

## Classis lakota

### AGENDA

September 19, 2023 9:00 A.M.

Place: Amistad Cristiana in Sioux Center, Iowa

Rev. Joshua Stammis, Chairman

Rev. Scott Nichols, Vice-Chairman

#### I. INITIAL BUSINESS

- A. Opening Devotions (host church)
- B. Presentation of Credentials & Roll Call
  - Signing of the Covenant for Officebearers by first-time delegates and returning delegates who didn't sign the Covenant at the 9/20/22 and 3/7/23 meetings.
- C. Declaration that Classis is constituted.
- D. Welcome to delegates and other attendees
- E. Adoption of time schedule: 9:00-noon; lunch; 1:00-3:15; break; 3:30-4:30
- F. Tally Committee (provided by the host church)

#### II. INSTRUCTIONS AND OVERTURES FROM ANY OF THE CHURCHES

- A. In accordance with Church Order Article 23-a, Faith CRC in Sioux Center requests the approval of the position of "Church-Planting Missionary" in Central Africa to be filled by a commissioned pastor, with a view to examining Mark Tiemersma (pp. 2-4).
- B. In accordance with Church Order Article 24-a, Bridge of Hope Ministries in Sioux Center requests the approval of the job description of pastor to be filled by two commissioned pastors (each serving part-time), with a view to examining Sam & Gail Ashmore (pp. 5- 6).

*[Stated Clerk's Note: If classis approves these positions and the synodical deputies concur, we will proceed with their examination at this meeting.]*

- C. Overtures from First Rock Valley CRC
  - Background (p. 7)
  - Overture #1: Approve the process laid out for dealing with Confessional Difficulty Gravamina (CDG) for officebearers within Classis lakota (pp. 7-8)
  - Overture #2: Instruct those officebearers within Classis lakota who have a CDG to resolve the issue by the end of the year in which the CDG was filed (p. 8)
  - Overture #3: Instruct councils to begin special discipline of officebearers . . . if they refuse to adhere to the definition of unchastity reflected in the standards (p. 8)
  - Overture #4: Call for delegates to Synod 2023 to reconvene in early December to finish the assigned work of Synod (p. 9)

#### III. REPORTS FROM STANDING COMMITTEES AND VARIOUS FUNCTIONARIES

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| A. Stated Clerk (p. 9)                 | G. Church Counselors                     |
| B. Interim Committee (p. 10)           | H. Regional Pastors (pp. 13-14)          |
| C. Classical Missions Team (pp. 10-11) | I. Minn-I-Kota Youth Network (pp. 14-15) |
| D. Ministerial Leadership Team         | J. Safe Church Team                      |
| E. Finance Committee (p. 12)           | K. Classical Treasurer                   |
| F. Church Visitors (pp. 12-13)         | L. Synod 2023 Report (pp. 15-16)         |

#### IV. ELECTIONS/NOMINATIONS

- A. Interim Committee—John Lee is completing his second term
- B. Interim Committee—Stanley Groothof is completing his third term
- C. Ministerial Leadership Team—Doug De Groot is completing his second term
- D. Missions Team—Scott Van Voorst, as the alternate, has taken Adam Eisenga's spot, so now a new clergy alternate is needed

## V. CLASSICAL/REGIONAL REPS TO SYNODICAL BOARDS AND OTHER SPEAKERS

- A. Calvin University (p. 17)
- B. Calvin Theological Seminary (p. 18)
- C. Council of Delegates
- D. Dordt University (p. 19)
- E. Faith Formation Ministries
- F. Resonate Global Mission
- G. World Renew

## VI. CLOSING BUSINESS

- A. Report from the Credentials and Article 41 Committee
- B. Next Meeting: March 5, 2024 (Is Trinity CRC in Rock Valley willing to host this meeting?)
- C. Closing Remarks (chairman)
- D. Closing Prayer
- E. Adjournment

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### Recognition of a ministry need for ordained leadership

**Faith Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center, Iowa**, has the following mission statement: “ROOTED in Christ, GROWING in faith, SERVING our neighbors, REACHING the nations.” While we believe every member of the church can and should be involved in all of these to certain degrees, there is also need for specific roles to be played by specific individuals. One of these is a missionary to the unreached ethnic groups remaining on earth. If we all left to reach the lost people of the world, then there would be no church left here; but if no one goes, then there will be no church among peoples and tongues that have no access to the truth. Not everyone is called to leave home and seek to advance the gospel in far lands, but in order for us to be faithful to our Lord’s Great Commission, some of us will have to do just that.

Faith CRC has sent Mark Tiemersma and his wife, Heather, to join a church-planting team in partnership with local believers in North Africa among a specific people group. The end goal is to establish and leave behind a healthy, biblical, native-led church. This is a monumental task, involving decades of work for both those on the frontlines and for those supporting from back home. In order for this goal to come to fruition (humanly speaking- we know that it is God who works through us!) Mark must do many of the things that only an ordained minister in America would have the approval to do, such as preaching the word and administering the sacraments, among many others. This has led Faith CRC to the conviction that those on the frontlines of church-planting must, to at least some degree, be recognized and approved (2 Timothy 2:15). The question then is, *Why should we do any less for the church in North Africa than for the church in America?* The council of Faith CRC discussed this concern, and the idea was brought up (and approved) that Mark pursue the office of Commissioned Pastor in the CRC.

