



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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119th meeting of Classis
Wednesday, February 23 2022 - held via Zoom

MINUTES

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

ROLL CALL

CHURCH	PASTOR / ELDER	ELDER	DEACON
Bethany	Pastor Colin Vander Ploeg	George de Roo	Steve van Lochem
Bethel	Pastor Frank Engelage	Clarence Houwer	David Engelage
Covenant	Pastor Janet Ryzebol	Elly Sarkany	Bill Kort
Fruitland	Elder Ben Nywening	Elder Al Voorberg	
Grace	Pastor Mike Vandyk	George Sportel	Carla Langenberg
Jubilee Fellowship	Pastor Woodrow Dixon	Diane Koole	Helen Verkuyl
Mountainview	Pastor Erick Schuringa	George Prins	
Providence	Pastor Steve deBoer	Dan Baarda	Evelyn Dam
Faith Fellowship		Elder Rick Meloen	
Riverside	Elder James Van Tuyl	Ben Lunshof	Jeremy Menger
Smithville	Pastor Peter Tuininga	Daryl Haanstra	Adam Vandenberg
Trinity		Elder Rick Kok	Art Kuipery
The Bridge	Hans Branderhorst, credentials submitted by Providence CRC		
The Table	Pastor Terence Schilstra, credentials submitted by Covenant CRC		
Village Church	Pastor Mark DeVos, credentials submitted by Covenant CRC		

CMC Members, Presenters and Guests: Joanne Drenth-Van Dyke, Karen Gerritsma, Anna Lensink, Marian Lensink, Ed Roorda, Amy Schenkel, Hilda VanderKlippe, Terry Veldboom, Andy Wunderink, Willemina Zwart

1. 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.

- 1.1 **Welcome & Opening Devotions:** Rev. Colin Vander Ploeg welcomed all to this meeting, which hopefully will be the last online meeting. Rev. Janet Ryzebol of Covenant CRC led devotions focused on the desire for unity, graciousness and coming together in our common bond as followers of Jesus.
- 1.2 **Committee appointment confirmations:** The committees were confirmed.
Credentials: **Faith Fellowship** (Chair) and Jubilee (reporting)
Advisory re overtures/protests: **Smithville** (chair) and Grace (reporting)
- 1.3 **Roll Call:** Jubilee Fellowship CRC's pastor, Rev. Woodrow Dixon, read the Roll Call.
- 1.4 **Constitution of Classis:** Rev. Colin Vander Ploeg read the affirmation of the *Niagara Declaration of Agreement with the Beliefs of the Christian Reformed Church in North America*. All the delegates indicated their agreement with the statement, after which Classis was declared constituted.
- 1.5 **Report of the Credentials Committee** – Rev. Dixon indicated the credentials forms were received in good order. Mountainview CRC requested church visitors help them assess their space and culture with a view to how that might help or hinder the experience of people new to their church. In the spirit of openness, they also shared that they are allowing their licensed interns to raise their hands in blessing under the guidance of their pastor. The Credentials Committee recommend the request be followed up with appreciation for the assessment process in which they are engaged.

1. 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.

- 2.1 **Brock Campus Chaplaincy Ministry Report:** Chaplain Zack DeBruyne was not able to attend. Delegates were referred to his written report which was included in the agenda.
- 2.1.1 **Niagara International Students report:** Hilda VanderKlippe shared stories of interactions with students at Niagara College and Brock University where relationships are developed and faith deepened. Hilda outlined the programs provided to respond to the needs of the thousands of international students. She encouraged delegates and churches to consider volunteering and is willing to come speak to churches about this vital ministry.
- 2.2 **Village Church Report:** Mark De Vos gave a presentation outlining the four seeds the Village Church is planting as they work in their neighbourhood and find ways to invite people to explore faith matters.
- 2.3 **The Table:** Terence Schilstra thanked Classis Niagara churches for their support of The Table and shared the ways they are connecting with the community of downtown Thorold. Terence shared several stories illustrating the way these relationships are growing them into a family of Jesus.
- 2.4 **Bridge Church Plant:** Hans Branderhorst acknowledged and thanked Classis and everyone who recognized the need for the work the Bridge church is doing, especially for their prayers. They have benefited from some mentoring that helps them focus on projects they can manage as it is easy to be overwhelmed by the great need they see in downtown Niagara Falls. Hans shared some data about their breakfast program and fundraising projects.

