the gospel of reconciliation (Eph. 2:11-22; John 17:20-23).

2. Its confession concerning injustice is rooted in the biblical message of God's concern for the poor (Luke 4:18-19; Ps. 146:7-9; Isa. 1:17; Amos 5:24; 1 Pet. 2:18-25).
3. Issues involving racism and injustice have a significantly problematic history in our denomination and in contemporary society.

Council of Hope CRC, Rapid City, South Dakota
Traci Noteboom, clerk

Note: This overture was presented to Classis Iakota at its March 6, 2012, meeting but not adopted.

Overture 36: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as the Fourth Form of Unity; Amend Existing CRC Documents to Better Reflect the Themes of Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice; and Express Support of the Principles of the Belhar Confession

I. Observations

Classis Hamilton has appreciated the dialogue that the Belhar Confession has brought to our churches and denomination. It has challenged and encouraged us to reevaluate our own theology and practice, particularly regarding the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice. In Canada, there are longstanding issues, particularly with Native Canadians, that we have not always handled well as the church. The Belhar's call to compassionate justice and unity in the body of Christ has spoken to us in a necessary prophetic way. The clear call to the unity which Christ prayed for, which is so sadly lacking in the abundance of denominations that our divisions have spawned, rightly urges a reconsideration of longstanding assumptions that unnecessarily divide the church of Jesus Christ. We have also been called afresh to consider the poor, the wronged, and the fringe members of our own communities, of which there are many, and whom we too easily overlook in everyday life. We have also been reinvigorated by the scrutiny about confessions in general—both how they serve us and how they are used. The Belhar has been a gift to our denomination. Yet, as we studied the Belhar in detail, a number of issues arose, which we offer as observations.

There are concerns about the content of the Belhar. First, the Belhar cannot stand on its own. This is evidenced by the inclusion of four supporting documents by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) that are apparently necessary to explain it. Second, the Belhar ends up confusing rather than clarifying several issues. It uses excessively broad language like "in a special way" and "any form of"; and vague language like "injustice" and "the wronged" without defining them. Third, though an excellent testimony to the moral behavior of the modern church, it is not a doctrinal standard, and therefore not properly a confession. Despite its language, it does not tell us so much what we believe as what we should do. It is an application of the faith, explaining the implications of our doctrine. If our confessions come to define orthopraxy as much as orthodoxy, then we will inevitably need new confessions for a host of other contemporary issues (e.g., abortion, greed, war, gender relations). Fourth, the Belhar blurs the distinction between the church as institute and organism. It seeks to

institutionalize those responsibilities which belong not to the organized church but to individual Christians living their lives in the world. The churches as organization cannot, and should not, become involved in every area of responsibility to which we are personally called. Finally, despite the claims of the EIRC, many of the issues the Belhar talks about are addressed in our other confessions (Belgic Confession Art. 27-28, 36; Heidelberg Catechism 107, 111) and in the *Contemporary Testimony* (Art. 17, 30, 43, 53-55). We would be better served by using our existing confessions, and perhaps amending or expanding the *Contemporary Testimony* to address the same themes.

There are also concerns about the motivations of the Belhar. Our forms of unity set forth the truth of the gospel and were adopted for the eloquence with which they summarized those scriptural truths. But the grounds for adopting the Belhar deal almost exclusively with ecumenical relations. The EIRC seems more concerned with how our church will appear to our sister denominations than with how clearly and urgently the Belhar proclaims the truth of the gospel. We do not adopt confessions because they will make us look good to others, nor because they will help in our relationships with others. We adopt confessions because we are convicted by their truth in proclaiming the gospel. The grounds for adopting the Belhar are unconvincing in this regard.

Finally, there are concerns about the application of the Belhar. It is worth noting that already in its brief history the Belhar has been widely open to misinterpretation. One of its authors has argued that it condones and mandates allowing same-sex marriage. It has been used to support the Palestinians against the Israelis, socialism against capitalism, and even radical environmentalism. As well, with increasing scrutiny on the church, particularly in Human Rights Tribunals, we are potentially setting ourselves up for lawsuits for a failure to apply this document, not as we understand it, but as someone else has interpreted it for us. The vague nature of its language allows a wide range of divergent applications which will end up dividing the church rather than unifying it, and causing injustice rather than justice.

II. Overture

Therefore, in light of these observations Classis Hamilton overtures Synod 2012

A. Not to accede to the recommendation of the EIRC and therefore not to adopt the Belhar Confession as the fourth form of unity of the CRCNA.

Grounds:

1. There are concerns about the content of the Belhar Confession that are significant enough that we should not bind ourselves to it as a confession.
2. There are concerns about the motivation for adopting the Belhar confession. The grounds offered, namely ecumenical relations, are neither proper nor sufficient for the adoption of a binding confession.
3. There are concerns about the application of the Belhar Confession which will leave us vulnerable to disagreements and divisions, thereby contradicting the very purpose for which it is offered.

B. To amend our existing documents to better reflect the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice.

Grounds:

1. This would allow the CRCNA to adopt the principles of the Belhar in a more contextual way, speaking prophetically to our people in our setting, to the principles which the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa has brought before us.
2. This would more effectively relate and integrate the principles of the Belhar to our people so that it would become part of the DNA and practice of our denomination as we wrestle with how to incorporate and apply the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice here in North America.
3. This would give us the freedom to phrase these principles in a more fluid manner that would allow future synods to adapt them to changing times and circumstances.

C. To formally express its support of the principles of the Belhar Confession, our commitment to live them out, and our intention to stand with them against all who would distort the gospel in word or deed to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, the members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Reformed Church in America, and all members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Grounds:

1. It would be beneficial to the CRC's ecumenical relations.
2. This would satisfy the grounds presented by the EIRC:
 - a. It would formally state our commitment to live out the principles of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
 - b. It would formally state our commitment to stand with our Reformed brothers and sisters around the world against injustice and, in particular, racism.
 - c. It would serve as a testimony to our own members that we are taking a public stand to promote such principles.

Classis Hamilton

John Veenstra, stated clerk

Overture 37: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Confession of the Christian Reformed Church

I. Background

The Belhar Confession was composed in 1982 as an anti-apartheid statement in South Africa. The path by which this document came to North America is described in a 2007 study guide created by the Christian Reformed Church's Interchurch Relations Committee. In the introduction we read the following:

Why is the CRC considering the Belhar as a Confession?

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) has given the confession as a gift to the worldwide Reformed community because the use or

application of this confession in the life of the church is far wider than its original context. The URCSA has asked . . . [that we] consider adopting the Belhar Confession so as to make it a part of the global Reformed confessional basis (*Agenda for Synod 1999*, pp. 197-200; *Agenda for Synod 2003*, pp. 235, 246; *Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 592).

II. Overture

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession does not meet the criteria of a confessional statement. The Belhar does not display the characteristics of a confession. The important spiritual and social issues of reconciliation, justice, and unity addressed are certainly worthy of consideration by the church. However, a *confessional* statement requires articulation of the essential aspects of biblical revelation and Christian faith. Namely, it summarizes Scripture in declaring Christ as the only Lord and Savior; it proclaims the way to salvation through the repentance of sin and in having faith in the crucified and risen Lord; and it calls God's redeemed through Christ to live all life to his glory. The Belhar Confession does not meet this requirement.
2. The ambiguity inherent in the Belhar Confession may lead to theological error and morally unacceptable practices.
 - a. Theological error

The Belhar Confession states, "God . . . is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged." The document finds strong consistency and appears rooted in liberation theology. In its historical and cultural context this theology has brought a necessary message of social justice to populations deprived of justice, and biblically it can be supported through numerous Old Testament and New Testament passages. Although the Bible does not necessarily deny God's favor to the wealthy (Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, Solomon, Lydia, Philemon), the scriptural evidence reveals a God whose heart is unequivocally committed to the outcast, the poor, and the hungry. Furthermore, in many ways, Reformed (and covenant) theology finds significant agreement with liberation theology: Israel was chosen, as the church is, to be a holy people who bring good news and relief to the downtrodden.

However, liberation theology as it developed theologically does present perspectives that create incongruities with Reformed theology. Namely, it can stress social solidarity over unity with Christ; is not always clear in its distinction between reconciliation with God and reconciliation between people, and to regard the biblical message of salvation with material prosperity; and tends to conflate distinctions between spiritual or eternal life and earthly life.

Thus, in spite of the contributions liberation theology has made, these aforementioned features are cause for concern, placing the Belhar Confession on questionable theological foundations.

b. Morally unacceptable practices

Due to ambiguity on key points, the Belhar Confession can make the church vulnerable to moral aberration. This may lead to approval of overtly sinful lifestyles.

The Belhar states “We reject any doctrine . . . which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.” This is clearly problematic, since such a statement may be evoked to declare the right of homosexual practice, polygamy, and membership in secret societies. Such a position is inconsistent with our current position on personal lifestyle and social matters in the Christian Reformed Church. The church needs to engage in more study and find more clarity on these moral concerns; the Belhar Confession does not accomplish this but may cause a lack of clarity and uncertainty in this area.

3. The Belhar Confession is more likely to bring disunity into the church than unity. It must be acknowledged that the risk of disunity is present with many decisions the community of faith faces. This is most likely no less the case with the proposal to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession for the Christian Reformed Church. However, for grounds given in this overture, we believe acceptance of the Belhar as a confessional statement would be a source of significant disunity.

The CRC has promoted and continues to promote unity through our three confessions, which are designed to unite our members and our churches in a common expression of faith. Although the Belhar Confession is a document that promotes ethnic and racial unity within the church, the questionable theological foundations and potential allowance of moral aberrations (noted in ground 2) may prove to be a source of disunity in the church.

In *concrete* terms, for example, officebearers who have signed the Form of Subscription may have trouble serving in the future because they cannot in good conscience agree with the Belhar Confession.

4. Racial and ethnic unity, reconciliation, and social justice are addressed in our current confessions, rendering the Belhar Confession redundant.
- a. Unity

All three of our current confessions (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) speak about the equality of all God’s people, the need for reconciliation and peace, and the call to social justice.

Synod 1992 appointed a study committee to engage in a comprehensive review and articulation of the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God. The report of the committee was presented in 1996 and was titled “God’s Diverse and Unified Family.” This report was based on numerous references to Scripture, but it also made references to our current confessions. To quote the report:

Our confessions articulate the unity and diversity of the church. Belgic Confession Article 27 speaks of “one single catholic and universal church,” which, though it is “spread and dispersed throughout

the entire world," is "still joined and united in heart and will in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith."

(Agenda for Synod 1996, p. 232)

The report also cites the Heidelberg Catechism concerning the holy catholic church, saying, "Lord's Day 21 . . . states,

"I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member."

(Agenda for Synod 1996, p. 232)

The study committee made a series of recommendations to synod without benefit of the Belhar Confession but through the study of Scripture and the church's current confessions.

The Canons of Dort, in discussing human redemption, states in the Second Main Point, Article 5:

Moreover, it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people. . . .

The Belgic Confession states in Article 27: "And so this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or certain people. But it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world, though still joined and united in heart and will, in one and the same spirit by the power of faith."

The Heidelberg Catechism asks in question 84, "How does preaching the holy gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven?" The answer: "The kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to all believers, each and every one. . . ."

The synodical study committee made a series of recommendations to synod without benefit of the Belhar Confession. It recommended that Scripture and the current confessions endorsed and encouraged church unity.

In terms of reconciliation and social justice, the following confessional citations serve to guide and encourage the church:

b. Justice

Belgic Confession Article 25 states, "We continue to use the witness drawn from the law and the prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to the will of God."

Belgic Confession Article 36 states,

We believe that because of the depravity of the human race, our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings. . . . [Governments] should do this while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them. They should do it in order that

the Word of God may have free course; the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress; and every anti-Christian power be resisted.

Heidelberg Catechism Question 105 asks, “What is God’s will for you in the sixth commandment?” Answer: “I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be party to this in others; rather, I am to put away all desires for revenge.”

Question 107 asks, “Is it enough then that we do not murder our neighbor in such way?” Answer: “No. By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly toward them, to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.”

c. Reconciliation

Heidelberg Catechism Question 60 asks, “How are you righteous before God?” Answer: “Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against God’s commandments, of never having kept any of them, and of still being inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift of God with a believing heart.”

Canons of Dort, Second Main Point, Article 2, states, regarding “The Satisfaction Made by Christ,” “Since, however, we ourselves cannot give this satisfaction or deliver ourselves from God’s wrath, God in boundless mercy has given us as a guarantee his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.”

The Heidelberg Catechism’s exposition on the second table of the law (Lord’s Days 39-44) amply comments on reconciliation with our neighbors.

One might respond by saying that the Belhar Confession discusses these matters in much more overt and explicit ways, which would be an accurate comment. However, the three creeds do set forth the basic grounds and principles of justice, unity, and reconciliation. The Contemporary Testimony, however, does explore in more overt terms the application of these three themes to present-day issues and challenges.

III. Conclusion

A Reformed understanding of God’s redemptive work in history, as understood in the reading of the Bible and articulated in our current confessions, declares that any lack of ethnic or racial equality in our society, workplace, or church is unacceptable. Christians are to abhor any discrimination against our brothers and sisters in Christ. God knows which of us are chosen to join his kingdom. The language we speak or the color of our skin makes no difference to our God in heaven. Thus we do not require the

Belhar Confession as a document to tell us that all who accept the Lord Jesus as Savior are welcome to full communion in Christ's church. Rather than strengthen the ministry message and oneness of the church, adoption of the statement would ultimately hurt our church and its kingdom work.

To summarize, the Belhar Confession should not be adopted as a confessional statement for the Christian Reformed Church because

1. It does not explicitly present the basics of the Christian gospel and thus does not meet the criteria of a confessional statement.
2. It is liable to lead our church into theological error and moral aberration.
3. It is more liable to bring disunity than unity into the church.
4. It adds nothing to our existing confessions regarding unity, social justice, and reconciliation in the church.

We therefore ask that Synod 2012 prayerfully consider this overture to oppose the adoption of the Belhar Confession as an official statement of faith for the Christian Reformed Church.

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan
Al Brander, stated clerk

Overture 38: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Form of Unity

I. Background

Classis Huron has appreciated the dialogue that the Belhar Confession has brought to our churches and denomination. It has challenged and encouraged us to reevaluate our own theology and practice, particularly regarding the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice. In Canada, there are long-standing issues, particularly with Native Canadians, that we have not always handled well as the church. The Belhar's call to compassionate justice and unity in the body of Christ has spoken to us in a prophetic way. The call to the unity that Christ prayed for, which is so sadly lacking in the abundance of denominations that our divisions have spawned, rightly urges a reconsideration of long-standing assumptions that unnecessarily divide the church of Jesus Christ. We have also been called afresh to consider the poor, the wronged, and the fringe members of our own communities, of which there are many, and who are all too easy to overlook in everyday life. We have also been reinvigorated by the scrutiny about confessions in general—both how they serve us and how they are used. The Belhar has been a gift to our denomination.

