

Classis lakota
AGENDA
March 7, 2023, 9:00 A.M.
Rock Rapids CRC
Rev. Kyle De Young, Chair **Rev. Joshua Stammis, Vice-Chair**

I. INITIAL BUSINESS

- A. Opening Devotions—led by Rev. Doug De Groot, pastor of the 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 September 20, 2022 meeting.
- C. Declaration that Classis is constituted.
- D. Welcome to delegates and other attendees
- E. Adoption of time schedule: 9:00-12:15; lunch; 1:00-3:15; coffee time; 3:30-
- F. Appointment of Prayer Leader
- G. Tally Committee (provided by host church)

II. READING OF INSTRUCTIONS AND OVERTURES

- A. Overture from Inwood CRC regarding classis meeting date in the Fall (p. 2)
- B. Overtures from First Sioux Center CRC regarding the Code of Conduct
 - 1. Not to Implement or Mandate the Code of Conduct (pp. 2-4)
 - 2. To implement the Code of Conduct for denominational offices and personnel and offer it as a template for classes and local congregations (pp. 4-6)
- C. Overtures from First Rock Valley CRC
 - 1. Regarding Code of Conduct (p. 6)
 - 2. Regarding delegates to Synod 2023 signing the Covenant for Officebearers (p. 7)
 - 3. Regarding restriction of synodical delegates not willing to sign the Covenant for Officebearers (p.7)
 - 4. Regarding the prohibition of officebearers who have submitted confessional difficult gravamina (pp. 7-8)
- D. Communication from Bethel Sioux Center CRC responding to Dr. Zachary King's invitation to reflect on unity (pp. 8-10)
- E. Overture from Lebanon CRC (to be distributed at the classis meeting)

III. STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

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| A. Stated Clerk (p. 11) | G. Church Counselors |
| B. Interim Committee (p. 12) | H. Regional Pastors |
| C. Ministerial Leadership Team (p. 12) | I. Minn-I-Kota Youth (p. 19) |
| D. Missions Team (pp. 13-14) | J. Safe Church Team (p. 20) |
| E. Finance Committee (pp. 15-16) | K. Classical Treasurer |
| F. Church Visitors (pp. 16-18) | |

IV. ELECTIONS/NOMINATIONS

- A. Finance Comm.—all four persons on the committee are completing their first 3-year term
- B. CMLT—Adam Eisenga has completed his second 3-year term
- C. CMT Clergy—Drew Hoekema has completed his second 3-year term
- D. CMT Lay—Gordon Dyk has completed his second 3-year term
- E. CMT Clergy Alternate—vacant
- F. CMT Lay Alternate—vacant
- G. World Renew—Cliff Hoekstra has completed his second 3-year term
- H. Election of delegates to Synod (per the decision made at the 9/20/22 classis meeting: "classis shall consider sending one or more delegates to synod for two consecutive years.")

V. CLASSICAL/REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES TO SYNODICAL BOARDS

- A. Calvin University
- B. Calvin Theological Sem
- C. Council of Delegates
- D. Faith Formation Ministries
- E. Resonate Global Mission
- F. World Renew

VI. REPORTS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

- A. Update regarding the disbandment of Hope CRC in Rapid City (pp. 21-22)
- B. Other Ad Hoc Committees

VII. CLOSING BUSINESS

- A. Next Meeting – September 19, 2023
- B. Concluding Remarks (chairperson)
- C. Closing Prayer
- D. Adjournment

Inwood CRC Overture to Classis Iakota

Overture: Inwood CRC overtures Classis Iakota to move its fall meeting from the third Tuesday in September to the final Tuesday in August.

Grounds

1. Some elder and deacon bodies are comprised entirely or almost entirely of farmers. Moving the fall meeting to the end of August would make it easier for these councils to select delegates.
2. Classis Iakota has many churches in agricultural communities. For many, the harvest is in full swing by mid-September and so the benefit of this change would be widespread.
3. Schools have, for the most part, started back up by the end of August and so the season in which office bearers and their families might take their summer vacation is largely over.

Proposed overture to Synod 2023 not to implement or mandate the Code of Conduct from the Council of First Christian Reformed Church, Sioux Center, IA [Code of Conduct Overture #1]

1. Background:

Lamenting and responding to the reality of abuse of power within the church, Synod 2018 mandated the formation of a committee to “bring recommendations...to Synod 2019 regarding how the CRCNA can best address the patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination.” Among the committee’s subsequent recommendations, adopted by Synod 2019, were the creation of training on abuse of power for pastors, taking steps to prevent abuse in CRCNA offices (including new limits on the use of non-disclosure agreements), the

formation of a Dignity Team, and the drafting of a code of conduct “for all employed ministry staff within the CRC.” The mandate further directed that the code of conduct, to be presented to Synod 2020 for approval, “shall be signed by all ministry personnel who are employed by the CRCNA, local churches, and classes” and shall be “reviewed annual, as part of annual evaluations” (Acts of Synod 2019, page 611).

The Council of Delegates, acting on behalf of Synod 2020 and Synod 2021, followed that mandate in the formation of a code of conduct presented to Synod 2022 for adoption. After robust discussion, Synod 2022 deferred action, giving time for congregations and classes to provide feedback.

In discussion throughout classis, it became clear that while there is deep appreciation for the spirit and intent of the Code of Conduct and a shared commitment to eliminating abuse of power at all levels of Christ’s church, there are specific concerns with the theological framework of the Code of Conduct and the polity implications of the scope of Synod 2019’s mandate. Specifically, we find the Code of Conduct’s implicit theology of power and authority to be one-sided and reductionistic, and we question the polity precedent and pastoral wisdom of synod mandating a static document across all local contexts and reaching into non-ordained ministry leaders, including at the micro-level of annual reviews. Such a centralized approach does not reflect deep trust in the integrity or contextualized ministry wisdom of local councils and classes. It also seems out-of-step with the reconciling admonishment of Belhar Confession that reconciled unity “can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.”

