



CLASSIS NIAGARA OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH



*To encourage, equip, and empower churches and ministries
to engage God's people in mission!*



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116th meeting of Classis

Wednesday, October 27, 2021 - held at Covenant CRC

Chair: Rev. Bob Loerts; **Vice-chair:** Rev. Colin Vander Ploeg; **Stated Clerk:** Wendy de Jong

MINUTES

classisniagara.ca/minutes-reports/

CHURCH	PASTOR/ELDER	ELDER	DEACON
Bethany	Rev. Colin Vander Ploeg	Tim Van Hoffen (morning) George DeRoo (afternoon)	
Bethel	Rev. Frank Engelage	Jim DeKlerk	David Engelage
Covenant	Rev. Bob Loerts	Brian MacIsaac	Henrietta Hunse
Fruitland	Elder Al Voorberg	Ben Nywening	
Grace		Henry Hessels	Christine Burghgraef
Jubilee Fellowship	Rev. Woodrow Dixon	Steve Folkerts	Ingrid Beck
Mountainview	Rev. Erick Schuringa	PJ Vermeer	Nick Kiers
Providence	Elder Rob Zwier	Dan Baarda	
Faith Fellowship		Rick Meloen	Tena Schuyler
Riverside	Elder Leo Van Tuyl	Phil Dekker	Devin Lunshof
Smithville	Rev. Peter Tuininga	Paul Heerema	
Trinity		Lucas Teeuwssen	
The Bridge		Hans Branderhorst, Karin Vermeer	
Village Church	Rev. Mark DeVos		

CMC Members and Guests for some or all of the day: Anna Bailey, Zack DeBruyne, Joanne Drenth-VanDyke, Peter Elgersma, Karen Gerritsma, Janet Ryzebol, Hilda VanderKlippe, Terry Veldboom, Jonathan Zwier

1. AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

Encouraging God's people by intentionally sharing life and story together so that classis is being transformed into a community of grace and truth.

- 1.1 Welcome & Opening:** Chairperson Rev. Bob Loerts welcomed the delegates to the meeting with prayer and reading from Philippians 3: 8-15, and laid out the expectations and details for how the day would proceed.
- 1.2 Constitution of Classis:** The Chair read the Niagara Declaration of Agreement with the beliefs of the CRCNA, which delegates affirmed by standing. Classis was declared constituted.
- 1.3 Committee appointment confirmations:** The Credential and Advisory committees were affirmed.
- 1.4 Roll Call and Report of the Credentials Committee:** Rick Meloen, elder delegate of Faith Fellowship CRC read the roll call. He also reported that Covenant CRC nominated Bob Loerts for consideration as a potential delegate for consideration to the Calvin Theological Seminary. Vice-Chair Colin VanderPloeg stepped in to chair.
MOTION: that Classis approve the nomination as submitted which will be forwarded to the Synodical Services Committee. **CARRIED.**
- 1.5 Report of the Overtures Advisory Committee:** The reports will be read when the overtures are discussed later in the day.
- 1.6 Church Counselor reports:** Church Counsellor Rev. Peter Tuininga reported on the recent decision by Fruitland to disband. Fruitland CRC Elder Al Voorberg shared the reasons Fruitland Council brought a survey to their congregation which resulted in a 73% vote to disband, and brought the formal motion on behalf of their Council. Members are being asked to find their own new congregation to join. The CMC is asked to appoint an oversight committee to report back to Classis on the distribution of assets, transfer of all active and inactive memberships. Their plan is to close by June 2022.
MOTION: As per Church Order 38b, Fruitland CRC asks Classis Niagara to concur with it's decision to disband as a congregation. **CARRIED.** Rick Meloen offered prayer for the Fruitland congregation.
- 1.7 Shalom Manor presentation:** Jonathan Zwier of Shalom Manor gave delegates an update on the process of building a new senior's residence in Hamilton. They are working through zoning, site plans, tendering for construction contractors, and are in discussions with the Ministry of Health. They hope to break ground in September of 2023. The financial challenge is significant but they are very thankful to have already reached 50% of their goal, working with other Reformed denominations as well. They celebrate the fellowship and faith commitment of the community of Shalom residents and staff. Youth Ministry Champion Anna Bailey offered prayer for Shalom.
- 1.8 Presentation by Peter Bulthuis of World Renew:** Delegates viewed a video update on World Renew's activities in Haiti and Afghanistan.

2. COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Encouraging God's people to engage in the various relationships and activities of the church with accountability so that our institutional and relational obligations are met.

