TRANSFER OF CONGREGATION BETWEEN TWO REGIONAL SYNODS

1. The Classis of Chicago overtures the General Synod to transfer Faith Community Reformed Church of Stickney, Illinois, with all of its assets and liabilities, from the Classis of Chicago, Regional Synod of Mid-America, to the Classis of the City, Regional Synod of the Far West.

Reasons:
1. The General Synod has responsibility and authority to transfer churches from one regional synod to another (BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3 [2017 edition, p. 65]).
2. The consistory of Faith Community Reformed Church has asked for the transfer, believing the new classis alignment will better position the congregation for an increasingly strong future of intentional, creative, winsome service and witness to the gospel in their urban context.
3. The executive committees of the Classis of Chicago and the Classis of the City have affirmed the request for transfer, as has the Regional Synod of Mid-America.

In response to Overture 1, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

OV 18-1
To transfer Faith Community Reformed Church of Stickney, Illinois, with all of its assets and liabilities, from the Classis of Chicago, Regional Synod of Mid-America, to the Classis of the City, Regional Synod of the Far West. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. The mutual understanding of representatives of Chicago Classis, the Regional Synod of Mid-America, and Faith Community Reformed Church of Stickney, Illinois, is that Faith Community Reformed Church of Stickney can best serve the kingdom as part of City Classis.

AFFIRM THAT RCA WELCOMES INCLUSION OF LGBTQ PERSONS

2. The Reverend Classis of New Brunswick overtures the General Synod to affirm that, in a forensic review of the structure, purpose, offices, governance, established theology, and approved Standards, the Reformed Church in America categorically and unequivocally welcomes the inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the offices, commissions, positions, synods, classes, consistories, ministries, and operations of the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:
1. The Book of Church Order states in the Preamble that the purpose of the Reformed Church “is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works” (2017 edition, p. 1) “All” necessarily includes LGBTQ people.
2. The Book of Church Order states in the Preamble that the purpose of the RCA “is achieved most effectively when good order and proper discipline are maintained
by means of certain offices, governmental agencies, and theological and liturgical standards” (2017 edition, p.1). These established means to maintain good order and proper discipline are silent in matters related to whether LGBTQ people are excluded from the process the RCA uses to maintain good order and proper discipline.

3. “God is not a God of disorder but of peace”—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people (1 Corinthians 14:33, NIV). “All” necessarily includes LGBTQ people. Therefore, order is a way to express unity and achieve cooperation and harmony in the body of Christ as all people—including LGBTQ people—seek to fulfill the mission of the RCA. The Reformed Church in America practices a theology that is lived out in the ways all people live and work together. Order does not presume homogeneity but unity in spite of diversity (Romans 12:5).

In response to Overture 2, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

OV 18-2
To deny Overture 2. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. The Preamble of the BCO states that the purpose of the RCA, together with all other churches of Christ, is “to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works.” The emphasis is on the purpose of the RCA to minister to all people with the gospel of Jesus Christ and is not suggestive that the word “all” categorically and unequivocally qualifies everyone to the offices, commissions, positions, synods, classes, consistories, ministries, and operations of the Reformed Church in America.

FURTHER AMEND BCO DEFINITION OF OFFICE OF MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

3. The Classis of Schenectady overtures the General Synod to further amend the following section of the Book of Church Order, pending the approval of a change from the 2017 General Synod (MGS 2017, R 17-44, pp. 268–269) to ratify the current language (new additions underlined, deletions struck):

Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 4a

a. A minister serving a congregation is a pastor and teacher of the congregation to build up and equip the whole church for its ministry in the world. The minister preaches and teaches the Word of God, administers the sacraments under the authority of the consistory board of elders, shares responsibility with the elders and deacons and members of the congregation for their mutual Christian growth, exercises Christian love and discipline in conjunction with the elders, and endeavors that everything in the church be done in a proper and orderly way. As pastor and teacher the minister so serves and lives among the congregation that together they become wholly devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ in the service of the church for the world.

Reasons:
1. The board of elders is charged with providing “for the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments” as well as guarding “the sacraments of the church
from being profaned” (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 8 [2017 edition, p. 13]).

2. While the consistory is “guided by the following requirements in their provision of services of worship” to include the sacrament of baptism and the administration of the Lord’s Supper (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11, [2017 edition, pp. 15–16]), this is only to occur following the decision of the board of elders.