It is understood that Mark’s role is perhaps not a common one seen in people pursuing this office, but hopefully after a brief look at the job description, one will see that not only are many of the tasks and giftings required of a church-planting missionary shared with that of the description in the commissioned pastor handbook, but also that it is necessary for there to be some sort of approval or recognition of individuals who feel called to this task.

Perhaps it could be summarized as follows: The “ministry need” is the spread of the gospel to all ethnic groups in obedience to the Great Commission from our Lord. In order for the Great Commission to be completed (humanly speaking), it is necessary for Christians to spread the gospel to peoples and languages that have no resources or believers or churches in their native tongue. In order for Christians to do that, the Word must be preached, the sacraments administered, elders appointed, and healthy churches left behind. In order for those things to be accomplished, these sent Christians must have recognition from those sending them that they are qualified (in spite of sins and weaknesses) to attempt such things, things that only ordained leaders are approved to do in America.

### **Job Description for Church-Planting Missionary among the Unreached**

**A general description:** The end goal to which men and women in this position work is the establishing of mature, biblical churches among the remaining ethnic groups on earth whose languages have no access to the Holy Scriptures, who have few to no believers and, consequently, no churches. If this is the goal, then there are many essential skills, character traits and giftings that the various members of a team will need to possess as a whole, and many processes and tasks that must be accomplished along the way.

**A specific description:** With the above-mentioned end goal in mind, this job requires the following (steps 1-6 have already been accomplished at this point):

1. Being approved by a local church (Faith CRC) to be sent to the Maba people in Chad
2. Training at Radius International missionary training program
3. Joining Frontiers International, a sending agency that works with Faith CRC
4. Fundraising
5. Establishing a partnership with local Christians and Missionaries already in Chad
  - a. Visas are obtained through a partnership with the Christian Assemblies of Chad. However, the team is an appendage to their denomination and are not constrained to their doctrinal practices, nor must they be members of their denomination.
  - b. The team consists of several families and singles, all through Frontiers International, with the exception of one Maba believer.
6. Moving to Chad and learning the trade language (Chadian Arabic) to a capable level
7. Using the trade language as a bridge language to engage the Maba people and learn the Maba language and culture to a capable level
  - a. Enough Maba people speak Arabic to be able to use it for building relationships, but many only speak the Maba language, which requires extensive knowledge of both languages.
8. Attempt to relocate to a completely Maba area
  - a. This may require creative access, such as a humanitarian platform (clinic, etc.)
9. Teach the Maba people to read and write their own language
10. Begin translating the Scriptures into Maba
11. Begin evangelizing the Maba by walking them through the biblical narrative, so that they may understand and (Lord willing) believe the gospel of Jesus Christ

12. Baptize and begin to disciple any new believers
13. As the church grows, start to set aside and train men for eventual leadership positions
14. As believers mature, start to slowly phase out all foreign workers, giving more and more responsibility to native Maba leaders
15. Leave the Church in the hands of the Maba leadership, continuing translation work and frequent visits

**Responsibilities:** Many of these can be deduced from the description, but some of the responsibilities are (or will be):

- 30-40 hours/week language and culture acquisition
- Building relationships among the Maba
- Preparing lessons from the Bible, creation to Christ, for eventual evangelism
- Introducing an orthography to the Maba people
- Preparing literacy primers for teaching the Maba to read and write
- Translation of the scriptures into Maba
- Administering the sacraments to any new converts
- Discipleship and training
- Establishing Maba elders
- Maintain a strong relationship with local church partners in Chad

**Requirements:**

- A knowledge of the Maba language to a level of being able to explain worldview-level concepts thoroughly and clearly, such as the gospel, as well as translate the Bible and teach literacy programs
- The necessary skills to accompany language acquisition (translation, literacy, phonetics, phonemics, etc.)
- A knowledge of the Scriptures, both testaments, to the extent that one could adequately teach someone through them persuasively
- The authority and approval from Faith CRC to administer baptism and communion to Maba converts
- The recognition from Faith CRC that one possesses the necessary character traits, giftings, and skills to attempt this weighty task
- Above all, a love for Christ and His gospel, and a desire to see His Name magnified among all the nations of the earth

**Approved by Faith CRC Council on 7/19/23**  
**Allen Horstman, Clerk of Council**

## **The following e-mail was sent to the Stated Clerk on 7/27/23:**

It's with great joy that I'm writing to you on behalf of the Council at Bridge of Hope! We are excited to have extended a call to Sam and Gail Ashmore to serve as our next pastors. We would like to formally request two additions to the agenda for the September meeting of Classis lakota:

1. The Bridge of Hope Council requests approval of the job description for a half-time commissioned pastor. We have extended a call to Sam and Gail Ashmore to serve jointly in this half-time position under Church Order article 24b. Both of them have plans for accountable progress towards ordination as ministers of the word and sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church. The job description is attached to this email.
2. The Bridge of Hope Council requests classical examinations for Sam Ashmore and Gail Ashmore as commissioned pastors in Classis lakota, serving at Bridge of Hope.