- 2.1** **Overtures:** The five overtures dealing with the synodical human sexuality report were all read consecutively, after which the delegates broke into small groups to share “what do you hope for from this conversation?” and “what do you fear could happen in this conversation?”
Hopes – continued engagement, unity, compassion, scriptural truth, clarity, community, love, forgiveness, grace and truth.
Fears – division, hurt, misunderstand, alienation, black & white thinking, anxiety, disobedience of God, hardening of hearts, not considering current context in relation to biblical context.
After the small group time and break, the overtures were considered as reported below. Ingrid Beck offered prayer for our lunch break.
- 2.2** **Jubilee Fellowship CRC Overture 1:** *Overture in response to the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality*
Presentation & Advisory Committee Report: Jubilee elder Steve Folkerts read the overture, after which Vice-Chair Colin Vander Ploeg read the Overture Advisory Committee’s (OAC) response, which recommended that Classis accede to the overture and pass it along to Synod. This overture was originally brought to the February 2021 Classis meeting, but deferred to October so that delegates could engage with the report through the Challenging Conversations groups held in September and October.
Discussion: Jubilee’s pastor, Woodrow Dixon responded to questions from the floor. It was discussed whether or not receiving the report for information would stop the conversation from happening, and acknowledged that as churches we have not done well at being pastoral even though we’ve had this matter before us for 50 years.
MOTION re Jubilee Fellowship CRC Overture 1: “Having read and reflected on the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality to be submitted to Synod 2021, and while appreciating the report’s counsel on a variety of points, the Council of Jubilee Fellowship CRC nevertheless overtures Synod to receive this report as information and not to approve it.” **DEFEATED**
- 2.3** **Jubilee Fellowship CRC Overture 2:** *Overture in response to the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality*
Presentation & Advisory Committee Report: Jubilee elder Steve Folkerts read the main points of this overture which Jubilee brought forward on behalf of a diverse group of college students who have no other way to get their voices to Synod. Vice-Chair Colin Vander Ploeg read the advice from the OAC, which was to not accede to the overture, however, they agreed the conversation should continue.
Discussion: It was noted that these voices represent the next generation, although also argued it was one perspective of that generation. A motion was made to divide the overture in response to the comments made in the previous discussion and in the small group time to look for ways to continue dialogue on this important issue.
MOTION: to divide the question. **CARRIED**
Overture 2 Question 1 – **MOTION:** “Make amendments to the recommendations of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality,” including Recommendations B, C, D, E. **DEFEATED**
Overture 2 Question 2 - **MOTION:** “Create a plan of action to continue careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality (particularly gender identity, same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage) and engagement with people affected by these issues.” **CARRIED**

Overture 2 Question 3 - **MOTION:** "Prioritize the unity of the body of Christ in the CRCNA by delegating the issue of same-sex marriage as a decision of local conscience (while actively studying the fruit of this decision to inform further dialogue)." The vote was a tie, broken by the chair. **DEFEATED**

- 2.4 Bethany CRC Overture 1:** *Overture in response to the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality*
Presentation & Advisory Committee Report: Colin Vander Ploeg, pastor of Bethany, stepped aside as Vice-Chair, replaced by Frank Engelage for this portion of the meeting. Colin read the overture, after which Peter Tuininga read the OAC's recommendation that Classis accede to the overture.
Discussion: A motion was made to remove the third paragraph from the preamble which some delegates found problematic in its positing those who espouse acceptance of same-sex marriage as starting with culture rather than from Scripture. Bethany did not accept this as a friendly amendment.
MOTION: Steve Folkerts made a motion, seconded by Erick Schuringa, to delete the paragraph "We recognize there are Christians, including Christian scholars, who espouse acceptance of same-sex marriage as the way to answer the suffering and the needs of those living with same-sex attraction. These perspectives most often start from a position of acceptance of same sex attraction as being in some way normative and from there going to Scripture to see how this can work Biblically. We do not believe that is a faithful starting point." **DEFEATED** Erick Schuringa registered a negative vote.
MOTION: "Bethany CRC Council overtures Classis Niagara to overture Synod to affirm the biblical foundation sections of The Report as being in accord with biblical teaching understood from a Reformed perspective as it pertains to human sexuality in the areas addressed in the report." **CARRIED**
- 2.5 Bethany CRC Overture 2:** *Overture in response to the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality:*
Presentation & Advisory Committee Report: Colin Vander Ploeg read Bethany's second overture, followed by Peter Tuininga reading the OAC's recommendation that Classis accede to the overture.
Discussion: The objective of this overture focused on encouraging discussion of the other parts of the report that have not received as much attention as the same-sex marriage issue.
MOTION: Bethany CRC Council overtures Classis Niagara to overture Synod to recommend The Report as a whole to the churches as a useful tool to help encourage ongoing learning, discussion, and guidance towards biblically faithful responses to such pastoral situations churches face." **CARRIED**
- 2.6 Bethany CRC Overture 3:** *Overture in response to the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality:*
Presentation & Advisory Committee Report: Colin Vander Ploeg, pastor of Bethany, read their third overture. The Overture Advisory Committee recommended that Classis accede to the overture.
Discussion: This discussion came back to the objection to the preamble about culture and scripture, and to other ways in which the church has changed its position such as slavery or women in office.
MOTION: Bethany CRC overtures Classis to overture Synod to amend Church Order 2020, Article 69-C by adding the sentence, "Same sex marriage is one example of a marriage considered to be in conflict with the Word of God." The vote was another tie, broken by the Chair to not send the overture to Synod. **DEFEATED.** Lesli Van Milligen offered prayer.
- 2.7 Classis Ministry Council report** – Erick Schuringa highlighted a few items from the two sets of minutes from the CMC, and thanked all the other members of the CMC for their excellent work. The proposal to rework the Rules & Regulations will be brought to the May meeting. **MOTION:** To approve the work of the Classis Ministry Council. **CARRIED**