2. Overture:

The council of First CRC overtures Synod 2023:

- a. to acknowledge the tragic reality of the abuse of power within the church and our denomination

- b. To recognize that deficiencies in the present Code of Conduct preclude its healthy functioning as a tool to prevent abuse and therefore synod should not mandate its use throughout the denomination.

- c. to encourage church councils and classes to appropriately respond to the reality of the abuse of power within the church and our denomination by
 - i. examining their governance models and procedures to 1) assess whether all officebearers and ministry leaders are truly held accountable to Scriptural standards of behavior and the right exercise of authority and 2) ensure that the governance model and procedures are transparent and open to all members of the church.
 - ii. making clear the expectation that all officebearers and ministry leaders will be held accountable to the standards of Scripture regarding the exercise of power and authority for all those who govern in the church.
 - iii. studying and reinvigorating the exercise of mutual accountability and church discipline, noting that when an abuse of power is tolerated, the failure is ultimately the failure of officebearers to exercise church discipline and robust scriptural oversight of one another.

3. Grounds:

a. The Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders is redundant and therefore unnecessary. Everything the Code of Conduct attempts to achieve is better accomplished by Scripture itself and by the process of church discipline that is outlined in Scripture and in the CRCNA's Church Order.

b. The opening paragraphs of the Code of Conduct's preamble reveal a questionable theological foundation. The preamble presents an often one-sided and reductionist view of Scripture's treatment of the gift and exercise of authority and power, highlighting the need for kenosis (emptying) while giving insufficient attention to the need for the exercise of power in the church to govern the body of Christ in order to confront, admonish, convict, and call to repentance those who are in sin (as modeled by Jesus himself in his earthly ministry and as compelled by the epistles of Christ's apostles).

c. The vague and extra-biblical terminology in the Code of Conduct (e.g. "abuse of power," "bullying," "harassment") lacks the Scriptural context in which those terms might be accurately interpreted; that terminology is thus open to broad and potentially abusive interpretation. Scripture names specific sins in biblical contexts that allow the church to properly identify specific sins and appropriately hold accountable brothers and sisters in Christ (including those in positions of institutional power).

d. A mandated, one-size-fits-all Code of Conduct does not reflect the beautifully varied contextualized realities of the CRCNA. God has blessed the CRCNA with different Canadian and US legal and cultural contexts, rural and urban contexts, and ethnic majority and minority contexts where the understanding and proper exercise of authority find varied healthy expressions captured by unique grammars and patterns of community formation that cannot be adequately captured in a uniform document.

e. Mandating the use of the Code of Conduct for unordained ministry leaders and employees in classes and in local churches establishes a new and unhealthy precedent, seeking to enforce orthopraxis in areas where we have refrained from enforcing orthodoxy. As God is Lord of our hearts and minds and not just our words and actions, for synod to mandate unordained local ministry leaders to sign a Code of Conduct but not something akin to the Covenant for Officebearers would be to privilege behavior over belief in ways that are neither Reformed nor wise. It would also establish a precedent of increasing centralized control of local ministry personnel, including local HR practices, that could unintentionally contribute to the very patterns of institutional abuse of power the code itself seeks to avoid.

**Proposed Overture to Synod 2023
to implement the Code of Conduct across denominational offices and personnel
and offer it as a template for use as desired by classes and local congregations
from the Council of First Christian Reformed Church, Sioux Center, IA
[Code of Conduct Overture #2]**

1. Background:

Lamenting and responding to the reality of abuse of power within the church, Synod 2018 mandated the formation of a committee to "bring recommendations...to Synod 2019 regarding how the CRCNA can best address the patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination." Among the committee's subsequent recommendations, adopted by Synod

2019, were the creation of training on abuse of power for pastors, taking steps to prevent abuse in CRCNA offices (including new limits on the use of non-disclosure agreements), the formation of a Dignity Team, and the drafting of a code of conduct “for all employed ministry staff within the CRC.” The mandate further directed that the code of conduct, to be presented to Synod 2020 for approval, “shall be signed by all ministry personnel who are employed by the CRCNA, local churches, and classes” and shall be “reviewed annual, as part of annual evaluations” (Acts of Synod 2019, page 611).

The Council of Delegates, acting on behalf of Synod 2020 and Synod 2021, followed that mandate in the formation of a code of conduct presented to Synod 2022 for adoption. After robust discussion, Synod 2022 deferred action, giving time for congregations to provide feedback.

In discussion throughout classis, it became clear that while there is deep appreciation for the spirit and intent of the Code of Conduct and a shared commitment to eliminating abuse of power at all levels of Christ’s church, there is a specific concern with the scope of Synod 2019’s mandate. Specifically, we question the polity precedent and pastoral wisdom of synod mandating a static document across all local contexts and reaching into non-ordained ministry leaders, including at the micro-level of annual reviews. Such a centralized approach does not reflect deep trust in the integrity or contextualized ministry wisdom of local councils and classes. It also seems out-of-step with the reconciling admonishment of Belhar Confession that reconciled unity “can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.”

2. Overture:

The council of First CRC overtures Synod 2023:

- a. to acknowledge the tragic reality of the abuse of power within the church and our denomination and continue to implement the good work of responding to abuse of power mandated by Synod 2018, 2019, and 2022.
- b. to instruct the general secretary of the CRCNA to implement the CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders across denominational offices and personnel.
- c. to instruct the general secretary and Office of Safe Church to provide the CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry leaders to classes and local congregations as a template to be adapted and adopted for ministry in their respective contexts.
- d. to further encourage church councils and classes to
 - i. examine their governance models and procedures to 1) assess whether all officebearers and ministry leaders are truly held accountable to Scriptural standards of behavior and the right exercise of authority and 2) ensure that the governance model and procedures are transparent and open to all members of the church.
 - ii. make clear the expectation that all officebearers and ministry leaders will be held accountable to the standards of Scripture regarding the exercise of power and authority for all those who govern in the church.
 - iii. study and reinvigorate the exercise of mutual accountability and church discipline, noting that when an abuse of power is tolerated, the failure is ultimately the failure of officebearers to exercise church discipline and robust scriptural oversight of one another.