### **Pastor Bridge of Hope Ministries**

#### **Job Description**

The Pastor serves the congregation by preaching sermons while empowering the other shepherds (elders and deacons) and staff to lead the people. It is a highly collaborative position, and one shaped heavily by Vision 2025. The primary function of the role is preaching/teaching, followed by administration as a secondary area. Pastoral care constitutes a smaller role. The position is designed to be half time, flexible in nature, with the potential for the candidate to be bi-vocational.

#### **Responsibilities**

##### *A. Preaching/Teaching*

1. Preaches sermons at least three times a month.
2. Secures and equips other preachers to deliver theologically and organizationally aligned sermons on the remaining Sundays.
3. Communicates weekly with members of the Worship Team to ensure joyful, orderly worship services.
4. Conducts baptisms and the Lord's Supper, or, if absent, arranges for such to be conducted in an orderly manner.
5. Does leadership training for Council and teaches classes and groups on an ad hoc basis.

##### *B. Administration*

1. Works collaboratively with the Ministry Coordinator and other staff members on administrative tasks.
2. Identifies and executes Vision-based strategies, especially those designated to staff.
3. Serves as "Vision keeper": Reminds the congregation, Teams, and staff of the Vision on a regular basis. With the Ministry Coordinator, documents strategies related to the Vision.
4. Attends, votes at, and prepares reports of ministry activities for Council meetings.
5. Oversees the Worship Director, providing support, feedback, training, and periodic reviews.
6. Sits as a member (non-chair) of the Adult Discipleship Team.
7. Maintains connections with the CRCNA denomination by meeting with local pastors periodically and attending biannual meetings of Classis lakota.

### *C. Care*

1. Refers congregational needs to the correct staff person, Team, or community service.
2. Communicates with the Congregational Caregiver(s) to identify care situations requiring the Pastor.
3. Provides pastoral care in select instances that appear to require the Pastor.
4. Intercedes for the congregation regularly, praying for good for the people and discerning next steps in their discipleship (1 Sam 12:23).

### **Hours**

Anticipated average work load is 20-25 hours a week. Hours may fall above or below this range in a given week but will average out over the course of the month. Work responsibilities should be tracked for the purpose of mutual accountability.

### **Reporting**

The Pastor reports to the Pastoral Shepherds (elders). The Pastor is expected to maintain regular communication with the Ministry Coordinator and Council.

### **Qualifications**

- Ordained as minister, or is in the process of seeking ordination. (Preferred: Ordained in the CRCNA, RCA, or comparable reformed denomination. Preferred: Master of Divinity from an accredited seminary.)
- Strong preaching abilities, including ability to exegete biblical texts carefully and communicate effectively to a range of ages, including children. (Preferred: Giftedness at preaching sermon series that relate to the organizational season of the church.)
- Ability to do worship planning that draws upon both reformed and evangelical resources.
- An excellent team player who shares authority, practices active listening, exhibits flexibility, problem solves, defers and delegates well, and expresses positivity toward others.
- Believes in the importance of committees/teams and navigates them effectively.
- Deference to Vision 2025 and an eagerness to help Bridge of Hope achieve the Vision.
- Efficient worker who manages their own time.
- Ability to use various office technologies, including cloud-based software, at an intermediate level.
- Communicates clearly through verbal and written means.
- Exhibits kindness, humility, and patience.
- Follows Jesus Christ as a dedicated disciple, actively practicing spiritual disciplines.
- Agrees to promote the Christian faith through a reformed interpretation of Scripture in alignment with the confessions of the Christian Reformed Church.
- Supports the denomination's commitment to Christian day schools.

**Approved by Bridge of Hope Ministries Council  
on 9/21/22; amended 11/22/22  
Dave Mulder, Clerk of Council**

## **Overtures to Classis Iakota from First Christian Reformed Church, Rock Valley, IA**

Background to overtures 1-3 are from the from the Majority report of Advisory Committee 8 from Synod 2023 which was not addressed because of time constraints.

The concept of confessional difficulty gravamen (CDG) was created within the CRC to allow officebearers to honestly question doctrinal matters contained in our confessions, giving them space to wrestle with the biblical accuracy of these doctrines, while also ensuring that there would be a season of pastoral care provided for the officebearer in his/her struggle and search for clarification.

A CDG occurs when “a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confessions but does not call for a revision,” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, 1). This kind of gravamen is submitted by a subscriber to a church council for “examination and judgment.” A CDG is defined as “a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, B, 2). Therefore, “examination and judgment” of a CDG occurs when the subscriber receives the information and/or clarification being sought – either from the church council, the classis, or concluding with synod.

Since 1) “no one is free to decide for themselves or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3), and 2) the person signing the Covenant for Officebearers must affirm “without reservation all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 1), the process initiated by a subscriber submitting a CDG, should be time-bound and time-sensitive and should result in a final decision whereby some terminal action takes place. This is true because signing the Covenant for Officebearers requires all subscribers to affirm that the doctrines in the standards “fully agree with the Word of God” and that the subscriber “promises to be formed and governed by them,” and to “heartily believe... promote and defend their doctrines...” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5).

