

Church Visitor Report for Exeter CRC – December 15, 2021

The Church Visitors (Rev. Martin Dam and Rev. Tim Leferink) were requested to join in a full Council meeting at Exeter CRC on the evening of December 15, 2021. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the release of Rev. Kevin te Brake from his calling as Minister of the Word from Exeter CRC via Article 17 (a) of the CRC Church Order.

Pastor Kevin has been discerning his call into ministry for some time. He took a “discernment sabbatical” earlier in the year, which was a time to reflect on his calling as a solo pastor. While the time away was one of renewal and revitalization, when Pastor Kevin returned he discovered much of the same struggle he had prior to the sabbatical remained. After a short time back in his role as sole pastor, Kevin felt he would be better suited in a different role, perhaps within a team ministry or a para-church organization. While he has been actively searching for such a position, one had not come together as of late in 2021, and Kevin felt it unwise for both him and the church for him to continue on in his role. It was then that he initiated a conversation to undergo an Art. 17 separation.

At this point the executive of Exeter reached out to Rev. Andrew De Gelder as head church visitor, and eventually a zoom meeting was held including Pastor Kevin, the chair of the Exeter council (Tim DeWeerd), Rev De Gelder and Rev Dam. Pastor Kevin shared a letter explaining the journey he’s been on and the conclusion he’s come to, and a plan was formed to bring this relationship to a close in good order. Pastor Kevin shared that letter at a special meeting in late November, and the church visitors were invited on Dec 15 to work through these issues in a special meeting held in executive session, with Pastor Kevin not present.

The Church visitors guided the conversation, making sure all office-bearers present had a chance to speak and ask questions, and came to realize that Pastor Kevin’s decision was less a reaction to specific challenges in the congregation, and more a recognition that solo pastoral ministry was no longer where he feels called to be. The Council of Exeter CRC has a strong appreciation for Pastor Kevin, but understands Pastor Kevin’s need to be released from his role as pastor. Therefore, they have agreed with the Art. 17 separation request (upon Classis approval). Council expresses the desire to support Pastor Kevin through this time of transition and has extended a generous continuing care package for him. Pastor Kevin’s separation begins as of January 31, 2022.

While there were challenges during the tenure, the Church Visitors sense no animosity between Pastor Kevin and the council of Exeter CRC. Both church and pastor have worked with a high degree of concern for the other, and a commendable level of integrity. Although saddened by this turn of events, we recommend the approval of the Art. 17 separation between Rev. Kevin te Brake and Exeter CRC as per the terms of the separation agreement.

The Church Visitors also hold that no oversight be recommended for either Pastor Kevin or Exeter CRC.

Grounds:

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- The separation holds no animosity, and no claims that Pastor Kevin is unfit for ministry. It is simply a realization of the pastor's inner realization that he needs to remove himself from solo pastoral ministry. Should Kevin's inner calling change, or a position suited to his gifts emerge, we see no reason for Kevin to be hindered from accepting it.
- While some sort of interim period is always wise for a congregation after a lengthy stay by a pastor, we see no reason to hinder Exeter from calling another pastor when they feel they are ready.

In Service to Christ:

Rev. Martin Dam
Rev. Tim Leferink