

PRIVATE OVERTURE TO SYNOD ON THE HUMAN SEXUALITY REPORT (HSR)

CONTEXT

As all of you know, Synod will consider the Human Sexuality Report (HSR) in June 2022. This report essentially asks Synod 2022 to grant it “confessional status”. In preparation, a large number of CRCs are expected to submit overtures that either agree with or disagree with this recommendation. Unfortunately this pits one church against another, is divisive, and has the potential of splitting the CRCNA. This is not scriptural. God calls us to be united, not divided.

The attached Overture is our response to this situation. **It neither argues for, nor against, HSR.** Instead, it goes beyond that and encourages Synod to develop a fuller scripture-based theology of human sexuality taking into account the church's primary role – the great commission. This Overture is based on two key realities. (1) First - HSR is essentially consistent with the 1973 Report on human sexuality. So if it is granted confessional status, it takes us back to 1973. On the other hand, if it is denied confessional status, that also takes us back to 1973. Either way, it could be seen as a step backwards. (2) Second - HSR covers a limited number of sexual sins – pornography, sexual identity, same-sex attraction (SSA). It fails to fully cover a range of other sexual sins (divorce, remarriage, adultery) and the related issue of equitable or similar treatment of different sinful life-style issues – that of adultery and that of gays/lesbians. And HSR fails to cover a host of tensions – such as the tension between: (i) universal gospel exposure (Matthew 28) and limited salvation; (ii) God's call for perfection (Matt 5-7) and the continuing reality of living in sin and a broken world (Rom. 7); (iii) being an influence on culture and being influenced by culture; and (iv) the church's oversight responsibilities and Paul's admonition for each of us to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling.

We are standing at a crossroads. The same-sex attracted (SSA) question threatens to divide the denomination. One side holds up God's demand for full perfection in conquering sin. The other side focuses on our sin-filled broken world that requires greater levels of compassion & understanding. The good news is that God's Word combines these 2 “opposites” into 1 **single message & response**. This was beautifully illustrated when the Pharisees came to Jesus with a woman caught in adultery and asked Jesus to choose between stoning her (as per OT laws) & showing compassion (as per many NT passages). While the church leaders of the day chose option one (scriptural law enforcement), Jesus chose option two (compassion) as his primary response. He then followed that up with option one - saying “sin no more” (or “strive for perfection”). Jesus replaced the divisiveness the religious leaders saw 2000 yrs ago (& which the CRC experiences today) with **the unity** of God's Word. Jesus combined compassion & perfection into one single message. Today God challenges us to do the same. We need to practice both perfect obedience & heart-felt compassion. They are not in conflict; they are 2 sides of the same spiritual coin. So let's renew our vision, follow the example of Scripture (Jesus), and combine these two commands into **one united message** of salvation, healing & renewal.

The attached Overture proposes that a 2nd Study Committee report be set up to renew this biblical vision & understanding. Essentially the attached Overture proposes two things - that Synod: (1) temporarily delay the decision on HSR; & (2) create a 2nd Synodical Committee to

study & report on the missing questions that the current HSR report fails to adequately cover (listed in the paragraph 2 above). This would give the denomination fuller scriptural teaching on which to make an informed decision and forms the basis for a **more unified decision**. In this context, we recommend that Synod adopt the following Overture:

PROPOSED OVERTURE

THAT Synod: (1) postpone the adoption of HSR; and (2) develop a 2nd Study Committee (a cross-section of CRC members including SSA) to report on what Scripture says about the following: (a) the inclusiveness of the Gospel; (b) clarify equity issues related to different sexual sins & life-styles ; (c) provide Scriptural guidance on the four tensions referred to above; and (d) identify what this all means for Church Membership* and profession of faith (POF) status.

* **Note:** “Membership” refers to baptized members, professing members and any other membership status the Study Committee feels Scripture includes, directs, or allows – including teaching, preaching, and leadership privileges, responsibilities and standard of members - and associated changes (if any) to the POF forms.

