

# The *Hesed* Project

## Wise Words from Church Members – Chastity

### Introduction

Hesed Project CRC has been in contact with leaders and members of various Christian Reformed Churches who are preparing letters, gravamina, and overtures to express their concerns about some of the decisions made by Synod 2022 with regard to human sexuality. We respect that each gravamen or letter is a personal and pastoral matter between an office bearer or member and their church council. They contain words of wisdom that are useful for others; sharing common themes, without identifying information and with permission, is consistent with one of Synod's decisions, which called for continued research and dialogue. Synod then went on to contradict the focus on dialogue by creating conditions of fear, exclusion, and punishment. The Hesed Project CRC will continue to promote open discussion and continuous learning. That's what Hesed – God's gracious and steadfast lovingkindness – looks like in our world.

The wise words are organized into six different themes. This document explores Chastity and Heidelberg Catechism Question & Answer 108, but the full document, with all six themes, is available [here](#).

1. **Chastity and Heidelberg Catechism Question & Answer 108**
2. Interpretation of Scripture
  - Covenant, Belonging, and Unconditional Love
  - Image-bearing, Moral Agency, and Conscience
  - Creation Order and Creation Norms
3. Harm
4. Justice: An essential, missing piece
5. Local Church as Locus for Pastoral Care
6. Unity and How We Make Decisions

Interested in engaging with other church leaders on any of these topics or with other questions you may have? Send us a confidential email and let us know what avenues you're exploring or the assistance you may need. The Hesed Project CRC is happy to help. [Email us](#).



## Chastity and Heidelberg Catechism Question & Answer 108

A primary focus for responses to Synod 2022 was Synod's decision to interpret chastity as prohibiting a list of specific activities and then give that list confessional status, which makes it binding within the CRC. Below are reflections gleaned from letters and draft gravamina.

- Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 108 is about the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment, which protects faithful, committed marriage relationships, grounded in equal respect for both partners as image-bearers of God. Synod's interpretation forbids sex within faithful, committed, same-sex marriages. Whether one approves of gay marriage or not, applying the seventh commandment to forbid married people from having sex is inconsistent with its original intent.
- A person who has sex only with one's marriage partner would never aptly be described as "unchaste," according to any plain and commonly understood definition of the term. The plain meaning of the word unchastity has to do with unfaithful expressions of sex: "sexual suggestiveness, transgression, or excess; lascivious; bawdy." The ironic consequence of Synod's decision is that a married gay couple who are faithful to each other for a lifetime are considered to be practicing adultery and unchastity.
- Synod's interpretation makes an unfair judgment on faithful relationships by categorizing them as unfaithful. Whether we believe they ought to exist or not, calling faithful relationships unfaithful fails to understand the nature and meaning of these relationships for both the persons involved and for the larger community.
- Calling faithful relationships unfaithful is demeaning to persons in them. It violates Question & Answer 105, in which the Heidelberg Catechism says demeaning behavior is murder. Questions & Answers 105 and 108 need to be taken together, in the context of the second half of the 10 Commandments and the gratitude theme of the final section of the Heidelberg Catechism.
- Monogamous and loving same-sex relationships did not exist at the time the Heidelberg Catechism was written. In these marriage relationships, two people enter into a lifelong commitment which demonstrates the same love, care, and mutual submission found in God-honouring heterosexual marriages. Many same-sex marriages exemplify characteristics of faithful life that are important for the individuals and for the community. Since they were not known at the time, they could not be included in the original intent of the Heidelberg Catechism.
- Basic Reformed sexual ethics has always respected and blessed consensual sexual relationships within committed marriage but held that sexual relationships outside of marriage are not acceptable. When the Heidelberg Catechism was written, all homosexual sex was by definition outside marriage, and most was exploitative instead of



consensual. We live in a moment when something new has emerged that was not envisioned: committed, legal same-sex marriages. Rather than giving this new situation careful consideration, Synod 2022 condemned it by a document written hundreds of years before there was even such a thing as married homosexual sex.

- This decision has a harmful impact on the covenant children of our denomination who identify as LGBTQ+, whether children, youth, or adults, adding to harm they already experience in our society.