This reflects the nature of a CDG in the historical development of this gravamen in the Harry Boer case from Synod 1976. Synod 1976 understood confessional-difficulty gravamina as a personal request for help in resolving their doubts. And the way a council, classis, or synod was to do that was by providing the officebearer with the “information and/or clarification” of the confessions (Supplement, Art. 5, B, 2). What Synod 1976 did not say and what no synod has ever said is that this type of gravamen is a way for someone to take exception to the church’s creeds and confessions.

The CRC does not allow gravamina as exceptions to the standards. While the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA are neither inerrant or exhaustive, they are a comprehensive summary of everything deemed essential for the faith and life of our denomination.

### **Overture #1:**

The council of First Christian Reformed Church, Rock Valley overtures Classis Iakota to approve the following process for Confessional Difficulty Gravamina (CDG) within Classis Iakota for officebearers:

1. An officebearer who has an unresolved CDG cannot be delegated to a higher body (classis or synod).

2. During the time the officebearer has a CDG, the individual must teach, act, promote, defend, and live in unity with the confessions of the church in all areas of life. The individual may not contradict the confessions openly and deliberately while the gravamen is still unresolved and must diligently work towards resolving the confessional difficulty.
3. A council has six months, or until the next classis meeting, whichever is greater, to provide the necessary information and/or clarification being sought. If the CDG is forwarded to classis, classis shall have six months, or until agenda items for the next synod must be submitted. If at the end of these periods the officebearer still has confessional difficulty, he or she must appeal to synod or be honorably released from office.

*Grounds:*

1. It is necessary to have a delineated process that guides churches and classis according to the purpose of gravamina in order to preserve confessional unity and the integrity of our confessional covenant.
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**Overture #2:**

Since synods 2022 and 2023 have already defined unchastity in HC 108 as confessionally binding, the council of First Christian Reformed Church, Rock Valley overtures Classis Lakota to instruct those who have taken a Confessional Difficulty Gravamen with respect to the definition of unchastity to resolve their difficulty by affirming the standards, resigning, or being suspended from office by the end of the year in which the CDG was filed. This would also include, if applicable, the officebearer's resigning from any position(s) on broader assemblies, boards, or committees.

*Grounds:*

1. The decision regarding the definition of unchastity has already been examined and judged by Synod 2022 and 2023.
  2. There is no need to file a Confessional Revision Gravamen unless new grounds are provided, since Synods 2022 and 2023 have affirmed the definition of unchastity as settled and binding.
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**Overture #3:**

The council of First Christian Reformed Church, Rock Valley overtures Classis Lakota to instruct councils to begin special discipline of officebearers who are suspended from office at the end of 2023 if they refuse to adhere to the definition of unchastity reflected in the standards.

*Grounds:*

1. "Special Discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct" (CO Art. 83).
2. Local councils are called to enact special discipline in order to preserve the confessional unity and integrity of our covenant together in Christ to guard His flock entrusted to their care and to seek and restore errant officebearers to the fold of Christ.



## Overture #4

The council of First Christian Reformed Church, Rock Valley overtures Classis lakota to call the duly elected delegates of Synod 2023 who did not unseat themselves in protest, to reconvene Synod the second week of Dec. 2023 in order to finish the work of Synod as it was assigned.

### *Grounds:*

1. Synod ended with a motion before the body that was not voted on. This is an unprecedented action that needs to be remedied in this calendar year. See the minutes of synod for this notation.
2. Synod has the right to call itself back into session to finish the business that is before it.
3. The unfinished work of Synod affects the denominational standards set for Calvin University, Calvin Seminary, all denominational agencies, and Council of Delegates representatives across the denomination.

Respectfully submitted,  
First CRC of Rock Valley

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## Stated Clerk Report – September 2023

Since the March 2023 meeting of classis, I have handled the following:

- Received and responded to e-mails from individuals and/or churches who had a question about an ecclesiastical matter or want to bring a ministry-related matter to the attention of our classis.
- Combed through documents, records, and artifacts received from Eric Kelderman on behalf of the now disbanded Hope CRC in Rapid City. In consultation of the Historical Committee of the CRCNA, certain items were sent to the CRCNA Archives at Heritage Hall.
- Updated the list of classical functionaries and posted this on our classical website.
- Sent out reminders of our 9/19/23 meeting to the councils of our classis and other ministry leaders who give reports to classis.
- Met with the lakota CIC on 7/19/23 to begin the planning process for the 9/19 classis meeting.
- Synodical deputies were secured and arrangements were made for the potential examination of three people seeking to become commissioned pastors.
- Made plans to attend a Zoom gathering of stated clerks on September 11 which will include a review of decisions made by Synod 2023 as they relate to the handling of classical matters.

## Classis Iakota Interim Committee Fall 2023 Report

Your Classis Interim Committee met on July 19, 2023, to help prepare for the classis meeting. Much of what we discussed is found throughout the agenda; however, we bring two items to the attention of the classis delegates.