However, as we studied the Belhar in detail, a number of issues arose, which we offer as observations. There are concerns about the content of the Belhar. First, the Belhar cannot stand on its own. This is evidenced by the inclusion of four supporting documents by the EIRC which are apparently necessary to explain it. Second, the Belhar ends up confusing rather than clarifying several issues. It uses excessively broad language like "in a special way" and "any form of" and vague language like "injustice" and "the wronged" without defining them. Third, though an excellent testimony to the moral behavior of the church, it is not a doctrinal standard, and therefore

not properly a confession. Despite its language, it does not tell us so much what we believe as what we should do. It is an application of the faith, explaining the implications of our doctrine. If our confessions come to define orthopraxy as much as orthodoxy, then we will inevitably need new confessions for a host of other contemporary issues (e.g., abortion, greed, war, gender relations). Fourth, the Belhar blurs the distinction between the church as institute and organism. It seeks to institutionalize those responsibilities that belong not to the organized church but to individual Christians living their lives in the world. The church as an organization cannot, and should not, become involved in every area of responsibility to which we are personally called.

There are also concerns about the motivations of the Belhar. Our forms of unity set forth the truth of the gospel and were adopted for the eloquence with which they summarized those scriptural truths. But the grounds for adopting the Belhar deal almost exclusively with ecumenical relations. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee seems more concerned with how our church will appear to other denominations than with the clarity and urgency with which the Belhar proclaims the gospel for us. We do not adopt confessions because they will make us look good to others nor because they will help in our relationships with others; we adopt confessions because we are convicted by their truth in proclaiming the gospel. The grounds for adopting the Belhar are unconvincing in this regard.

Finally, there are concerns about the application of the Belhar. It is worth noting that already in its brief history the Belhar has been widely open to misinterpretation. One of its authors has argued that it condones and mandates same-sex marriage. It has been used to support the Palestinians against the Israelis, socialism against capitalism, and radical environmentalism. The vague nature of its language allows for a wide range of divergent applications.

II. Overture

A. Classis Huron overtures Synod 2012 to not adopt the Belhar Confession as the fourth form of unity of the CRCNA.

Grounds:

1. There are concerns about the content of the Belhar Confession which are significant enough that we should not bind ourselves to it as a confession.
2. There are concerns about the motivation for adopting the Belhar Confession. The grounds offered—namely, ecumenical relations—are neither proper nor sufficient for the adoption of a binding confession.
3. There are concerns about the application of the Belhar Confession.

B. In addition, Classis Huron overtures Synod 2012 to formally express by letter its support of the principles of the Belhar Confession, our commitment to live them out, and our intention to stand with them against all who would distort the gospel in word or deed. The letter would be sent to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, the member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the Reformed Church in America.

Grounds:

1. It will be beneficial to the CRC's ecumenical relations.
2. This would satisfy the grounds presented by the EIRC.
 - a. It will formally state our commitment to live out the principles of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
 - b. It will formally state our commitment to stand with our Reformed brothers and sisters around the world against injustice and, in particular, racism.
 - c. It will serve as a testimony to our own members that we are taking a public stand to promote such principles.

Classis Huron
Keith Knight, stated clerk

Overture 39: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Confession of the CRC

I. Background

Synod 2009 proposed to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession for the CRC. From 2009-2012, the CRC has discussed the merits of the Belhar Confession. The church now stands on the edge of making a decision regarding adoption. This overture is a response to the proposal before synod.

II. Introduction

It is difficult to overestimate the sin of racism. It is also difficult to overestimate the roots of racial hatred in our own hearts. The allegation of racism is too easily dismissed. Those who have not been an oppressed minority find it difficult to understand the experience of oppressed racial groups. Racism, we believe, is someone else's problem. Racism, we sometimes suggest, is a trumped-up sin. No one likes to be rebuked, and the Belhar Confession forces us to ask serious questions about ourselves. For these reasons, it is easy to dismiss the Belhar Confession. But as children of God, we must resist such tendencies.

The history of the church, and even our own church, is one of racial tension and injustice. Anthony Carter in his book *On Being Black and Reformed* states, "The sad yet irrefutable fact is that the theology of Western Christianity, dominated by White males, has had scant if any direct answers to the evils of racism and the detrimental effect of institutionalized discrimination. Those who advocated a caste system of slavery and racial superiority in places such as the United States, England, South Africa, and India have often done so with the consent of a church defined by conservative theologians" (pp. 6-7). Carter notes that racial sin has been part of our own story. This is clear when we consider our own denominational history. In the 1960s, African American children were refused enrollment in one of our Christian schools on the grounds of fear of community violence. In the 1920s, missionaries were sent to China instead of Africa because the Chinese people were viewed as more similar to us than African people. But we do not need to go back to the 1920s or 1960s to discover the seeds of racial sin in our own

hearts. How do we feel about minority populations filling our neighborhoods and churches? Do we succumb to popular racial stereotypes regarding poverty and work ethic? When we encounter someone of a different race, is our mind focused on skin color or do we think of them as coworkers, neighbors, moms, or fathers?

This brings us to the Belhar Confession. The Belhar Confession is a call to action. It challenges the church in the areas of unity, reconciliation, and justice. Much of what it says is biblically based and beautiful in expression. There is much to affirm in the Belhar Confession. However, given its significant weaknesses, it would be unwise to adopt the Belhar as our fourth confession. Richard Mouw notes that the Belhar is an important prophetic declaration in its original context, but is too weak to stand on its own as a normative confession (*Mouw's Musings*, blog, April 21, 2009). John Cooper adds, "The Forms of Unity are not merely venerable documents expressing the faith of our ancestors on the issues of their time. They are *doctrinal standards*—definitive summaries and explanations of the essential and enduring truths that God teaches in Scripture—foundational to our denominational identity and unity" ("Affirm the Belhar? Yes, but not as a doctrinal standard," p. 4). What both Mouw and Cooper affirm is that while a document might convey many truths, there is a stricter standard for that document to be considered a confession. Adopting or not adopting the Belhar Confession must not be viewed as a rejection or acceptance of racial sin, but as a matter of confessional definition. The question before us is not "What do we think of racism?" but "Do we believe the Belhar Confession should be adopted as a confession?" On this matter there are significant concerns.

The first concern is with the Belhar Confession's *content*. The content of the Belhar is limited in scope compared to our other standards, the Three Forms of Unity. It is true, as Dr. Lyle Bierma points out, that "not all confessions . . . have the same scope" (*Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, Fall 2010, p. 7). The Belgic Confession covers many topics that the Canons of Dort and the Heidelberg Catechism do not. The Canons of Dort are narrower in focus than the other two. But while not all cover the same breadth of material, each one is a summary of the gospel and the Reformed Christian faith. The Belhar Confession, however, fails to meet that standard. It addresses gospel implications without much explanation of the gospel itself. How can a gospel explanation be missing when it is the gospel alone that has the power to stop racism? Racism is a blood sin that can only be defeated by the power of the blood of Christ. Racism is not first a social issue but a spiritual one. Our deepest problem is not that we are alienated from one another, but that we are alienated from God. Only when we address our alienation from God can we find the answer for alienation from others. The gospel alone has the power to conquer the roots of racial hatred, such as pride, greed, hate, and guilt. Yet gospel content is in large measure missing from the Belhar Confession. The result is that it is left to be interpreted by our other confessions, which makes it submissive to them and not adequate to be considered as a confession with equal authority. Even worse, the Belhar Confession potentially leaves itself and our denomination open to gospel reinterpretation. Considering the absence of clear gospel definition it is no coincidence, as John Cooper indicates, that the Belhar Confession allows readings from the perspectives of Reformed orthodoxy as well as the progressive social gospel, and various

forms of liberation theology (Cooper, “Affirm the Belhar?” p. 11). How can a document open to so many perspectives serve as a confession?

A second concern has to do with the Belhar Confession’s *clarity*. Typically, confessions clarify what the church believes. Take the Belgic Confession, for example. It was a clear apologetic to the king what Guido De Brès and others believed during the 1560s. The Belhar Confession is not nearly so. Take for example, this statement from Article 2: “We reject any doctrine . . . which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.” What is meant by human or social factor? Race is clearly the intent here, but could faith be included as a social factor? Or sexual orientation? Equally puzzling is this statement, “God in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” (Art. 4). To be sure, the Bible is full of examples of God’s love for the humble, poor, and oppressed. But does God love them in a special way? Does God love all the poor in a special way? How do we understand that Abraham was the object of God’s covenantal favor and yet was wealthy? Is it through humble faith that God’s favor is received or by economic status? This is a crucial gospel question. Add to this one more example of the Belhar Confession’s lack of clarity: “In following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others” (Art. 4). The language of “powerful, privileged, control, harm” sounds more like a progressive socio-economic political statement than it does a normative confession. The gospel is clearly opposed to selfish use of wealth, but could the Belhar Confession be taken as being opposed to privilege and wealth as a whole? Because of such underlying ambiguities, the Belhar Confession does not stand the test of a binding confession. What exactly is the CRC binding itself to if it adopts the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession?

One final concern regarding the Belhar Confession deals with *consensus*. Confessions are designed to create unity. Unity is best achieved when an issue arises from the bottom up or from the grass roots. Adoption of the Belhar Confession, however, feels more like a top down approach. We have been told that the Belhar is a *gift*. How can you refuse a gift? The burden of proof, it seems, does not stand with those who wish to adopt it but with those who do not. This is not a path to unity. Rather than unifying our denomination, adopting this confession may lead to unnecessary division.

With thanksgiving to God, the Christian Reformed Church already has a clear and compelling gospel-oriented statement regarding racism that ought to be reconsidered as a testimony. The 1996 report to synod, “God’s Diverse and Unified Family,” wonderfully explains the gospel and its implications for racial reconciliation and unity (www.crcna.org/site/uploads/uploads/racerelations/diversefamily.pdf). Let us reaffirm our commitment to racial diversity and harmony by recommitting ourselves to this statement.

III. Overture

Given the above discussion, Classis Grandville overtures synod not to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the CRC.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession lacks the content and clarity to serve as a normative confession.
2. Our denomination already has clear and compelling gospel-oriented statements regarding racial reconciliation and unity, such as “God’s Diverse and Unified Family.”

Classis Grandville

Daniel B. Mouw, stated clerk

Overture 40: Do Not Accept the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Reformed Confession

Classis of the Heartland overtures Synod 2012 not to accept the Belhar Confession as a fourth Reformed confession. We appreciate the fact that this confession was written in response to centuries of sinful injustice that was practiced in South Africa, and even here in the USA. There is no doubt in our minds that the intent and purposes for which it was written are worthy of recognition and applause. However, we do not recognize in it the contents that qualify this document to be recognized as a Reformed confession for the following reasons:

A. It does not contain within it statements of faith pertaining to our salvation, the works of Christ, or the character of God. It is strictly limited to the doctrine of the church and the unity of the body of believers, and thus it seems to us that it falls short of the character of a confessional standard.

(The *Contemporary Testimony* is far more like a confession than the Belhar by comparison, and it has not been elevated to the status of a Reformed confession.)

B. The wording of the Belhar in Article 2 in reference to “we reject any doctrine,”—the last point in particular—reads as follows: “which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent *or any other human or social factor* should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.”

We believe that this wording can be used to open the door to “table and pulpit fellowship” with those who profess to be Christian, yet practice a homosexual lifestyle as if it were neither immoral nor an unnatural act: acts which Paul explicitly sites in Romans 1:26-27 as being the result of God removing his grace from a rebellious people, leaving them to follow the lusts of their idolatrous hearts.

Though the Belhar Confession was not written with this intent, we fear that accepting it as is will open the path to misinterpretation and will allow this very confession to be used against us by those of evil intent.

Classis of the Heartland

David L. Heilman, stated clerk

Overture 41: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as Part of the Standards of Unity of the CRC (as a Fourth Confession)

I. Introduction

This overture is the response of Classis Minnkota to the report of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) regarding the Belhar Confession and the recommendation to adopt the Belhar as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession).

We have read the committee's report and appreciate the clear way in which the committee has presented the background and history of the Belhar and the history of the discussion of the Belhar in the CRC. However, we do not find the argumentation of the committee in favor of the adoption of the Belhar as a fourth confession to be persuasive.

II. Reasons the Belhar Confession should not be adopted by the CRC as a fourth confession

We believe that whatever its strengths, the Belhar Confession should not be adopted by the Christian Reformed Church as a fourth confession for the following reasons:

A. The Belhar Confession lacks the theological comprehensiveness and Reformed emphasis of the other standards of unity.

The Belgic Confession (BC), Heidelberg Catechism (HC), and Canons of Dort (CD) all contain the outline of biblical teaching that may be summarized as "creation, fall, and redemption." A harmony of the three documents demonstrates this. The creation and fall of humankind appear in BC 14; HC III, 6-7; and CD III/IV, 1-4. Redemption through Christ's death is described in BC 20-21; HC XV-XVI, 37-44; and CD II, 2-4. The Holy Spirit's work of regeneration appears in BC 24; HC III, 8; and CD III/IV, 11-12. The truth that salvation is by faith alone is affirmed in BC 22; HC VII, 20-21; XXIII, 61; and CD I, 2-4. While each of the three standards of unity was written in a different context, all of them had the purpose of giving a comprehensive statement of the Bible's message of salvation in Christ. In addition, all three of our current standards give expression to the Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God in our salvation (BC 16, 22; HC XXI, 54; XXV, 65; and CD I, 5-18; III/IV, 10-14). Because of their comprehensiveness and Reformed emphasis, the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort do indeed function as *standards*.

Although the Belhar is called a confession, it is fundamentally different from our current standards of unity. It lacks both a comprehensive statement of salvation in Christ and a Reformed emphasis on God's sovereignty in salvation. While the Belhar's concern for unity and justice is important, its focus is narrow. The Belhar speaks generally of Christ's work of reconciliation, but does not go beyond saying that the church is "the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another."

Because of its lack of theological comprehensiveness and Reformed emphasis, the Belhar Confession cannot function as a doctrinal standard. While the Belhar at times speaks eloquently regarding unity, reconciliation, and justice, it does not fit well with the confessions that currently make up our standards of unity and should not be included among them.

B. The Belhar Confession has significant theological weaknesses.

The Belhar has a number of strengths theologically. We are grateful for its strong statements in section 2 about the unity of the church, and how that unity is to be manifested. We appreciate its witness against any attempts to legitimate forced separation on a racial basis by appeal to the gospel. We are moved by its call for the church to practice social justice.

