

CLASSIS HURON REPRESENTATIVE VISIT REPORT

WATERLOO CRC -- June 23, 2006

Classis Huron Representatives: Pastor Ed Den Haan & Pastor Ray Vander Kooij

Waterloo CRC Council Chair Brian Eelkema welcomed Pastor Ed and Pastor Ray

Pastor Ed opened by acknowledging the pain in the process for both parties, the church and classis, and named his connection with the church since it's beginning.

Pastor Ray expressed appreciation for the respectful and responsible way Waterloo has taken their journey, both in how they have related to classis and reached out to synod. He also named that the church disaffiliation process calls on classis representatives to dissuade, persuade and even written rebuttals. He indicated that we did not come in that posture and would not be putting any of these on the table. Instead, we are coming alongside, supporting, and seeking to ensure proper process, recognising this is to avoid hurting people as much as possible and instead honouring people and honouring Christ. The council chairperson, Brian Eelkema, indicated that overall they felt honoured by the members of classis during their journey and our approach in this visit.

Our reasoning for coming with this supportive and collaborative posture, rather than the dissuading posture named in the disaffiliation process, is that the Waterloo CRC Council has been on their journey for some time. They had sustained engagements with synod, having submitted overtures to synod in 2022 and 2023 and informed synod in 2024 that they were a church in protest. They were subsequently disciplined by synod and their council placed under limited suspension. The lack of options to provide for conscientious disagreement with synod left no room for divergent views, eventually leading Waterloo CRC to the conclusions that there is no viable path for them to remain in the CRCNA while maintaining their convictions and pastoral commitments, which were clarified in a "Welcome and Belonging Statement" adopted in April, 2026. All this is elaborated in the "Communication to Classis Huron" received by the May 2026 meeting of Classis Huron. Their congregational polling indicated a substantial majority supporting the statement and the process of disaffiliation. In light of these factors and this point on their journey there was little value seen in dissuading and so a posture of naming the pain but focussing on process was chosen and was supported by the AdCom of Classis Huron.

We continued with inquiring about the level of engagement with the congregation beyond polls. They indicated that the polls were to engage both members and attenders, to get a broad representation of input on the questions asked, while realizing that the disaffiliation vote could only include members. We were encouraged to hear that they have engaged the congregation in person around these matters through listening circles and also with gatherings sharing food and conversations and informal meetings to engage the congregation. We were grateful to hear of this congregational engagement in conversation around these matters. They named that their long journey was intentionally sensitive to a range of opinions, some wondering why they were taking so long to leave the denomination and others needing more time but also recognizing that there needed to be action at some point.

We inquired about care for those who want to remain in the CRC, and they indicated that this was a small percentage and they felt that their journeying with connection and care across differences would provide for a caring connection to those who want to stay in the CRC, and that they would have several regional options.

When we inquired about what was next for them, they indicated that they would schedule a congregational meeting in September for a first vote on disaffiliation, and that their typical November congregational meeting would be where a second vote would be held, if the first vote carries. We clarified that Classis Huron has the final decision in disaffiliation, so as to ensure that proper process was followed. We will attend the congregational meetings and ensure that their process also adheres to their bylaws and/or articles of incorporation. We will also make ourselves available to meet with those who want to stay in the CRC, to ensure that classis cares for and supports them.

If and when they disaffiliate from the CRCNA, Waterloo CRC will initially be an independent church. They don't want to pre-determine where they will eventually land. They are a Towards Canada observer church, and are also looking at the pros and cons of joining either the RCA or PCC. They do see themselves remaining engaged with some CRCNA agencies as partners, and also continuing to support campus ministry.

We inquired about how they were handling the matter of ministerial credentials, and they indicated that they had informed all of the member pastors about their disaffiliation direction before they submitted their document to classis. The Waterloo Campus Ministry team has also been in conversation with Pastor Melissa Burmaster regarding her credential options. We indicated that we would be in contact with all of those with their ministerial credentials at Waterloo CRC, to be transparent with the Council.

In indicating that the Council has reached out to Thrive for advice on the disaffiliation process, this introduced sharing their and Thrive's surprise and disappointment that Classis Huron did not reach out in any official way during their journey of overtures to synod and especially when they became a church in protest and were placed under limited suspension. They felt that would have been a time to connect and engage with them in some official way to understand them and to possibly have engaged in persuading them to staying in step with the denomination. They hoped that by naming this that any churches in the future would be connected with earlier. We expressed our appreciation for them naming this, expressed regret, and ensured them that we would include this in our report.

Our time of meeting with the Council of Waterloo was concluded with appreciation from both sides, and Pastor Ed closed in prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor Ed Den Haan
Pastor Ray Vander Kooij