

Dear CRC Classes and Councils:

For the second year in a row, the Christian Reformed Church in North America was unable to convene its annual synod due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As in 2020, the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA (COD) met on behalf of synod via teleconference to address matters that the Program Committee of synod (officers of Synod 2019) decided could not wait until Synod 2022—indicated in the [Deferred Agenda for Synod 2020](#), the [Agenda for Synod 2021](#), and the [Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021](#).

After convening in advisory committees, the Council of Delegates met for two days in plenary sessions, deliberating on matters such as Neland Avenue CRC's ordination of a person in a same-sex marriage to the office of deacon and how to encourage challenging conversations about human sexuality, addressing the abuse of power, and adopting the ministry evaluation of our Global Mission agencies (ReFrame Ministries and Resonate Global Mission). The COD, on behalf of synod, heard from the executive director on the state of the church (see crcna.org/news-and-events/news/state-church-hopeful-and-promising), had the privilege of approving *thirty-one* candidates for ministry of the Word (see crcna.org/candidates), and gave special recognition to *thirty-two* ministerial retirees and *eight* commissioned pastors who concluded service in the past year. We are grateful for the effective work of these dedicated servants of the church, and we wish them God's blessing as they enter a new chapter in their lives.

Other matters discussed and decided by the Council of Delegates in June included denominational structure and leadership, a code of conduct for ministry leaders, organizations recommended for offerings, and appointments to denominational boards and committees. To assist you in identifying topics of particular importance for discussion with your classis, council, and church members, we have summarized the decisions of this special meeting of the Council of Delegates on the following pages. **Please take a few moments to review the attached highlights during an upcoming meeting.**

The digital version of the *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021* is posted to the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources. The printed version of this publication will follow in August.

On behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, I want to express our sincere appreciation to the members of the Council of Delegates for their time selflessly given to the special meeting in June—added to the time they already contribute to meetings throughout the year. “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans” (Prov. 16:3).

Yours faithfully,



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Summary of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021

1. Anticipating Synod 2022 and its agenda

Recognizing the weight of deferred agenda matters from two canceled synods in addition to significant matters on the agenda for Synod 2022, the COD, on behalf of synod, mandated the Program Committee (officers of Synod 2019), in the interest of an efficient use of time, to explore options for the meeting of Synod 2022, including consulting with a design team of staff and significant participants at synod. A preliminary report will be presented to the COD in October, and a formal recommendation will be brought to the COD in February 2022. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2021*, p. 627.)

2. Facilitating challenging conversations

Consideration was given to concerns noted in Overture 17 to create an effective space for LGBTQ believers to share their perspectives on recommendations to synod as part of the human sexuality report (see *Agenda for Synod 2021*, pp. 390-92, and the human sexuality report at crcna.org/SynodResources). In addition, it was noted that the *Challenging Conversations* toolkit produced by Pastor Church Resources is helpful for congregations but is not designed for use at classis or synod. As a result of deliberations on this matter, the COD, on behalf of synod, instructed the executive director to “develop and implement a mechanism or forum that would allow LGBTQ voices to be heard by the delegates to Synod 2022 with regard to the human sexuality report and present the proposal to the COD in February 2022 for approval.” (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021*, p. 676.)

3. Neland Avenue CRC discussion

The Council of Delegates was tasked by the Program Committee to consider eight overtures and two communications included in the *Agenda for Synod 2021* (pp. 352-76, 475-76, 595-617), written in response to the decision of the council of Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to ordain a person in a same-sex marriage to the office of deacon. The COD spent a significant amount of time deliberating this matter. In the end, the COD, on behalf of synod, decided that the matter should best be deferred to Synod 2022 for consideration, primarily because the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality will be addressed in 2022. The COD did, however, respond to Overture 11 by not acceding to the request that the COD rescind its previous action to send a letter to the council of Neland Avenue CRC. (Overture 11 will be included on the agenda for Synod 2022 as background only.)

The COD also decided to “send a ‘formal communication’ to Synod 2022, reaffirming the COD letter of admonition and grave concern to Neland Avenue CRC and urging Synod 2022 to be mindful of the three marks of the true and vital church.” One of the grounds states, “In a time of denominational turmoil, it is incumbent on the COD to reaffirm our denominational commitments and to add further weight in hopes of preventing other churches from taking independent actions that bypass Church Order.” (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2021*, pp. 629-30.)

4. Addressing structure and leadership

Two overtures submitted by way of the *Agenda for Synod 2021* requested that the COD halt processes of structural changes implemented by the COD and the CRCNA Canada Corporation to comply with Canadian charitable law. Because the COD adopted the report of the Structure and Leadership Task Force (SALT) in May 2021 and is recommending the report to Synod 2022, the

COD did not accede to the overtures because it feels the SALT report addresses many of the concerns expressed in the overtures. In addition, Synod 2022 is asked to adopt the SALT report and will review all decisions of the COD related to structure and leadership. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2021*, pp. 519-58, 628.)

