

Overture on Due Consideration, Church Order Article 29

Classis Lake Erie adopted this overture from River Terrace CRC

Re: Synod 2022 decision, 2020 Report on Human Sexuality

BACKGROUND

The decision of Synod 2022 to declare its interpretation of “unchastity” in the Heidelberg Catechism as having confessional status has been difficult for RTC [River Terrace Church]. Prior to 2022, we understood the decisions of Synod 1973 relating to same-sex attraction and same-sex intimate relationships were intended as pastoral advice. This advice had considerable weight, but it was not determined to have confessional status. This was great for RTC. It reflected the CRC’s teaching on the subject, but left room for differing viewpoints. It allowed us to focus on the gospel, and remain in good relationship with each other and the CRC. We recognized that in view of changes to societal norms we had work to do on how to faithfully and effectively address human sexuality matters in our ministry. We think we were positioned to address this challenge in a constructive way.

Since Synod 2022, RTC’s reality has changed. The confessional status decision now severely hampers full engagement on this matter. Many, who previously felt safe to disagree, now feel unable to express their sincerely held beliefs. They must agree with Synod, or accept a limited status within the CRC. Some are now reluctant to be associated with the Christian Reformed denomination. This matter has potential to divide us.

SCOPE

Our overture is limited in scope. It is not intended as an objection to or an endorsement of the biblical position articulated in the HSR. Our overture focuses on the process that led up to the report, and that ultimately assigned confessional status.

Per Church Order, Article 29, “Decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon due consideration.” By specifying that “The committee will be constituted of twelve individuals, CRC members, who adhere to the CRC’s biblical view on marriage and same sex relationships,” due consideration was significantly compromised.

We believe that if a Synodical committee had intentionally been composed of those adhering to the CRC’s long-standing position, along with those not in agreement with that position, it would have been a good step in meeting the threshold of due consideration. A discovery process where opposing positions could be fully represented, compared side-by-side, and placed before the churches and Synodical delegates would have supported the requirement of due consideration.

We think such a process, at minimum, champions all voices in the church. We think such a process would contribute to unity and understanding.

CONCLUSION

We cannot change the past. The work of the HSR committee, as constituted, is complete. The HSR report has been published. However, we contend that the process leading to a determination of confessional status lacked the necessary rigor required for “due consideration.”

OVERTURE

River Terrace Church asks Classis Lake Erie to support an overture to the Synod of the CRCNA. We are asking Synod to rescind the interpretation of unchastity in the Heidelberg Catechism as having confessional status. The 2022 HSR report would remain as pastoral advice, as was the original report in 1973.

Grounds:

1. Christian Reformed Church Order, Article 29, provides in part: “Decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon due consideration.”
2. “Due consideration” includes the ability to reflect on the work of advocates committed to the positions under consideration.
3. The limitation of the HSR study committee’s composition mandated by Synod 2016 precludes “due consideration” and is therefore an inadequate basis for Synod 2022’s decision regarding confessional status