3. It is important that in a time where the roles of elder and minister are confused (i.e., the role of commissioned pastors), the order offers clarity on responsibilities in order to preserve the parity of offices.

In response to Overture 3, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

**OV 18-3**

To deny Overture 3. (ADOPTED)

**Reasons:**

1. In the *Book of Church Order*, the administration of the Lord’s Supper is clearly a responsibility of the consistory (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11(c) [2017 edition, p. 16]).

2. *BCO* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, “Responsibilities of the Board of Elders,” doesn’t contain any instructions of administering the sacraments. The Lord’s Supper is not mentioned at all in this article.

**AMEND RULES FOR SEATING GENERAL SYNOD DELEGATES**

4. The Classis of Dakota overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to amend the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod in regard to the Seating of Delegates (*Book of Church Order* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1 [2017 edition, p. 103]):

   An amendment to Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1, Seating of Delegates, to add subsection d:

   d. To be seated, the clerk of the classis must confirm that during the preceding year:

   1. No ministers of Word and sacrament or other classis members are actively living in a same-sex relationship.
   2. No congregations have allowed same-sex weddings in their sanctuary, facilities, or upon their property.
   3. No ministers of Word and sacrament or other classis members have officiated a same-sex marriage or union.

**Reasons:**

1. The classes that have ministers of Word and sacrament or classis members engaged in such practices are living in contradiction of the RCA’s constitution that marriage is between one man and one woman, for we have indeed affirmed that this is what the Standards of Unity teach: “To affirm that the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns ‘all unchastity,’ which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA’s Standards, therefore, entails
the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman” (MGS 2017, R 17-29, p. 161 [adopted]).

2. The classes that have ministers of Word and sacrament or classis members engaged in such practices are living in contradiction to the RCA’s theological statements (General Synods of 1978, 1979, 1994, 1998, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017) in regard to sexuality that an active same-sex sexual relationship is consistently described as a practice outside the will of God. At the same time, marriage is affirmed on more than one occasion to be “between one man and one woman,” found in some of the actions of synod-approved studies. Yet there has not been any approved theological statement of the General Synod that approved same-sex sexual activity or same-sex marriages as God-honoring.

4. The classes that have ministers of Word and sacrament engaged in such practices are living in contradiction of the vows ministers of Word and sacrament take upon their ordination and installation into their respective office of upholding the theology and constitution of the Reformed Church in America. “I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God. I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the classis, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and in accordance with the Liturgy and the Book of Church Order” (BCO, Formulary #3, “Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament” [2017 edition, p. 130]).

5. Presently, the General Synod does not seat a classis if the classis has not fully paid its assessments for that year. Theological and constitutional reasons should result in the same practice (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1 [2017 edition, p. 103]).

In response to Overture 4, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

OV 18-4
To amend the Bylaws of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order by adding the following as subsection “d” to Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1 [2017 edition, p. 103], under “Seating of Delegates,” for submission to the 2019 General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>d. To be seated, the clerk of the classis must confirm that during the preceding year:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No ministers of Word and sacrament or other classis members are actively living in a same-sex relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. No congregations have allowed same-sex weddings in their sanctuary, facilities, or upon their property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No ministers of Word and sacrament or other classis members have officiated a same-sex marriage or union.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons:
1. The classes that have ministers of Word and sacrament or classis members engaged in

2. Presently, the General Synod does not seat a classis if the classis has not fully paid its assessments for that year. Actions contrary to RCA theological statements and Standards could reasonably result in the same practice (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1 [2017 edition, p. 103]).

A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-4 as follows (additions are underlined):

4. No ministers of Word and sacrament or other classis members have actively discouraged infant baptism.

5. No ministers of Word and sacrament or other classis members have actively led a functionally Unitarian worship service.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To not adopt the amendment.

A motion was made and supported to refer OV 18-4 as follows:

To refer OV 18-4 to the 2020 Vision Group as part of the information they consider as they prepare to bring final recommendations in 2020.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To refer OV 18-4 to the 2020 Vision Group as part of the information they consider as they prepare to bring final recommendations in 2020.

