

Overture: To Postpone Decision on Synodical Study Committee Report on Human Sexuality

To: Classis Huron

December 2021

From: Council of New Life Christian Reformed Church, Guelph, Ontario

Re: Report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality for Synod 2022 [herein after, the Report"]

Overture:

We write to request that Classis Huron again request Synod to postpone decision on acceptance of the Report, and ask that the ramifications of the acceptance or rejection of this report be more clearly explained to the congregations of the denomination, before asking delegates to make a decision at Synod.

Grounds:

During the first half of 2021, five groups of our members met by Zoom in facilitated listening circles to discuss the Human Sexuality Report. This involved around 40 members of our New Life CRC congregation in Guelph, Ontario. Each group met for five to six sessions. **All groups** expressed concerns and questions about the outcome of what Synod may decide regarding the Report. **All groups** agreed it was important to continue and expand discussions within our congregation, and to involve more of New Life church's members. **Most of the groups** found the Report a thoroughly written basis for discussions regarding human sexuality, but found it to have a narrow bias and to lack insight from a full range of Christian perspectives. Each listening circle wrote a report to Council by the end of May 2021. Excerpts from those reports, representing the groups in summary, are listed below at the end of this overture.

Subsequent discussions this past fall included additional members of the congregation, our pastoral elders, and our Council. Many among us are learning more about this topic from the excellent resources that have been recommended, including books by Preston Sprinkles and Matthew Vines, and video lectures on YouTube by Professor Jeff Weima and Professor James Brownson. We have utilized the rubric shown in Appendix B, adapted from a Calvin University white paper, to explore the range of positions held on this topic among us. Informal preliminary surveys indicate a substantial number of our members identify with positions 3, 4, and 5. We believe that our differences should not keep us from worshipping and serving together as a body of believers.

We feel the leading of the Spirit to engage more deeply and broadly with our members in the study of scripture and discussion of its guidance on pastoral care to all those who seek to follow Christ. We have learned in the past year that such study and discussion requires considerable time.

It is evident to us as council that our members are cautioning against a hasty decision with respect to acceptance of the recommendations of this report. We feel more time is needed for congregations to deliberate on this topic, and to share their own experiences in reaching out with pastoral care among their members differing in opinions and orientations.

The stakes are very high due to the *status confessionis* given the document's findings: the consequences of adopting such a document need to be more clearly spelled out. If passed *as is*, will church memberships and denominational and congregational ordinations (elder, deacon, minister) be withdrawn from those who dissent? What about dissenting congregations? These issues have enormous practical consequences in the lives of thousands of CRCNA members and if Synod is to vote on the matter, the consequences of such a vote needs to be clearly laid out. Confirming *status confessionis* may be unwise and even unnecessary.

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Appendix A: Excerpts from the five reports of the New Life CRC Guelph listening circles, spring 2021:

- We struggled with some of the conclusions of the report, and we agreed that declaring them to have 'Confessional Status' felt heavy-handed and had unclear or unfamiliar but negative implications.
- We need more listening circles and exploration of Christian perspectives, to explore how to build community, to consider what sexual purity is, to find hopeful ways forward.
- This conversation should continue in various forms: smalls groups, renewed discipleship time including this discussion, encourage conversations at home in family settings.
- Explore a focus on confession of sin. We are all sinners. Through confession, Jesus can lead each of us to freedom from our own sinful ways, whether sexual sins, or other sins.
- We should find a way forward that allows for understanding to develop, not taking drastic and exclusionary steps at this time.
- It seems that there must be a third way that may lead us together to greater understanding and increased fruitfulness – the way of Shalom.
- Discover how Jesus is inviting our church to be more welcoming of all people. We want the conversation and responses to be inspired by our call to love God and one another.
- Council should be prepared to deal with various opinions if this report moves forward and take steps to encourage conversation and love.
- Inspire ministry with and to singles, fully envelope them in the life, leadership, and use of their gifts in the church.
- Be Jesus to everyone we interact with; See each person as a child of God
- Not everyone sees loving, monogamous same sex relationships as a sin.
- A community with a variety of opinions is a healthy one.
- Gently find out the position of New Life members.
- Continue talking and understanding.

Appendix B:

	Position 1	Position 2	Position 3	Position 4	Position 5	Position 6
Summary description	Condemn same-sex attraction, orientation, and behaviour in all circumstances.	Love the person, but consider same-sex attraction, orientation, and behaviour sinful.	Love the person, consider same-sex attraction and orientation not to be sinful, but consider the behaviour to be sinful.	Heterosexuality is normative but same-sex orientation is not sinful. Monogamous partnerships may be tolerated as a pastoral accommodation.	Same-sex attraction, orientation and behaviour may be valid in God's creation.	Many expressions of sexual attraction, orientation and behaviour are valid.
View of same-sex sexuality	Same-sex orientation and behaviour are abnormal and unnatural.	Same-sex orientation and behaviour are abnormal and unnatural.	Same-sex orientation is a burden or affliction, not a part of God's intention for creation.	Same-sex orientation is a burden, but can be open to experiences of grace.	Sexual orientation of all persons can be a source of sin or holiness, depending on how it is expressed and disciplined.	Same-sex attraction/ orientation is a created variant as 'normal' as heterosexuality. Sexual orientation is an expression of creation variety.
Typical view of way to live	Repent of orientation and behaviour. Change to heterosexual orientation or live in celibacy.	Repent of orientation and behaviour. Change to heterosexual orientation or live in celibacy.	Repent of behaviour. Marry heterosexually or live in celibacy. The church should be hospitable to and work with same-sex-attracted persons, calling everyone to repentance and obedience.	Exclusive lifelong same-sex partnerships can be discreetly tolerated by the church.	Exclusive, lifelong same-sex partnerships are a means of sanctification that may be blessed by the church. Same-sex partnered persons may be ordained.	Celebrate one's sexuality as part of a just and consensual relationships (not necessarily monogamous or lifelong).

Modified from Calvin White Paper on Sexuality