3. Grounds:

- a. A mandated, one-size-fits-all Code of Conduct does not reflect the beautifully varied contextualized realities of the CRCNA. God has blessed the CRCNA with different Canadian and US legal and cultural contexts, rural and urban contexts, and ethnic majority and minority contexts where the understanding and proper exercise of authority find varied healthy expressions captured by unique grammars and patterns of community formation that cannot be adequately captured in a uniform document.
 - b. Providing the Code as a resource for local church communities to adapt and adopt holds potential for greater buy-in, investment, and ownership of the Code by local communities than a centralized mandate. Greater ownership best ensures the development of a sustained culture of goodness to which God calls us.
 - c. Resourcing local churches with a code of conduct template rather than mandating a static document better reflects Reformed Polity where original authority is vested with church councils.
 - d. Mandating the use of the Code of Conduct for unordained ministry leaders and employees in classes and in local churches establishes a new and unhealthy precedent, seeking to enforce orthopraxis in areas where we have refrained from enforcing orthodoxy. As God is Lord of our hearts and minds and not just our words and actions, for synod to mandate unordained local ministry leaders to sign a Code of Conduct but not something akin to the Covenant for Officebearers would be to privilege behavior over belief in ways that are neither reformed nor wise. It would also establish a precedent of increasing centralized control into local ministry personnel, including local HR practices, that could unintentionally contribute to the very patterns of institutional abuse of power the code itself seeks to avoid.
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Overtures from First CRC of Rock Valley

Overture 1:

The council of First Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa, overtures Classis Iakota to overture to Synod 2023 the full retraction of the Code of Conduct document from being mandated across the churches and volunteers of the CRCNA.

Grounds:

1. The Code of Conduct in form and governance does nothing more for holders of office in the church than the current Covenant for Officebearers.
2. The Code of Conduct is an overreach into volunteer positions who are already governed by God's Word, Church Council's, Administrative teams, Safe church policies, Classis, the legal authorities of the state, and Synod.

Overture 2:

The council of First Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa, overtures Classis Iakota to overture to Synod 2023 the requirement of all officebearers attending Synod 2023 to be willing to sign the Covenant of office-bearers without reservation of the clear understandings of the decisions of Synod 2022 in view.

Grounds:

1. All leaders of the church sent to Classis are required to be of one mind and heart in faith and covenant revealed in God's Word, taught by our Lord Jesus Christ and directed by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2)
2. Synod 2022 gave clarity to the doctrines of Penal Substitutionary Atonement and Human sexuality that should be affirmed by all signers of the Covenant for officebearers.
3. The goal of this re-signing is to highlight the covenant that we make with one another regarding our unity in fidelity to the full revelation of God's Word and our denominational decisions.

Overture 3:

The council of First Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa, overtures Classis Iakota to overture to Synod 2023 the restriction of any person or Classis who has not signed the Covenant of Officebearers without exception or reservation in their local church or Classis from being seated or recognized as delegates at Synod.

Grounds:

1. It is impossible to do the work of the Christ Jesus as office bearers in the Christian Reformed Church if officebearers are not willing to submit their life and doctrine to the clear teaching of God's Word and its summary in our Creeds and confessions as agreed on in covenant with one another.
2. It is this covenantal foundation that gives us the wisdom and clarity of the Holy Spirit for any subsequent discussions and decisions made in and for the faithful unity of the body of Church before the face of Christ Jesus our living head and savior.

Overture 4:

The council of First Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa, overtures Classis Iakota to overture to Synod 2023 the prohibition of officebearers who have submitted confessional difficulty *gravamen* to their local councils from being delegated to any higher governing bodies of classis, council of delegates, denominational offices or Synod.

Grounds:

1. A gravamen is always a stated question asking for a clarifying response. A confessional difficulty *gravamen* is not a declaration of permitted dissent toward the rest of the local body or broader classical and denominational body.

2. For the sake of the integrity of the covenant between officebearers at the classical and synodical level, those seated at those delegations need to have full assurance that their fellow delegates do not harbor reservations about the confessions that would threaten their confessional covenant. Likewise, the confessing members of the denomination should have the assurance that those leading and making decisions on behalf of synod (in denominational offices) are fully, and without reservation, committed to the doctrinal standards that form the covenant bond of unity of the denomination.
3. Without confessional covenantal integrity it is impossible to do the work of the Christ Jesus as office bearers in the Christian Reformed Church.

Respectively submitted,
Council of First Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley

Cover Letter from Bethel CRC

February 2023

Dear Friends in Ministry,

Dr. Zachary King, General Secretary of the CRCNA, sent a pastoral letter to churches in November in response to Synod 2022 directing him “to instruct the churches and classes to seek and to keep the unity of the church and the denomination in ways that are consistent with biblical principles, our Reformed confessions, and our Ecumenical Charter” and to “gather best practices on pursuing unity from the various classes [and congregations] and share these with the broader church.”

That letter ended with a bold, underlined request: “Please share the lessons you have learned about unity in this fraught time with me by e-mailing your reflections (including any effective practices you’re doing)”.

The attached draft is our attempt to provide the requested feedback. We offer our reflections first to Classis Iakota, welcoming your feedback to us. If Classis Iakota finds the reflections helpful, we also offer these reflections as a possible document to adopt as a classis and send on to Dr. King as a collective response from our region.

May God continue to bless, grow, purify, and unify His church for His purposes and to the glory of His name.