Grounds and Additional Context

- o **TIMING.** The denomination is not ready for the divisive gay/lesbian question. HSR provides Biblical direction on the perfection God seeks, but there are a host of missing pieces that need to be flushed out. It is essential that decisions be made, based on full information - not partial information.
- o **INCLUSIVENESS.** Gospel access is for **all** sinners. As Paul said, there is no difference between men or women, slave or free, and (we can add) gay or straight in this world. We are **all** created in God's image. We **all** need to hear the Gospel. We are **all** in need of God's salvation, forgiveness & renewal. The Church is for sinners – not the righteous. As Paul said we **all** need to (individually) “work out our salvation in fear & trembling”.
- o **UNITY.** God requires that we approach decision-making in unity. This requires faithfulness to God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (who unifies). At present, one CRC is pitted against another and this is not the way God wants us to proceed forward.
- o **EQUITY ISSUES.** There are people in the CRC who go through divorce and remarriage while retaining their Profession of Faith (POF) membership status. There are also people who marry members of the same gender and who are denied POF membership status. Both are life-style issues that involve sexual sins. So the questions is this. How can we (the Church) justify this difference in treatment? On what Scriptural direction is this based? On what grounds do we claim that one sexual sin is worse than the other? These are important questions which the proposed 2nd Study Committee would address.
- o **SIN & BROKENESS.** Since the fall in sin, we live in a broken world. One of the consequences is that people, churches and social institutions are confronted with difficult choices. Examples illustrate: (1) In WW2 people hid Jews from the Nazis. When asked if they were hiding Jews they had to choose between lying to save a life or accept responsibility for someone's death. Either option compromised one of God's commands.

(2) Or take divorce. If you are living in a violent & abusive relationship and there is no hope for future change, what is worse – to continue to live in a destructive marriage or to protect the children, divorce and look for an alternative? The proposed 2nd Study Committee would provide Biblical guidance as to how to deal with these “broken world” situations and how such guidance might apply to the SSA issue.

- o THE TYPICAL FAITH JOURNEY – We are all on a journey of faith. This journey begins - not with preconditions - but with exposure to the power of God's Word. It is **after** hearing God's Word, that change and renewal can begin. When God's Word penetrates, faith the size of a mustard seed begins to grow and small steps in faith become evident. The point is this. Our journey of faith does not begin with “life-style” conditions. It begins with the all-inclusive Gospel exposure that Matthew 28 envisages. God comes to us as we are & where we are - broken sinners in need of repair. Repentance and the will to “sin no more” follows - not precedes - Gospel exposure.
- o JUDGING. No-one is without sin. Often we see the sins of others more clearly than our own. The NA press tends to focus on church issues like divorce, adultery and abortion. Yet the Scriptures exposes all sins - including greed, consumerism, the environment, racism and others. The Bible makes it clear that while we should stimulate one another to greater levels of faith, there is no ground for judging others. That's God's prerogative.
- o MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONS. The church has used many membership structures in its history. We can benefit by knowing which Biblically-allowed membership structures work well to accommodate the difficult choices the church needs to make in this 21st (increasingly secular) century. For example, is there merit in adding the Bible's teachings on 21st culture's “popular” life-style issues (abortion, divorce, remarriage, same-sex marriage, etc) to the POF forms? Should past or present sins have any bearing on qualifications for church leadership? Guidance on these and similar questions would be very beneficial before making final decisions on HSR.

On these ground, we recommend that Synod act wisely, delay the decision on HSR and first undertake a 2nd Study Report that focuses on the missing, but equally important, Scriptural directives that cover the broader range of missing items, questions, and tensions identified above. Only then - when both Reports are available - are CRC members, Classes and Synod in a better position to make a fully-informed and more united decision.

On these grounds, we urge Community CRC, Classis Huron, and Synod 2022 to embrace this Overture in June of this year. May God give each of us His wisdom and His guidance to deal graciously with this difficult issue.

Signed by the following 18 confessing members of the Kitchener CCRC

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