**INTERPRETATION OF “HISTORIC AND FAITHFUL WITNESSES”**

5. The Holland Classis overtures the General Synod to direct its Commission on Theology to present an interpretation of the sentence, “I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.” This sentence is used in the Declaration for Licensed Candidates (*BCO*, Appendix, Formulary #1 [2017 edition, p. 129]), the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament (*BCO*, Appendix, Formulary #3 [2017 edition, pp. 130–131]), the Declaration for a General Synod Professor (*BCO*, Appendix, Formulary #7 [2017 edition, pp. 134–135]), and the Declaration for Commissioned Pastors (*BCO*, Appendix, Formulary #16 [2017 edition, p. 141]). We request that the interpretation presented by the commission address these questions as well as any other relevant question that arises within the commission: What has been the historical understanding of this sentence (i.e., why is this sentence in these declarations)? What had been understood that the person was declaring about the Standards when the declaration was made? What does “historic” mean? What does “faithful” mean? Has the understanding of the meaning of this declaration changed after the 2017 General Synod declaration about the interpretation of the Heidelberg
Catechism Q&A 108–109? If so, what is that understanding? Does the declarant affirm the action of the 2017 General Synod when the declarant states, “I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God?”

Reasons:

1. It is important that this sentence has a common interpretation and understanding for the sake of all persons who are required to make this declaration in front of a classis or General Synod. The sentence’s meaning has come into question because of the action of the 2017 General Synod that stated an interpretation of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109. This declarative sentence has been understood by some to mean that the Standards were interpreted in their context at the time the Standard was written. The General Synod in 2017 provided a present-day interpretation to the Heidelberg Catechism. It interpreted the Standard in a present-day context rather than a historical context.

2. The sentence “I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God” has been contained within the Declarations since 1973, if not earlier. We wonder what it means in this new century to say these words?

3. The action of the 2017 General Synod took a new step to provide a current interpretation to the catechism. With its action, the synod has opened the gateway to be challenged to provide contemporary understandings to other questions and statements in our Standards, such as the value and priority of infant baptism. Will other such contemporary interpretations alter the meaning of the sentence within the Declarations?

4. The Belgic Confession Article 36 states, “the government’s task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word.” The Reformed Church in America has not provided a contemporary interpretation of this sentence but recognizes that the sentence is part of the historic record of the document. Likewise, Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 80, which condemns the Mass, remains as a witness in the catechism without contemporary interpretation or alteration. Are these items now required to have a contemporary interpretation that is approved by the General Synod so that we understand their meaning, as was done with Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109?

5. The commissioned pastors, ministers, General Synod professors, and licensed candidates should be able to be aware of and understand what they are declaring before their hearers when they recite this sentence.

In response to Overture 5, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

OV 18-5
To deny Overture 5. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

1. The paper in the Commission on History’s report (pp. 281–284) is sufficient for what the classis is seeking.
6. The Holland Classis overtures the General Synod of 2018 to take the necessary action that has the effect of rescinding or nullifying R 17-29, the statement of the 2017 General Synod regarding Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109 (MGS 2017, R 17-29, p. 161).