2.8	Stated Clerk report – Wendy de Jong’s report covered the significant amount of work involved in organizing this meeting and the Challenging Conversations, which took place in September and October. She expressed thanks on behalf of Classis to the four facilitators from Classis Hamilton who led these sessions. MOTION: To approve the work of the Stated Clerk. CARRIED
2.9	Treasurer’s Report: Treasurer Joanne Drenth-VanDyke presented the 2022 budget highlighting the main changes this year. The Leadership Development budget is reduced since there are fewer seminary students being supported. Extending support for The Bridge church plant is included. Some surplus funds are being transferred as well within some budget areas. The total budget is \$250,730, of which Classical Ministry Shares cover \$215,980, at \$80.80 per member. The remainder will be covered by surplus funds. MOTION: To adopt the proposed budget for 2022, and approve the work of the Treasurer. CARRIED

3. PRAYERFUL DEPENDENCE ON GOD

Engaging in prayer with expectant hearts and minds so that our classis, churches and individual members are prayerfully dependent on God.

3.1	Small group time of lament and prayer: The delegates went into their small groups again for 15 minutes of prayer for the churches in Classis Niagara, the CRC in Canada, the challenges of bi-nationality, and for our denomination facing a challenging Synod in June.
3.2	Council of Delegates report: Alternate Stated Clerk, Frank Engelage, took over as recorder. Wendy de Jong, who is also the Classis Niagara COD delegate, gave a presentation covering the recent October meeting highlighting the positive atmosphere at this meeting, the hiring of Lindsay Wieland Capel, a diversity awareness activity the COD engaged in, their commitment to more respectful dialogue and interactions, as well as a policy on vaccinations for Synod and future COD meetings, There were no questions. Karen Vermeer led in prayer for the COD and overtures.
3.3	Overture from Mountainview & Providence CRCs re Resignation of the Canada Corp Executive: <u>Presentation & Discussion</u> – Erick Schuringa spoke on behalf of both churches. As the overture pertained to the Executive of Canada Corp and Wendy is not a member of the Executive, Rev. William Koopmans of Classis Hamilton who is on the Executive, was invited to attend this portion of the meeting via Zoom to respond to any questions directed to the Executive. The OAC shared their advice asking that the overture be referred back to the churches for clarity. Erick spoke in some detail regarding the actions of the Canada Corp executive in relation to the dismissal of Darren Roorda as Canadian Ministries Director and the adoption of the SALT report. As Synod would not be able to speak to this matter, the intent is that the Canada Corp Board receive this overture and the Executive hear the request that they resign. Wendy, as well as William Koopmans responded, expressing regret that confidentiality prevents them from sharing more information. The difference in vision pertains largely to implementation of bi-nationality. MOTION: “To overture Classis Niagara to strongly recommend that the Canada Corp Executive resign from the COD because of a differing vision from the Christian Reformed classes, churches, and people of Canada they are meant to represent.” It was moved by Colin Vander Ploeg and seconded to recommit the motion to the churches for clarity. This resulted in a tied vote which the Chair broke by referencing the OAC’s recommendation to recommit the overture. RECOMMITTED
3.4	Update on restructuring and update on the contextualized Ministry Plan: Peter Elgersma, Director of Advancement-Canada, gave a report highlighting work done by Canadian Ministries and with the Joint Ministries Agreements that the staff are engaged with currently as the SALT report is

being implemented. He mentioned the CRC digital library of all the Faith Alive publications, which are free to CRC members. Peter also gave a refresher on the new approach to calculating Ministry Shares pledges and encouraged churches to make a pledge on a 12-month time frame that seems reasonable and within what their church is able to give.

4. DISCIPLES MAKING NEW DISCIPLES

Empowering and equipping churches and individuals to multiply ministries that will reach their local communities so that not-yet Christians may embrace Christ as Lord.

