

**Overture to Classis Alberta North  
from Fellowship Christian Reformed Church, Edmonton  
in response to the 2021 synodical report from the  
Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of  
Human Sexuality**

That Classis Alberta North overture Synod to receive the synodical report on the Biblical Foundations of Human Sexuality for information, thank the committee for its work, and take the following action:

**Appoint a new study committee which is not limited in the scope of its theological inquiry by adherence to the 1973 report. This committee will actively and appreciatively engage all perspectives on human sexuality and will seek input from the wide range of experiences in the CRC in order to help give direction to churches in ways that honour diverse perspectives and maintain the unity of the church. This committee will undertake a three-step process, with each step dependent upon and accountable to the previous step.**

1. First, the committee will design and coordinate a denominational listening tour to create safe spaces in which to hear the lived experiences of sexual minorities and their families within the Christian Reformed Church of North America. The committee should take seriously the confessions of our church's shortcomings and failures as outlined in the 2021 Report on the Biblical Foundations of Human Sexuality, all of which conclude, "It is a sad truth that the Christian community, including our Christian Reformed denomination, has failed in its calling to empathize with, love, and bear the burdens of persons who are attracted to the same sex" (95). The committee must seek to navigate this tour with wisdom and grace, creating as safe a setting as possible (in line with 118 of report).
2. Secondly, in conversation with the findings from the listening tour, and perhaps as part of it, the committee will critically examine the processes, policies, and practices of the CRC, as well as the assumptions and biases, that have led to the previous study committee's overwhelming confession that since the 1973 report the CRC has failed to care for members who are attracted to the same sex:

*The church has also harmed people who are attracted to the same sex by promoting the false expectation of orientation change, as if believers who are attracted to the same sex can expect to become attracted to the opposite sex as they are sanctified...Indeed, the church has not been the supportive, grace-saturated community it is supposed to be (95).*

*Despite repeated and strong exhortations of past study committee reports to love and care for brothers and sisters who are attracted*

*to the same sex as equal members of the body of Christ, the church has all too often ostracized, shunned, or ignored such Jesus-followers (114).*

These admissions, while remarkable in their honesty, beg for a collective self-examination about why the CRC has found it so difficult to fulfill the mandates and pastoral advice given to it by Synod.

3. Thirdly, in dialogue with, and accountable to, the findings of the first two steps, and with no responsibility to adhere to the conclusions of the 1973 synodical report on pastoral care to LGBT members, the committee will produce a new report on the biblical foundations for human sexuality with a particular focus on the question of inclusion for sexual minorities. The purpose of the new report will be three-fold:
  - a) To dialogue with and offer constructive criticism of the 2021 report. This critique will include examination and clarification of the report's hermeneutical starting point as well as a sympathetic and appreciative engagement with alternate and thoughtful biblical interpretations.
  - b) To engage more seriously and report more accurately the findings of new scientific research in the area of human sexuality.
  - c) To offer pastoral care recommendations that
    - promote non-shaming expressions of loving acceptance with a desire for individual and communal flourishing;
    - foster continued unity in the church as we work through an issue that threatens to be very divisive; and
    - focus on caring for congregations whose perspectives and experiences lead them to ministry practices that include full participation.

## Grounds

1. A true desire to understand viewpoints of a diverse community requires authentic and open-hearted listening. The committee struck in 2016 was not free to listen well, having been constrained by the requirement that its members agree with the 1973 report. Voices that struggle with or disagree with the 1973 stance could not be heard. This fact is relevant not only to the credibility with which the final report is received, but also to pastoral care and justice concerns, where the commonly held aphorism, "nothing about us without us," is good practice.
2. This requirement of adherence to 1973 conclusions meant that though the committee was equipped to articulate the historical position of the CRC, it could not honestly engage alternative readings of Scripture. It was also ill-equipped to objectively perform one of its primary tasks: to engage in a "(d)iscussion outlining how a Reformed hermeneutic does or does not comport with readings of Scripture being employed to endorse what are, for

the historic church, ground-breaking conclusions regarding human sexual behavior and identification” (3).

