

Classis Iakota
MINUTES
March 4, 2025
Covenant CRC: Sioux Center, IA

Art. 3858: The meeting begins at 9:00am with a time of worship led by Rev. Joel Kok, pastor of the host church. He opens with a prayer, followed by the singing of the first stanza of “Come, Thou Almighty King.” He goes on to read Romans 8:28-30 and share some insights on this passage. Another prayer is offered, followed by the singing of the first stanza of “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service.”

Art. 3859: Below is the list of the delegates appointed by their councils who are present at this meeting:

<u>Churches</u>	<u>Ministers</u>	<u>Elders</u>	<u>Deacons</u>
Corsica (no delegation present due to a winter storm)			
Harrison	Gary Maas	Kent Spoelstra	Cody Vanden Hoek
Inwood		Jeff Meyer	Andre Williams
		Heath Van Voorst	
New Holland (no delegation present due to a winter storm)			
Platte	Drew Hoekema	Curtis Sybesma	Jeremy Bultsma
Rock Rapids		Bill Jansma	
		Ron Vander Veen	
Rock Valley – Calvin		Kevin Den Boer	Rece Evans
		Gaylon Van Holland	
Rock Valley – First	Matthew Haan	Evan Vanden Bosch	Mitchell Byl
Rock Valley – Trinity	Stanley Groothof	Ron De Weerd	Mark Mouw
Amistad Cristiana	Eddy Olguin	Daniel Sanchez	Arturo Carasco
Sioux Center – Bethel	John Lee	Paul Ross	AJ Borger
Sioux Center – Bridge of Hope	Gail Ashmore	Tim Foreman	Andrea Westerbeek
Sioux Center – Covenant	Joel Kok	Mark Christians	Lee Mellema
Sioux Center – Faith	Bob Pollema	Sylvan Byker	David Altena
Sioux Center – First	Kurt Monroe	John Wesselius	Sam Fopma
Sioux Center – Lebanon	Robert Drenten	Arlo Bonnema	Dan Dunn
Sioux Falls – Cornerstone Prison	Scott Van Voorst	Gordon Dyk	
Sioux Falls – First	Steve Zwart	Aaron Rietsema	Tim Den Dulk
Sioux Falls – Shalom		Steve Connell	Terri Harmelink
		Terry Schaap	
Valentine – Lakeview (no delegation present due to a winter storm)			

Art. 3860: Drew Hoekema, the Chairperson for the day, reads the Covenant for Officebearers, and the delegates go on to sign the Covenant. Stanley Groothof serves as the Vice-chair and Bernie Haan as the Clerk.

Art. 3861: Classis is declared constituted. The Chair welcomes the delegates and visitors and appoints John Lee to keep track of the prayer concerns throughout the day with a view to the closing prayer.

Art. 3862: The Chair notes the time schedule for the day and adds that, with a winter storm approaching, it’s his hope that they move quickly through the agenda but not be in a hurry.

Art. 3863: Retirement requests are made via the classical credentials.

- A. **Motion** from the Calvin CRC in Rock Valley CRC on behalf of Gideon Wamala to accept his request for retirement effective March 1, 2025, due to age and health concerns.

-Adopted

- B. **Motion** from the Faith CRC in Sioux Center on behalf of Dr. Jay Shim to accept his request for retirement effective February 25, 2025, due to age. *-Adopted*

Art. 3864: Jeff Santema requests that his license to exhort be renewed for another two years. The Calvin CRC in Rock Valley endorses his request.

- **Motion** is made to grant his request. *-Adopted*

Art. 3865: Through the credentials from Faith CRC in Sioux Center an overture is presented. This overture had been emailed to the churches after the agenda was sent out.

- **Motion** to consider this overture at today's meeting *-Adopted*

Art. 3866: The Stated Clerk's report in the Agenda is noted (p. 8).

- **Motion** to approve the work of the Stated Clerk *-Adopted*

Art. 3867: The Classical Interim Committee report (Agenda, p. 9) is given by Kurt Monroe. One item in particular is noted: "On behalf of Classis Iakota, the CIC approved the honorable release of Rev. Sara Hoogendoorn from ministry in the CRC according to Church Order, article 14-b. We also acquired the necessary concurrence of synodical deputies. Approval of this report will constitute classis' approval of Rev. Hoogendoorn's release from ministry according to Church Order, article 14-b."