Yet, despite the Belhar's strengths, it also has significant weaknesses. Two Calvin Theological Seminary professors have pointed out some of these weaknesses. Professor John Bolt notes the failure of the Belhar to speak of repentance and forgiveness as being at the heart of biblical reconciliation.¹ Professor John Cooper describes the Belhar as "clearly ambiguous."²

One statement in the Belhar that concerns us is the statement in section 2: "Therefore, we reject any doctrine . . . which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church." Synod 2009 adopted a statement intended to prevent a misuse of the Belhar: "Synod further observes that, as a faithful witness to Scripture, the Belhar Confession does not negate the biblically derived statements of synod on homosexuality, including those of 1973 and 1996." The synodical statement is somewhat reassuring, but one can still envision some future attempt to sanction including in the church those engaging in homosexual behavior that would appeal to the Belhar's words.

The most problematic part of the Belhar is its fourth section. Certainly it is true "that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people." But why, at this point, does the Belhar say nothing about *how* God brings about justice and shalom among people? Why does it say nothing about God reconciling the world to himself in Christ or about Christ being our peace? The Belhar refers in this section to Ephesians 2:14 and in section 2 to Ephesians 2:11-22. But here in section 4 the full message of Ephesians 2:11-22 should ring out in its words. By saying nothing at this point about reconciliation to God and to one another in Christ, the Belhar leaves itself open to being interpreted as an expression of "liberation theology."

The statement in section 4 that "God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged" is likewise easily misunderstood, and the Belhar does nothing to clarify it. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, *the poor* is a religious, as well as a socioeconomic, category. The summary of Robert Guelich is helpful: "*The poor* in Judaism referred to those in desperate need (socioeconomic element) whose helplessness drove them to a dependent relationship with God (religious element) for the supplying of their needs and vindication. Both elements are consistently present, although *'nwm* does place more stress on the latter."³ In the Gospel of Luke (cited repeatedly in section 4 of the Belhar), the poor often appear in a good light, while the rich appear in a bad

¹ J. Bolt, "Necessary Testimony—Flawed Confession?" *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, vol.17:3 (Fall 2010), pp. 8-9.

² J. Cooper, "Context and Confusion: What Does the Belhar Confess?" *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, vol.17:3 (Fall 2010), p. 11. See also his unpublished paper, "Affirm the Belhar? Yes, But Not as a Doctrinal Standard."

³ R. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), p. 69.

light. In Luke 6 Jesus looks at his disciples and says, "Blessed are you who are poor. . . ." He also says, "Woe to you who are rich." But it is a mistake to think that those who are poor in a socioeconomic sense can thereby claim to be blessed and in possession of God's kingdom. Nor are those who are rich in a socioeconomic sense automatically condemned. Luke 19 presents Zacchaeus, a rich man socioeconomically, who repents of his sins, becomes generous, and makes restitution. Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house. . . ." Guelich describes "the poor" of Jesus' ministry as "those who stood empty-handed, without a power base and pretense, before God."⁴ Even a wealthy man like Zacchaeus could come to be "poor" in this sense.

In defending the Belhar's statement that God "is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged," the EIRC report says that "it is indisputable that the Holy Scriptures teach us much about God's concern for those who are suffering and are the victims of injustice. The prophets of the Old Testament, as well as the teaching of the New Testament, repeatedly emphasize that the church is called to 'preach good news to the poor . . .' (Isa. 61:1)." Unfortunately, the Belhar says nothing about preaching good news to the poor. Section 4 would have been greatly strengthened if it had said that the good news that Jesus preached to the poor (and also to wealthy people like Zacchaeus who became "poor in spirit") was that through faith in him their sins could be forgiven and they could be reconciled to God and to one another. By saying nothing about God's good news for the poor, the Belhar leaves the "special way" in which God is "the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged" undefined and open to a variety of interpretations.

The Belhar goes on to affirm "that God calls the church to follow him in this. . . ." This appears to refer to being on the side of "the destitute, the poor and the wronged." Then echoing Psalm 146, the Belhar speaks of God as the one who "brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry," the one who "frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind," the one who "supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly." All of this must be affirmed by anyone who believes the Bible. But we need to recognize that Psalm 146 refers primarily to what God does for *members of the covenant community*.⁵ For us as new covenant believers, the psalm is fulfilled as God works through the ministry of Jesus and his renewed people. As the love of Christ is proclaimed in the gospel and demonstrated in action, the oppressed are liberated and the hungry are fed. Likewise, it is as those transformed by the grace of Christ that we practice what "for God" is "pure and undefiled religion," namely, "to visit orphans and widows in their suffering" (Belhar Confession and James 1:27). The Belhar fails to strike a Christ-centered "grace note" at precisely the point where it needs to be heard.

We agree with the Belhar "that the church must . . . stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing

⁴ Ibid, p. 71.

⁵ L.C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21), (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), p. 303.

stream." We agree too "that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others." Thus, for example, it is appropriate for the church to stand on the side of those in danger of being aborted and to witness against those who oppose laws that would protect them. But here again we believe it is a weakness of the Belhar that it fails to express the interrelationship between preaching the gospel and pursuing social justice. Missing is an acknowledgment that the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ is the primary means that God uses to "bring about justice and true peace among people."

Because of this significant theological weakness and ambiguity, the Belhar Confession should not be given a place alongside the standards of unity we currently have.

C. The Belhar Confession is likely to weaken rather than strengthen the unity of the CRC.

Because the Belhar lacks the theological comprehensiveness and Reformed emphasis of our other standards of unity and because it has significant theological weaknesses, it has not been embraced as a potential fourth confession by a considerable number of councils and classes within our denomination, or by at least two of the professors in Calvin Theological Seminary. This raises some important questions that the EIRC report fails to address.

Since the committee says nothing to the contrary, we have to assume that they intend that the Belhar Confession be adopted as part of the standards of unity (as a fourth confession) by means of a simple majority vote at Synod 2012. That leaves open the possibility that 51 percent of the delegates of synod could decide to add the Belhar as a fourth confession, even though 49 percent of the delegates (and perhaps 49 percent of the churches) are not in favor of doing so. Adopting the Belhar by a simple majority vote does not appear likely to promote unity within our denomination.

What will the consequences of adopting the Belhar as a fourth confession be? The committee says that requiring all officebearers to sign the Form of Subscription once again "is logistically very difficult and probably unnecessary." But how can officebearers be bound to teach and defend a document when they have not subscribed their names to it? If subscription to the Belhar is required, some will subscribe to it without enthusiasm or conviction, while others will refuse to subscribe to it. What then is the status of those who refuse to subscribe? Do they cease to be officebearers in the CRC? Will it be acceptable that some officebearers subscribe to three standards of unity and some to four? What if a church or classis decides not to require subscription to the Belhar? What will the status of such a church or classis be within the denomination?

The only guidance the EIRC report provides is the following: "If any officebearers should be faced with a difficulty contained in the Belhar Confession that would prevent them from giving their assent with a clear conscience, then the same procedure would apply as is already the case for such a difficulty with any of the other confessions that are part of our standards of unity." This fails to recognize that having a difficulty with a confession to

which one has already subscribed is different from refusing to subscribe to a confession. And given that a significant number of officebearers, councils, and possibly even classes may refuse to subscribe to the Belhar, the committee's proposed solution of submitting gravamina is not likely to work well.

It is ironic that the Belhar, which in its second section speaks of church unity, may in fact be the means of further fracturing the unity of the Christian Reformed Church. Because we are convinced that the Belhar Confession is likely to weaken rather than strengthen the unity of the CRC, we believe synod should not adopt it as a fourth confession.

III. Overture

Classis Minnkota overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar Confession as part of our standards of unity (as a fourth confession).

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession lacks the theological comprehensiveness and Reformed emphasis of our current standards of unity. It does not provide a comprehensive statement of the Bible's message of salvation in Christ. It also lacks a Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God in our salvation.
2. The Belhar Confession has significant theological weaknesses. It fails to state that God brings about justice and peace among people through his gracious redemption in Christ. It also fails to express the interrelationship between preaching the gospel and practicing social justice.
3. The Belhar Confession, if adopted as a fourth confession, is likely to weaken rather than strengthen the unity of the CRC.

Classis Minnkota

LeRoy G. Christoffels, stated clerk

Overture 42: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Confessional Standard or as a Testimony of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

I. Background

Synod 2009 proposed to Synod 2012 "the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession)" (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 604). Since that time, a lengthy discussion has taken place in our denomination—in local congregations, in classes, and on the CRC Network.

However, if the "ministry priority of the CRC is to create and sustain healthy congregations" (from current version of the Ministry Plan of the Christian Reformed Church, developed by the Board of Trustees, p. 7), any decision regarding adding a confession must be weighed against that goal. Interchurch relations are important, but they must not be given priority over the needs of the CRCNA in determining which documents have confessional status.

II. Analysis

A variety of reasons have been used to promote adopting the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession for the CRCNA. There has been little consideration of the negative impact that adopting the Belhar as an official confession of the CRCNA could have on a local church. Furthermore, there is little evidence that adopting the Belhar as a confession will advance the stated goal of the CRCNA of creating and sustaining healthy congregations.

A. The majority of theological arguments against adopting the Belhar Confession as a CRC confession focus on section four that highlights justice. Taken literally, adding this confession would alter the mission of the church (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

Who will define justice for the CRCNA? The Board of Trustees? The CRC Office of Social Justice? The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)? None of those organizations can possibly define justice in 1,000 different church contexts. If the answer is “individual churches,” then why must the Belhar be a confession for the denomination? Churches already practice justice in the manner and issues to which they feel called and equipped. Attempting to define the “just” side of an issue (whether same-sex marriage, economic policies, abortion, welfare, or any other multi-faceted issue) will only fracture churches and the denomination, not create solidarity.

More important than who will define justice is the question of priorities. Following the Great Commission is the primary task of the institutional church. Standing against “any form of injustice” (Belhar Confession, Section 4) is a huge shift in church focus.

B. The denomination is proposing a revised Form of Subscription (FOS) because so many churches have found potential officebearers reluctant to sign it. Adding a confession to the FOS would make it more likely that people would object to signing it. Beyond what prospective new officebearers might think, many current ones in the CRCNA have expressed concerns regarding the nature and content of the Belhar.

Will ministers and other officebearers who refuse to sign a Form of Subscription that includes the Belhar Confession be expected to resign? Why would we bind consciences in such a way?

C. There are many churches and classes who are against adopting the Belhar Confession. It is ironic that a document professing unity would be promoted in a manner and place where it will produce dissension.

The churches who feel they benefit from using the Belhar Confession are free to do so within biblical and confessional guidelines. To the extent churches have found ways to use the Belhar Confession beneficially, we celebrate with them. Any church will be able to follow their example without the CRCNA adopting the confession. There is no reason the Belhar Confession needs to be a CRCNA confession in order for the church to continue its efforts toward unity, reconciliation, and justice as described in various official documents of the CRCNA, most notably, the study committee report to Synod 1996, *God’s Diverse and Unified Family*.

D. The objection that the Belhar is too vague to be useful has never been answered. The fact that Synod 2009 felt the need to attach its own commentary to the Belhar stands as evidence of the Belhar's lack of clarity. The original authors of the Belhar seem to disagree with the commentary added to the Belhar by Synod 2009. By adopting the Belhar, the CRCNA could be assumed to agree with the Belhar's authors' interpretations of justice by those unfamiliar (especially new or prospective church members) with the introduction which Synod 2009 added.

E. The Belhar Confession allows for various interpretations of God's redemptive activity and is unclear about the nature of the gospel. Although the Belhar rightly asserts that true faith in Jesus Christ is the "only condition for membership in the church," it says nothing about repentance or the cross of Jesus Christ. Further, the Belhar confession presents a distorted view of God when it declares that God is "in a special way, the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged." While it is true that God cares deeply for the poor—and by extension, as God's people we must share in that concern for the poor—this language suggests that God plays favorites with the poor.

F. The local church often feels isolated from the decisions of synod. These feelings only grow when decisions appear to be made for political or inter-church reasons. The fact that the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) of the CRC is the primary force behind this proposal, rather than a ground swell from various congregations, also feeds cynicism and a disconnect in the local church.

G. None of the following reasons given by the EIRC (December 2011 letter to all CRC councils from the EIRC) effectively meet the stated goal of creating or sustaining healthy congregations.

This confession directly addresses a gap in the historic creeds. It must be acknowledged that much of the injustice in the world, including injustices perpetuated by members of the Reformed family, developed after the three historic creeds had already been adopted.

The notion that the Belhar fills a gap in our current confessions is a poor rationale for adopting the Belhar. Our current confessions call us to unity and reconciliation. Though they do not specifically mention racism, they do call us, for example, to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 4) and "not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be a party to this in others . . ." (Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 105).

Synods have said much about racism, but if we are trying to fill this gap confessionally, must we then adopt a confession regarding climate change, in vitro fertilization, and so forth?

The northern part of the Reformed family of churches that first adopted the three historic confessions must now listen to the voice of the southern Reformed family. The CRC must confessionally learn to walk in the shoes of those who have been oppressed.

Listening to the voice of southern Reformed believers is hardly the same as adopting the confession of one subset of its members. Further, the idea

that we, as North Americans, can walk in the shoes of people oppressed in South Africa by confessing their beliefs is questionable.

The Reformed ecumenical organizations of which the CRC has been and is a part of have recommended the Belhar Confession's adoption.

This is not a good reason for adoption. The CRCNA has not made major decisions based on ecumenical consequences, as evidenced by our acceptance of ejection from a different Reformed ecumenical council—the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) over the women-in-office issue. Neither should we make ecumenical concerns paramount now.

We should also note the Belhar has not been adopted for confessional status by all members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The CRCNA will not be isolated—even within the WCRC—for not adopting the Belhar. In 2011, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, a large and progressive denomination which is also a member of the WCRC, voted against adopting the Belhar as one of their confessional standards.

A significant number of ethnic-minority members of the CRC believe that the adoption of the Belhar Confession is an important step in the denomination's commitment to racial reconciliation and upholding the biblical principles of justice.

This is partially true. It is also true that some ethnic-minority members (especially in California) do not seem to support the adoption of the Belhar Confession. If synod wishes to unify its various racial groups, it must give weight to minority voices regardless of whether they agree or disagree with adopting the Belhar Confession as binding on the CRCNA.

III. Overture

Classis Columbia overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confessional standard, nor as a testimony of the CRCNA.