5. Abuse of power matters; CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders

Synod 2019 adopted a series of recommendations in response to the report by the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee, directing the COD to fulfill additional work as one of the outcomes of the original report. On behalf of synod, the COD adopted the CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders and will in the coming year devise a plan for implementation by the denomination, classes, and churches. (See the **Appendix** at the end of this letter for the full Code of Conduct, also downloadable at crcna.org/synodresources, including Korean and Spanish translations.)

Following Synod 2019, the COD appointed an ad hoc committee, which presented its final report and recommendations to the COD in February 2021. The COD presented the ad hoc committee report to synod for adoption as a fulfillment of the tasks assigned (see *Agenda for Synod 2021*, pp. 44-71). At the Special Meeting of the COD in June, acting on behalf of synod, the COD adopted the report and its recommendations, providing for training in restorative justice practices and interpersonal relationships for CRCNA staff, requiring a regular review of discrimination and harassment training, and establishing a Dignity Team, along with other measures. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2021*, pp. 634-37.)

The COD responded to Overture 9 in the *Deferred Agenda for Synod 2020* by affirming work that has already been done concerning abuse of power (e.g., development of a training program for church leadership, revisions to CRCNA employee handbooks, and more) and instructed the executive director to make recommendations to the COD for improving the appeal process in light of Church Order. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2021*, pp. 633-34.)

6. Global Mission ministries evaluated; videos for use in worship/meetings

At the direction of Synod 2018, the COD adopted a policy to ensure continual evaluation of all agencies and ministries, including their comprehensive and strategic program goals, objectives, and annual outcomes over a four-year cycle according to the five ministry priorities. The Global Mission ministries group (ReFrame Ministries and Resonate Global Mission) provided evaluation reports in 2021, which the COD approved on behalf of synod.

In addition, the COD instructed the executive director to review the program evaluation reporting process to help clarify “the purpose, outcomes, goals, and metrics to be used.” Any recommended revisions to the current policy will be brought to the COD for consideration. (See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2021*, p. 674.)

Please also note two special videos prepared for presentation at Synod 2021—focusing on the CRC’s Global Mission ministries. Because synod was unable to meet, we encourage churches and classes to make use of these brief videos as ministry highlights during a church service, an educational class, or the fall classis meeting:

ReFrame Ministries: <https://vimeo.com/560429511>

Resonate Global Mission: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAAghGp96AY>

(See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the COD 2021*, p. 669.)

7. Financial and Pension Trustees matters

For the first time since the adoption of the new ministry share system—now based on pledges by congregations—synod was *not* asked to adopt a per-member ministry-share amount for the coming year. The COD reported on the unified budget and the ministry-share allocations for fiscal year 2021-22 as information (see *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021*, p. 671). A new denominational salary grid for senior positions, reflecting a 3 percent increase from the previous year, was adopted by the COD on behalf of synod. The COD also noted the list of denominational agencies, institutions, and ministries, as well as organizations recommended for offerings (see *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021*, pp. 672-73). The list of organizations recommended for offerings reflects a process of vetting and accreditation according to a policy adopted by synod. There is one addition to the list this year: the International Network for Christian Higher Education (INCHE) in the United States.

In addition, the COD, on behalf of synod, took note of the endorsement of actions of the Pension Trustees with respect to retirement benefits for ministers of the Word and the per-member assessment and per-participant assessments. (See specific amounts in *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021*, p. 673.)

Please also note the following actions by the COD on behalf of synod in response to recommendations presented by the Pension Trustees:

- a. To designate up to 100 percent of a minister's early or normal retirement pension or disability pension for 2022 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.
- b. To designate up to 100 percent of an ordained pastor's distributions from their CRC 403(b)(9) Retirement Income Plan as housing allowance for United States income-tax purposes (IRS Ruling 1.107-1) on or after July 1, 2021, but only to the extent that the funds are used to rent or provide a home.

(See *Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021*, pp. 673-74.)

See Appendix: CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders on next page.

Appendix CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders

Preamble

In Philippians 2 the apostle Paul brings to his Philippian readers the words of a hymn in which Christ Jesus is acknowledged as being, in his very nature, God. Among other things, this means that Christ is the one to whom all power belongs.

The hymn goes on to say that Christ did not consider equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage. In fact, he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, and humbling himself toward a life-sacrificing kind of obedience. In other words, he used his power for the thriving of others.

All of us who are united to Christ by faith and who serve in the life of the church are called, in this passage and others, to this way of being. Jesus himself, in response to the desire for power expressed by his disciples, called them (and us) to use power to serve people, a way of holding power that confronts and contrasts with the ways that the world uses power.¹

Not only do we have this call from Christ, but we actually have Jesus living and growing within us (Gal. 2:20). As a result, we find ourselves being transformed into the kind of people who hold and use power in a Christlike way.