- **Motion** to approve the work of the Classical Interim Committee *-Adopted*

Art. 3868: Kurt Monroe provides a brief oral report on behalf of the Classical Ministerial Leadership Team. He shares that Rylan Brue, from Covenant CRC, and Trevor Mouw, from Faith CRC, are both moving towards candidacy in the CRC.

- **Motion** to approve the work of the CMLT *-Adopted*

Art. 3869: The Classical Missions Team report (Agenda, pp. 10-11) is given by Gary Maas.

- A. Ron De Wit, from First Sioux Falls CRC, speaks on behalf of SIMDEL Children's Education Ministry, a ministry which provides basic educational resources as well as backpacks, new shoes, a tutoring program, scholarships, and Torch audio Bibles for those living in a rural part of Togo in West Africa. He expresses the hope that this ministry could receive some funding through classis and invites other churches to partner with First CRC in this missions endeavor.

- **Motion** to have the CMT discuss this opportunity and come to the September 2025 meeting with a recommendation. *--Adopted*

- B. The Chair informs the delegates that a video about Areopagus has been received from Lora Copley and goes on to declare that in the interest of saving time this video will be sent to the churches. [Clerk's note: Lora Copley felt it would be better for her to send a written report which will be sent to the churches.]

- C. The request from Inspiration Hills to receive some funding is brought to the attention of the delegates.

- **Motion** to have the CMT discuss this opportunity and come to the September 2025 meeting with a recommendation. *--Adopted*

- D. **Motion** to approve the work of the Classical Missions Team *--Adopted*

Art. 3870: The first overture from First Rock Valley CRC (Agenda, pp. 2-3) is presented by Matthew Haan. After another ground is added, the following action is taken:

Motion to overture Synod 2025 to begin the process to remove Article 8-b (and other applicable sections, e.g. supplement Art. 12-c) from the Church Order and update the relevant rules, in order to treat the Reformed Church in America (RCA) ministers, ministries, and churches the same way that all ministers and ministries are treated from other denominations—thus ending the “free exchange” of all ministers agreement, the Pella Accord (2014), and the status of being “in communion” with the RCA. Such transfers of ministers would now require the same labor that is required from any other denomination that is currently in communion with the CRC. RCA ministers serving on loan to the CRC would also be required to comply with synod’s decisions by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Church Order Article 38-h and supplement).

Grounds:

1. Our covenantal polity and practiced faith no longer align with the RCA as much as they once did (see Overture 15, *Agenda for Synod 2024*, pp. 450-454). The RCA has no provision that decisions of assemblies are considered settled and binding (Church Order Article 29).
2. In many of our communities the Pella Accord that once connected us to local expressions of the body of Christ now actually separate us from those same local expressions who have themselves left the RCA over biblical convictions.
3. Ending our fellowship and communion with the RCA allows for a formal avenue to address and seek fellowship with the Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC), Kingdom Network, and other churches that have recently left the RCA.
4. If this overture is adopted in 2025 and implemented in 2026, ministers and congregations will have sufficient time to make adjustments.

--Adopted via ballot

[This overture in its entirety can be found in the Appendix to these minutes.]

Art. 3871: The overture from Platte CRC (Agenda, pp. 6-8) is presented by Drew Hoekema.

Motion to send the communication as presented by the Platte CRC to the CRC Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) and to Synod 2025. *--Adopted via ballot*

[This overture in its entirety can be found in the Appendix to these minutes.]

Art. 3872: The second overture from First Rock Valley CRC (Agenda, pp. 3-5) is presented by Matthew Haan.

Motion to overture Synod 2025 to quickly and decisively address the matter of congregations and classes in a state of defiance by:

1. declaring to Classes Alberta North, Grand Rapids East, Toronto, and any other churches and classes that have taken similar actions in this past year that their decisions and actions constitute open and defiant rebellion.
2. inviting these churches and classes to repent of their rebellious action and be restored to a confessional understanding of faith and practice.
3. receiving overtures from these churches and classes as communications only.

4. recognizing that absent of repentance that is communicated in writing by the date of Synod 2025, as law and covenant breakers, these churches and classes have cast themselves into the state of limited suspension and in need of special discipline. The goal of this special discipline is to bring them back into fellowship with the CRCNA following the outline of Church Order Art. 84.
5. having Synod 2026 judge if special discipline has done its good work to bring these bodies back into fellowship.