Reasons:
1. The action by the 2017 General Synod created significant ambiguity in the use and meaning of the vows for ministry, i.e., the Declaration for Licensed Candidates, the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, and the Declaration for a General Synod Professor.
2. The action of the 2017 General Synod set a new protocol in the historic Reformed Church in America. The ramification of this protocol opens the way for the Standards to become contemporary pawns in a tug-of-war over the meaning of words.
3. Historic precedent calls for the present church to restrain itself from attempting to interpret historic standards in a present-day context. Examples:
   a. In 1972, the General Synod received an overture from Classis of Cascades [Overture #9] that “a thorough restudy of the answer to Question 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism be made with the intention of changing the answer to fit the situation today in order to foster Christian love and unity among sincere Christians.” The answer by the Synod: “Since the Heidelberg Catechism is an historical document speaking to a particular point in time, it is not subject to revision, but still offering opportunities for teaching today, WE RECOMMEND no action” (MGS 1972, pp. 87–88).
   b. Also at the 1972 General Synod, the Classis of East Sioux sent an overture to the General Synod [Overture #32] “to take action which will provide that question and answer 98 of the Heidelberg Catechism be removed into a footnote with the explanation that those in the ministry of the Reformed Church in America need not commit themselves to the position of not using visual aids in the teaching ministry of the church. Question 98 reads as follows: Q. — ‘But may not pictures be tolerated in churches as books for the laity?’ A. — ‘No; for we should not be wiser than God, who will not have his people taught by dumb idols, but by the lively preaching of his Word.’” The answer of the General Synod: “Since the Heidelberg Catechism is an historical document speaking to a particular point in time, it is not subject to revision, but still offering opportunities for teaching today, WE RECOMMEND no action” (MGS 1972, p. 99).
   c. The Classis of East Sioux also sent Overture #33: “… to take action which will provide that in the Belgic Confession, Article XXXVI, the following words be removed into a footnote with the explanation that those ordained into the ministry of the Reformed Church in America need not commit themselves to this position. Concerning Magistrates: ‘And their office is, not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also that they protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed, and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must, therefore, countenance the preaching of the word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honored and worshipped by everyone as he commands in His Word.’” The answer by the Synod: “Since the Belgic Confession is an historical document speaking to a particular point in time, it is not subject to revision, but still offering opportunities for teaching today, WE RECOMMEND no action” (MGS 1972, pp. 99–100).
   d. The 1972 General Synod Minutes also record this action: “A motion from the floor was ADOPTED to refer overtures 9, 32, and 33 to the Theological
Commission for study and report back to the 1973 General Synod” (MGS 1972, p. 100).

d. Report of the Theological Commission to the 1973 General Synod:

Overtures from the Classes of Cascades and East Sioux … suggesting changes to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, were referred to the Commission for study and report.

The Commission has studied and discussed the matter of revisions to the historic standards of the church. While we recognize that certain minor changes and omissions have been made in recent editions of the doctrinal standards with regard to matters where history has changed the evaluation of the church, we believe it is desirable to maintain the integrity of these standards as historical witnesses to the biblical faith. Therefore, we support the recommendation of the Overtures Committee that the Church refrain from revision of these great historic documents. In this light we wish also to reaffirm our support of the church’s effort to add to our historic doctrinal standards a new confession of faith (MGS 1973, p. 194).

In other words, the Synod has stated that we are to refrain from attempts to contemporize these historic documents.

4. The use of a General Synod declaration in 2017 to force a contemporary meaning on a word that is contained in a four-centuries-old sentence is a grievous error to the catechism, an affront to our commonly-held RCA understanding of the value of the Standards, and merely a foil in our current discussion of human sexuality.

5. The legislative action of 2017 only brings confusion in the church. Some assume the statement means more than what is true of General Synod statements. Some observers assume such a statement to be a stance of the church, when it is simply an opinion of one General Synod.

6. To rescind the action is a recognition that the 2017 General Synod overstepped its limits.

In response to Overture 6, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

**OV 18-6**

To direct the Commission on History, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, to provide greater clarity on the role of the General Synod in interpreting our Standards of Unity, and to report back to the General Synod of 2019. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. We need a broadly thought-through understanding of the use of our Standards of Unity by the General Synod.

2. We need a broadly thought-through understanding of the use of our Standards of Unity in addressing contemporary issues.

3. To discourage the perpetual revisiting of this issue or other issues in future synods.
ELIMINATE OFFICE OF GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSOR

7. The Classis of Central California overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to eliminate the fourth office of General Synod professor.

The office of General Synod professor involves representing “the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry,” as well as offering “the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole.” In section 3, it continues that General Synod professors shall “have the confidence of the churches … ,” and in the Declaration for a General Synod Professor, the newly elected professor states, “I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace” (BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Sections 1 and 3 [2017 edition, p. 70]; Appendix, Formulary # 7 [2017 edition, p. 134]).