1. As usual, we have several openings that need to be filled, including two positions on the Classis Interim Committee. Please review the Nominations section and consider candidates who may be able to fill the open positions.
2. We set the suggested host church schedule for upcoming regularly scheduled classis meetings:
  - March 2024: Trinity CRC, Rock Valley
  - September 2024: Platte CRC
  - March 2025: Covenant CRC Sioux Center
  - September 2025: New Holland CRC
  - March 2026: First CRC Sioux Falls

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### CMT Classis Report for Fall 2023

The Classical Missions Team (CMT) met on May 10 at Shalom CRC in Sioux Falls for a bit of a transition meeting, as the past chairman and secretary had both completed their terms of office. Pastor Adam Eisenga graciously assumed the chairmanship of the meeting, but then informed us that he had accepted a call to Michigan and would no longer be able to serve on the CMT. Since three of the members of the CMT were new to it this year, Adam recommended that Gary Maas and Robyn Kelderman, who were appointed last year, serve respectively as chairman and secretary.

On July 6 the CMT met again, a bit bewildered as to what we were supposed to be doing. Thankfully Piet Koene, who has served on the CMT for the past six years, but is not eligible to serve as an officer, was able to give us some direction. We proceeded to agree to recommend to the finance committee, by way of Robyn Kelderman, that the following ministries be funded the same as last year unless they requested differently. Each of the ministries were contacted and expressed their great appreciation for the support which they receive from classis. The Aeopagus Ministry at Iowa State University asked if they could receive a \$100 increase.

The amounts the CMT recommended to the finance committee are as follows:

1. Areopagus (Iowa St.) \$6500 up \$100 at their request
2. Geneva (Iowa) \$6400
3. Prairie Light \$0
4. New Roots \$16,000
5. Siouxland Unity \$24,250
6. Cornerstone \$30,000
7. Amistad \$20,000
8. Klompiens in Nepal \$20,000 a year for the next four years.
9. Stellenbosch International Fellowship (SIF) – Tyler Helpers South Africa \$6000

Addendum: The CMT also received the request (below) from Siouxland Unity. The CMT voted to recommend that Classis Iakota give Siouxland Unity their blessing in this ministry.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of your humble servants of the CMT

Gary Maas

To Classis Iakota:

Thank you for your support of Siouxland Unity Church and Pastor Keo's ministry in Sioux City. We have the privilege of hearing about the work he is doing, and it is made possible by the continued support of churches in Northwest Iowa. Given the recent \$26,000 accounting error that ended up being a net positive for Siouxland Unity, the advisory committee, in consultation with Pastor Keo, would like to hire a seminary intern for the summer of 2024.

The rationale for hiring an intern:

1. To engage the younger generation of Lao people who are living between two cultures—Lao and American. Siouxland Unity would like to utilize a seminary intern to facilitate outreach to this younger generation and provide ways for them to engage with the church community.
2. To work with Pastor Keo to establish a vision for Siouxland Unity as it transitions from first generation immigrants to second and third generation immigrants.
3. To help Pastor Keo continue to do outreach to the neighborhoods around Siouxland Unity by providing basic needs and sharing the gospel.
4. Begin the process of establishing a succession plan for Siouxland Unity when Pastor Keo retires.

We believe this money can be used to bring in a fresh perspective for Siouxland Unity to help revitalize and support the pastoral work Pastor Keo has faithfully undertaken.

Once we receive the blessing of classis, we will reach out to two Lao Seminaries in the United States to see if there is anyone interested in coming to Sioux City. We will also explore opportunities at Calvin and Western Seminaries.

If you have questions about this request, please contact Verlyn De Wit at [verlyndw@mtcnet.net](mailto:verlyndw@mtcnet.net)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

On behalf of the committee,

Verlyn De Wit, Secretary

**Finance Committee  
Report to Classis Iakota - September 2023**

**Recommendations**

1. **That Classis Iakota authorize the alternate treasurer of classis to have access to its bank account information.**

Grounds:

- A. This provides the safeguard of redundancy and an added measure of oversight to the access already granted the treasurer of classis.
  - B. The alternate treasurer is required to assume the duties of the treasurer of classis should the treasurer be unable to perform those duties. Access would allow the alternate treasurer to assume those duties more easily.
2. **That Classis Iakota delay implementing three-year terms of service for members Eric Maas, Darrel Raih, and Rev. Bob Drenten, for one year, until March 2024.**

Grounds:

- A. This would allow the current members to make sufficient progress developing tools for reviewing the work of the treasurer of classis.
  - B. A measure of turnover in the committee will happen this year with the addition of a member from the Classical Missions Team to succeed the term served by Jacklyn Nieuwendorp from the CMT.
3. **That Classis Iakota approve the work of the Finance Committee.**

**Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Bob Drenten, Chair**

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**Church Visitor Report  
Sioux Center: Covenant CRC  
June 12, 2023  
Classis Iakota – September 19, 2023**

The church visitor team of Rev. Robert Drenten and Elder Jerry Steenhoek, Lebanon CRC, met with the council of Covenant CRC on June 12, 2023. The council highlighted the following areas of vital ministry: Their worship on the Lord's Day is marked by a weekly celebration of holy communion and an evening vespers service. They actively care for their members, addressing their spiritual and material needs. They nurture faith in their members from youth through adulthood, noting especially a mentor program available to high school juniors and seniors, and a ministry to young adults. They advance the mission of the church by currently supporting five missionaries and in community mission work, including local support of Ukrainian refugees.