Grounds:

1. It is the task of the local Classis to bring local churches and officebearers into compliance with our unified confessional ministry. That is not happening in all classes.
2. The principle of authority originating in the congregation does not negate synodical pronouncements.
3. Churches and classes similarly do not have the authority to ignore or change synodical instructions.
4. Titus 3:10-11 says, “As for a person who stirs us division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” Synods 2022-2024 have given more than two warnings.
5. These churches and classes have not followed all three aspects of Church Order Article 83, which instructs the church to apply special discipline when officebearers “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.”

--Adopted via ballot

The following negative votes are registered: Stanley Groothof, Joel Kok

[This overture in its entirety can be found in the Appendix to these minutes.]

Art. 3873: The third overture from First Rock Valley CRC (Agenda, pp. 5-6) is presented by Matthew Haan.

- A. **Motion** to overture Synod 2025 to move the gathering of Synod to a biennial meeting that occurs in January of odd years in Phoenix.

Grounds:

1. Synod is costing over a million dollars annually using affiliated CRCNA universities to house, feed, and provide meeting space for less than 300 people.
2. It is becoming more difficult for our elders and deacons to be able to attend in the summer (a critical time for those working in agriculture) whereas a winter meeting in a warmer climate would be preferred.
3. There is a realization that with great connectivity and more directed work occurring at the classis level that many synodical decisions have little time to be implemented before the next year’s synod occurs.

4. Half of the CRCNA churches now exist west of the Mississippi, yet we have not had any synods west of the state of Iowa.
 5. More than 50% of the growth in the denomination is happening outside of Dutch nationality which is moving from a family denomination to a confessional denomination. It is important to meet this trend for continued growth.
- B. **Motion** to temporarily table this motion with its grounds. *--Adopted*

Art. 3874: The overture from Faith Sioux Center CRC (see Art. 3865 above) is presented by Bob Pollema.

- A. Faith CRC overtures Classis to have the Classical Interim Committee create, curate, and maintain a list of six to eight individuals who have the skill and the desire to run classis meetings on a rotational basis.

Grounds;

1. Too often a person who does not possess the gifts necessary to run an effective classis meeting is met with derision and condescension. There seems to be limited patience for their mistakes and lack of knowledge at times. This is compounded by the meeting time crunch creating a group tension.
 2. There are those who are skilled in this area, enjoy this work, and run classis meetings well and efficiently. So let us allow them to use the gifts God has given them. The rest of us will still come to classis and all of us will enjoy it a whole lot more.
- B. **Motion** to approve this overture in concept and instruct the Classical Interim Committee to come to the September 2025 meeting with a plan of implementation. *--Adopted*

Art. 3875: The written report from the Minn-I-Kota Youth Ministry is distributed and Lee & Doug De Groot proceed to expand on some of the points being made in this report, particularly the successful start of the MIK+ Post High Ministry, the Jr. High Retreat coming up in April, and the Traveling Lesson Plans they can use to lead a youth group's lesson.

- The chair commends this ministry for its ongoing work within our region.

Art. 3876: Elections/actions taken through the course of the meeting renders the following results:

- A. Classical Finance Committee – Darrel Raih (term ends 3/2028)
- B. Classical Missions Team – with Gideon Wamala's retirement Jack Gray, as the alternate, takes his place (term ends 3/2028)
- C. Classical Missions Team – Scott Van Voorst (term ends 3/2028)
- D. Classical Missions Team – Leonard Hoekstra (term ends 3/2028)
- E. Classical Missions Team Lay Alternate – Bonnie Vander Ley (term ends 3/2028)
- F. Classical Ministerial Leadership Team –Orlan Gulker (term ends 3/2028)
- G. Classical Safe Church Team Clergy member – vacant
- H. Classical Safe Church Lay member – vacant
- I. Classical Safe Church Lay alternate – Heather Buys (term ends 3/2028)

J. Delegates to Synod

1. Minister delegate – Matthew Haan
2. Elder delegate – Ben Saarloos
3. 2nd Elder delegate (in lieu of a deacon delegate) – Gerald Zwart
4. 4th Officebearer delegate – Gary Maas

Art. 3877: The Classical Finance Committee report (Agenda, pp. 11-12) is given by Bob Drenten. He supplements that written report with the following:

- A. A review of the 2024 Classical Treasurer's records is in process.
- B. The CFC is in conversation with the CMT about the current practice of representation from the CMT on the CFC.
- C. The CFC and CMT are looking into appointing a task force to draft clearer guidelines for utilizing funds from disbanded churches.
- D. The CFC notes that since there is no desire at this time on the part of Classis Heartland to reboot a successor to the Siouxland Diaconal Conference, the CFC plans to explore options within Classis Iakota.
- E. **Motion** to approve the work of the Classical Finance Committee *--Adopted*

Art. 3878: The Classical Treasurer's report is distributed, followed by Robert Van Ruler highlighting certain parts of that report.