In Christ,

Bethel CRC Council

Communication to Dr. Zachary King Submitted by Bethel CRC

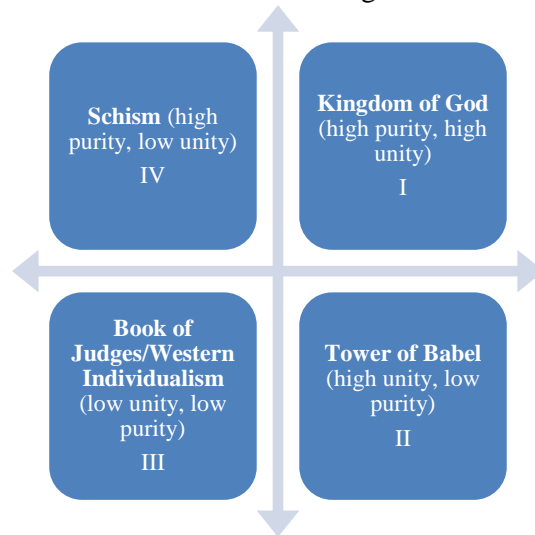
February 1, 2023

Dear Dr. Zachary King

Thank you for your recent pastoral letter on unity. In a time of cultural tribalism, ecclesiastical polarization, and entrenched conflict, we appreciate your wise and Biblically-grounded words, your admonishment to a Gospel-shaped vision of the Kingdom, and your invitation for feedback.

In response to that invitation, we offer these observations:

- We would be well served to move beyond a dialectic that frames “unity” and “purity” as opposing virtues on a linear continuum that need to be held in tension or in balance. A more helpful frame is a 2 X 2 with ‘purity’ on the ‘y’ axis and ‘unity’ on the ‘x’ axis resulting in four quadrants. Both the paths to schism and Babel (quadrants IV and II) are *false choices* that elevate one Biblical virtue at the expense of the other. Quadrant III in which individuals and congregations (or classes) do what is right in their own eyes ultimately is a rejection of both virtues. A distinguishing characteristic of the Kingdom of God is its Spirit-led, Scripturally-grounded commitments to both high purity and deep unity. It is in shared *obedience to God* that we find the ground to shared *fellowship with one another*.



- It is possible to be organizationally connected and not be truly one in Christ. It is possible to be truly one in Christ, and not be organizationally connected. Oneness in Christ should therefore not be reduced to or equated with organizational unity.
- Jesus’ prayer in John 17 and God’s word through Paul in Ephesians 4 speak first to the church catholic, not to any human denominational construct. Seeking the unity of the church catholic may at times supersede preserving the unity of particular denominational expressions of the church. In our context, maintaining formal unity with distant CRCNA congregations who are rejecting historic and global understandings of Christian life and doctrine would come at the expense of functioning unity (and shared ministry) with our sisters and brothers in Christ in ARC, Kingdom Network, PRC, NRC, URC, Roman Catholic, E-Free, Hispanic Pentecostal, and Ukrainian refugee evangelical believers in our actual neighborhoods as well as unity with the historic and global church.

- Biblical unity should never be equated with the perpetuation of formal, organizational ecclesiastical expressions that have become historical artifacts. Denominations can become expressions of unholy momentum in which shared structures persist long after shared vision has ceased. Preserving shared denominational symbols on our stationary or church signage because congregations were once unified in doctrine and life is disingenuous if we are no longer unified in doctrine and life. Shared property is not a stand-in for shared purpose.
- Biblical unity should never come at the expense of the vulnerable. With regard to the HSR, when progressives consistently argue that conservatives in their teaching “have blood on their hands” and when conservatives regularly argue that progressives in their teaching are leaving people “in danger of the fires of hell”; for both groups to nonetheless maintain formal unity with each other is to conspire together to prioritize organizational unity with one another over the wellbeing of those of us who are the vulnerable brothers and sisters both profess to care about.
- Seeking to maintain a denominational status quo as congregations dynamically move theologically apart has been a historically demonstrated recipe for prolonged conflict that generates more heat than light and holds the potential to hurt more than help the witness of the body of Christ in comparison with an amicable and honest parting with mutual blessing.
- Biblical unity finds expression in not only shared faith (doctrine) and order (ministry) but also in shared submission to God’s revelation expressed in mutual accountability. When individuals, churches, or classes willfully and persistently reject mutual accountability, real unity is broken regardless of what latent organizational unity continues.
- The unity of the church is preserved by the marks of the church. Where the marks are not present, the church is not present and therefore unity within the church is not possible.
- Unity functions best within a *center*, not *bounded set* framework. Confessions do not so much police pastoral postures of welcome as they give a shared direction to discipleship. Unity does not eliminate the pastoral discernment of local churches, but it exercises that discernment in mutually accountable submission to the will of God revealed in Scripture.
- Perhaps the bigger challenge we face as a denomination is not *division* but *discipleship*. Are our communities forming people with the foundational character qualities of humility, kindness, wisdom, patience, and the tools of Scriptural discernment to sustain the high calling of Christ to walk together the obedient path of the cross?
- As agrarian people, we appreciate the wisdom of Robert Frost that often “good fences make good neighbors.” We have found fruitful unity with brothers and sisters in Christ in other denominations, despite disagreements (on baptism with E-Free or the mass with Roman Catholic or same sex marriage with ELCA), *because* we had clear boundaries that gave definition to our shared ministry and friendship.
- Finally, we share your concern “about a future in which our denomination remains organizationally connected, but in which churches and leaders moving in opposite directions attack one another, withhold mutual support and care for ministry, and damage our witness to the world.” Unity is not merely organizational connectedness. Let that, therefore, not be our ultimate goal.

You have our prayers as we together heed God’s call to “holy living and right teaching so that we, through the Spirit, might offer His gospel humbly and graciously to the world for which Christ died.” Amen.

