

Oversight Committee for Vanastra CRC | Report for Classis Huron, May 2026

Committee Members: Pastor Ed Den Haan; Pastor Tim Keep; Pastor Darrell Bierman

Over the past several months, Vanastra Community CRC has taken some significant steps in reflecting on the past few years and preparing for how and where God is leading them— including towards calling a pastor. Perhaps most significantly, the council invited Joan Brady (Classis Huron Mission Catalyzer) to a council meeting and, later, to lead in two congregational meetings that would help the congregation talk about where they had been and begin discerning where God is leading them.

The first of these meetings was held on January 12, 2026. The meeting was well attended and focused on identifying Vanastra Church's identity *today*. What strengths has God provided? What gaps exist? Then the group began to describe what the church would look like if they became who God wants them to be over the next five years. What will they be doing? What will they see happening?

This meeting also allowed for the expression of difficulty and frustration that some members had been feeling. Some members were still working through forgiveness and release of hurt and anger from the past few years, related to loose of time, resources, and families who had moved on from Vanastra. This discussion allowed for members to name what had been experienced, while also expressing a certain hope and dedication for moving forward together —there was a recognition of the need to care for one another and to be gracious, hope, honest, and caring.

The second meeting was held on February 2, 2026. This meeting was also well attended. Time was spent following up on the last meeting to "name this moment." The idea was to find a collective way to talk about the last few years and fit them into the broader story of Vanastra Church. There was an emphasis on comments like, "we've been wandering, but are hopeful" or "we're full of uncertainty, but learning to trust in God's leading."

Five main priority action areas arose, and small groups brainstormed how to develop and foster action that would address one of the given topics. All of that information would be synthesized by Joan and passed along to the council to begin implementation. The council will include these items on their agenda to discuss monthly and follow up on the action items that were suggested through the congregational meetings.

The five priority areas are:

1. Provide clear spiritual leadership that nurtures healing, unity and renewed trust
2. Reduce burnout by strengthening leadership capacity and sharing responsibility
3. Foster clear, honest and hopeful communication that builds trust and momentum
4. Increase participation and connection across age groups while adapting to demographic realities
5. Grow as a visible, welcoming, and engaged church in Vanastra

Additionally, the council has assembled a search committee to begin preliminary work. They have been connected with Thrive to assist in getting their work off to a good start. The material from the congregational meetings with Joan will provide helpful information for the committee when they begin to assemble their church profile.

The council is also exploring the possibility of having an interim pastor serve, perhaps on a part-time basis. There are some connections and potential opportunities, but the council is taking it's time and being deliberate about finding someone who would be a good fit for them during this time.

There are still some challenges. There has been financial concern for the church in terms of covering the expenses of operating the church. This has stabilized somewhat more recently. The other concern has been related to losing families and members. The council has been diligent to have conversations with those members who have considered leaving or have already left. Overall, those conversations have been helpful and well received.

What the church has found is that where gaps have opened up, others have stepped in to serve and lead in a variety of ways. This has been a great encouragement to the council and congregation.

It is noteworthy to Classis that Vanastra has been very appreciative of the support that Classis has provided, especially in navigating the difficult times. However, more speedy help in resolving concerns would have been beneficial. Some questions were raised regarding to degree to which Classis is aware of the struggles faced recently, especially as it relates to losing some members. This might serve as a reminder to all churches, including Vanastra, to bring concerns and questions to Classis *sooner* rather than later to address them. It also serves to remind Classis of the importance of our church visitors and taking time to consider how we can support churches when issues are brought forward.

Recommendation:

Our committee has been encouraged to see the steps that the church has taken, both with the council organizing meetings with Joan Brady, and with the search team connecting diligently with Thrive. There is a committed core of people who are hopeful and ready to move into what God has for them. It is also worth noting that while there is a desire to begin moving forward, that is not to say that all are anxious to simply call a pastor right away. There is a desire to begin taking appropriate steps forward at this point, but an awareness of the time that the process will take. We are also encouraged that a search team, representative of the diversity in the congregation, was formed as quickly as it was—people who were asked were ready and willing to help.

In light of all this, we make the following recommendations:

1. Thankful to God, we rejoice with Vanastra CRC in its renewal and spirit of hope.
2. That Classis approve Vanastra's initiative in preparing to call a minister.
3. That Classis thank Revs. Tim Keep, Darrell Bierman and Ed Den Haan for their support to Vanastra and that their work in supporting Vanastra continue in view of hoped for calling and installing of a minister in Vanastra.

In service to Christ,
Rev. Ed Den Haan
Rev. Darrell Bierman
Rev. Tim Keep