- **Motion** to approve the work of the classical treasurer *--Adopted*

Art. 3879: Brad Meinders, the Central US Regional Mission Leader from Resonate Global Missions, extends an invitation to a Pastor's Breakfast coming up on March 25 in Sioux Center and reminds the delegates of the three main emphases of RGM: supporting missionaries, assisting with church planting, and providing resources for local evangelistic programs.

Art. 3880: The Chair notes the Church Visitors' reports found in the Agenda (pp. 12-13). No other reports are given at this time.

- **Motion** to approve the work of the classical Church Visitors. *--Adopted*

Art. 3881: The Chair notes the Classical Counselor's report from Dave Heilman, the counselor for the Inwood CRC, found in the Agenda (p. 14). No reports are given from Scott Nichols, the counselor for the New Holland CRC, and from Drew Hoekema, the counselor for the Shalom Sioux Falls CRC.

- **Motion** to approve the work of the classical counselors *--Adopted*

Art. 3882: The Chair notes the Regional Pastor's Report from Dave Smit found in the Agenda (p. 14). He is Regional Pastor for the pastors in the Iowa churches of Classis Iakota. No report is given at this time from Gary Maas, the Regional Pastor for the pastors in the South Dakota churches of the classis.

- **Motion** to approve the work of the regional pastors *--Adopted*

Art. 3883: The Chair directs the delegates to the Classical Safe Church Report (Agenda, pp. 14-15).

A. **Motion** to appoint Abby Vanden Bosch, a member of Living Water Community CRC in Sheldon, Iowa, to serve as the Safe Church Team Coordinator. *--Adopted*

B. **Motion** to approve of the work of the Classical Safe Church Team *--Adopted*

Art. 3884: The report from the Care Committee (Agenda, p. 17) for the Shalom Sioux Falls CRC is given by Matt Haan.

A. **Motion** to approve the Care Committee's recommendation that Shalom CRC be encouraged to begin the formation of a search committee. *--Adopted*

B. It is noted that the Classis Care Team will continue to walk with Shalom CRC, in partnership with the classical counselor, until a new pastor is secured.

Art. 3885: At 12:30pm the Chair brings the meeting to a close, expressing appreciation for the cooperation from the delegates and thanking the host church for their hospitality. John Lee offers a closing prayer and the meeting concludes with the singing of the Doxology.

Next meeting: September 16, 2025 at the New Holland CRC

APPENDIX

OVERTURE 1 from First Rock Valley CRC: End the 'In Communion' Relationship with the Reformed Church in America, The Pella Accord, and the 'Free Exchange of Ministers' in Church Order Articles 8 & 12 and its Supplements

I. Background

According to the 2014 Pella Accord we are to "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel [us] to act separately" (Acts of Synod 2014, p. 504). At that time, the accord naturally meant that ministers from the CRCNA and the RCA could pursue and accept calls in both denominations with a shorter and easier process and thus something like a "free exchange" of ministers was codified in Church Order articles 8 and 12 (see supplements).

However, in the last several years, it has become apparent that the CRCNA and the RCA are not as closely aligned in belief and practice as they might have been in 2014. The "presenting" doctrinal divide has to do with human sexuality. The RCA at present keeps as its official stance the traditional and more importantly biblical understanding of marriage as consisting of one man and one woman and that sexual activity belongs only within the boundaries of such marriage.

However, in practice many pastors and congregations teach to the contrary and promote same-sex marriage as a legitimate option for Christians. This is because the RCA has a constitutional system which limits the authority of synods. The CRCNA, on the other hand, not only declared same-sex sexual activity to be unchaste behavior, but that this understanding has always had confessional status in our denomination and thus officebearers and congregations who disagree are now placed on limited suspension until they repent of their errors or disaffiliate from the denomination. The CRCNA is enacting discipline on this matter and the RCA is not.

As evidence of this growing divide between the CRCNA and the RCA, same-sex-affirming CRC pastors and churches have left for the RCA.