In Christ,

Bethel CRC Council

Stated Clerk's Report – March 2023

Since the September 2022 meeting of classis, I have handled the following:

- Updated the Classical Rules of Procedure and the List of Classical Functionaries and posted them on our website, along with the minutes of the 9/20/22 classis meeting and a document giving the highlights of that meeting.
- Contacted those who classis has given a license to exhort informing them of the decision by classis to have them sign the Covenant for Officebearers. All five of them (Jason Lief, Barry Miedema, Trevor Mouw, Nathan Nieuwendorp, and Thomas Soodsma) expressed an agreement with the Covenant.
- Attended the 11/14/22 meeting of the classical interim committees of Heartland and Lakota to discuss matters of mutual concern.
- Have been in contact with the Rapid City Hope CRC council as arrangements continue to be made towards the completion of their disbandment (see their report on p.)
- 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.
- While I wasn't able to attend the Stated Clerks' Gathering in January I received a summary of pertinent matters that were brought to the attention of the stated clerks and discussed at that gathering. I might mention some of those matters at the March 7 classis meeting.
- Sent out reminders of our 3/7/23 meeting to the councils of our classis and other ministry leaders who give reports to classis.
- Gathered what was necessary for putting together the agenda for the 3/7/23 meeting and met with the CIC to discuss and decide on how to proceed with regard to various matters to be handled at the classis meeting.

Classis lakota Interim Committee Report to Classis

The Classis Interim Committee met on February 3, 2023, at Bethel CRC Sioux Center. Much of our time was spent preparing for our March and September 2023 meetings, so much of our work is already reflected through the agenda. Below are additional items to note.

1. Licensure to Exhort:
We anticipate classis getting a request from Calvin Rock Valley CRC to reinstate Jeff Santema's licensure to exhort.
2. Covenant of Officebearers:
In light of our decision at our September 2022 classis meeting, first time delegates to classis as well as delegates who signed before Synod 2022 will be asked to sign the Covenant of Officebearers at our March 2023 meeting.
3. Partnering with Classis Heartland:
The Interim Committees from Classis Heartland and Classis lakota had a combined meeting on November 14, 2022. We see value in our two CICs meeting annually to discuss (a) updates and best practices from each classis, (b) shared ministries, and (c) opportunities for partnership.
4. Synodical Reports:
We remind the classis delegates of reports coming to Synod 2023: (a) Ecclesiastical Marriage, (b) Bivocationality, and (c) Updated Procedure for Classis Delegations to Synod (Church Order Article 45).

Classical Ministry Leadership Team Classis Report *Spring 2023*

Members: Rev. Doug DeGroot, Rev. Adam Eisenga (chair), Mr. Orlan Gulker, Rev. Kurt Monroe, Mr. Nathan Nieuwendorp, and Mr. Bob VanRuler

Anna (Christians) Mooers is at Western Theological Seminary (remotely). She is enrolled in the EPMC program at Calvin Seminary and is currently interested in serving as a chaplain. She is a member of Covenant CRC in Sioux Center.

Trevor Mouw is now at Calvin Seminary (remotely). He is a member of Faith CRC in Sioux Center. He is hoping to serve as a pastor of a congregation. He is receiving financial assistance for this school year.

We currently have two individuals—**Brent Nymeyer** and **Dustin VanderHaar**—who are repaying their loans monthly and have been for some time.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the CMLT,
Rev. Adam Eisenga

Classical Missions Team Classis Report *Spring 2023*

Members – Rev. Drew Hoekema (chair), Rev. Adam Eisenga (secretary), Gord Dyk, Robyn Kelderman, Piet Koene, Jacklyn Nieuwendorp (liason w/ finance committee), Rev. Gary Maas, and Rev. Gideon Wamala

We discussed **drawing down our budget surpluses**. We decided that the best way forward would be for us to communicate the situation to the ministries and give them the option to either receive the funds or have us hold the funds for them for future need.

We discussed the **criteria by which to decide on future missions works**. We will decide based on whether a pre-existing relationship between the individual and our classis exists and whether the individual is working through Resonate. After that, we will take it on a case-by-case basis.

We discussed how best to keep our classical missionaries before the churches.

We hope to discuss the following with the delegates at our March classis meeting. Please read it and consider the questions at the end to aid in our discussion:

A Call for Church Planting in Classis Iakota

In the Great Commission, Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations. Throughout the book of Acts and all the epistles, we read about how the apostles and the early church took that calling to heart and established churches throughout the Mediterranean world and beyond. Afterwards, the church has continued to bring the gospel to more and more people, planting churches in many countries and regions, including in North America. The CRC has played a vibrant role in church planting, sending missionaries to many places to bring the gospel to others. As the CRC spread across the U.S., many CRC churches were established and grew, including those of Classis Iakota. As such, it is important for all of us, including the churches of this Classis, to continue to bring the gospel to as many people as possible.

During more recent times, the churches of Classis Iakota have paid important attention to **church revitalization**, ensuring that the members of the churches continue to grow in their faith and that the next generations would continue to be part of the churches. This has taken many forms, such as the physical expansion of church buildings, more extensive facilities, new and revitalized programs for the many age groups in the churches, discipleship activities, etc. In order to have a strong missional perspective in order to reach the unchurched, it is vital to have strong, multi-generational churches.

However, when looking at recent history in Classis Iakota, we see that few **new churches** have been established. When the demographics of our churches are reviewed, we need to ask whether or not the makeup of our churches is reflecting the changing demographics of the area in which we live. For Classis Iakota to continue to grow and thrive, it is of utmost importance that we continue to follow the call of the Great Commission.

Although inward-looking growth and programs are key to strong churches and a strong Classis, we also need to be outward-looking, seeking out the unchurched, and one way to do that is by planting entirely new churches. Though it is not the only way, it is one essential way. Perhaps the idea of establishing new churches among different demographic populations (different from the traditional groups in CRC churches) can sound daunting. Nevertheless, that is what we are called to do, and the New Testament is filled with examples of Paul going out to new regions and different population centers, establishing churches and with a call to them to seek out even more unchurched peoples.

The Opportunity for Church Planting in Classis Iakota

Beyond the question of why a church plant ought to be considered by councils and congregations, there is the question of where. One could simply consider the geography of Classis Iakota, stretching from Sioux Center in the Southeast corner, all the way across southern South Dakota, to Spearfish in the Northwest corner. But where are our current ministries? Consolidated in the southeast. Thus, when considering where the opportunities are ripe, the old American adage applies again: “Go west!”