The council and pastor report a mutually appreciative and supportive relationship. We encouraged the council to continue to care for Rev. Kok and his family.

Covenant CRC celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. We rejoiced with the council that the Lord has favored them to mark this milestone. The church is also grateful that they can tend to their facilities this year with major repairs to their roof and sanctuary.

The council had agreed in advance of our meeting to discuss one item with us. They described at length a sense of disappointment at the lack of respect they sometimes feel from other Christian Reformed churches in their community and in Classis Iakota. They recognized that their sensibilities sometimes, through their history, set them at odds with neighboring churches, at least to a degree. Two examples they offered were their decision to ordain women as deacons and elders, and their more recent request that Classis Iakota consider asking synod to process the issue of same-sex relationships through dialogue. Covenant CRC's council wished for a greater sense of respect for their decisions and requests, while recognizing and respecting the sensibilities of fellow churches in classis.

We discussed the need and desire to encourage communication and mutual respect between Covenant CRC and Classis Iakota. Covenant CRC affirmed our shared commitment to Christ, Scripture, creeds and confessions, and the guidance of our ecclesiastical assemblies. When there are differences, Covenant CRC expressed their wish for respect from other churches, as they also seek to esteem their fellow Christian Reformed churches.

To encourage the council, Rev. Drenten observed that Classis Iakota has been better off for Covenant CRC's distinctive presence. He observed Covenant CRC has a history of asking questions and pursuing fresh expressions of ministry and mission which have enriched our broader ministries. He also expressed hope that Covenant CRC has been blessed by its fellowship with the churches of Classis Iakota. As church visitors, we encourage our churches to honor Covenant CRC's desire for respect, and to remember in our differences the substantial things we hold in common in Jesus Christ.

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**IOWA REGIONAL PASTOR**  
**David Smit**

Of the 12 Iowa congregations in Classis Iakota, there are 14 pastor's positions with 12 pastors presently serving congregations. Two congregations are seeking pastors. The Inwood congregation is vacant as Adam Eisenga accepted a call to the Grace CRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Also, the Bridge of Hope congregation seeks a pastor.

There has been and continues to be concern and prayers for Gideon Wamala, pastor of Calvin Congregation in Rock Valley, who had extensive colon surgery the first part of May at Mayo. He was anticipating the reconnection surgery the first part of August, however they were sadly disappointed as it was postponed now until October.

Also our concern and prayers are for Mary Jo, John Lee's wife, pastor of the Bethel Congregation in Sioux Center, who had surgery, chemotherapy and continual medication in her struggle with cancer.

Cliff Hoekstra, whose credentials are in Classis Iakota, is presently serving as the pastor of the First Reformed Congregation in Rock Valley, Iowa.

My effort as regional pastor has been to be in touch by phone.

Every three months we have a pastor's breakfast at the Sioux County Livestock Restaurant in Sioux Center. This has been a time of sharing of the blessings as well as the struggles that are experienced in ministry. It's an opportunity to encourage each other.

In these unsettling times, we urge the Iakota congregations to pray for us as pastors. Our Christian, historic faith is being challenged and mocked. But our God is faithful. He has called us to preach the Word, keeping our focus on Jesus Christ and the coming of His kingdom.

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## 2023 Fall MIK Youth Report

**Thank you for your continued prayers, words of encouragement, and financial support. MIK Youth truly could not do youth ministry without your support.**

### **MIK YOUTH BOARD:**

**MINNKOTA:** Classical Representative-Rev Greg Timmer (Prinsburg MN CRC), Secretary- Karmen Vis (Luverne MN CRC), Secretary-Sarah Van Dyken (Prinsburg, MN CRC).

**IAKOTA:** Classical Representative-Rev Henry Lengkeek (Rock Valley IA Trinity CRC), President-Dan Elgersma (Sioux Center IA Bethel CRC), Shelli Kollis (Rock Valley IA Trinity CRC)

**HEARTLAND:** Classical Representative-Rev Ben Wiersma (Sibley IA CRC), Treasurer-Kody Tesch (Orange City IA Immanuel CRC), Beth Heerspink (Lincoln NE F Street Church)

### **REPORT:**

The 13<sup>th</sup>

Annual Jr High Retreat took place on April 21, 22, 23, 2023 and was truly a blessing for all involved. Our theme "Satisfied" was based off of John 4:14. We had the help of 26 Dordt University students and once again DU provided the transportation for these Student Leaders along with transportation to and from our Saturday afternoon service project. Bethel CRC also helped us out with transportation and opened up their beautiful youth building (The Light House) so we could enjoy our Saturday evening meal there. We had 90 Jr High Students from 13 supporting churches and 6 visiting churches: our highest number since before Covid. PTL!

The travelling Lesson Plan was shared with 5 supporting churches from January-April. Since we started presenting "The Talking Donkey" Lesson Plan after the New Year 2023 we will continue sharing this lesson through December 31. For those who already heard this lesson we are writing a new one for after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

Thunder Road All Night Kick Off will be Friday-Saturday Sept 8-9 from 11pm-4am with pizza, pop, and devotions at 1am. Cost: \$35/person.