That being said, until Christ returns and brings us to perfection, we will continue to wrestle with the urge to misuse power and abuse others. Ugly realities such as verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse are found among us. The power that we hold by virtue of our person or our position can always be twisted into the project of building our own kingdoms at the expense of others. This is true for pastors, lay ministry leaders, and church members alike.

In awareness of these ugly realities and in the beautiful hope of Christ's transforming work, the following code of conduct is offered for ministry leaders. It is shaped by Scripture and by commitments found in our confessional statements and contemporary testimonies.² It emerges out of a response by Synod 2018 to patterns of abuse that had been brought to its attention³ and is aimed at preventing such abuse in the future. May God's peace be among us.

¹ See Mark 10:35-45. Note that there are other Scripture texts that address the use of power to bless, such as 1 Peter 5:1-4. In addition, there are texts that describe abuses of power and the damage that such abuses cause (see, for example, 2 Sam. 11 and Ezek. 34).

² See Belgic Confession, Article 28, and Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 55, 107, 111. See also the statement in the Confession of Belhar that says, "We believe . . . 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" (Confession of Belhar, Article 4). Further, in *Our World Belongs to God*, we read that the church is a "new community," gathered by God, in which "all are welcome" (para. 34); that the church's mission in this broken world is a mission of proclaiming the gospel and its implications for life today (para. 41); and that, "restored in Christ's presence, shaped by his life, this new community lives out the ongoing story of God's reconciling love, announces the new creation, and works for a world of justice and peace" (para. 39). Such statements describe the mission of the church in general and provide foundation for the specific code of conduct presented here.

³ Bev Sterk's overture to Synod 2018, titled "Address Patterns of Abuse of Power That Violate the Sacred Trust Given to Leaders and Recognize How These Hinder Due Process and Healing," and appendices specifically related to it, can be found in the *Agenda for Synod 2018*, pp. 282-307 (see

Code of Conduct

Abuse of power is a misuse of position, authority, or influence to take advantage of, manipulate, or control. Abuse of power occurs when a person with power, regardless of its source, uses that power to harm and/or influence another for personal gain at the other's expense. All abuse by faith leaders within the church is also spiritual abuse and has spiritual impacts that often heighten the harm caused to individuals and to the family of God. (For more background, see *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 587-615).

As a ministry leader, I commit to the following:

Confidentiality

I will use confidentiality appropriately, which means I will hold in confidence whatever information is not mine to share.

I will not use information shared with me in confidence in order to elevate my position or to depreciate that of others.

My use of confidentiality will also be guided by mandatory reporting as required by law.

Relational

I will speak and act, in all my personal and professional relations, in ways that follow the pattern of Christ, who used his power to serve (1 Pet. 5; Mark 10; Phil. 2; 2 Tim. 4:2).

I will conduct myself with respect, love, integrity, and truthfulness toward all—regardless of position, status, race, gender, age, or ability.

To the best of my ability, I will contribute to an environment of hospitality.

Financial

I will ensure that funds are used for their intended ministry purposes.

In all financial matters, including the acceptance of gifts, I will act with scrupulous honesty, transparency, and appropriate accountability.

I will appropriately use accepted accounting practices and regular reviews and/or audits.

Intimate Relationships

I will maintain standards and appropriate boundaries in all relationships, which are informed by the Scriptures.

crcna.org/SynodResources). The subsequent action of Synod 2018 was to form an "Abuse of Power Committee" to study "how the CRCNA can best address patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination" (*Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 523-24). The work of Synod 2019 related to this overture can be found in the *Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 794-96 (see crcna.org/SynodResources). The particular recommendation calling for a code of conduct is recommendation 3, c (p. 795).

I will keep all of my professional relationships free from inappropriate emotional and sexual behaviors. This includes not engaging in inappropriate intimate contact or a sexual relationship, unwanted physical contact, sexual comments, gestures, or jokes.

Safety

I will actively promote a safe environment where all persons are respected and valued, where any form of abuse, bullying, or harassment is neither tolerated nor allowed to take place.

I will report known or suspected cases of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect of minors to the proper government authorities.

I will support adults who disclose physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in a way that appropriately empowers the person who has been victimized.

Spiritual

I will acknowledge the use of Scripture and the Spirit's work in the community of the church and, therefore, refrain from presuming to be the sole "voice of God."

I will use my position as a way to serve the body of believers, rather than myself, for the common good and the cultivation of the gifts of the Spirit.

Additional Commitments

I will work within my professional competence, especially in counseling situations, and I will refer individuals to other professionals as appropriate.

I will promote truthfulness, transparency, and honesty in all of my work.

I will disclose any perceived or actual conflict of interest.

In all that I do, I will seek to use my position, power, and authority prudently and humbly and in nonexploitive ways.

In the event that I misuse my power, either intentionally or unintentionally, as a ministry leader, I will acknowledge the harm that has been caused and the trust that has been broken, and I will actively seek restoration with justice, compassion, truth, and grace. I will humbly submit to the insight and accountability of others to ensure that I use any power entrusted to me fully in service to Christ.