The most obvious spot for potential harvest is the nearby, growing, western corridor of **Sioux Falls**. Our churches are consolidated in the eastern and southern area, and yet how many unbelievers could be better reached by a new ministry on the west side? Further west is **Vermillion**, one of the few towns in our area with a major state university, which also has few vibrant, Bible-centered campus outreach ministries. As you continue west, there are many communities lacking solid churches, let alone a Reformed witness. For example, our recent discussion about **Chamberlain** revealed at least that the need was great. Most of all, our eyes land upon the growing harvest fields in and around the **Black Hills**, and communities like Rapid City, Custer, Sturgis and Spearfish (home to Black Hills State University).

But perhaps you only need to look in your own town, or in a neighboring town. The question can easily arise: “does x town really need yet another CRC church?” But in the topic of ‘where,’ it must be asked if such questions arise out of a missionary mindset, or a “market-share” mindset. A better question in response might be, “are there still unsaved people in that town?”

The question is, how can the churches of Classis Iakota respond to our calling and continue to establish more churches?

We ask the delegates to consider the following questions for discussion during our March meeting:

- What considerations may have kept your own congregation from considering a church plant since 2000 (to choose a round number)?
- What excites you about the thought of new churches in our classis?
- What signs of vitality do you see in your own congregation as to spreading the gospel locally? -How could we, as a classical missions team, best encourage or equip the churches for our call to grow the church?

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Adam Eisenga

Finance Committee
Report to Classis lakota - March 2023

Items of Note

- The treasurer wishes to address the increasing costs borne by host churches for classis meetings. At present Classis lakota reimburses the host church at a rate of \$8.00 per plate. The Finance Committee does not want classis to burden host churches. We will research the actual costs incurred by churches. We will also consult neighboring classes to learn their method for reimbursing churches for hosting our meetings. Expect a recommendation in September 2023.
- The committee reviewed the progress of receiving classical ministry share payments from the churches. Treasurer Bob Van Ruler reports receipts are mostly in line with the budgeted requests. He will report on 2022 classical ministry share giving at the March 2023 meeting.
- Treasurer Van Ruler reported on the progress of receiving denominational ministry share pledges for 2024 from the churches. These are to be reported by mid-February 2023.
- The Finance Committee had not yet received records of the 2021 Classis lakota financials from the treasurer in order to review (“audit”) the work. Treasurer Van Ruler assured the committee those records would be turned over soon for the committee’s work. That review began in February 2023. It will be completed and reported to the September 2023 classis meeting. The committee discussed the challenge of submitting an audit report to the March regular meetings of Classis lakota. The committee expects in the future to report the findings of its review of the treasurer’s work at the regular classis meetings in September. Should the Finance Committee judge a matter needs attention sooner than September will be handled in consultation with the Classical Interim Committee.
- The Finance Committee discussed the wisdom of providing access to Classis lakota bank account information to the assistant / alternate treasurer, along with the treasurer of classis. At present, only the treasurer of classis has the privilege of access to bank account information. See the recommendation below.
- The Classical Missions Team informed the Finance Committee that surplus funds for each of its causes will be handled in one of three ways:
 - A cause, ministry, or mission may receive a lump sum payment of the surplus held by Classis lakota.
 - The surplus may be distributed over two years.
 - The surplus will be held by Classis lakota. Regardless, the cause, ministry, or mission will be aware of the amount of any surplus held by Classis lakota.
- When Classis lakota formed the Finance Committee, its members were to begin staggering three-year terms after March 2023’s classis meeting. The committee asks classis to delay that move for one year, until March 2024. Members of the committee are still developing the process for reviewing the treasurer’s work, and it would be helpful if the current members, Eric Maas and Darrel Raih, could complete that development.

Recommendations

- 1. That Classis lakota 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 lakota 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 lakota approve the work of the Finance Committee.**

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

Church Visitor Report – Corsica

On **October 18, 2022**, at about 8:00 in the evening, elder Wayne Lefers and myself made our way down into the depths of the basement of Corsica Christian Reformed Church. While we had no intention of making our beds there and spending the night, and the council assured us that they surely didn't plan on staying that long, we were assured as Psalm 139 states, that God was there with us.

The council meeting which we attended was a joint meeting of the elders and deacons of both Corsica CRC and of Grace Reformed Church, led by Pastor Scott Nichols. These two churches have been sharing a pastor and worshipping together for approximately fifteen years. Pastor Scott currently attends three council meetings each month. One with each of the separate councils, and one that is a joint meeting.

When asked how things seemed to be going, having council meetings this way, they replied that they work together well, they try to keep the meetings light, and that they enjoy laughing together.

The council all agreed that they really appreciate the leadership and experience that Pastor Scott has given them for the past two years and that both churches have been blessed by him returning to Corsica after having served on the east coast for twenty five years. The churches have both celebrated new members and families joining them in worship and celebrating together baptisms, professions of faith, and weddings. They expressed their appreciation for the youth group leaders in the church, and how they lead a two community youth groups of both junior and senior high students which keep very active in a variety of activities, such as service projects, Bible studies, and a trip to the Noah's Ark replica in Kentucky.

When asked if there anything that they would like to see change in their churches, some of them replied that they would like to see the two churches become one entity. There seemed to be some hesitation in this, as it was said that when they are together it feels like they are really one church, but that they really didn't want to push something and ruin the good thing that they have going.

Elder Wayne Lefers agreed to offer a prayer for these two churches, that God would continue to bless them as they work together for His kingdom.

As we were preparing to leave, elder James De Boer asked if he could tell a joke before we left. He was given the go ahead and proceeded to tell a joke about a west river rancher who was weary of putting up hay. The rancher went to an old Indian chief several times to ask him what the winter was going to be like. Each time the rancher came to ask him, the chief would reply that the winter was going to be increasingly sever, which would send the rancher home to put up more hay. Finally the rancher asked the chief how he came to such a conclusion. The chief replied by saying that with all the hay the white men were putting up that year it had to be a rough winter.

