

The *Hesed* Project

Your voice matters

You may not be an ordained member of your church council, or perhaps you have been previously ordained and are not serving now, but your voice still matters. Your church leaders need to know about your concerns and you do not need to take sides. Here are some suggestions for letter-writing or conversation-starting that open doors instead of closing them.

- Ask your elder or pastor or church leader what they are thinking about Synod's decision and share your concerns; offer to pray for specific wisdom on this matter as well as offer general prayer for your leaders.
- Convey interest in discussing the matter as a congregation. You don't need to accept an explanation that people are not interested, or it is too divisive to talk about. Not talking about it can cause more harm to vulnerable people -- we know this from years of work attempting to end abuse in the church.
- Ask what your church council is planning to do. Do not accept that the council should decide for the whole congregation without discussion. That has happened in some churches and is harmful for persons who are struggling with these issues; you can help prevent that from happening in your church.

You can convey sentiments like these by engaging in an in-person conversation with a pastor, elder, or church leader you trust. Some people find it easier to put their thoughts in writing. Crafting a letter allows you to be careful with what you are expressing, and gives you the opportunity to engage with humility, generosity, and care for your readers. Here are some answers to questions you might have.

Q. Am I being disloyal, divisive, or a troublemaker if I write a letter?

No, you are exercising your responsibility as a member of the CRC. We believe every member serves as prophet, priest, and king in communal discernment of what God calls us to do.

Second, the first HSR decision of Synod 2022 calls for reflection and dialogue that includes:

- Consideration of what it means to live a healthy Christian sexual life for both married and single persons
- Dialogue and research among scholars in a wide variety of fields from biblical studies to biology and social sciences.
- Listening and supporting conversations among diverse groups, including youth and voices not heard.

A pre-condition for meaningful implementation of this Synod direction is the kind of open exploration that Hersed Project CRC encourages. We trust God enough to not close doors on other viewpoints within the body of Christ.

Finally, as John Lewis famously said, Christians need to get into “good trouble” to be agents of God’s mercy and justice.

Q. If I write a letter, what could it include?

There is no one right way to write a letter, but, similar to the advice given for those writing a gravamen, here are some things a letter could include.

1. State your concern, as clearly as you can.

You may have concerns about the potential for harm caused by the decisions of Synod. You may have concerns about the unity and witness of the church in general or your congregation in particular. You may think the topic requires further study or conversation in your church.

For many, a primary concern relates to the decision to define violation of the Seventh Commandment as a list of specific sins and give that list the same status as the core confessions of the CRC. The specific motion of Synod 2022 reads:

That synod affirm that ‘unchastity’ in the Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extra-marital sex, polyamory, pornography and homosexual sex, all of which violate the Seventh Commandment. In so doing, synod declares this affirmation ‘an interpretation of [a] confession’ (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status.’”

In one specific application of this decision, Synod 2022 went on to rule that persons living in committed, same-sex relationships cannot serve as office-bearers in the CRC.

You may have other concerns about using the HSR report as an authoritative teaching tool about human sexuality, impacts of the whole report, or its impact on pastoral care. State the concerns as clearly as you can; use trusted resources; ask for help from those you trust or consult with the Hesed Project CRC team (advice@hesedprojectcrc.org) or others.

2. Make it personal

State why this is important for you as a member of the CRC. What are the impacts for you, your family, those you support, those to whom you minister or who minister to you, or in how you follow Jesus in your life?

3. Affirm your commitment to Jesus and to the CRC as a church

Include a re-affirmation of your faith and your calling to follow Jesus and contribute to God's mission in God's world through God's church. Convey your willingness to engage with others in communal discernment, with humility, honesty, grace – taking seriously both personal and communal discipleship.

Don't hesitate to reach out to us with questions or to share your letter-writing experiences. This is an important way to encourage each other and for your voice to be heard! Contact us at advice@hesedprojectcrc.org