3. The lived experience of congregations within the Christian Reformed Church requires an unencumbered examination of the best biblical, theological, and pastoral arguments for all perspectives regarding the inclusion of LGBT Christians in full membership before making decisions at a denominational level.
4. We in the CRC have long considered our denomination to be thoughtful, deliberative, and biblically-based. Honest denominational care of all Christians on a topic regarding inclusion/exclusion of brothers and sisters requires a report capable of taking seriously all biblical and theological arguments before making recommendations. The very existence of a variety of robust biblical and theological arguments for the inclusion of celibate *and* married LGBT Christians in the church signals that there is not theological consensus on this topic. An unencumbered report would display our denominational trust in God’s ability to reveal truth through Scripture and the Holy Spirit, and it would prevent us from engaging and making decisions from a place of fear.
5. The pastoral guidance offered for the care of sexual minorities is confusing and potentially harmful, and better guidance is needed, particularly for churches for whom caring for LGBT brothers and sisters is more than a hypothetical reality. For example, the report acknowledges the harm done in the past when same-sex attracted Christians were encouraged to change their orientation (95). The acknowledgment that a change in orientation is not a realistic expectation implies that same-sex attraction is not a choice. Yet the report also raises the point that “no ‘gay gene’ has yet been identified,” and that “the claim that attraction to the same sex has a biological cause has been seriously challenged by recent research” (93). The mixed messages are bewildering and call for a more thorough examination of the scientific research regarding gender dysphoria and same-sex attraction, with due consideration of the view that these may be core elements of one’s being.

There is a dissonance in the report that leads to confusing and potentially harmful pastoral care. How can we as a church be inviting, loving, accepting—as the report rightly calls us to be—up until the point a person or couple desires to join our congregation, when we have to tell them that they are not in fact welcome as they are, but need to make changes before they can join? How could this not be devastating to both these people who have developed relationships within the church and to the elders or ministers who eventually have to have this conversation? If we are going to land where this new report lands, would it not be wiser and more kind to just be upfront at the beginning of a new relationship with gender dysphoric and same-sex

attracted people, and tell them as kindly and clearly as we can that they are not welcome unless they agree not to act on their natural impulses? Though the pastoral care section of the report expresses a desire to be compassionate and welcoming, in the end this desire will seem by many to be incompatible with the committee's conclusion that LGBT people who are not celibate may not participate fully in the life of the church.

6. Honest pastoral care takes into account the experiences, fears, hopes, and struggles of the individuals it is seeking to offer care to. By not taking seriously the voices of Christians who disagree with the traditional position, or feel devalued by it, the care that we offer is at risk of being more about caring for our leadership as we uphold the church's stance than it is for caring for the individuals amongst us who think and feel differently. It is at this point that we also risk making our churches culturally irrelevant by not engaging in the very conversations in which our young people are immersed, both within and outside the church. This is why more sincere listening, without an agenda or foregone conclusion, needs to be done at every level of the church. This is an opportunity for us to model trust in God as we engage in difficult conversations that we cannot control.
7. If we as a denomination are serious about confessing the systemic harms perpetrated against and suffered by LGBT members in our community (which the previous study rightly names), then it is our responsibility to engage in a humble and thoughtful assessment of our ecclesiastical culture, including the procedures, policies, and practices that have allowed this harm to continue. We thank the committee for naming these weighty confessions, but disagree with their assessment that we can simply choose to be better without an honest critique of the systems that have allowed for our on-going patterns of harm.

**In the event that Synod does not accede to our request to embark on a new and more open process and chooses to consider the recommendations of the HRS report, we wish to communicate to Synod our objection to Recommendations D and E and urge Synod not to adopt those recommendations.**

#### Grounds

1. These recommendations close the door on further theological study and reflection and assume that there is consensus on this matter when that is clearly not the case. Many faithful Christians interpret scripture differently and come to different conclusions. To break communion with them would be an affront to the Lord of the church who prayed for our unity.

2. To declare that beliefs about human sexuality have confessional status when that same status was denied the Belhar Confession, which addresses core biblical themes of justice, unity, and reconciliation, is to say that those are of less importance than a contested view of human sexuality.
3. The scientific study of human sexuality is a relatively recent field of inquiry, and new discoveries are bound to deepen our understanding of same sex attraction. We believe that the church should remain open to ongoing exploration and learning, and indeed is obliged to, as it cares for its diverse members and reaches out to others living in an ever-evolving culture. To declare confessional status would cause stagnation, irrelevance, and a disregard for the gift of science.
4. To declare that the report's beliefs about human sexuality have confessional status will have consequences for denominational agencies engaged in ecumenical partnerships as well as for office-bearers engaged in ecumenical and interfaith work (for example, campus ministers and hospital chaplains). These consequences should be considered.
5. To declare that this committee's interpretations are so thorough and reliable as to warrant confessional status is reckless and unnecessarily provocative, an attempt to draw a line in the sand foreclosing all further discussion. It is extremely divisive and will do irreparable harm to the church and its witness.