Everyone laughed, and yet it seemed a bit symbolic of us as churches and denominations, how we often don't want to become too involved with each other but make our decisions based on what others are doing.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gary Maas

Lakeview Christian Reformed Church Visit

On the evening of November 14, 2022 elder Steven Veenstra and myself journeyed to Lakeview to visit their council meeting at 7:00. We arrived just a couple of minutes late as some of the usual road markers were not visible on a dark cloudy night. We were greeted with homemade hot chocolate, a courtesy of Pastor Joshua Stammis.

Pastor Josh opened the meeting by reading from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and prayer. Their minutes and treasures report were given. Everything seemed to be handled in an orderly manner. The council consists of two elders and two deacons.

A discussion was held as to whether or not to have a Thanksgiving service. It was decided to have a Thanksgiving Eve service and to take an offering for Ruth Veltcamp. The church will also host a coat drive for Christmas. Pastor Josh shared that he plans to preach on the book of Ruth for advent.

The council seems to be appreciative of the work that Pastor Josh is doing after being there his first year of ministry; from the sermons he preaches, to the men's Wednesday morning coffee, and the children's school release program that he helps to conduct. They decided to reward him with a 3% pay increase, which he was very grateful for, stating that it was the first pay raise he had ever received.

Lakeview CRC continues to reach out to the children in their community by providing the Prairie Light Bible School program for children K-5th grade. They continue to look for more ways to reach out to those on the reservation who have reservations about the church.

The people from Lakeview CRC think of themselves at a tight knit group of people who are blessed to be able to come together to worship and encourage each other. While they may come together over many miles, they are close together in heart.

Elder Veenstra offered a prayer for the Lakeview Church, then he and myself made our way back to Harrison over lightly snow covered roads having been blessed by the perseverance of the saints at Lakeview CRC.

Pastor Gary Maas

Harrison Community Church visit

On the evening of October 3, 2022, myself and Rev. Drew Hoekema visited with the council of the Harrison Community Church (henceforth Harrison). The members of council—like all members of Harrison—belong to both the CRC and the ARC. They spoke about how they handled this union and the unity they now enjoy.

The Harrison council expressed their thankfulness for Pastor Gary Maas. They appreciate his preaching, care for the congregation, and involvement in the community. Pastor Gary has been preaching through highlights of the Old Testament starting at Genesis to build biblical literacy. He is now in 1 Kings. Pastor Gary also serves Grandview Reformed in Armour, SD.

Harrison is blessed with many young families and are thankful to have the right members in the right volunteer positions. They have been enjoying a period of growth.

The state of both the ARC facility and CRC facility necessitated either one renovation, two renovations, or a new building project. Harrison decided to build a new facility to further solidify their union. They have been creative with fundraising and are thankful to have the facility question settled.

There was comradery among the members of council. The chair capably kept the meeting moving and ensured that decisions were clear and responsibilities assigned. The council meeting serves as the leadership meeting for the month—meaning there are not regular elder or deacon meetings. These bodies meet on an “as needed” basis to deal with the respective areas.

Harrison, like so many congregations, has had difficulties stemming from covid. Some members have yet to return to in-person worship. We discussed the benefits and liabilities of live streaming.

The Harrison council keeps up to date financial information and reliable minutes. They are serving the Lord in the community in which He has placed them, and we give thanks to Him for their good work.

Rev. Adam Eisenga

Minn-I-Kota Youth Network Report

Thank you all for the continued support of our youth, our youth leaders, and Minn-I-Kota Youth Network (MIK Youth). Over the past 13 years I have seen a lot of changes in youth culture and in our world around us, but there are a few things that never change and I hold on tightly to these promises. Our God never ever changes. No matter what...we can trust God... He is consistent. He and His Word are the same yesterday, today, and forever! **Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8.**

BOARD MEMBERS ***Minnkota Classis:** Representative-Pastor Greg Timmer-9/2022, Karmen Vis-Co Secretary-9/2017, Sarah Van Dyken-Co Secretary-5/2019. ***lakota Classis:** Representative-Pastor Henry Lengkeek-9/2018, Dan Elgersma-President-1/2019, Shelli Kollis-1/2020, ***Heartland Classis:** Representative-Pastor Ben Wiersma-9/2021, Kody Tesch-Treasurer-11/2019, Beth Heerspink-4/2021

I am Lee De Groot. I have had the privilege of serving Minnkota, lakota, and Heartland Classis as your Youth Ministry Coordinator through (MIK Youth 2/1/2011) and as the Champion Representative (2016)/Executive Team Member (2019) for Faith Formation in Youth Ministry. I often say my passion for youth ministry is because a long time ago I too was young ☺ , but also because of my 5 children and now my growing number of grandchildren (#12 due in March, #13 due in June, and #14 due in July).

This fall my husband, Pastor Doug De Groot (Pastor of Rock Rapids, IA CRC), joined me in a part time paid position. This has been a blessing as he helps me with various events. Together we also do a lot of brainstorming and talking about “what’s next”.

This year we have brought back the Travelling Lesson Plan. I had taken two years off during the COVID years. This year’s lesson is from Numbers 22. The title is “Would You Rather-The Talking Donkey”. If your church would like us to come and teach this lesson, please, contact us and we will get you on our calendar. We will continue this lesson through 2023.

The Jr High Retreat is coming up—April 21, 22, and 23 at Inspiration Hills. This event is in its 13th year and we look forward to it every year. We continue to partner with Dordt University and started meeting with our team of Student Leaders this past October. Our theme this year is “Satisfied” and is taken from the John 4:13-14. The registration forms will be handed out at the Classis meetings. This year three of the 26 DU Student Leaders went through this retreat when they were in Jr High...That is full circle ministry.

Be watching for a new Leaders’ event coming in Feb 2024. MIK Youth will be partnering with Ryan Feltman (Synod of the Heartland), Ron de Vries (Faith Formation Ministries), and Rick Zomer (Therefore Go Ministries) to bring your leaders a local event designed for each individual.