Grounds:

1. Granting the Belhar Confession equal status to the other three confessions of the CRCNA will fundamentally change the nature of the CRCNA. Many members could not in good conscience sign the Form of Subscription if it included the Belhar. Adopting the Belhar will leave few options. In this respect, this decision will likely be more divisive than the women-in-office issue.
2. The Belhar Confession is vague. Synod 2009 recognized the ambiguity of the Confession specifically regarding the issue of homosexuality and clarified the confession by adopting an introductory statement. Raising justice issues to the level of confessional status will lead to unending arguments and disunity. We can expect that future synods will be called to issue additional clarifications as various assertions are made about what the Belhar says and what it means. This expectation limits its effectiveness at fulfilling a primary role of a confession, that is, defining what the church believes.
3. The Belhar Confession will not help congregations reach those who are ignoring God in their lives. In our three years of discussion, no one has demonstrated that the Belhar Confession will help local churches reach

non-Christians. Most importantly, its adoption will drive churches who take the Belhar Confession seriously to put the needs of justice and reconciliation above our call to evangelism.

4. Much of the passion behind the push for confessional status of the Belhar Confession comes from the actions and expectations of our ecumenical partners. A decision this fundamental to our identity simply should not be made based on what our ecumenical partners think or do.
5. Because the Belhar Confession was written by others, it cannot function in the role typically implied by the term *testimony*. The CRCNA already has a contemporary testimony. Using the same terminology for the Belhar Confession is confusing at best and at worst will upset both those strongly for and those strongly against adopting the Belhar Confession.
6. There has been little discussion about how the Belhar will help our denomination achieve its stated goal of creating and sustaining healthy congregations. Unless the adoption of the Belhar Confession can be demonstrated to be a vital help to the mission and ministry of the CRCNA, it should not be adopted.

Classis Columbia

Roger D. Kramer, stated clerk

Overture 43: Do Not Adopt the Belhar as a Confession of the CRC

Classis Eastern Canada overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar as a confession of the Christian Reformed Church.

Grounds:

1. The present confessions: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belgic Confession of Faith, adequately address the relationships we are to have with our neighbors and fellow human beings: that we are not to harm them, but to love them as ourselves; that we are to protect, preserve and improve their lives; that we are not to covet them or what they have; that we are to care for the poor and disadvantaged.
2. Though the Belhar Confession came out of a context of apartheid and is correctly considered to be dealing with racism, it is not merely about racism. It is also about the unity of the church (Article 2) and the mission of reconciliation (Article 3). However, the Belhar's words about unity, particularly in the rejection clauses under point 2, are both too strong and too vague.

For instance, consider this statement: "We reject any doctrine . . . which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church." What will this mean for our denomination, which acknowledges two theological positions regarding women in office?

If the Belhar were adopted by the CRC, we wonder to what exactly we are committing ourselves as a denomination. "Unity at all costs" is

an overstatement of the Belhar's position; however, we think it is tilting in that direction.

3. If the Belhar is adopted as a confession because of a certain sin or injustice to our fellow humans, then we would need to consider making other sins and injustices, such as pollution or gambling, the subjects of a confession to combat those sins.
4. We believe that adopting the Belhar as a new confession will take away credibility of our present forms of unity, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belgic Confession of Faith, which already clearly state how we are to deal with our fellow persons.
5. The Belhar Confession is an excellent interpretation and application of certain parts of the Christian Reformed Church's present confessions, which deal with how we should relate to our fellow human beings, with unity, and with equality in Christ. Therefore, we recommend synod adopt the Belhar Confession as a *testimony* (like the *Contemporary Testimony*).

Classis Eastern Canada
Jean Lauziere, stated clerk

Overture 44: Do Not Adopt the Belhar as a Fourth Confession of the CRCNA

I. Background

In 2009, the synod of the CRCNA proposed to Synod 2012 "the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church in North America" (*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 606).

The churches of the CRCNA have now had three years to study and reflect on the Belhar Confession. These discussions have led us to think more clearly and precisely about the sin of racism, the need to encourage reconciliation, and the nature of our confessions.

The Belhar Confession has many important points which do need to be lauded as biblical and thus extremely helpful to the church in the world today. It is entirely true that our triune God "gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit." This wording from the Belhar reminds us of the rich words from Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 21, which states that "the Son of God, through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith." How comforting it is to know and to believe these truths from God's Word and from these two confessions.

The Belhar also strives for unity, the unity that Christ called for in John 17:20-23, to exist within the church of Jesus Christ. This unity should be lived out by all Christians and "must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways" so that "the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people . . . may have no place in the church and must be resisted." This is what Christ desires for his church.

The Belhar also stands boldly in its call to see the sins of racism, injustice, and neglect of the poor and the widows eradicated from the church. In the

church of Jesus Christ there is no room for these sins, for the unity that we have in Christ calls us to love one another with the same type of love that Christ shows to his church.

While the Belhar does excel in many areas and consistently calls the church to reconcile broken relationships and to be united in Christ, there are too many theological issues for it to be accepted as a fourth confession.

II. Overture

Classis Northern Michigan overtures Synod 2012 to not adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the CRCNA.

Grounds:

1. There are statements within the Belhar that are theologically ambiguous.

Classis Northern Michigan believes that if any document were to become a new confession of the CRCNA, then that document ought to be clearly written, succinct in its message, and equally consistent with the Word of God and with the three forms of unity within the CRCNA (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belgic Confession).

Unfortunately the Belhar Confession has statements within it that are inconsistent with the Word of God and are thus open to a great variety of interpretations. They are as follows:

- a. #2: bullet point following “Therefore, we reject any doctrine”—
“which explicitly or implicitly maintains that . . . any . . . social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.” This is also inconsistent with Scripture, as some social factors (such as homosexual practices) are indeed sinful (Gen. 18-19; 2 Peter 2:6-10; Jude 6-7; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). In fact, Allan Boesak, who helped draft the Belhar, “dramatically insisted that the church’s Belhar Confession demands the defense of the full rights of gay members. When the synod rejected this, he announced his intention to resign from all church offices and left the synod floor with his wife” (*The Banner*, January 16, 2009).
 - b. #4: second bullet point says that “God . . . is in a *special way* the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” This too is inconsistent with the whole of Scripture, which clearly teaches that God is in a special way the God of his people, regardless of their economic status. There are plenty of verses to support the contention that God cares for the poor and oppressed, but there are no verses that suggest that he is their covenantal God apart from faith. Nor are there any verses which suggest that God looks on the believing poor with more favor than the believing non-poor. God does not show partiality to the poor, nor does he defer to the great (Lev. 19:15).
2. The Belhar confuses the message of salvation.

The Belhar Confession speaks at great length about the issue of reconciliation. Unfortunately, the Belhar speaks little about the fact that all humans need to repent and be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ alone. While reconciliation among people certainly is biblical, it is not the means of salvation. It is very possible that one could read the Belhar and come to the conclusion that one is saved when one is

reconciled to people of different races, economic classes, ages, or abilities. While “loving your neighbor as yourself” certainly is a biblical mandate, the other mandate of “loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength” is not even mentioned in the Belhar.

Salvation in Christ is far more than simply loving one another and treating others as Christ would have treated them. There are many morally good people in this world who do not know Christ and therefore their morally good works are still detestable to a holy God.

When the gospel is reduced to simply loving one another, it is very possible for one to view the Belhar Confession as having its roots in the social gospel movement. This movement implies that God grants eternal life to all humans, or to all people of goodwill, whether or not they have faith in Jesus Christ during this life. This “gospel” movement is consistent neither with the truths of Scripture nor with the three forms of unity.

3. The content of the Belhar is too narrowly focused to be a confession of the CRCNA.

One of the great blessings we have within the CRCNA is that we have three confessions, each of which clearly states the essential content of the gospel and summarizes the Reformed Christian faith. All three clearly explain the basic doctrines of sin, alienation from God, God’s sovereign grace, election, reconciliation through the Son of God (his incarnation, perfectly obedient life, death, and resurrection), and more. The three forms of unity are not flawless, as they are written by sinful man. For example, people have questioned the need and the accuracy of Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 80. Others wonder why Belgic Confession Article 4 notes that Paul was the author of Hebrews when it very possibly was written by Apollos or someone else. Our three confessions are not without fault, but they are very concise and clear on Reformed doctrine.

While it is commendable that the Belhar focuses on the issues of reconciliation, racism, oppression, unity, and a few more, it is also unfortunate that the Belhar Confession does not teach or state the basic gospel of Jesus Christ. Reformed biblical doctrine is not addressed either. It does not make clear the way of salvation or outline mere Christianity.

The Belhar therefore could not stand on its own to explain even the basic teachings of Scripture regarding salvation, election, God’s sovereignty, the life/death/resurrection of Christ, atonement, and much more. Therefore the Belhar Confession ought not be adopted as the fourth confession of the CRCNA.

4. The teachings of the Belhar Confession have already been addressed by the CRCNA in other documents which clearly teach on issues such as ethnic diversity, unity in Christ, and social justice. Many of these statements are stronger than what is in the Belhar, as shown in the following:
 - a. *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*

As covenant partners, set free for joyful obedience, we offer our hearts and lives to do God’s work in the world. With tempered impatience, eager to see injustice ended, we expect the Day of the Lord. (6)

Together, male and female, single and married, young and old—every hue and variety of humanity—we are called to represent God, for the Lord God made us all. Life is God’s gift to us, and we are called to foster the well-being of all the living, protecting from harm the unborn and the weak, the poor and the vulnerable. (11)

All spheres of life . . . bear the wounds of our rebellion. Sin is present everywhere—in pride of race, arrogance of nations, abuse of the weak and helpless. . . . We become victims of our own sin. (16)

In all our striving to excuse or save ourselves, we stand condemned before the God of truth. But our world, broken and scarred, still belongs to God, who holds it together and gives us hope. (17)

God the Spirit lavishes gifts on the church . . . equipping each member to build up the body of Christ and to serve our neighbors. (29)

We grieve that the church, which shares one Spirit, one faith, one hope, and spans all time, place, race, and language, has become a broken communion in a broken world. . . . When our pride or blindness hinders the unity of God’s household, we seek forgiveness. (40)

We are thankful for the freedoms enjoyed by citizens of many lands; we grieve with those who live under oppression, and we seek for them the liberty to live without fear. (52)

We call on all governments to do public justice and to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals, groups, and institutions so that each may do their tasks. We urge governments and pledge ourselves to safeguard children and the elderly from abuse and exploitation, to bring justice to the poor and oppressed, and to promote the freedom to speak, work, worship, and associate. (53)

We long for that day when . . . we will see our Savior face to face. . . . He will set all things right, judge evil, and condemn the wicked. . . . God will be all in all, righteousness and peace will flourish, everything will be made new, and every eye will see at last that our world belongs to God. (56-58)

- b. The synod of the CRCNA condemned apartheid in 1983 and called it “unbiblical” (*Acts of Synod 1983*, p. 712)
- c. See Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 40.
- d. The CRCNA’s synodical report “God’s Diverse and Unified Family” (1996)

To be in Christ is to be reconciled with one another as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people of God. We see this statement as both declaration and judgment, indicative and imperative. It is a statement of the way things are in God’s program; it is also a prophetic call to “become who we already are” in Christ. (8)

The crown of this varied creation is the human person, God’s image bearer. As God’s image bearers, all human beings without exception are endowed with royal dignity and share in dominion over all creation. As God blesses them with fruitfulness, all their descendants without any exception also share equally in this royal dignity. Human beings also image God in their capacity for loving relationships with God and with each other in righteousness and holiness. (9)

Second, applied more narrowly to the human race, this truth of the unity of all things in Christ implies a radical unity and equality of all people. In the biblical picture, all humanity has been created in God’s image and has its source not only in Christ but also in Adam and Eve, our first parents. Referring to Adam, Paul says, “From one ancestor he made all

nations to inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26, NRSV). According to Genesis 3, Eve is "the mother of all the living" (v. 20). All human beings of all races are related to one another through their common origins in our first parents. The Christian faith allows no room for holding that other human beings are fundamentally different from us or somehow less truly made in God's image than we are.

Third, the unity that Jesus Christ died and rose again to bring into being is not a new unity created for the first time, unknown and untested; it is a primal unity restored, a unity re-created. When the world is reconciled through Jesus Christ, it is going back to being a world that has already been and to the one by whom and in whom and through whom all things were created and existed in unity. This gives Christians hope and direction in their work. (11)

The availability of additional pertinent information from "God's Diverse and Unified Family" is too lengthy to be reproduced in this overture. Please read the following:

- Pages 17-24 provide a helpful and biblical understanding of the unity that God's people have in Christ.
- Pages 25-28 present an excellent exposition on the need for racial reconciliation and the hope that Christians have, knowing that one day reconciliation will be fulfilled in Christ.

Therefore, with statements such as these, "God's Diverse and Unified Family" is a far weightier, more thorough, and more biblical document than the Belhar Confession.

5. The adoption of the Belhar will cause even greater division within the CRCNA.

The Belhar was written in hopes of promoting unity. There already is great division within the CRCNA regarding the Belhar. If accepted as a confession within the CRCNA, then all officebearers must subscribe to its teachings (unlike the ordination of women) as being biblically true. Since many officers within the church have great reservation as to the Belhar's consistency with Scripture, not all officebearers will sign the Form of Subscription if the Belhar becomes the fourth confession. This will create great division within the CRCNA.

6. The desire for the CRCNA to adopt the Belhar has come out of a movement within the CRCNA to strengthen ecumenical relations. While strong ecumenical relations are important and healthy, the basis for adopting a confession for the sake of ecumenicity is an unbiblical ground (Synod 2009 used the argument for ecumenicity in its grounds for recommending the adoption of the Belhar as a confession to Synod 2012). All unity and ecumenicity should be grounded in the truth.

Classis Northern Michigan
David G. Kroon, stated clerk

Overture 45: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Form of Unity

The council of Redeeming Love Community Christian Reformed Church (East Grand Forks, Minn.), with the concurrence of First Christian Reformed Church (Crookston, Minn.), overtures Synod 2012 to not adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth form of unity.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession is not of sufficient clarity to be a standard of doctrine, practice, and discipline, as are the three forms of unity.
2. The doctrine of reconciliation as a model for public service outside the ministry of the Word in the church is insufficiently grounded in Scripture.
3. The Belhar Confession is not sufficient to bring about its purpose of unity as the three forms of unity bring about unity.
4. There is no unity over this matter within the CRCNA, as there is with regard to the three forms of unity.

The best service that the CRCNA can offer to other Reformed denominations is to insist on the same standards for the Belhar Confession that are demonstrated in the three forms of unity.

Council of Redeeming Love Community CRC,
East Grand Forks, Minnesota
Walter Van Eps, clerk
with the concurrence of First CRC,
Crookston, Minnesota

Note: This overture was submitted to the meeting of Classis Lake Superior on March 5, 2012; however, classis did not adopt the overture.

