

The Council of West End CRC overtures Classis Alberta North to send the following overture to Synod 2023

Preamble:

Synod 2022 declared 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 declares this affirmation "an interpretation of [a] confession" (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status."

This decision to raise to confessional status an interpretation of the word "unchastity" in Question & Answer 108 (Q&A 108) has raised questions about procedure as to whether such a declaration can be made by a single Synod or whether it constitutes a change to the confessions. It has also led to confusion and disagreement in many churches with uncertainty about the scope of Synod's decision: can members who disagree with this interpretation make public profession of faith, remain members, present their children for baptism, serve as office-bearers, or sign the Covenant for Office-bearers? We also note that this is following on the heels of a pandemic and its subsequent continuing effects. This has placed considerable strain on church councils and congregations who are finding themselves working through the implications of the Synod 2022 decision before they have restored community post-COVID.

We believe for both pastoral and process reasons that Synod 2022 acted too hastily and should have given the churches, agencies, and institutions of our denomination time and opportunity to reflect on, and speak into, such a decision before the decision was made. This would include addressing how the church should pastorally address the different beliefs members have on this issue. Regardless of our views on matters of human sexuality, recognizing that the church may not be able to resolve these differences, we believe the process regarding confessional 'change' and allowing the churches to consider and speak to such changes is very important. The issue of how we live together with those differences is the immediate concern we need to address to pursue unity in the faith and in the church.

We believe that Synod 2023 would help the church in this by withholding implementation of the 2022 change to the confessions to pursue a more holistic, pastoral and proper process. This does not address the position the CRC has had, but asks specifically to withhold implementation of the function of such a position by not declaring it to have confessional status at this time.

Overture:

1) That Synod 2023 declare that Synod 2022's definition of unchastity in Q&A 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism as having confessional status was a change to the confessions, and that Synod 2023 withhold implementation of that decision of Synod 2022 to allow time for proper process to be followed.

Grounds:

- a. Q&A 108 prior to Synod 2022 did not define the word "unchastity".
- b. By its declaration Synod 2022 elevated an interpretation of that word to the level of confession. Many see this as being in conflict with the report that Synod 1975 adopted entitled "Synodical Pronouncements and the Confessions" which states that "no synodical decision involving doctrinal or ethical pronouncements to be considered on a par with the confessions" (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 598)
- c. This introduced a specific change to the confessions during the sessions of Synod 2022 that did not receive prior discussion and deliberation by the church and classes.

d. Insufficient rationale was given to explain the significant change in function from pastoral advice (1973) to confessional status (2022).

e. The churches did not receive sufficient time to consider and properly weigh the implications and effects of this declaration upon the churches, its office-bearers, and its members.

2) That Synod review the implications of such a confessional assertion, and how such a definition attached to or included in the confessions functions before implementing such a declaration.

Grounds:

The confusion, lack of direction and conflict within our churches, agencies, and institutions in seeking to work out the implications of the Synod 2022 declaration demonstrate that much more deliberation and planning is required before a declaration of this kind is made.

3) That Synod, pending the above, submit any clarification of unchastity and the interpretation of Q&A 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism with appropriate rationale to the churches for consideration, with deliberation and subsequent vote at a future synod.

Grounds:

a. Such changes will have momentous impact on our congregations, assemblies, agencies, and institutions so all due diligence must be done to ensure that these changes are worthy and that any negative results will be sufficiently mitigated.

b. This will allow a period of dialogue as a denomination before the potential of schism, to discern if there is a way 'to be one' (John 17:20,21) in spite of differences, and if not, what might be the most God honoring way forward.