MIK Youth was blessed with a “parting gift” from Rapid City, SD Hope CRC. The MIK Board has set up “THE RC HOPE SCHOLARSHIP FUND”. If you know of an individual who is in need of aid to attend an upcoming MIK Youth event, please contact me or a board member. It is our “HOPE” to offer these scholarships for many years to come because of this generous gift from RC Hope CRC!

Thank you for all your continued support in this ever-changing world! Let us know how we can serve you and our youth.

God Bless~~Lee & Pastor Doug De Groot

Classis Heartland & lakota Safe Church Report Spring 2023

Prepared by: Tara Boer, lakota & Heartland Safe Church Coordinator
Submitted: 02/06/23

lakota & Heartland Classical Safe Church Team Members: Pastor Henry Lengkeek (Trinity CRC, lakota) Heidi Van Roekel (Bethel CRC-lakota), Pastor Jesse Walhof (Living Water CRC-Heartland), Kristi Habben (Sibley CRC-Heartland). Tara Boer (Hope CRC, Heartland).

Classical Safe Church Team Tasks:

- The Safe Church Team serves in a consultative role for churches in classis who are developing (or reviewing/revising) congregational safe church policies.
- The Safe Church Team serves as a resource for churches dealing with allegations of abuse.
- The Safe Church Team serves as a clearing house of best practices and periodic trainings for Classis Heartland and Classis lakota with regard to abuse awareness and prevention.

Team Meeting:

A team meeting took place on October 25, 2022 to discuss outcome of classes meetings. The team discussed the proposed signing of the code of conduct policy by ministry leaders, concerns for churches who report physical safety concerns from community and congregation members, and training initiatives needed for leaders and churches as they create and maintain effective safe church practices. The team will meet again in February.

Safe Church Committee Activity

Committee members continue to serve church leaders and congregations who ask for assistance and resources. Classes clerks forwarded an email and survey to churches for the purpose of understanding what ministry leaders need to support their safe church goals.

[Please complete this survey if you haven't already.](#)

Safe Church Team Goals:

The safe church team continues to ensure that each church have an updated safe church policy, conduct background checks on ministry leaders, and maintain a 2–3-person safe church team to over-see the policy. Ministry leaders can further prevent abuse by implementing the CRC supported Circle of Grace programming in their Sunday school classrooms. This curriculum takes 2-4 weeks of the year and provides age-appropriate education on boundaries, safe behaviors with others, the internet, and social media. Please contact Tara if you have questions about what services to use for background checks and how to get started with Circle of Grace.

Please also continue to follow the [CRC Safe Church](#) ministry page, blogs, and upcoming events. They offer many resources to ministry leaders and congregations in the form of education, training, policy formation, abuse prevention and response.

Please do not hesitate to contact a member of our committee if you would like to talk about any needs or problems that your church has. You may communicate with any committee member above or contact Tara directly at 712-898-6468 (cell) or tara.boer@dordt.edu

Hope CRC Disbandment Update

With assent from our congregation members, the council of Hope CRC has transferred the deed to all its real property to the Barnabas Foundation. Recently, Barnabas retained the Kahler Group, a realtor organization with associates who have strong ties to evangelical churches and Rapid City Christian School. The church property will soon be listed for sale at a price of \$599,000. You will, of course, hear about a sale because Classis Lakota will receive half of the sale price under the dispersal plan we previously submitted at prior classis meetings. A number of churches or other classical and CRC organizations also will receive some percentage of the final sale price.

Lifeway Church, a growing, local evangelical church that ran into difficulty with the purchase of a building it sought, has leased our church building since July 2022, and they have continued the lease with Barnabas. Their vibrant ministry fills the church building every Sunday with people and an energy that reassures our council that God guided us to the right decision in providing the space to them until a sale of our property is finalized.

We are working with the remaining members of our congregation to find a place to transfer their membership records. The council of the Harrison Community Church has agreed to hold any remaining records at the time we officially dissolve.

In November and December, the council voted to disperse most of the remaining cash in our accounts. The amounts were dispersed in the following amounts to the following organizations, which we believe carry on the mission Hope CRC sought to serve in our local and larger community:

- \$22,500 to Minn-I-Kota Youth
- \$10,000 to Passages - a faith-based, residential re-entry program to guide and support women as they transition from incarceration or homelessness into positive sustainable life patterns.
- \$12,500 to Front Porch Coalition - a prevention, intervention, and postvention service to the community that works to prevent the incidence of suicide.
- \$10,000 to Hope Center - a drop-in day center ministry aimed at serving those living in poverty and filling gaps in services.
- \$5,000 to Cornerstone Prison Church
- \$5,000 to One Heart - a transitional housing and co-locating organization providing a variety of services from addiction and mental health counseling to life skills and job training
- \$5,000 to Care Campus - a Pennington County organization providing a full continuum of services offered to adults age 18 and over and families afflicted with substance use disorders and/or mental health conditions

We also intend to give whatever remains in our accounts to the Center for Church Renewal/ Legacy Project, which guided us through the process and assisted in setting up the transfer to Barnabas. Fortunately, we held back some cash because, since we made the above-listed distributions, the furnace went out in the church building, and pipes burst in the parsonage-education building during cold temperatures in late December, due to a thermostat failure. (On a positive note, our removal of the 30-or-more-year-old carpet in the basement of that building may have increased its value.)

President Jerry Vanden Bos, Deacon Gary Kreun, and I have been blessed to be involved in the closure process. While we do not recommend it to others, we are honored that the Lord entrusted us with this task. Moreover, Nora Vanden Bos and Carol Kreun have been invaluable in keeping us organized with many details, not the least of which were bookkeeping, contacting and scheduling local charities to come pick up items we gave away, as well as cleaning, cleaning some more, and cleaning again.

On behalf of the council of the nearly completed ministry of Hope CRC, we thank you for your prayerful attention, assistance, and guidance as we complete this part of our calling.

For the council,
Eric Kelderman

January 28, 2023