Overture 46: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as the Fourth Confessional Standard

Classis Pacific Northwest overtures Synod 2012 to not adopt the Belhar Confession as the fourth confessional standard of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Grounds:

1. Ambiguity in the Belhar confession greatly impedes its authority to function as a doctrinal standard and form of unity. Widely diverging interpretations of the Belhar, both supportive of and opposed to the adoption of the Belhar Confession, illustrate this ambiguity.
2. As a confession, the Belhar cannot stand alone, requiring the addition of four other documents with its adoption. While these additional documents do clarify some of the ambiguity in the Belhar, it is not clear that they would be binding on officebearers and the church.
3. The churches have not, by and large, come to agreement with the Belhar during these three years of reflection. That is, we have not used it to express our faith regarding these matters. This is out of step with

how the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism came to be adopted as standards of unity by our forebears.

4. The overture presented by the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) does not offer sufficient checks and balances to the consideration of the Belhar. That the biggest change in our Church Order in our lifetime is made by a simple majority vote and without at least the check of the next synod is problematic. Synod 2009 did not vote to adopt the Belhar but, rather, to present it to the churches for discussion and then have Synod 2012 consider the Belhar:

That synod propose to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession) and the revision of Church Order Supplement, Articles 5, 23-a, and 32-d and the Public Declaration of Agreement to reflect that adoption.

(Acts of Synod 2009, Article 57, p. 604)

The adoption of Classis Pacific Northwest's overture that synod decline to adopt the Belhar is evidence that the three years of consideration have not led to agreement, making a simple vote on the Belhar problematic. Church Order Supplement, Article 47, c, 1 requires that any substantial alteration "may not be implemented until it is adopted by the following synod." While the EIRC report suggests the three year period of reflection is consistent with the requirement of Church Order Article 47 (p. 3, quoting from the 2009 decision in the *Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 604), this path bypasses the wisdom of a second synod's consideration of a potentially divisive change.

5. The overture presented by the EIRC offers insufficient pastoral advice or procedure for those officebearers who cannot affirm the Belhar as a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church. The EIRC's overture calls for officebearers to use the "same process" as other confessional concerns, but that process assumes that the officebearer has come to have a difficulty after first signing the Form of Subscription. This situation is different—one in which a present officebearer might not be able to affirm the Form of Subscription to begin with, thus not be eligible to hold office in the CRC. In addition, churches that explicitly affirm the three standards of unity in their articles of incorporation would find themselves no longer in agreement with those of the Christian Reformed Church. According to the Belhar, these pastors and churches would find themselves in disobedience to Jesus Christ for breaking unity and for failing to confess the Belhar:

"We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and do all these things . . ." (Article 5).

Without clear direction for those whose consciences would keep them from affirming the Belhar as a confession, adoption of the Belhar would lead to disunity and confusion.

Classis Pacific Northwest
Matthew J. Borst, stated clerk

Overture 47: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as the Fourth Form of Unity

After a five-week Sunday afternoon study of the Belhar Confession in Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Woodbridge, Ontario, the council of Maranatha CRC overtures Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar Confession and add it to the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism as a fourth form of unity.

Grounds:

1. The fact that the Belhar Confession has been deemed “in harmony with the Reformed faith as a body of truth” (*Acts of Synod 2009*) and “faithful to Holy Scripture and consistent with the teachings of the Reformed confessions” (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 242) by no means compels one to the conclusion that the Belhar should become one of the forms of unity; otherwise most sermons preached in the CRC would be eligible for confessional status.
2. The Belhar Confession lacks the theological precision required to direct the Christian Reformed Church toward right doctrine and away from heresy.
 - a. Synod 2009 already acknowledged this lack of theological precision in the adopted statement of introduction: “Synod further observes that . . . the Belhar does not negate the biblically derived statements of synod on homosexuality . . . synod recognizes that injustice and enmity between peoples are two dimensions of all-pervasive human sinfulness, for which every human being needs Jesus Christ as Savior.”
 - b. The Belhar does not distinguish between the church as institution and the church as organism, nor between the church and the individual Christian, leaving unclear the practical application of statements like “the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice.” Does this mean the organic church, the CRCNA, the local congregation, the universal church, an individual Christian, or all of the above?
 - c. The Belhar does not sufficiently explain the statement “God . . . is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged,” in light of Leviticus 19:15—“Do not show partiality to the poor.”
 - d. The Belhar sets up an unresolved tension between the poor and the rich, by declaring that God is in a special way the God of the poor while also charging the church with the task of witnessing against (rather than witnessing *to*) the powerful and the privileged.
3. Beyond issues of theological precision, the Belhar contains some glaring omissions in its biblical theology.
 - a. While expounding on reconciliation and on justice, it does not discuss the equally relevant biblical themes of mercy and forgiveness for wrongdoers.
 - b. It hardly mentions the great reconciliation between God and humanity brought about by the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Nor are these central doctrines of the Christian faith mined for their potential in addressing the issues of reconciliation, justice, and unity.

- c. It does not highlight Matthew 18 or other biblical texts that provide practical biblical guidance for achieving reconciliation.
 - d. It does not discuss the Lord's Supper, in which the church demonstrates through sacrament these very themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
4. The ecumenical creeds and three forms of unity describe, clarify, and defend what has always been affirmed by the universal church. The Belhar by deliberate intent is prescriptive and seeks to push the church forward into a process of "continuous soul searching together and joint wrestling with the issues. . . ." In this way, the Belhar represents a significant and unacceptable departure from the history and genre of confessional documents.
 5. Denying the Belhar "form of unity" status would allow the Christian Reformed Church to address the issues of racial reconciliation, unity, and justice in a more theologically robust way—a way that does not omit important themes and is more theologically precise.

Council of Maranatha CRC, Woodbridge, Ontario
Willem Ubbens, clerk

Note: This overture was submitted to the January 19, 2012, meeting of Classis Toronto but was not adopted.

Overture 48: Do Not Accept the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Confession

I. Introduction

For at least the past two years, the CRCNA has been engaged in a discussion regarding the status of the Belhar Confession. We have been asked to do this by churches in South Africa who have given the Belhar *status confessionis*. As they have done this, they have also commended the Belhar to us, asking us to adopt it as well.

As we read and explore the Belhar, we recognize that this document raises the vital themes of justice, unity, and reconciliation—important themes in both the Bible and the Christian church. We commend the Belhar Confession and the recently published materials associated with it for raising these important issues. For this, we are very thankful.

II. Overture

However, as important as these issues are, we do not feel that the Belhar itself should be added as one of the forms of unity in the CRCNA. Therefore, Nelson Avenue Community CRC (Burnaby, British Columbia) overtures synod not to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession in the CRCNA.

Grounds:

1. *Insufficient Content:* Compared to our three forms of unity (and even the *Contemporary Testimony*), the Belhar Confession is much too brief and narrow to be considered a confession. It neither summarizes the Christian faith (as do the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession) nor elaborates God's plan of redemption (Canons of Dort).

In addition, the Belhar reads more like a political document than a theological or confessional document. Simply put, the Belhar does not carry the “weight” of or have the “tone” of a confession.

2. *Vague and Ambiguous*: The Belhar is not well written, is wordy, and portions of it are *vague and ambiguous*. *A confession should be none of these things*.
3. *Troublesome Statements*: We find the following statements in the Belhar troubling:
 - a. “That this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17:20-23)” —the use of John 17:20-23 to support this statement is strained.
 - b. “Work for one cause” —what is the “one cause” we are called to work for?
 - c. “That true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church” —what does this statement do to our understanding of baptized infants and children as members of the church?
 - d. “Which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin” —what does this phrase mean? What does it commit us to?
 - e. “That God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people” —God does not only *wish* to bring justice but has done so in and through Jesus Christ!
 - f. “That God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” —We do not feel that a statement like this should be given confessional status.
 - g. “That the church must therefore stand by people *in any form of suffering and need*, which implies, among other things, that the church *must witness against and strive against any form of injustice*, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (emphasis added) —Who will judge what are the forms of injustice that we must “witness and strive against”? What does this commit us to?
 - h. “That the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others” —What does this commit us to?
4. *Where Will This Lead Us?* We are concerned when we hear things like “the Belhar has been promoted as liberation theology by prominent leaders of denominations in the former World Alliance of Reformed Churches” and that it has been “widely used to advocate progressive economic and political policies and gay marriage as gospel mandates.” If true, these are troublesome reports of the Belhar’s use in the wider Reformed Christian community.

5. *Confessional Integrity*: We do not want to adopt a document with deficiencies in it. If we do, we will either inflate the Belhar or deflate our other confessions.
6. *Levels of Authority*: We recognize that in the church there are various levels of authority (i.e., personal opinion, church-wide statements, binding confessions) as we address issues in our world. The issue of ethnic and racial reconciliation, very thoroughly addressed in Scripture (i.e., Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 3:11; Rev. 7:9-10) is certainly more than personal opinion. However, we do not feel that this issue is on the level of binding confession. If we make it so, then what will stop us from also adopting confessions that address other things (i.e., human trafficking, poverty, homelessness, the environment, economics, worship, evangelism, other lifestyle issues)?
7. *Redundancy*: The CRC has already written a very good document on ethnic diversity (*God's Diverse and Unified Family*, 1996), which is much more extensive than the Belhar. As well, the CRC has already adopted statements on racial and ethnic reconciliation, including the following: "That synod, on the basis of the above principles, declare that to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people, and that to ignore his calling to turn this principle into experienced reality is sinful according to God's Word and the Reformed confessions" (Synod 1996). There are also various places where the themes of racial and ethnic reconciliation are addressed either directly or indirectly in our present Confessions (Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 20, 32, 54, 55; Belgic Confession Articles 12, 14, 15, 27, 37; Canons of Dort I, 1, 4, 7; II, 5; III/IV, 1, 2).
8. *Reformed?* We miss in the Belhar Reformed themes such "sin-salvation-service, "creation-fall-redemption," or the "covenant"—themes so evident in the three forms of unity.
9. *Potential Divisiveness*: The Belhar is supposed to promote unity. If it becomes a confession, then all officebearers must subscribe to it. What will happen to those who cannot conscientiously do so? We fear that adoption of the Belhar could, ironically, lead to disunity in the denomination.
10. *Ironic*: It is ironic that in a time when the CRCNA is becoming more apathetic about its confessional heritage (something that we are concerned about) that we are so eager to add a fourth confession. Why are we doing this? Maybe it would be better to give attention to the confessions that we already have. In addition, adding more confessions will, in the end, not make us more confessional but will rather water down our confessional foundation.
11. *Prescribing Behavior/Changing People?* As thankful as we are for recent developments in our denomination toward ethnic and racial reconciliation, we need much more than a confessional document to change people's behavior and attitudes!

III. Conclusion

We overture Synod 2012 not to adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession. The Belhar is a flawed document, it does not carry the *weight* that *status confessionis* would place upon it, its adoption will weaken the confessional and

doctrinal foundation of our denomination, and its approval as a confession will lead to disunity within the CRCNA.

Council of Nelson Avenue CRC,
Burnaby, British Columbia
Deb Ashton, clerk

Note: The above overture was presented to the meeting of Classis B.C. North-West held September 20-21, 2011, but not adopted.

Overture 49: Do Not Adopt the Belhar Confession as a Fourth Standard of Faith

Grace Christian Reformed Church in Burke, Virginia, urges synod not to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of faith for the Christian Reformed Church.

Grounds:

1. While the Belhar Confession makes some needed and significant statements on important current issues, it focuses on specific issues rather than covering the broad areas of theology, as is done by the other CRC confessions.
2. The Belhar Confession is, at times, less than clear in its theology. For example, in the first statement under item 3, the Belhar seems to equate human reconciliation with reconciliation to God. It uses 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 as a basis for its statement, which focuses on reconciliation to God, which the confession ignores. More generally, the confession does not clearly cover the redemptive work of Christ at any point.

Council of Grace CRC, Burke, Virginia
Curtis Dubay, clerk

Note: This overture was presented to Classis Hackensack at its winter meeting but was not adopted.

Overture 50: Address the Process of Shared Supervision in Church Order Article 13-b

I. Background

Classis Grandville wishes to express to Synod 2012 its continued sadness and regret over the April 2011 request by the Board of Trustees for the Rev. Gerard Dykstra to resign as executive director of the CRCNA and the process by which it occurred. We are thankful that Synod 2011, through its advisory committee, did make certain acknowledgments and laments regarding Rev. Dykstra's resignation and expressed thanksgiving for his work. However, pain, confusion, and disappointment continue for many of us. We also continue to hurt for our brother and his wife, Linda, as they seek healing.

We ask Synod 2012 to

1. Pray for the council and congregation of Ivanrest CRC and other congregations and individuals who continue to hurt, that they may find peace.
2. Pray for Rev. Dykstra, for his wife, Linda, and for their family.
3. Reach out to Rev. Dykstra to seek reconciliation.
4. Pray for the current leadership of the CRCNA, and pray that future leadership of the CRCNA will be new, diverse, and innovative.

We trust that God will remain faithful to his Romans 8:28 promise, and we are eager for the time when all of us will be able to celebrate the good that God works in us and through us from this lamentable situation. We hope that Synod 2012, out of compassion for those who continue to hurt and a passion for the future of the CRCNA, will be used by God to bring healing for the past and a hope for the future.

II. Overture

Classis Grandville overtures Synod 2012 to address Church Order Article 13-b and its Supplement in order to provide a more honest, effective, and God-honoring process for shared supervision between calling churches and cooperating congregations, institutions, or agencies in the future or delete it if its requirements cannot be followed.

Grounds:

1. The current wording of Church Order Article 13-b does not sufficiently address the timing and the nature of the communication between the partners in supervision.
2. The current wording of Church Order Article 13-b does not speak to a collaborative approach between the calling church and the employing agency in caring for those they supervise.

Classis Grandville
Daniel B. Mouw, stated clerk

Overture 51: Amend Church Order Article 17

I. Background

At its September 2009 and March 2010 meetings, Classis Lake Superior received Article 17 requests from Prinsburg Unity CRC and Rev. Jeffrey Fisher, and from Emo CRC and Rev. Daniel Vos. In both cases, Rev. J. Fisher and Rev. D. Vos desired to pursue an advanced theological degree with no intention of returning to serve their present congregations at the conclusion of their studies. Noting the stigma that has been attached to an Article 17 release, these ministers and councils considered all other possible ways of maintaining their ministerial credentials while returning to school. Prinsburg Unity CRC sought the possibility of calling Rev. J. Fisher to serve the church in "other work which relates directly to the calling of a minister" (Article 12-c). Advised by the classical interim committee that Article 12 does not apply to this situation, they reluctantly brought an Article 17 request, with the added request that the reason for the separation be clearly stated so as to avoid any undue negative reflection on either the church or Rev. J. Fisher. Similarly, Rev. D. Vos was advised by Dr. Henry De Moor that Article 17 was the proper article of

the Church Order for such a release, since this was not a temporary leave of absence with intent to return to the congregation (Article 16). Rev. Vos was likewise advised to request that the reasons for the release be clearly noted by classis. Dr. De Moor also recommended that Rev. Vos request that his eligibility for call begin at the conclusion, not the beginning, of his studies.