	<p>They are also thankful that The Hub, their arts connection ministry, will be moving to a better location next door to The Third Space Café.</p> <p>Pastor Steve de Boer offered prayer for these ministries and their leaders.</p>
2.5	<p>Discover Your Bible: Marian Lensink, on behalf of Resonate, gave a presentation on Global Coffee Break. They are celebrating 50 years of ministry in the CRC and around the world. She highlighted new resources, and pointed out that in many places Coffee Break includes men and women. Marion was thanked for her presentation on this aspect of spreading the gospel.</p>
2.6	<p>South Coast (SoCo) Beach Project: Willemina Zwart of Resonate shared a video highlighting the first summer's experience of the SoCo project. She outlined how this missional project in Port Dover provides employment for young adults, enables them to develop relationships in their community, and where spiritual growth can take place. Willemina asks churches to spread the word, encourage their young adults to apply, and to support this ministry through prayer and financial support.</p>
2.7	<p>Witness – New curriculum from Resonate Global Missions: Willemina, along with Amy Schenkel, who works for Resonate based in Grand Rapids, led Classis in an interactive presentation introducing Resonate's new evangelism program called Witness. Delegates were led through some videos and breakout rooms to discuss questions such as what we long to see happen in our congregations, what God's vision is for our churches and our interactions in our neighbourhoods. The foundation of this approach is being intentionally present as we develop authentic relationships being aware of where God is at work in the lives of our neighbours as we say 'yes' to being part of one another's lives and stories. Each church was encouraged to think about who in their congregation could spearhead using the Witness program and materials in their church. They are tentatively planning a Classis wide presentation on Wednesday, April 6, 7:30-9:30, at Mountainview CRC. Free resources are available at www.resonateglobalmission.org/witness.</p> <p>Hans Branderhorst closed the morning portion of the meeting with prayer.</p>

1. 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.

3.1	<p>Leadership Development Team Report & Questionnaire: Chairperson Karen Gerritsma, was joined by fellow team members, Andrew Regnerus, Elly Sarkany, Anna Lensink and Erin Knight. Andrew spoke about the survey they have sent to the churches while Elly shared about the connections being made with those involved in worship leadership, and Erin, who works for Diaconal Ministries Canada, spoke about the team's desire to provide leadership training events for local churches. A meeting is being planned for March 30th particularly for deacons but open to all church members. The Leadership Development Team will make a follow up presentation at the May meeting talking about their roll in classis and listening to what churches would like them to focus on or assist in providing leadership resources. Those churches who have not submitted their survey are asked to do that as soon as possible.</p>
3.2	<p>Youth Ministry Champion report: Anna Lensink gave a brief report indicating the pandemic impeded local networking. She represents Classis Niagara through her involvement and connections with other youth champions across the denomination through some intentional listening sessions about ministry to youth and young adults. In terms of larger events, SERVE is happening this summer, including a SERVE Niagara, organized by Annalise Hoogendam of Trinity, who will be looking for volunteers. The All-Ontario Youth Convention is hoping to run a 1 day event on May 7 in Hamilton.</p>

3.3	Classical Ministry Leadership Team report: Rev. Woodrow Dixon gave an update on the work of CMLT, noting the financial support for Anna Lensink who is enrolled in the distance education program with Western Theological Seminary. David Scholman's situation has changed as he is picking up more work outside of his youth ministry position at Covenant. The CMLT has made some changes to their funding policy for bi-vocational pastors and are walking alongside these students in working out financial support and loan forgiveness arrangements.
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4. 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.

4.1	Church Visitors - <i>deferred to the May 2021 Classis meeting</i>
4.2	Church Counselor reports: Rev. Steve DeBoer provided an encouraging report that Trinity CRC has posted their position, has received responses, and will be putting interviews together in the near future.
4.3	Fruitland CRC Disbanding: Rev. Erick Schuringa reported that the oversight committee is offering support as ministry in this congregation is winding down. Mountainview has offered to let people transfer their membership there or to help them find a new church home. They anticipate the closing service to be held on June 5.
4.4	Regional Pastors report: Andre Basson highlighted a few items from his report of the Pastor Church Resources conference. Some of the calls the PCR is receiving indicate Covid has simply exacerbated existing issues, particularly for pastors and churches where the speed of change and technological challenges of moving church online became problematic. One of the speakers stressed the importance of churches taking the time to process the trauma, stress and grief that have been experienced the last two years in their congregations.

5. 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.