RCA belief and practice is unique and therefore no longer in communion with the faith or life of the CRC. We expect that division to become more apparent in the years to come that the free (or expedited) exchange of ministers from both denominations will prove more and more problematic.

II. Overture

Therefore, Classis Iakota overtures Synod 2025 to begin the process to remove Article 8 b. (and other applicable sections. e.g. supplement Art. 12-c) from the Church Order and update the relevant rules, in order to treat the Reformed Church in America (RCA) ministers, ministries, and churches the same way that all ministers and ministries are treated from other denominations—thus ending the “free exchange” of ministers agreement, the Pella Accord (2014), and the status of being “In communion” with the RCA. Such transfers of ministers will now require the same labor that is required from any other denomination that is not currently in communion with the CRC. RCA ministers serving on loan to the CRC are required to comply with synod’s decisions by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Church Order Article 38-h and supplement).

III. Grounds

1. Our covenantal polity and practiced faith no longer align with the RCA as much as they once did (see Overture 15, *Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 450-454). The RCA has no provision that decisions of assemblies are considered settled and binding (Article 29).
2. In many of our communities the Pella Accord that once connected us to local expressions of the body of Christ now actually separate us from those same local expressions who have themselves left the RCA over biblical convictions.
3. Ending our fellowship and communion with the RCA, allows for a formal avenue to address and seek fellowship with the ARC, Kingdom Network, and other churches that have recently left the RCA.
4. If this overture is adopted in 2025 and implemented in 2026, ministers and congregations will have sufficient time to make adjustments.

OVERTURE 2 from First Rock Valley CRC: Provide Actionable Steps of Accountability Towards Churches and Classes Who are in Defiance and Open Rebellion

I. Preamble

Classis Iakota is concerned about the open rebellion that is taking place in the CRCNA. We believe steps are needed both in individual churches and classes—actionable steps of accountability that will help us to more deeply covenant together in our shared confessions.

II. Background

For many years the CRCNA, along with most other Christian denominations, was caught up in the debates about human sexuality. This debate, which had been publicly debated denomination-wide since 2013, centered particularly on the question of whether same-sex sexual activity was among the actions that constituted unchastity and thus prohibited as sinful according to question and answer 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Synod launched two study committees to address these questions, and the second committee's *Human Sexuality Report* was "recommend ... to the churches as providing a useful summary of biblical teaching regarding human sexuality." Synod 2022 also "affirm[ed] that 'unchastity' in Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment. In so doing, synod declare[d] this affirmation 'an interpretation of [a] confession' (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status." The whole *Human Sexuality Report* does not have confessional status, but the identification of same-sex sexual activity (whether in a so-called same-sex marriage or outside of one) as prohibited behavior does have confessional status as it is our denomination's understanding of HC Q&A 108. The only sexual activity that is permitted is between one man and one woman in the context of a Biblical marriage.

Following the decisions of Synods 2022-2024 the CRCNA has faithfully determined that it is vital for the communication of the true gospel of Jesus Christ that all in leadership positions of pastor, elder, deacon, teacher, board member, Trustee, staff, and standing committees, must submit to God's Word and our Three confessional forms of unity, by promoting and defending the denomination's position without exception by signing the Covenant for Officebearers.

Synod 2024 instructed all classes to re-sign the Covenant for Officebearers on a yearly basis (*Acts of Synod 2024*, article 89, p.928). Furthermore, synod decided that when an officebearer signs the Covenant for Officebearers, it is a statement that he or she has no difficulty or settled convictions contrary to any of the doctrines contained in the creeds and confessions and this includes what synod has declared to have confessional status (*Acts of Synod 2024*, article 69, p. 876). Thus as we go forward, every classis will be in agreement with the rest of the denomination and we can rebuild trust with one another as we are all in one accord as the church should be.

Regarding congregations and officebearers that have made public statements against what synod declared to be a confessional matter, Synod 2024 declared that such congregations and officebearers are to be placed on limited suspension after the conclusion of Synod 2024. This suspension includes a loss of ability to send delegates to classis, synod, the COD, or the CRCNA agencies. Officebearers under limited suspension may attend classis with the privilege of the floor but not as a seated delegate (*Acts of Synod 2024*, Article 76, p. 887).