Classis Lake Superior agreed to these Article 17 requests with the reasons for release clearly noted, and the synodical deputies concurred. In 2009, the synodical deputies further noted, "This article does not fit the purpose of study, but there is no other more suitable article in the Church Order. This should be addressed by a future synod." In its discussion in 2010, classis noted the comments of the synodical deputies from 2009 and requested that Rev. D. Vos and Rev. J. Fisher and the councils of Prinsburg Unity and Emo CRCs draft an overture to synod to change the Church Order with regard to the release of ministers from their congregations for the purpose of pursuing further theological education. In their research on the application of Article 17 to ministers returning for further theological education, it was observed that there has been a consistent attempt by these ministers to seek out any means other than Article 17 to maintain their credentials, particularly to avoid the negative stigma associated with Article 17 (see, for examples, Rev. Timothy Howerzyl, Rev. Amanda Benckhuyzen, and Rev. Edward Gerber). Additionally, despite the fact that Classis Lake Superior followed the recommendations of the synodical deputies and Dr. De Moor, the reasons for release under Article 17-a were not included in the *Acts of Synod 2010* for Rev. D. Vos and Rev. J. Fisher (see *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 847-50).

Prinsburg Unity CRC brought an overture proposal to Classis Lake Superior at its September 2010 meeting, at which the overtures committee recommended an amendment or addition be made to Article 12 rather than Article 17. The reasons they offered were that Article 12 addresses circumstances more similar to those considered by the overture, and that the establishment of a specific "honorable" release under Article 17 tends by implication to heighten the unfortunate stigma that has come to be associated with Article 17. The overture proposal was returned to Prinsburg Unity for further consideration. After further study and discussion with denominational representatives, the overture was brought back to Classis Lake Superior to propose an amendment to Article 17.

II. Overture

Classis Lake Superior overtures Synod 2012 to revise Article 17 of the Church Order in order to more clearly address the situation of ministers of the Word seeking release from active ministerial service in order to pursue further theological education.

We propose the following addition of an Article 17-e to the Church Order:

- e. A minister of the Word who desires to pursue further theological education and does not intend to return to their present congregation shall be declared to be honorably released from active ministerial service for the reason(s) stated upon the approval of the classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies. Further, ministers thus released will be eligible for call at any time during their studies and for a period of two years upon completion of or withdrawal from their studies.

Note: This revision does not change the requirements of Article 17-a, -b, -c or its supplements. As long as all documentation is in order, the concurrence and advice of synodical deputies may be accomplished without requiring their presence at the classis meeting, since this is an honorable release with the blessing of all parties involved.

Grounds:

1. Pursuing further theological studies is consistent with the calling of a minister of the Word in the CRCNA.
 - a. Church Order Article 20 requires that theological professors be ministers of the Word who are equipped to train others. In order to be qualified and properly equipped to carry out these tasks, it is often necessary for the minister to be trained at the Ph.D. level.
 - b. The CRCNA has a long history of valuing the teaching ministry of professors at the seminary and college levels.
2. The functional usage of Article 17 has created a negative stigma that is not appropriate for the reason of a minister pursuing further theological education.
 - a. The supplement to Article 17, the *Manual for Synodical Deputies*, and the regulations regarding “release from ministerial service” adopted by Synod 1998 and amended by Synod 2010 exclusively refer to dealing with conflict, disruption, and emotional difficulties, with specific suggestions for counseling, assistance, advocacy, and reconciliation. These guidelines are not appropriate to the situation of a minister returning for further theological education (see *Acts of Synod 1998*, pp. 392-96; *Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 623-24; *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 915-16, and *Manual for Synodical Deputies 2008*, section IX, G, 3 and Appendix A).
 - b. The requirement that a separation be based on “weighty reasons” has attained the connotation of situations that are “heavy, serious, grave, solemn, or burdensome,” since many Article 17 cases are the result of conflict.
 - c. A minister of the Word seeking to be more effective in ministry or specializing in a specific area of ministry should not be stigmatized by receiving the same treatment as cases caused by irreconcilable conflict. (*Note:* The same should be said about *congregations* whose minister is released to pursue further theological education rather than irreconcilable conflict.)
 - d. The recommendation that the reasons for release be included with the Article 17 decision is an ineffective means of avoiding this stigma when the reasons are not included in the *Acts of Synod*.
3. The judgment of the synodical deputies that Article 17 does not fit the situation of a minister returning to school for further theological education demonstrates the need for a more fitting procedure. The addition of Article 17-e would provide an appropriate means of addressing this situation within the current process of releasing a minister from active ministry in a congregation.

Classis Lake Superior
Harold de Jong, stated clerk

Overture 52: Revise Church Order Article 40-c

Classis Hamilton has experienced a marked improvement in effectiveness by having the same person preside over its meetings during the past one year period. Having elected a presiding officer for a full year has allowed Classis Hamilton to strengthen its planning capabilities, while ensuring that the needs of the churches as expressed during the meetings, as well as those detailed on the credentials, are met.

Therefore, Classis Hamilton overtures synod to revise Church Order Article 40-c by removing the phrase, "the same person shall not preside twice in succession."

Grounds:

1. There is no scriptural warrant for limiting the term of presiding officers.
2. Churches and classes are increasingly discovering the benefit of consistent leadership.
3. This will allow each classis to judge what is most beneficial for the local churches in different times, places, and circumstances.

Classis Hamilton

John Veenstra, stated clerk

Overture 53: Revise the Church Order to Allow for the Formation of Union Classes with the Reformed Church in America

I. Background

Classis Arizona has been very blessed by close cooperation with the Classis of the Southwest of the RCA, especially in the last year of cooperation as a Kingdom Enterprise Zone launched by a joint CRC-RCA task force administering donor gifts.

Without close cooperation with a sister denomination, classes such as Arizona are in danger of being merged with other distant classes resulting in less focused denominational attention on the key geographical locations they serve and the likelihood of further decline.

We already have a mechanism in the Church Order allowing for the formation of union churches (Art. 38-g). We would commend this as an example for the synod, while also asking synod to formulate bylaws which would work in this new context.

There were union presbyteries between the Northern Presbyterian Church (UPCUSA) and Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) for many years before the two bodies eventually voted to merge and form the PCUSA. This precedent from other Reformed denominations in North America shows the wisdom of exploring union regional assemblies to see if eventual reunion is in the best interest of both the CRC and the RCA.

Classis Arizona has found that closer working with the RCA Classis of the Southwest has been a great blessing spiritually and strategically.

Given the current close cooperation caused by the impetus of the Kingdom Enterprise Zone, there is much unnecessary duplication of classis

committee work between Classis Arizona of the CRC and the Classis of the Southwest of the RCA.

In addition to a deep shared history and confessional unity we also share a similar evangelical spirit, which makes cooperation easy, and a union classis would help present a unified church presence for church planting and revitalization, as well as for dialogue with local ecumenical partners.

Both the CRC and the RCA are very deliberative in the process of revising their Church Order. We need to begin the process years in advance to allow for the possibility of union classes so that it will be in place when the request may come.

II. Overture

Classis Arizona overtures Synod 2012 to revise the Church Order to allow the formation of union classes with the Reformed Church in America.

Grounds:

1. The CRC and RCA classes composed of the churches in Arizona and outlying areas have been working closely together, producing significant kingdom fruit.
2. Having two separate committee structures is duplicating much work on the mostly combined outreach efforts. In the future, having the ability to form one union classis offers the potential of better stewardship of time and resources.

Classis Arizona

Derek G. Van Dalen, stated clerk

Overture 54: Amend Church Order Article 47

I. Background

For the past several years there have been ongoing discussions in three sister denominations regarding how to respond to the Belhar Confession.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) have held focus groups, published materials, and wrestled with the content of the Belhar Confession. The RCA General Synod of 2009 proposed adoption of the Belhar Confession, and their General Synod of 2010 finalized the approval. The 2010 General Assembly of the PCUSA proposed adoption, with potential final adoption by the 2011 General Assembly. However, they were not able to obtain an affirmative ratifying vote in two-thirds of the presbyteries, so the Belhar Confession will not be adopted at this time. The CRC Synod of 2009 proposed adoption of the Belhar Confession to Synod 2012, allowing for three years of discussion.

On the surface, the processes appear to be the same. But there is a significant difference. In both the RCA and PCUSA, confessional changes or additions require approval by two-thirds of their classes or presbyteries, respectively. The mandate for regional body approval creates a healthy denomination-wide discussion process. It also guarantees that a significant majority of the denomination approve a confessional change or addition before it takes place.

The RCA Book of Order provisions outline their processes in the following:

Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall have power to make all rules and regulations necessary to put into effect any and all articles of the Government, the Disciplinary Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 2. Amendments to the Government, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy and the Directory for worship shall be made only upon adoption by the General Synod at a stated meeting, with recommendation to the classes for approval. At least two-thirds of the classes shall approve a proposed amendment in order to secure its adoption. If an amendment is approved by the classes, the General Synod, at its discretion, may pass a final declarative resolution on the amendment. When the declarative action has taken place, the amendment shall become effective.

The following provisions are from the PCUSA Constitution:

G-18.0200 2. Confessional Documents

G-18.0201 Amendments to Confessional Documents

a. Amendments to the confessional documents of this church may be made only in the following manner:

(1) The approval of the proposed amendment by the General Assembly and its recommendation to the presbyteries;

(2) The approval in writing of two thirds of the presbyteries;

(3) The approval and enactment by the next ensuing General Assembly.

The CRC Church Order (as indicated below) only requires approval by two succeeding synods, with no direct classical input or approval required, though there must be enough time for the classes to respond if they wish.

Article 47

The task of synod includes the adoption of the creeds, of the Church Order, and of the principles and elements of worship. Synod shall approve the liturgical forms, the *Psalter Hymnal*, and the Bible versions suitable for use in worship. No substantial alterations shall be effected by synod in these matters unless the churches have had prior opportunity to consider the advisability of the proposed changes.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 47

Supplement, Article 47

Regulations Pertaining to Article 47 of the Church Order

a. A substantial alteration is any alteration which changes the essential meaning of the creeds or the articles of the Church Order or which changes the church's regulation of its worship through the adopted liturgical forms, *Psalter Hymnal*, principles and elements of worship, or the designated Bible versions to be used in the worship services. A committee recommending any change in these matters shall specify what change is being recommended and shall state whether or not the change is a "substantial alteration."

b. *Prior opportunity* is understood as sufficient time for churches and classes to be able to respond to a substantial alteration with overtures or other communications to synod before the substantial alteration is adopted. Generally, churches and classes have prior opportunity in the case of study committee

reports because such reports are received by November 1 of the year before synod meets. Generally, churches and classes do not have prior opportunity in the case of standing-committee reports and overtures because the printed *Agenda for Synod* is received only two months before synod meets and one month after the majority of the classes have had their last meetings before synod.

c. If the churches and classes have not had prior opportunity to consider a substantial alteration, it must be submitted to a following synod, which will consider its advisability. The first decision shall be understood as a decision to propose; the action of a following synod shall be understood as a decision to adopt.

d. A proposed change may not be implemented until it is adopted by a following synod. It has no effect on any other synodical decisions until it is adopted.

e. A proposed change has the same status as the recommendation of a study committee. The synod proposing the change may designate a person(s) to represent the change at the synod to which it is submitted for adoption. The proposed change and its representatives have all the rights and privileges of the recommendations and representatives of a synodical study committee.

f. If a proposed change is rejected by a following synod, that change (or one substantially similar) is not available for adoption by a succeeding synod unless it has been first proposed once again by synod.

g. Changes to Church Order Supplements are not subject to the above requirements.

(*Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 755-56)
(*Amended Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 500)

Synod 2009 of the CRC provided three years for discussions to take place and, as Regulation b of Church Order Supplement, Article 47 provides, “for churches and classes to be able to respond to a substantial alteration with overtures or other communications to synod before the substantial alteration is adopted.” However, when Classis Niagara responded with an overture to Synod 2010, suggesting Synod 2012 adopt the Belhar Confession at the level of the Contemporary Testimony, their work was set aside when synod withheld action on their overture. As a result, no responses from the classes will be considered until Synod 2012 actually meets and the three-year period for direct classical input is essentially reduced to a single synod meeting.

In addition to the consideration of the Belhar Confession, the *Banner* editor has recommended that *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* be raised to full confessional status (“A Modest Proposal,” December 2010). And while there has been no official action on the Accra Confession, suggestions have been heard that we add that as one of our confessions as well.

With this range of suggestions at work, it would be wise to adopt the processes of the RCA and PCUSA as our own with regard to confessional changes or additions. While the three-year period for reflection on the Belhar Confession approved by Synod 2009 was intended to allow for maximum local input, not all classes have set aside time to discuss it and, as we have seen in the case of the Classis Niagara overture, efforts by the local classes to directly address the matter have been set aside. Mandating agreement by a minimum of two-thirds of the classes to confessional changes or additions would guarantee widespread approval before confessional changes would be finalized.

A substantially similar overture was submitted last year. Unfortunately, the words “before a confessional change or addition could be finalized,” which had been included in the overture as passed by Classis Grand Rapids North, were accidentally deleted when it was submitted. The overture as received by Synod 2011 would have required the process of classical ratification for all changes to “the articles of the Church Order or . . . the church’s regulation of its worship through the adopted liturgical forms, *Psalter Hymnal*, principles and elements of worship, or the designated Bible versions to be used in the worship services,” in addition to changes or additions to the confessions. The debate suggested this was part of the reason the overture was not adopted last year.

II. Overture

Classis Grand Rapids North overtures Synod 2012 to amend Church Order Article 47 so that before a confessional change or addition could be finalized one synod would propose the change or addition and two-thirds of the classes would then have to approve by a majority vote before a subsequent synod could finalize the change or addition.

Grounds:

1. The confessions constitute the theological foundation for the teaching of the CRCNA. Changes and additions should only be made when there is broad assent on the wisdom and need for such changes and additions.
2. This process would assure that a significant majority of the denomination agreed with a proposed confessional change or addition, helping to maintain the unity of the CRC.
3. This process would mirror the process used by our closest sister denominations.

Classis Grand Rapids North
William G. Vis, stated clerk

Overture 55: Adopt the Creation Stewardship Task Force Report

Classis Alberta North overtures Synod 2012 to adopt the Creation Stewardship Task Force Report.

Grounds:

1. The task force report offers sound biblical insight and a much-needed call to action with respect to our vocation as God’s imagebearers to care for and properly steward the creation and its resources.
2. The report accurately summarizes the current scientific evidence and warns us about the danger of climate change and of its consequences to the environment, to humankind, and especially to the poor and disadvantaged.
3. The report carefully states that the human use of non-renewable energy sources is most likely a significant contributor to climate change and warns of the unacceptable risks of continuing our over-consumption of these resources.