We continue to Zoom meet with Ryan Feltman (Synod of the Heartland RCA), Rick Zomer (Therefore Go Ministry), and Ron de Vries (Faith Formations CRCNA) about the Leaders event that we are hoping to have February 2024. It is our goal to share more information at the Fall Classis Meeting about this upcoming Leaders' event.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Jr High Retreat is April 19, 20, 21, 2024 at Inspiration Hills. Again we will be partnering with Student Leaders from DU. We will start meeting with the Student Leaders in October of this year and will continue meeting and planning until the week of the retreat.

We are "building" a portable Travelling Escape Room for 2024! The theme for the Escape Room is "GAMES". We will be starting the sign up around November 1<sup>st</sup> with the hopes of sharing it after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. There will be a small charge for this event.

There will be more youth/leader events during the 2023-2024 school year...please watch for announcements through the Minnikota Youth facebook page and our website at minnikotayouthnetwork.com.

**Thank you again for all your support!  
Lee & Pastor Doug De Groot**

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## **Synod 2023 Report**

As a delegate to synod 2023, I offer the following brief report on some of the significant acts of this year's synod that impact the life of the denomination, our classis, and our congregations. Given classis lakota's overtures to synod 2023 regarding our confessional covenant and the "Code of Conduct," please note especially points 3, 4, and 6 below.

- 1) Synod 2023 affirmed Synod 2022's decision that explicitly recognized that the meaning of "unchastity" in HC 108 includes, among other things, same-sex sexual activity, re-affirming that human sexuality is a confessional issue meriting special discipline if denied and declining to delay the implementation of this decision.
- 2) Synod denied Neland CRC's appeal of Synod 2022's decision calling for it to rescind its ordination of a practicing LGBTQ+ office-bearer (who has since completed her 3-year term).
- 3) However, synod declined to enact any mechanism for meaningful and substantive discipline (in-loco committee, accountability steps, etc.) to ensure that Neland and Classis Grand Rapids East respond to the admonition of the broader church. Unless this is addressed at Synod 2024, the CRC now has a *de facto* local option in which each congregation and classis does what is right in its own eyes.

- 4) Because synod ran out of time, we did not clarify the use of gravamina by which office-bearers could ask for explanation and clarification of the doctrines of the church when they experience confessional difficulties.
- 5) Synod consolidated all of the CRC's ministry agencies and offices into one ministry agency called "Thrive."
- 6) Synod adopted a revised version of the Code of Conduct and "encourage[d] councils and classes to implement the Code of Conduct for all staff (non-ordained as well as ordained) and volunteers who are providing leadership in the church or classis."
- 7) Synod received two study reports:
  - a. a study report on "ecclesiastical marriage," in short, urges pastors and churches to avoid ecclesiastical marriages (i.e. non-civil marriages)
  - b. a study report on bi-vocational pastors urges better support of bi-vocational pastors
- 8) Synod did not establish a committee to oversee the denominational agencies' statements but did urge "the CRCNA organization to exercise discretion when responding to social, economic, and/or political matters."
- 9) Synod granted greater flexibility to classes in choosing their delegations as long as there are not more than two of any specific office (i.e. a classis could send two elders or two deacons).
- 10) Synod did not immediately make a statement on assisted suicide but approved a task force to develop a position statement on assisted suicide and give theological/ethical guidance to officebearers, doctors, nurses, etc.
- 11) Synod did not declare a "virtual church" not a church but rather appointed a task force to explore the theology of a "virtual church."
- 12) Synod declined to elevate the Belhar Confession to a form of unity and refused to revise the Belgic Confession.
- 13) Synod approved two new Calvin Seminary faculty, continued reorganization of the Council of Delegates, new candidates for ministry, new budgets, etc.
- 14) Synod adopted changes to ministry shares that 1) allows churches to determine their pledge cycle based on their fiscal year, 2) suggests to churches what would be a reasonable amount to cover basic/core denominational operational costs as part of their pledge, and 3) provides to the churches and classes more information on pledges and giving results, including what comprises the basic/core denominational costs.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kurt Monroe, delegate to synod 2023



## **2023 Classis Meeting**

### **Calvin University Brief Overview Presented at Synod:**

Our mission is to equip students to think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. While that work of renewal extends to every square inch, it begins in the church. While you will hear and read about our alums doing amazing work in every sector around the world – leaders and innovators in business, technology, medicine, education, finance, and elsewhere – we know we get our first glimpse of God's new creation in Christ's church, as all of us are knit together into one body. While sin has fractured our world, God's work of renewal begins with a church that shares "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." And so Calvin, which is grounded in the church, seeks to prepare agents of renewal who are likewise grounded in the church. That is the foundation of callings that touch every kind of work in every corner of the world.

### **Academic Year in Review**

We had the privilege of teaching 3,200 undergraduate students. This year we made Calvin home, literally, for 1,630 student residents. As a campus we praised God together with students in 139 worship services. We cared for God's creation in more than 100 acres of the ecosystem preserve and native gardens.