However, there are several instances in which synod's clear instruction has been disregarded (public meeting minutes can be provided to the advisory committee):

- Classis Alberta North seated delegates from churches that are in protest as voting delegates (October 18-19, 2024, minutes, Article 3).
- Classis Grand Rapids East said that "full delegations from all congregations shall conduct the ordinary business of classis, but for matters that clearly involve our denominational ties...the full delegations by majority vote appoint an *ad hoc* committee to make the necessary decisions during the classis meeting" (September 19, 2024, minutes, Article 1.3).
- Alger Park CRC has said that they "will not require those who wish to serve as elders and deacons to sign the Covenant for Officebearers if they cannot do so 'without reservation'" (Vimeo of congregational meeting, January 19, 2025).
- Classis Toronto adopted an overture from Heritage Fellowship CRC which calls for the seating of voting delegates who by synodical definition are under limited suspension and who by synodical decision may not vote at classical meetings. (Classis Toronto, October 9, 2024, minutes, art. 7).
- Classis Toronto adopted an overture from Fellowship CRC and Willowdale CRC which in the name of protecting the original authority of the local council as well as honoring the authority of

the Classis, asks Classis not to adopt or enact what they consider to be “overreaching decisions” by Synod 2024. To “not enact” here means (1) ongoing seating of delegates regardless of limited suspension status and (2) that there would be no requirement to sign the Covenant for Officebearers for the next two years (October 9, 2024 minutes, Article 8).

- The Council of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Barrie, ON has appealed the decisions of Classis Toronto to Synod 2025, noting that their classis meeting was not duly constituted.

The argument of Classis Toronto is that since authority originates from the local council, neither classis nor synod have the authority to require officebearers to sign the Covenant for Officebearers if the sending council disagrees. If such is the case, then all classical and synodical decisions and instructions are regulated to advisory status only. And so we see that this argument goes beyond the debate about sexuality; it goes to the heart of what it is to be a confessional denomination. If the doctrines in our confessions may be publicly opposed in a way other than the gravamen process to amend those confessions, then we are not a confessional church since then our confessions are merely a statement of heritage. Similarly, if synodical decisions can be disregarded, then we are no longer a denomination, but rather something akin to a “network” or club.

III. Overture

Therefore, we overture Synod 2025 quickly and decisively to address the matter of congregations and classes in a state of defiance by:

1. declaring to Classes Alberta North, Grand Rapids East, Toronto, and any other churches and classes that has done similar actions in this past year that their decisions and actions constitute open and defiant rebellion.
2. inviting these churches and classes to repent from their rebellious action and be restored to a confessional understanding of faith and practice.
3. receiving overtures from these churches and classes as communications only.
4. recognizing that absent of repentance that is communicated in writing by the date of Synod 2025, as law and covenant breakers, these churches and classes have cast themselves into the state of limited suspension and in need of special discipline. The goal of this special discipline is to bring them back into fellowship with the CRCNA following the outline of Church Order Art.84.
5. having Synod 2026 judge if special discipline has done its good work to bring these bodies back into fellowship.

IV. Grounds

1. It is the task of the local classis to bring local churches and officebearers into compliance with our unified confessional ministry. That is not happening in all classes.
2. The principle of authority originating in the congregation does not negate synodical pronouncements.
3. Churches and classes similarly do not have the authority to ignore or change synodical instructions.
4. Titus 3:10-11 says “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” Synods 2022-2024 have given more than two warnings.
5. These churches and classes have not followed all three aspects of Church Order Article 83, which instructs the church to apply special discipline when officebearers “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.”

OVERTURE from Platte CRC: Send Communication to EIRC Regarding RCA Status

Background

In 2024, Classis Iakota overtured synod (Overture 15) to re-examine our ecumenical relationship to the Reformed Church in America (RCA). In response, Synod directed the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee to have a conversation with representatives from the RCA, and to bring a recommendation to Synod 2025 regarding their official status as “church-in-communion,” the closest relationship among the categories used by the CRC.

In response to Overture 15, the EIRC sent a ‘right-of-comment’ memo to Synod 2024, defending the current arrangement. The memo stated that any change would be going against the CRC Ecumenical Charter, citing a portion of its Preface which states that requiring biblical, theological and confessional uniformity among our ecumenical relationships is “no longer a meaningful option.” Thus, the committee argued, any change in our relationship with the RCA would be forcing the committee to go against its mandate in Church Order Article 49-a.

Rationale

Since Classis Iakota initiated this current work of the EIRC through its overture to Synod 2024, it is fitting to address this significant point made in response. As the committee considers its recommendations to Synod 2025, the council of Platte CRC thought it worthwhile to continue a dialog with this committee through the means of an official communication from Classis.