4. Adoption of this report will encourage and assist CRC members, congregations, and denominational agencies and representatives to witness in word and deed to our confession that our world belongs to God and that we, as God's imagebearers, are to husband its resources for God's glory, for the creation's well-being, and for the benefit of humanity in this generation and the generations to come.

Classis Alberta North

Rick Struik, stated clerk

Overture 56: Broaden Membership and Focus of the Creation Stewardship Task Force; Give Guidance on the Appropriateness of an Ecclesiastical Assembly Making a Definitive Statement on a Scientific Issue

I. Background

This overture requests that the report of the Creation Stewardship Task Force, recently submitted to Synod 2012, be referred to the denomination for discussion and feedback, that the task force be given a broadened mandate, that the task force be augmented with representation from other relevant disciplines, and that it be asked to prepare a new report for Synod 2014. There are three fundamental reasons for this multiple request.

First, the report was released mid-November 2011. This left insufficient time for individuals to prepare thoughtful reactions to the report's contents and submit these as an overture to Synod 2012, via the local church council and classis, by the March 15, 2012, deadline.

Second, the report acknowledges that not all members of the CRC will necessarily agree with its views and recommendations (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 291). Where these alternative views are also grounded on biblical reflection, scientific understanding, and a commitment to live accountably before God, they need to be listened to. A brief debate at Synod 2012 is inadequate for this. A two-year delay will give time for all voices to be heard.

Third, the concept of creation stewardship presented in the report omits key components and is thus incomplete. More time and a wider discussion are needed to develop a well rounded and robust Reformed understanding of creation stewardship.

II. Overture

Classis B.C. South-East overtures Synod 2012 to take action on the following:

- A. That the report of the Creation Stewardship Task Force be received with thanks and recommended to the CRC community for study and response.
- B. That the membership of the task force be broadened to include representation from other relevant disciplines and that its mandate be expanded to include the following:
 1. Address from a Reformed perspective, but in more depth than in the 2012 task force report, the following issues:

- a. Mankind's unique position in creation, the responsibilities *and privileges* associated with that position, and the implications for the concept of Christian stewardship that flow from it.
 - b. Christian *creation* stewardship within the broader concept of Christian stewardship.
 - c. The implications of God's ever-present guiding hand in history for the concept of Christian stewardship, and thus also for Christian creation stewardship.
2. Explore whether there are differences between the Reformed concept of Christian creation stewardship and secular environmentalism.
 3. Show an awareness in its final report of the themes being raised in chat rooms it has set up and in submissions it has received, and engage with those responses pastorally in its report.

Ground: There are many skills and resources available within the membership of our denomination, and modern technology (e.g., conference calls, electronic communication in a variety of ways, special purpose chat rooms), as well as written submissions, make it possible to tap into these gifts at a low cost. Combining the insights in the current task force report with the insights from an open discussion will undoubtedly result in a more robust, comprehensive Reformed perspective on creation stewardship and global warming, as different insights and emphases complement and refine each other.

4. Provide pastoral guidance on global warming in the context of points B, 1-3.
5. Submit its report to Synod 2014.

Grounds: There is much to reflect on in the Task Force report, and much can be learned from it. The report thus deserves to be recommended to the CRC community for study and discussion. However, ultimately the report fails to establish a Reformed perspective on creation stewardship and global warming. This is evident in a number of ways, for example:

- a. The report has an incomplete concept of stewardship. Fundamental to any concept of stewardship is a weighing of costs and benefits to decide a course of action. For example, we do not pursue without reference to costs objectives such as risk reduction in road safety, automobile safety, or job site safety. Nor do many of us pursue personal physical fitness to perfection despite the fact that we are made in God's image as the crown of creation (Gen. 1:26-30) and that we are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Instead, stewardship requires that we consider all the competing claims on our time and resources and find a balance that reflects the relative importance of the competing claims and the relative costs of achieving them, and acknowledge that pursuing more of one objective generally yields ever smaller additional benefits per additional dollar spent on that objective.

In short, the fundamental responsibility of Christian stewardship is to prayerfully balance benefits against costs when making our decisions. This concept is missing in the report. At times costs are stressed and benefits are largely ignored, and at other times benefits are stressed and costs are ignored.

- 1) An example of highlighted costs and ignored benefits—The report claims that over the last two hundred years or so earth's habitability has been degraded by mankind's negative impact on the biosphere (*Degradation of the earth's habitability, Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp. 312-14). It reaches this conclusion by highlighting a number of undeniable negative effects of mankind on the biosphere, and mentioning only in passing (pp. 315, 332) some ameliorating circumstances. There is no assessment of the degradation that has occurred (the costs) in the context of the numerous improvements in habitability over the last 200-300 years (the benefits). Life expectancy at birth has risen dramatically everywhere, and we live healthier lives. We feed a world population vastly larger than anyone thought possible even 40 years ago. With our rising standard of living have come more literacy, female emancipation, and greater respect for human rights. There has never been a better time than now to receive healthcare if ill; to receive dental care; to access a nutritious, varied diet at a reasonable cost; to be comfortably housed; to receive an education; to be free of the arbitrary exercise of authority; or to be destitute and at the mercy of charity. These are also characteristics of habitability, and they need to be acknowledged in a discussion of stewardship. Even more important, these blessings need to be witnessed to as gifts from God working in history to achieve his purposes despite man's imperfect, sinful efforts.
- 2) An example of highlighted benefits and ignored costs—The task force's call for more environmental action is based on the observation that environmental degradation exists and must be cleaned up. Costs are largely ignored, or are cautioned against as a possible "excuse to shy away from doing what is right based on our understanding of the stewardship of creation" (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 333). Mankind's stewardship responsibilities to his neighbor, as well as to the biosphere, are mentioned only briefly (p. 342), and there is no attempt to develop the concept of stewardship as decision making in the context of allocating this world's productive capacity among competing objectives. Nor is there acknowledgment that environmental cleanup comes at the expense (cost) of other social objectives, such as helping the poor and homeless, looking after the sick, the elderly, the mentally disturbed in our communities, and helping nations desperately trying to emerge from grinding poverty and all its consequences.
- b. There are additional elements critical to a Reformed perspective on Christian creation stewardship that are not developed in the report. These include deepening our understanding of our claim that "God uses our skills for the unfolding and well-being of his world" (Contemporary Testimony [CT], 10), and how this activity will force

decisions at “life’s raw edges” (CT, 44). It should elaborate on the rights and responsibilities we have as stewards appointed by God to make choices at *all* of life’s raw edges, including the raw edge between environmental purity and human needs. It should explore the concept that stewardship involves choices and that choices virtually always involve sacrificing things of lesser value for things of greater value. Most important, it should explore mankind’s right to decide before God, as his stewards, the relative importance of all factors entering decisions, a right denied by some environmentalists when it comes to decisions about the environment. A discussion of these issues is critical to developing a Reformed perspective on Christian creation stewardship that is clearly distinguishable from secular environmentalism. A well-articulated Reformed perspective should also help identify commonality with and differences from evangelical declarations on creation stewardship and global warming.

- c. Our confession “God is in control” is poorly integrated into the report. “God is in control” is a recurring theme in our *Contemporary Testimony*. The report acknowledges this, for example, when it briefly refers to God’s providence working in the past (p. 332) and in the unknown future (p. 341), and when it notes “that human activity cannot produce a result so calamitous that the entire human race is wiped out” (p. 339). However, the report does not work with this theme in developing more fully a Reformed perspective on Christian creation stewardship. Surely, the confession that God is in control has implications for how we view the explosion in scientific and engineering knowledge, enabled by coal and oil, which started some 250 years ago, long before any understanding of the potential impact of carbon dioxide emissions on climate. Surely, it must have implications for how we view global warming policies based on fear, or based on analyses that ignore best practice principles for public policy formation on the grounds of “unique” circumstances—for example, analyses in the global warming debate that argue future costs and benefits should not be time discounted (p. 333). Most fundamentally, it must have implications for our choice between addressing current human needs that are well understood, well documented, and urgent, and future human needs that are understood imperfectly and may or may not materialize as decades more of scientific and engineering discoveries occur under the active, guiding hand of God.
- d. The report’s bucolic view of the relationship between man and nature is incomplete. The concept of “con-servancy” in Section IV, 8 of the report sketches mankind’s relationship with the biosphere as the relationship between a garden and the gardener. In this view the biosphere provides us with many good things, and our role is to be the “biosphere’s safeguarding stewards” (p. 305). There is much valuable insight here, but ultimately two fundamental concepts are missing that a Reformed perspective on Christian creation stewardship must take into account. First, in Genesis 3:17-19 God makes it abundantly clear that the fall into sin also destroyed the previous relationship between the garden and mankind, and that henceforth

man would have to struggle to scratch a living from the soil. The report acknowledges the brokenness of nature after the fall into sin (p. 339) but does not explore its implications for their concept of “con-servancy,” a concept that appears to be based on the relationship between Adam and the Garden of Eden (p. 305). Second, the report essentially ignores our mandate to develop the potential God has embedded in creation to the glory of his name and for the benefit of mankind and what this mandate implies for how we may cultivate the “garden,” such as the imprint we may place on it. Our relationship with the biosphere is not limited to safeguarding it in its original condition. This has implications that need to be discussed.

C. That synod give guidance on the appropriateness of an ecclesiastical assembly making a definitive statement on a scientific issue.

Ground: Synod has a limited mandate. Section X, E of the Creation Stewardship Task Force Report (p. 347) recommends that synod take a specific position on global warming (that it is anthropogenic and a significant threat to future generations, and that urgent action is required now). Synod as an ecclesiastical body is neither mandated by its constituents nor competent to make pronouncements on any scientific propositions, computer model predictions, or the appropriateness of climate change policy proposals. The challenge synod faces is to give pastoral guidance on stewardship responsibilities without making pronouncements on issues outside its mandate and competence. While this is difficult, it is not impossible. Much useful guidance can be given by developing in greater detail the basic principles for a more complete Reformed perspective on Christian stewardship than is provided in the current Creation Stewardship Task Force report. Individuals should then be challenged to consider these principles when deciding, before God, on how to discharge their stewardship responsibilities. Stewardship decisions are made at “life’s raw edges.” How these are assessed and traded off against each other becomes very personal. Synod should not make such decisions for its members.

Classis B.C. South-East
Henry Jonker, stated clerk

Overture 57: Provide More Time and Guidance to Study and Discuss Issues Raised by the Creation Stewardship Task Force

I. Background

At the end of November 2011, CRC churches received from the Denominational Office the report of the Creation Stewardship Task Force to Synod 2012. It is a large report on a complicated, yet essential, subject about which there are a variety of opinions and approaches. One need only to track the recent coverage of the subject in the November and December 2011 issues of *The Banner* and the comments of readers on the denominational website to understand that there are radical differences of opinion. The CRC needs time for thoughtful and careful reflections on this report.

II. Overture

Classis Hamilton overtures Synod 2012 to

A. Table the report from the Creation Stewardship Task Force until at least Synod 2013 to allow for thoughtful reading, reflection, and dialogue among and within the churches.

Grounds:

1. The report came late in the calendar year, allowing only limited time for reflection and dialogue prior to meeting the agenda deadlines for classis.
2. The report is extensive and complex, requiring more than a casual reading and limited conversation.

B. Arrange for the development and distribution of a limited number of questions and talking points that will guide the members of the CRCNA to look productively and constructively at the issues raised in the report.

Grounds:

1. Because some of the issues raised in the report are emotionally charged, carefully constructed questions and talking points will serve the churches well toward having constructive and respectful dialogue.
2. Such questions can contribute to the essential feature of having a multi-dimensional discussion.

C. Invite the congregations to consider how the church can speak prophetically on these issues, while at the same time respecting the sovereignty of spheres of expertise and discipline.

Grounds:

1. While the institutional church is called to speak prophetically, it should be careful not to enter into areas of expertise where it has none.
2. We need to support those who work in spheres of expertise by respecting their insights while they, at the same time, strive to live out their confessional convictions.

Classis Hamilton

John Veenstra, stated clerk

Overture 58: Do Not Adopt the Report and Recommendations of the Creation Stewardship Task Force

Classis Zeeland overtures Synod 2012 to thank the Creation Stewardship Task Force for the time, effort, and passion they have put into their work, but to *not adopt* the study, conclusions, and recommendations of the task force report. Such information and pronouncements made on the basis of the report are best left in the spheres of science and politics. The church should instead invest its energy, time, and resources into the proclamation of the gospel.

Grounds:

1. The report starts out with a high goal which it then fails to accomplish:

The task force is confident that its work is rooted deeply in the biblical and Reformed heritage we all share, and will therefore resonate deeply

with the CRC. We are also aware that the topic of climate change generates intense passion and diverse opinions on many levels, and that some of our conclusions may draw opposition. Nevertheless, it is our hope that the report may serve to enhance and deepen the critical conversations and engagement of the wider church and society. Our hope is that this report will at least serve to unify our community around common principles and understandings regarding care for God's creation.

(*Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp. 290-91)

By the end of the report, the task force has neither provided a report that "at least serve[s] to unify our community around common principles and understandings regarding care for God's creation" nor provided a report that "resonate[s] deeply" following their work with Scripture and our Reformed heritage.

2. In the sphere in which we as elders and ministers are able to competently interact with the biblical and doctrinal work of this report, we find that the report is lacking in its understanding and application of Scripture and Reformed doctrine.
 - a. The creation-care principles outlined in the report (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, pp. 301-2) that are found in Genesis 1 and 2 were given to Adam and Eve prior to the fall. As a result of the fall, mankind's relationship to creation has been greatly complicated and changed. According to Genesis 3:17-19, the earth is going to struggle and fight against us, and vice-versa. We also note that after the flood in Genesis 9:1-3, Noah and we who are his descendants were told that we could now use all of the living creatures for food, and that all living things would now be in fear of mankind. This is a radical shift in our relationship to the created world, and yet it is overlooked by the report.
 - b. We must use *discernment* about the principles laid out in Genesis 1 and 2, particularly as regards life in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall. Obviously, not everything that happened in the garden has an equal application in our fallen world. There is a great difference between the Garden of Eden pre-fall and creation post-fall, and yet the report does not substantially make any such distinction.
 - c. Because creation care will take shape differently post-fall than pre-fall, we must also allow for post-fall evaluations and decision-making differences among Christians. To promote, as the report does, a Christian response to creation-care issues as *the* appropriate Christian and church response is neither wise nor advisable, particularly considering the need to allow for Christian freedom and liberty in deciding what is or is not appropriate creation care. To do otherwise is to constrain the consciences of fellow brothers and sisters, and to communicate to fellow Christians who take a different approach to creation care in this post-fall world that they are being somehow less-than-Christian in their approach and decisions.
 - d. The report accurately points out that Jesus, the second Adam, does make all things new (p. 303). However, he will not do this in power with his creation until his return (Revelation 21:1-5). When he was on this earth, Jesus did not speak of environmental degradation, though it was happening all around him. The mountains of Lebanon

had largely been deforested. Why was Jesus silent about this? There was raw sewage in the slum areas of a large city like Jerusalem. Why was Jesus silent about this? Jesus referred to the fires of Gehenna, a very large trash pit in the Valley of Hinnom outside of Jerusalem where waste was burned day and night, and yet he did not condemn this constant, 24-hours-a-day smoking, sooty burning of trash, but rather used this “polluting” presence to speak of God’s glory when it comes to the final judgment and the fires of hell. It would best serve the church to keep *that* message as our primary focus, and it needs to be where we will spend our time, energy, and monies.