More than 1,900 sections of undergraduate and graduate academic courses were taught across all of our schools. Our global campus served 309 graduate students—59% of whom study online—90 Calvin Prison Initiative students, and 20 Ready for Life students. We issued 125 digital badges to global campus learners. Calvin's centers and institutes are estimated to have reached over 100,000 people during the 22-23 academic year.

### **CRC Stats**

As membership in the CRCNA has declined, the number of CRC youth has declined even faster. Our number and percent of CRCNA students are down over the past decade. And there is also a shrinking percentage of college age CRCNA who are Calvin bound - from 18% to 13% over the last decade.

To keep supporting the ministry of the CRCNA at Calvin, we have increased the percentage of non-CRCNA students from 62% to 74%. That growth has come from students with other Reformed backgrounds and students from other churches both in North America and around the world.

### **Thank You**

We anticipate the trajectory that this kind of flourishing will bring us as an institution and as a community, with God's help. Be highly encouraged in your good work, and *thank you* for your steadfast commitment to the flourishing of God's kingdom through the work of the CRCNA and Calvin University.

## **Calvin Theological Seminary Highlights**

### **Fall 2023 Classis Report**

#### **Rev. Bob Drenten – Region 8 Trustee**

(Classes: Central Plains, Heartland, Iakota, Lake Superior, Minnkota, Northcentral Iowa)

#### **Faculty**

CTS welcomes two instructors to its faculty this Fall.

- Dr. Gabriela Tijerina-Pike will serve as Director of Latino Ministries and Associate Professor of New Testament. Her scholarship and ministry leadership experience in the United States, Mexico, and Central America will be an asset to CTS.
- Dr. Daniel Daley will join the faculty as Assistant Professor of New Testament. He earned his Ph.D. at Trinity College Dublin. He has served in ministry in Edinburgh, Dublin, and Reno, NV. CTS is grateful to welcome him to the faculty.

The Board reappointed Dr. Matt Tuininga as Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and History of Christianity, with tenure. CTS gratefully congratulates Dr. Tuininga on this milestone.

#### **Program Updates**

- CTS launches a new M.A. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program this fall. Graduates will be equipped to offer mental health care within a rich theological and pastoral framework. There is great need for and interest in this new program.
- CTS continues to develop its Competency Based Theological Education Program. At Grand Valley State University's Campus Ministry Program (Michigan) and at Sunlight Community Church in Port St. Lucie, Florida, students are mentored in ministry, drawing upon resources from CTS. CTS is exploring additional partnerships in this program.

#### **Students**

- CTS anticipated an increase in enrollment this year, including gains in the M.Div. program.
- In May 2023, CTS granted 8 certificate-level degrees, 30 master-level degrees, and one Ph.D. degree. This included 11 Master of Divinity degrees.

#### **Facilities**

- CTS is constructing new housing for international students at 3300 Burton Ave SE. This will provide better proximity to campus and higher quality residential space. The current international student housing property in SE Grand Rapids has been sold.
- Remodeling at CTS has been completed. Class space is now easily adapted to a blend of in-person and virtual student participation. Workspace for faculty, staff, and students received a needed, significant upgrade. We are blessed with a great campus!

#### **Funding**

- Revenue from donor giving remains strong. CTS is grateful for this vital support.
- Revenue from CRCNA ministry shares continues to decrease, a trend that we're told we should expect to continue.

[Stated Clerk's note: the following letter was received from Dordt's Director of Church Relations and forwarded to the Finance Committee.]

August 7, 2023

Dear Stated Clerk,

Greetings from Dordt University!

We are thankful to partner with you as we keep our covenant promises to provide an education where a "biblical, Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation is clearly taught." (c.f. Art 71, Church Order of the CRCNA)

This past year we welcomed 1,858 students, marking over 15 years of steady growth and representing the largest total enrollment in the institution's history. This figure includes a record of 1,483 full-time undergraduate students, with the remainder enrolled in our graduate or dual-credit programs. This fall, we expect to welcome another large freshman class. Enrollment has grown to a point where 4 new residential apartments are currently in construction and expect to be completed by the beginning of the academic year. These buildings will house 96 of our upperclassmen. Plans are also in motion to hopefully break ground this fall on a new dining facility as well as added space to the B.J. Haan Auditorium. We praise God for this growth and the opportunity to impact more lives for Christ's kingdom purposes. 93% of our students graduate in four years or less, with 98% of those graduates finding employment or pursuing advanced degrees in their program of study within 6 months of graduation.

At Dordt, we reaffirm our thankfulness, but also our need for your continued classical support. We believe that Dordt University is an important piece of regional and local ministry for our churches and communities. Many of our alumni attend your churches on Sundays, serve and lead in the programs in your congregations, and some serve as council members or even your pastors. Dordt is invested in the local church and we are grateful for your investment in us.

Matching the Dordt University fiscal year of 2023-2024, the ministry share request is \$69.20 (per professing member).

This figure was determined by looking at a combination of factors: student enrollment, professing members in historically supporting classes, and carefully evaluating the costs related to Christian higher education.

Thank you again for your faithful support both in prayer and gifts. If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact me.

Serving with you,

Todd Zuidema  
Director of Church Relations