Overture

Platte CRC overtures Classis Iakota to send the following communication to the CRC Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee:

Dear Dr. Roels and EIRC Members,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Last year, our classis submitted Overture 15 to Synod 2024 regarding the Reformed Church in America [RCA]. In response to that overture, synod directed your committee to dialogue with the RCA and bring forth a recommendation to Synod 2025 concerning its status as ‘church-in-communion.’ We are grateful for your committee’s work toward that end and write to you now concerning it.

We took note of several concerns mentioned in your evaluation of our overture to Synod 2024 but wanted to continue this important conversation by addressing the first. Your claim was that a change in our relationship with the RCA would cause the EIRC to violate Church Order Article 49-a, since the Ecumenical Charter states that requiring ecumenical partners to “think biblically, theologically, and confessionally like the CRC” is “no longer a meaningful option.”

We wanted to raise several concerns in response. First, the point raised cites not the Ecumenical Charter itself, but its Preface. But more importantly, we wonder about applying such a broad principle on “ecumenical relationships,” generally speaking, to what you have called our “closest ecumenical partner” (*Agenda for Synod 2024*, p. 317). Does such an interpretation and application of our Ecumenical Charter mean that there are no longer any faith and practice expectations defining our closest partners? If that is the case, where is our unity grounded?

To observe that we are no longer in alignment on significant confessional matters of faith and practice, and to then change the status of a partnership to accurately reflect that reality, is not a matter of policing or holding accountable, but of honesty. The interpretation and application of our Ecumenical Charter offered by your committee’s memo to Synod 2024 would lead us to wonder what another church could

do, if anything, that would lead to a change in their status. Such an application of the Charter (or to be specific, its Prelude) seems untenable.

We deeply lament the hurdles and consequences that would come out of a growing separation from the RCA. Consequences, however, arise out of actions. Where there is no longer a deep alignment on matters of faith, unity – especially to the extent of ‘church-in-communion’ – no longer truly exists. We in Iowa and South Dakota no longer recognize the RCA of 2025. Most of the brothers and sisters who we work together with in our local communities have left the RCA, and they have done so specifically because of commitments on human sexuality and biblical interpretation that we share.

As you consider your recommendations to Synod 2025, we hope that you will bear these concerns in mind. The RCA of 2025 is not the RCA with whom we formed the so-called ‘Pella Accord’ in 2014. We urge you to let this reality, lamentable as it may be, be reflected in your decisions.

Appendix – Relevant Portion of EIRC ‘Right-of-Comment’ Memo to Synod 2024 Regarding Classis Iakota Overture 15

1. If the overture were adopted, the CRC would be going against its Ecumenical Charter

The preface to the CRC’s 2019 Ecumenical Charter reads, in part, as follows:
Historically, ecumenical contacts of the CRC were exclusively with denominations in the Reformed tradition who shared the viewpoint that ecumenical partners assume responsibility for keeping each other confessionally Reformed. Not only did synods consult each other on important theological issues, but the one partner could hold the other partner accountable for deviations or practices that were considered to be objectionable.

The CRC has learned that requiring such uniformity for ecumenical relationships is no longer a meaningful option. The requirement that ecumenical partners think biblically, theologically, and confessionally like the CRC can soon make the circle of ecumenical relationships very small. Furthermore, such a demand for similar perspectives exposes the risk of being perceived as being theologically arrogant...

These changes in ecumenical relationships prompted Synod 2006 to revise its Ecumenical Charter. The Charter was revised again in 2010. The CRC is less insistent than it once was that our ecumenical partners understand issues in the same way as those issues are understood in the CRC. The CRC does not endorse every position taken by ecumenical partners; nor do we need to (cf. Church Order Art. 50-c). Rather, the present understanding in ecumenical circles is that churches learn from each other and discuss differing perspectives. Ecumenical relationship can be built on common interests and commitments to the ministry of the gospel and the mission to which the gospel calls the whole Christian church...

Were Overture 15 to be adopted, the EIRC would have to operate contrary to this stance in the Ecumenical Charter, which would itself be a violation of Church Order Article 19-a: “Synod shall appoint a committee to encourage ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches, especially those that are part of the Reformed family, *as articulated in the synodically approved Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church* so that that the Christian Reformed Church may exercise Christian fellowship with other denominations and may promote the unity of the church of Jesus Christ” (emphasis added).