3. The report engages in unfocused historical and cultural criticisms which most charitably interpreted could be read as naively biased, or most critically interpreted as an example of a breaking of the ninth commandment (“you shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor”). This is unbecoming of a report on creation, nor ought it to be the place for unregulated pot-shots at our forefathers. In the section “Misappropriation of dominion” (p. 308ff), the report moves away from science toward a cherry-picking of history and a skewed interpretation of that. The report gets away from the data of the “hard sciences” and from a study of Scripture and instead engages in a cultural and historical critique of Western culture and a critique of “Manifest Destiny” in regard to the relationship between Native Americans and the land. This section of the report is loaded with biases and presuppositions that are guided not by Scripture but by what appears to be the authors’ own political and cultural agendas. The report further compounds an uncharitable and unbalanced criticism of history (the participants in which are not here to defend themselves) by recommending at the end (section XI, 1) that the CRC ought to probe this issue even more.
4. Some of the presuppositions about the importance of all life, including all living organisms, undermine the trustworthiness of the entire report and will lead many to doubt other observations made in the report. “Unlike chemicals made by organisms and the earth, some of these chemicals leave living things defenseless. Some are even specifically designed to destroy life: biocides, pesticides, herbicides, avicides, and fungicides” (p. 313). The report at times appears to treat all living organisms as sacred and to be preserved. However, the report fails to take into consideration the seriousness of the fall and the earth’s struggle against mankind (and vice-versa). The obvious result of this conflict between mankind and creation is that not all living organisms are our friends. Mildew and molds and blights are often our enemies. Living viruses can be our enemies and do cause great numbers of deaths to humans as well as other living creatures. Living organisms like mosquitoes carry malaria which has caused millions of deaths worldwide. Swarms of insects can be our enemies. It was for good reason that God sent plagues on Egypt of frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts, all living creatures! But such struggles against living organisms in this fallen world are also reminders to us of God’s glory and our need to bend the knee to him and his rule. There is no inherent evil in the use of man-made substances to fight against invasive and destructive

living organisms. That is a result of the struggle between man and creation that has occurred as a result of the Fall.

5. The entire section VII on climate change and section VIII on implications of climate change for the future (pp. 316ff and pp. 326ff), as well as the Appendix, is information overload, and not in the purview of elders and ministers to be able to adequately interact with at synod nor in a study report such as this. As the report ably demonstrates, much has been written in “primary literature” and “gray literature.” To attempt to encapsulate all of it and streamline the entire debate with all-ensuing controversies cannot do this controversial issue justice. Instead, such information and pronouncements made on the basis of it are best left in the spheres of science and politics. Of course, the task force cannot entirely be faulted based on this herculean task they have undertaken; Synod 2010 asked too much of them, and therefore asked too much of a future synod.
6. The Walking the Talk section (p. 343) is predicated on an acceptance of the earlier points made in the report. However, the study and doctrinal conclusions of the report are questionable. Therefore, the suggested follow-up points and recommendations at the end of the report will also be questionable and open to debate and disagreement. How can the denomination stake out a definitive position on something which, in fact, is not definitive? And, conversely, how can the CRC commit the use of funds from ministry shares to promote a position that is not agreed upon and, in fact, vigorously disputed at points by church members and councils alike? Speaking in terms of stewardship that activity is poor financial stewardship, and will sadly but inevitably continue to give churches pause when making hard budget decisions on how much money they will contribute to the denominational pot, as opposed to financing local ministry efforts. The Call to Action, sections G-J, as well as section XI, 2, call for the use of ministry share monies to promote this particular (divisive) agenda. If the denomination has excess money like that at its disposal, then a strong case can be made that ministry shares need to be cut back and that we as a denomination need to examine the existence of spending ministry share monies on the Office of Social Justice (whose ministry coordinator served as the denomination’s staff adviser to the task force, and would be the office predominantly tasked to carry out these action points).

Classis Zeeland

Ronald J. Meyer, stated clerk

Overture 59: Reject the Creation Stewardship Task Force Report

Classis Columbia overtures Synod 2012 to reject the Creation Stewardship Task Force report and recommendations.

Grounds:

1. The subject of this report is of a political nature, and therefore not within the sphere of the church.

2. Christian Reformed Church members should be encouraged to be involved politically and also to exercise proper environmental stewardship, but the denomination should not seek to define a political platform for a topic in which her members are free to come to differing and sometimes opposing conclusions.

Classis Columbia

Roger D. Kramer, stated clerk

Overture 60: Do Not Accept Statement E, 1 in the Recommendations Section of the Creation Stewardship Task Force Report

Classis Eastern Canada overtures Synod 2012 not to accept Statement E, 1 contained in the Creation Stewardship Task Force recommendations, "Climate change is occurring and is very likely due to human activity," but instead to endorse its "Call to Action" (*Agenda for Synod 2012*, p. 347) on the basis of what is known as the precautionary principle.

Grounds:

1. The task force asserts that a broad consensus has now been reached among climate scientists, and that, based on peer review of related research, climate change is occurring and is probably due to human activity. It is of little benefit here to dispute that claimed consensus exists, but there are strong indications that these two specific conclusions regarding climate change are not as simply based on peer review by experts as the task force suggests.
 - a. The task force, to provide support for its recommendations, points to the conclusions of the IPCC panel (p. 324). This panel is often and similarly referred to by proponents of man-made global warming. Recently, however, many have strongly criticized both the panel's integrity and its peer review process. For instance, Ross McKittrick of the University of Guelph has recently published *What Is Wrong with the IPCC, a Proposal for Radical Reform*, in which he strongly criticizes the policies and investigative procedures of the IPCC. He shows that conclusions reached within the IPCC by peer review were subsequently rewritten by non-expert IPCC authors, and describes its review process as "elegant stagecraft." McKittrick based these criticisms partly on disclosure of many emails among these authors, sometimes described as the Climategate email. The report ignores all such criticisms.
 - b. There is good evidence (among, for example, the Climategate email) that proponents of man-made climate change have tried (1) to influence academic journal editors not to publish research that contradicts their views; and (2) to discredit scientists with contradictory views—both professionally and personally.
2. The science is not as clear-cut as the task force suggests. Consider three givens.
 - a. It is evident from, for example, the Climategate email that the primary data sets (from, e.g., tree rings) from which estimates of global temperatures are derived are limited, closely guarded, and not

- freely available. In order to translate these into “temperatures,” the data are treated in an opaque way.
- b. In the present application, predictive modeling, as described by the task force, is fraught with difficulty. The models themselves are very complex and use many adjustable parameters, and reputable scientists have asserted that they can be used to support just about anything. It has not been clearly shown that these models are well supported by past experimental data and are testable in the near future.
 - c. The science needs to be tested by those outside the community that sees a “consensus.” That is one way for science to make progress. It was McKittrick, an economics professor, who showed that the well-known and alleged “hockey stick” upturn of recent terrestrial temperatures was based on incorrect use of statistics. Such statistics too could be used to explain most anything.
3. In summary, section VII and The Climate Change Primer, Appendix A of the report, in our view do not address the above criticisms, and this, we suggest, is sufficient grounds for synod not to accept its recommendation that “climate change is occurring and is very likely due to human activity.”
 4. This does not mean, however, that the action suggested by the task force to, for instance, reduce our usage of fossil fuels should be postponed until the debate on the science of global warming and the influence of human activity is fully settled. The report does describe some of the dangers that extensive global warming would pose. Given this, we regard it as wise for humans to now begin to apply the *precautionary principle*, which, in simple terms, suggests that prevention may be less costly than a cure that may be needed later. True, it is possible to be too cautious; one could for instance take this principle to indicate that one should not drive a car. More significantly, this principle has a long history and is enshrined in law in the European Union and various nations. It is germane to the present context that it has been formulated by R.B. Stewart to state that “scientific uncertainty should not automatically preclude regulation of activities that pose a potential risk of significant harm.” We suggest that, even though there is such uncertainty regarding climate warming and its causes, synod should take the environmental threats outlined in the report seriously enough for it to recommend that we all begin to take substantive precautionary measures. We regard many of the measures proposed in the Report to be stewardly and see few of them as extreme.
 5. Through such application of the precautionary principle synod would exercise Christian stewardship as described in the report, avoid making a judgment on a complicated scientific issue, and provide leadership in a complex situation in which other faith groups are reaching for answers.

Classis Eastern Canada
Jean Lauziere, stated clerk

Communication 1: Classis Iakota

Classis Iakota hereby requests that synod not approve the Belhar Confession as a fourth doctrinal standard, but officially receive it with gratitude as a testimony.

Grounds:

1. The Belhar Confession cannot stand alone, as our other doctrinal standards can, because it does not adequately articulate the core of the Christian gospel. Its passion for unity, reconciliation, and justice is not clearly rooted in the foundational work of Jesus Christ and, as such, easily sounds like liberation theology.
2. The Belhar's wording at crucial moments is ambiguous enough to have it used to advocate progressive economic and political policies and gay marriage as gospel mandates. Even though the cover letter clearly repudiates this, one of the original sponsors of the Belhar, Allan Boesak, has passionately affirmed this.
3. The Belhar adds little to what the CRC already affirms. The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21, addresses unity and reconciliation in Christ fairly well. *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* repeatedly addresses ethnic diversity, unity in Christ, and social justice. The 1996 synodical report "God's Diverse and Unified Family" is more extensive than the Belhar.
4. A doctrinal standard is supposed to clarify doctrine and promote unity. From all of the things we have read and heard, the Belhar clearly has not done so and, if it would become a fourth standard to which all officebearers would have to subscribe, we would lose officebearers because of all of the grounds given so far.
5. The Belhar has been offered to the CRC as a gift, with the expectation that it be added to our confessional base. Gifts should be received with grace and thanksgiving, but, let us—not the giver—decide where the most appropriate place is to display it.
6. The Belhar is a *testimony* and is *contemporary*; however, as a single-issue document, it does not rank as an equal to *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*. We would need to open up a new category or a new receptacle for such gifts. We trust that synod in its wisdom can figure out the *what* and *where*.

Classis Iakota

Marvin Van Donselaar, stated clerk

Communication 2: Classis Northcentral Iowa

As the Christian Reformed Church considers adopting the Belhar Confession, we find much to commend the Belhar. The Belhar highlights the biblical theme of reconciliation and applies it to a setting where the North American church has been challenged as we have faced our own culture and practices. While the Belhar has its roots in South Africa, we are not immune to the temptation to racism and believe the Belhar speaks with a scriptural voice to us within the church, as well as bearing testimony to our culture about how followers of Jesus Christ must stand against racism.

We support the adoption of the Belhar Confession in a category distinct from the three forms of unity. We believe it testifies to an important theme and should be accepted in a grouping of testimonies and declarations. We believe that such adoption would give the Belhar official status and should be regarded as carrying the weight of positions officially adopted by synod.

We believe that the ecumenical creeds (Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed) define the Christian faith over against other religious faiths and the secular faiths of humanism and atheism.

We believe the three forms of unity (Belgic Confession of Faith, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) define us as a Reformed church within the broader Christian community. Growing out of the historic Reformation and the doctrinal discernment of the Reformed churches, these creeds demonstrate the origins of the Christian Reformed Church and provide the biblical grounding for who we are.

Since the Belhar Confession does not fit with the three forms of unity, we believe it is better to include it with other testimonies and declarations that the Christian Reformed Church may choose to recognize. While it challenges us with a crucial biblical and culturally relevant message, the Belhar is more of a testimony or declaration than a full confession. We believe the adoption of the Belhar Confession into this category will also encourage the Christian Reformed Church to consider other testimonies or declarations that speak to our church and our culture in a way that is relevant to each generation.

Classis Northcentral Iowa
Thomas J. Vos, stated clerk

Communication 3: Council of Ebenezer CRC, Berwyn, Illinois

The following communication was submitted to Classis Northern Illinois and discussed at classis on March 7, 2012. In light of the action of classis to receive the communication for information, it was decided to forward the same to synod.

After careful and prayerful consideration of the Belhar Confession and the 2009 request for input by the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, we the council of the Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Berwyn, Illinois, have undertaken a serious study of the Belhar. This study has included a classical forum in November 2011, a meeting of council in January 2012 dedicated almost entirely to a discussion on the Belhar, and a series of messages on the key themes identified by the confession.

We, the council, are aware that the issue before the synod is whether the Belhar Confession should be accepted as the fourth standard, joining the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort, or held in some other category. We have heard or seen no evidence that the Belhar Confession contradicts the Word of God and therefore continued our study to answer the call of the synod.

We, the council, believe that the Christian Reformed Church should adopt the Belhar Confession as the fourth confession. We note that the Belhar calls the church of Jesus Christ to be living out its faith in actions that clearly address ills and divisions both in society at large and within the church. We concur that faith must be lived out concretely and clearly in keeping with the Scripture's call to unity, reconciliation, and maintenance of justice within the community of believers first of all and by example to and action within the broader society. As complex as the challenges may be, the church cannot ignore this call.

The confessions historically have each had an important function, whether that was to supply an instructional need (the Heidelberg Catechism), a defense of truth as taught in the Bible (the Belgic Confession), or a defense of the message of Scripture more sharply focused on a heretical position. The Belhar Confession offers a strong call to address biblically the social issues that have invaded the church and thus serves an important function.

We, the council, believe that by adopting the Belhar Confession as one of its own standards, the Christian Reformed Church gives clear evidence to, as well of our solidarity with, the other communities in the work of faith and the defense of the gospel. The issues faced are not unique to the South African context; they are to be faced here too.

Council of Ebenezer CRC, Berwyn, Illinois
David L. Bakker, clerk

Personal Appeal

1. Mr. A.J. Veltkamp

Appeal of Mr. A.J. Veltkamp from a decision of Classis Red Mesa in January 2012, denying reinstatement as minister of the Word.

