

Overview

Fellowship has been a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church North America (CRCNA) from its inception more than forty years ago. Its membership is now in jeopardy because of a series of Synodical decisions taken over the past 3 years regarding human sexuality. Practically, the issue is whether those who identify as 2SLGBTQI+ can be members in good standing of the CRCNA, theologically the issue concerns interpretations of Scripture and the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 108), one of the denominations confessional documents.

The Synod of the CRCNA took its first official position on human sexuality in 1973. At that time Synod recognized that homosexuality was an orientation, not a choice. Furthermore, if homosexual people did not ‘act’ on their orientation, but remained ‘celibate,’ they could remain members of the church in good standing.

In 2016 Synod appointed a study committee to articulate a biblical theology of human sexuality. That committee submitted its report at the 2021 Synod. Both the selection process of this committee’s members and the contents of its report were criticized by many individuals and some churches within the CRCNA.

Fellowship registered its first official opposition to Synod’s interpretation of human sexuality with an overture to Classis Alberta North (CAN) submitted in January of 2021. The overture asked Synod to appoint a new study committee, one that was not forced to adhere to the conclusions of the 1973 report. That overture (**Document 1** in the list below) and others like it were defeated.

Fellowship also submitted an overture to Classis Alberta North’s Spring meeting in 2023. This overture challenged Synod 2022’s unprecedented procedural process and its expanded interpretation of unchastity in Q&A 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism to include homosexual sex. This overture requested that Synod create a local option for CRC communities that wish to allow 2SLGBTQI+ Christians to fully participate in the life of the church and second, to remove homosexual sex from the list of things implied by unchastity. This overture (**Document 2** in the list below) was not discussed at Classis and voted down, then sent on to Synod where it was defeated as well

In response to Synod 2023’s decisions to adopt the HSR, give confessional status to the new meaning of unchastity, and redefine/restrict the use of ‘confessional-difficulty gravamina,’ Fellowship exercised its only remaining option for expressing disapproval: we submitted a letter of protest to the Spring 2024 meeting of Classis Alberta North. (**Document 3** in the list below.) This letter stated that given Synod’s decisions, Fellowship could only remain Christian Reformed as a church in protest. The letter was not discussed or supported by Classis and sent on to Synod. Synod 2024 affirmed all previous decisions associated with the HSR and outlined disciplinary procedures for individuals and churches that did not comply. Following the process of Article 38 of the Church Order, Classis Alberta North was obligated to send representatives to

Fellowship and work with us towards repentance and compliance. Fellowship would have a year to do so.

In August of 2024 Fellowship's Pastoral Committee received a letter from the Classis Interim Committee (CIC is an executive committee that acts on behalf of Classis Alberta North when it is not in session) that stated it would not implement Synod's disciplinary decisions immediately and Fellowship was welcome to send delegates to the Fall Classis meeting where a "gracious discussion" would take place about differing views on human sexuality. In preparation for this discussion, all churches were asked to submit answers to two questions; these answers would be used as a resource for the discussion.

Fellowship was in the process of sending a letter to Classis (**Document 4** in the list) when we received the CIC letter. The purpose of our letter was to share our members' feelings about Synod's decisions and their implications for Fellowship Church. Among the many feelings expressed, the main ones were disappointment, sadness, grief, frustration and betrayal. Our letter also noted that a large majority of members believed that disaffiliation seemed inevitable. The Pastoral Committee (our church council) added our responses to CIC's two questions to this letter and sent it in to the Clerk of Classis in last August expecting that it would be distributed to all the churches of Classis Alberta North (CAN).

Fellowship held a congregational conversation in September to clarify positions about when and how to disaffiliate in ways that a summer survey failed to do. Both the survey and the congregational conversation demonstrated that Fellowship is unanimously an affirming congregation. The only areas of disagreement were process and timing. Some members favoured unilaterally disaffiliating, the sooner the better, however, a majority wanted to follow Article 38, but not allow it to drag on.

Fellowship sent delegates to the fall meeting of Classis Alberta North to participate in the "gracious conversation." Unfortunately, that agenda item failed to generate conversation or meaningful discussion about the implications of Synod 2024's decisions.

The pastoral committee passed a resolution to disaffiliate and sent notification to Classis Alberta North in late November. (**Document 5** in the list.)

The prescribed second step in the Article 38 process is for Classis to send representatives to a meeting of our Pastoral Committee; the purpose of this meeting being to carry out the will of Synod, namely, calling the church in protest to repent of its affirming position. This meeting took place on January 14, 2025.

As is the case with many other CRCNA classes, Classis Alberta North utilizes its appointed cadre of church visitors to be its representatives when dealing with Article 38 churches. It became apparent early in our meeting with the church visitors that they had received no advice, training or instructions from Synod or Classis. They were on their own. To our surprise our visitors

stated up front that they had no intention of following Synod's disciplinary directive to call Fellowship church to repentance. They felt this would be inappropriate given their understanding that we have studied the Scriptures deeply, know our confessions well, and have done the prayerful work of seeking the Lord's guidance for our congregation. They saw their visit as a time to express their gratitude for our faithfulness as a church in Classis Alberta North over the years, to mourn with us at the decision we have been led to make, and to offer us a blessing as we move forward and seek the Lord's guidance in the months and years ahead.

Thus, the tone of the meeting was respectful and gracious in the context of pain, grief and disappointment; each side showed empathy for the plight of the other. Nevertheless, we impressed upon the visitors our frustration that Classis has not been willing to honestly engage the issues around human sexuality and Synod's handling of the HSR report. And we thought the visitors were themselves "tip toeing" around the issues rather than face them head on. They admitted all of this was true.

Our classical representatives agreed with our assessment that one step remains in our disaffiliation process: a congregational vote. That vote will take place sometime in February.

List of Documents

1. Overture to Classis Alberta North, January 2021
2. Overture to Classis Alberta North, January 2023
3. Declaration of Fellowship as a Church in Protest, March 2024
4. Letter to CIC of Classis Alberta North, August 2024
5. Resolution to Disaffiliate, November 2024