- 4.1 **Brock Campus Chaplaincy Ministry Report:** Chaplain Zack DeBruyne gave a report on his 4th year of ministry with Brock Campus Ministry. This summer the Brock University Chaplaincy Team conducted a formal review of Brock ministry. He highlighted the values of engaging students, returning to in person studying and interactions. Zack shared a moving story of a student who is actively trying to walk away from her faith but who God keeps calling back, as well as other connections he makes with university staff, and beyond with wider denominational ministry staff.
- 4.2 **Niagara International Students report:** Hilda VanderKlippe shared about her ministry with international students at Niagara College and Brock University, primarily at the Welland campus. This summer they made contacts with approximately 150 students. They welcome additional volunteers.
- 4.3 **Village Church Report:** Mark De Vos spoke of their struggles and loss of members, some of which are involved with The Table, and others who have dropped away due to the pandemic. They have experienced discouragement, but have been encouraged recently as four new families have connected with them. Mark asks for prayers for him and his board.
- 4.4 **The Table:** Terence Schilstra was not able to present but included a report in the agenda.
- 4.5 **Bridge Church Plant:** Karin Vermeer shared her passion for the Bridge ministry and the strong conviction they have that God is calling them be part of the community in downtown Niagara Falls. They have recently started meeting again in person and are having conversations focused on how to move forward, and how their vision has changed over the past 5 years. As a result of raising almost \$22,000 through their BBQ bash and Sleeping out in the Cold night, they have been able to prepare 1600 breakfasts for those who experience homelessness. The Third Space Café continues operating with funding from the Niagara Region and The Hub is being used as an art gallery where they serve the local arts community. Ben Nywening offered prayer for all the discipling ministries who reported.

5. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Providing opportunities to develop, equip and encourage lay and ordained leaders in every context and at every level to be on mission with God.

- 5.1 **Faith Formation Ministries:** Regional Catalyzer Lesli Van Milligen brought resources for the churches. She spoke of the discernment taking place as they help support leaders and congregants. The cards based on the five milestones we committed to as a denomination a year ago are meant to be conversation starters for churches to reflect on ministry in the here and now. Lesli recommended churches consider more intentional ways to dig into spiritual practices rather than programming since church as we knew it pre-pandemic will certainly be different. She offers her support to our churches to explore new ways of doing ministry, and shared her experience at Willowdale CRC and Covenant CRC, Woodstock evidencing what the Holy Spirit is doing and calling us to.

5.2	Youth Ministry Champion report: Anna Bailey reported that very little has been happening within youth ministry in Niagara as a result of the pandemic.
5.3	<p>Classical Ministry Leadership Team report: Woodrow Dixon reported that the CMLT is currently supporting two students, Anna Bailey who is enrolled in the distance studies program at Westminster Theological Seminary, as well as Malorie Van Weelden as she is able to pursue part-time courses at Calvin Theological Seminary. The CMLT has recently reworked their loan forgiveness policy in recognition of bi-vocational ministry and seeks Classis approval of these changes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pastors who are called to a part-time position in an established congregation shall have their loan forgiveness calculated at a pro-rotated basis. If working at 50% or more, the forgiveness formula will follow that of pastors in full-time ministry, i.e., 5 years of ministry at 50% or more. If working below 50% of a full-time position, the length of ministry service required will be set in accordance with the number of hours worked. 2. Pastors called to a church plant will be interviewed by the CMLT which will assess the level of missional engagement, additional part-time work, life and family circumstances, financial support, etc., and make a recommendation that is appropriate to each individual situation in terms of the number of years of ministry required to consider the loan forgiven. <p>MOTION: To approve the changes in the CMLT funding policy incorporating bi-vocational ministry. CARRIED. All voting data through Mentimeter has been deleted.</p>
5.4	<p>Closing Prayer & Adjournment – Chairperson Bob Loerts expressed appreciation on behalf of Classis to the four Facilitators of the Challenging Conversations, to William Koopmans for attending on behalf of the COD, to Devin Lunshof and Leah Schilstra for their technical support, and to all participants for modeling respectful engagement. Thanks were extended to Frank Engelage for stepping in for the Stated Clerk and Vice-chair as needed during the course of the day. Vice Chair Colin Vander Ploeg thanked Covenant for hosting, particularly with the extra work involved of making this an in-person and Zoom hybrid meeting. He also thanked Bob Loerts for his skill in chairing, for his focus, and guidance giving us a good context in which to work. Colin offered closing prayer and the meeting was adjourned.</p>

Next meetings: Wednesday, February 23, 2022. Following meeting: Wednesday, May 25, 2022

Agenda Deadline: January 5, 2022

Chair: Rev. Colin Vander Ploeg; *Vice-chair:* Rev. Mike Vandyk

Credentials Committee: Faith Fellowship (*Chair*) and Jubilee (*Reporting*)

Overture Advisory: Smithville (*Chair*) and Covenant (*Reporting*)