5.1	<p>Canadian Catalytic Conversation Report: Rev. Steve de Boer, one of the four delegates from Classis Niagara, presented a report of this event which took place on January 29, 2022. He encouraged everyone to read the detailed minutes to get a good overview of the deliberations and input on CRC ministry structure and culture in Canada. There were two parts to the conversation, first hearing concerns from stakeholders, and secondly, discerning other paths forward that could potentially be helpful in determining effective Canadian contextualized ministry. The other delegates, Bill Kort, George Sportel and Terence Schilstra, also shared their reflections of the gathering, expressing either support, or that our churches face very real challenging issues that may warrant more energy than focusing on structure. In many ways they represent the differing voices reflective of all Canada since the four of them experienced the meeting differently. The CCCII was not a decision-making body. Its intent was to encourage conversation within the churches and classes.</p> <p>MOTION: That every Council/Board member of Classis Niagara read the minutes of the January 29, 2022 CCCII meeting; that Councils pray over and discuss the concerns expressed, and communicate their questions for clarity, affirmations, hesitations, and/or overtures to the CMC in preparation of a fuller discussion at the May Classis meeting.</p> <p>CARRIED</p>
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5.2	<p>Canada Corp & Council of Delegates meeting Report: Wendy de Jong gave a report of the recent Canada Corp and COD meetings. One of the main concerns expressed within Canada is the desire for parity of leadership with an Executive Director Canada and an Executive Director US, which is not reflected in the SALT report. An encouraging development at the last COD meeting was a new proposal to create an ED US position and to move the General Secretary and Chief Administrative Officer into a separate corporation focused on the overall ecclesiastical aspect. The highlight of the COD meeting was the interview with Rev. Dr. Zachary King for the General Secretary position. The search team for the transitional Canadian Executive Director has been formed and includes two Classis Niagara members, Elly Sarkany and Malorie Van Weelden.</p>
5.3	<p>Overture to Classis Niagara to amend the 2022 budget: The overture from Covenant CRC, recommending that Classis Niagara remove the line item from the 2022 Classis Niagara Budget for the Bridge App, and instead have churches who wish to continue use of the Bridge App subscribe individually, had been tabled at the December 8, 2021 meeting. The Credentials Committee advised the overture had merit and recommended it to Classis to accede. The main issues raised in the discussion posited that small churches who aren't making extensive use of the app would likely see the most savings and be able to allocate their funds elsewhere. The vision for classis as a covenant of communal believers that resource and provide services for each other was also brought forward. The overture was defeated.</p>
5.4	<p>Classis Ministry Council report: Rev. Erick Schuringa, Chair of the CMC referred delegates to the minutes in the agenda and supplemental agenda, highlighting Pastor Frank Engelage's appointment to serve as the new Vice-Chair. MOTION: To approve the work of the Classis Ministry Council: CARRIED</p>
5.5	<p>Election of delegates to Synod: The voting results for delegates to Synod 2022 are as follows: Rev. Steven DeBoer as first delegate with Rev. Bob Loerts as alternate Elder Leo Van Tuyl on single nomination Deacon Ingrid Beck on single nomination Rev. Mike Vandyk as fourth delegate with Rev. Erick Schuringa as alternate</p>
5.6	<p>Stated Clerk report & Pulpit Supply List: Wendy de Jong gave a brief overview of four Stated Clerk sessions focusing on preparation for Synod, matters for Canadian Stated Clerks, advice for Overture Advisory Committees, and the process for affiliation or disaffiliation from the CRCNA. MOTION: To approve the work of the Stated Clerk: CARRIED</p>
5.7	<p>Reports: Interim Canadian Executive Director, Terry Veldboom, was welcomed and gave an update on matters before Canada Corporation, the COD and the Canadian Catalytic Conversation. He also expressed the readiness of the denominational staff to assist churches where needed, and asked that we hold him and the other staff in prayer. Delegates were referred to several additional denominational reports included in the agenda.</p>
5.8	<p>Closing Prayer & Adjournment – Vice-chair, Rev. Mike Vandyk, thanked the chair, Rev. Colin Vander Ploeg, for his leadership. He noted that we have managed well with meeting online but it will be so good to be able to meet in person again as we hope to do at the May Classis meeting. Mike closed with a prayer of thanks, after which Classis was declared adjourned.</p>

Next meeting: *May 25, 2022, held at Smithville CRC; Agenda Deadline: April 13, 2022*

Chair: Rev. Mike Vandyk; *Vice-chair:* Rev. Erick Schuringa

Credentials: Jubilee (chair) and Mountainview (reporting)

Overture Advisory: Covenant (chair) and Grace (reporting)

Following meeting: Retreat to be held in October 2022 at the Gethsemane Retreat Center in Wellandport. Dates to be determined