

Fellowship CRC Edmonton Overture in Response to Synod 2022's adoption of HSR

Background

Committed to inclusivity, Fellowship Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton desires to “welcome all who seek to follow Christ to participate as full members in the life of our church. We strive to remain faithful to the promises made at baptism, welcoming and nurturing the faith of all God’s children. We seek to build community in the midst of diversity and honour God’s greatest commandment – to love one another as Christ loves us” (Fellowship CRC Statement of Inclusion, adopted 2015).

Our commitment to welcome God’s children and invite them to full participation in the life of the church extends to *all*, including “people of all ages, colours, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, ethnic origins, and economic circumstances” (Fellowship CRC Statement of Inclusion). Our church arrived at this statement after several years of common prayer, theological reflection, learning, and discernment, and we communicated the statement to the church visitors of Classis Alberta North in 2015. We have tried to live up to this statement of inclusion, recognizing that we are broken people on a journey of learning who need God’s grace, Christ’s teaching, and the empowerment of Christ’s spirit.

Our church is convinced that the deliberations over the Human Sexuality Report at Synod 2022 and the decision to adopt the corresponding majority report, including the interpretive statement on Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 108, are at odds with our Christ-inspired commitment to welcome and love all of God’s children.

Overture

Fellowship Christian Reformed Church of Edmonton requests that Classis Alberta North overture Synod to:

- Create a local option for Christian Reformed Church communities in the CRCNA who wish to allow all LGBTQ+ Christians – either celibate, single, or in committed same-sex relationships - to participate fully in the life of the church, including as office-bearers.
- Correspondingly, remove the phrase “and homosexual sex” from the Synod 2022 decision (copied in italics, below) as it is at odds with a local option.

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.

- Continue to critically and openly engage the Human Sexuality Report which provided the theological framework for Synod’s deliberations. This, at the very least, will require a more robust minority report written by a committee not bound by the 1973 Synodical decision on homosexuality and open to a diversity of Reformed scholarship.

Rationale

- While Fellowship CRC is not asking that all churches interpret the Scriptures and Christian tradition as we do, we do ask that our church and others like ours be given the freedom to minister to our community from a foundation of biblical interpretation that

does allow for same-sex intimacy within the covenant of marriage. The very existence of a variety of robust biblical and theological arguments for the inclusion of celibate *and* married LGBTQ+ Christians in the church signals that there is not theological or pastoral consensus on this topic. We are asking that the CRCNA recognize that the conclusions of the HSR are but one interpretation of scripture, allowing for other interpretations. This would give local congregations, like Fellowship CRC, the freedom to be open and affirming of full participation by LGBTQ+ persons in the life and membership of our congregation while still belonging to the covenant community of the CRCNA.

- Pastoral care and community building with those in the LGBTQ+ community, their families, and their allies, has been severely damaged by the decisions of Synod 2022. Those churches who wish to offer genuine care and welcome to LGBTQ+ Christians must have the local authority to do so with integrity. Though the pastoral care section of the HSR and the synodical discussion of the majority report at Synod 2022 expressed a desire to be compassionate and welcoming, in the end this desire seems by many to be incompatible with Synod's conclusion that LGBT people who are not celibate may not participate fully in the life of the church.
- The HSR of 2022 did not engage robustly with theological understandings of same-sex relationships that differ from those articulated in the report. A number of prominent Reformed biblical scholars and theologians have provided compelling arguments for the full inclusion of same-sex relationships in the church. The *Classis Grand Rapids Study Report on Biblical and Theological Support Currently Offered by Christian Proponents of Same-Sex Marriage* (January 2016) is a helpful summary of just some of these arguments. The HSR relied on a definition of Reformed theology indebted to the notion of 'the order of creation', a construct that is not unanimously accepted among Reformed scholars, and which is absent in the theology of John Calvin himself. The absence of careful engagement with these arguments and the apparent refusal to engage with differing voices in a spirit of generosity and listening hampered the discussion of the HSR at Synod 2022 by withholding the full spectrum of Christian wisdom – Reformed and otherwise – on this vital topic.