This concise definition of the General Synod professor office and its role has made it clear to a portion of the RCA that a majority of the professorate is no longer fulfilling their office and has become separated from the RCA churches, its officers, and its members by losing their confidence in the professorate and the agencies they represent. In their 2016 report to the General Synod about unity being our calling, it’s ironic that a majority of the professorate members openly promote disunity within the RCA by being “Room for All” supporters and are using their office to instill progressive and unorthodox doctrine into the minds of our ministerial candidates. An example has been the allowance for Dr. Brownson to continually use Western Theological Seminary (WTS) as a platform to promote an unhistorical living tradition of the holy catholic church in regard to human sexuality. WTS allowed Dr. Brownson to teach a class on Scripture & Human Sexuality in the fall of 2017, which is promotion of his open defiance to the stated RCA position of marriage being between one man and one woman and that homosexual behavior is a sin according to the Holy Scriptures. Our numerous General Synods have spoken on where the RCA stands, even with the approval of R 17-29, “To affirm that the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns ‘all unchastity,’ which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA’s Standards, therefore, entails the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman” (MGS 2017, p. 161). Some in our professorate and the agencies they represent seem to miss the message, therefore not adhering to the RCA’s Standards. This has become a great grievance within the RCA, and the tolerance for it needs to come to an end as classes seek to send their candidates to non-RCA seminaries.

Reasons:
1. Members of the professorate (collective of General Synod professors) are openly promoting disunity within the RCA through their allegiance to “Room for All,” thus breaking fellowship within the church and not adhering to their vows of “seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace.”
2. General Synod professors have lost the confidence from a portion of the RCA as they continue to promote a contradictory position of human sexuality and marriage to our ministerial candidates.
8. The Great Lakes City Classis overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare amendments to the RCA Book of Church Order that would remove the office of General Synod professor from our polity for report to the 2019 General Synod.

Reasons:
1. In 2011, the Reformed Church in America expanded the role of the office of General Synod professor so that they have a disproportionate influence in General Synod meetings. The regular delegates to General Synod include five General Synod professor delegates, drawn from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1 [2017 edition, p. 65]). “A General Synod professor who is present at the session of the General Synod, but who is not a regular delegate from the professorate, shall be recognized as a corresponding delegate” (BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 2 [2017 edition, p. 120]).
2. Close examination of Calvin’s practice in Geneva shows major differences from the situation of the church today, providing little support for our current practice.
3. Moving the membership of those presently in the office of General Synod professor to the classis will actually strengthen their ministry and service in the RCA.
4. The RCA is the only denomination having the office of General Synod professor, making it difficult to consider union with the Christian Reformed Church in North America or any other Reformed body.
5. The process for discipline of a General Synod professor is cumbersome and makes it less likely that the General Synod will take on its responsibility of oversight.

In response to Overtures 7 and 8, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

OV 18-7
To direct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on History and the Commission on Church Order, to study and report to General Synod 2019 the necessity of and biblical basis for the office of General Synod professor as well as the implications for the RCA if the office were to be eliminated; and further,

To instruct these commissions to review and consider decreasing the allowed number of General Synod professor delegates to General Synod with the intent of ensuring proportionate representation.

Reasons:
1. These steps address some of the concerns raised in Overtures 7 and 8 without making drastic changes to our polity without proper study and due process.
2. This addresses the concern of disproportionate General Synod representation from the office of General Synod professor.
3. The office of General Synod professor has tremendous influence. It is wise to regularly review and improve upon our process of ongoing evaluation and the process of installing new members into the office of General Synod professor.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To not adopt OV 18-7.
OV 18-7
To direct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on History and the Commission on Church Order, to study and report to General Synod 2019 the necessity of and biblical basis for the office of General Synod professor as well as the implications for the RCA if the office were to be eliminated; and further,

To instruct these commissions to review and consider decreasing the allowed number of General Synod professor delegates to General Synod with the intent of ensuring proportionate representation. (NOT ADOPTED)

OV 18-8
To direct the GSC to develop a plan for appropriate theological evaluation of our current General Synod professors, and to evaluate and recommend changes to the process by which General Synod professors are theologically evaluated and received into the office of General Synod professor.

Reasons:
1. These steps address some of the concerns raised in Overtures 7 and 8 without making drastic changes to our polity without proper study and due process.
2. This addresses the concern of disproportionate General Synod representation from the office of General Synod professor.
3. The office of General Synod professor has tremendous influence. It is wise to regularly review and improve upon our process of ongoing evaluation and the process of installing new members into the office of General Synod professor.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To not adopt OV 18-8.

OV 18-8
To direct the GSC to develop a plan for appropriate theological evaluation of our current General Synod professors, and to evaluate and recommend changes to the process by which General Synod professors are theologically evaluated and received into the office of General Synod professor. (NOT ADOPTED)

AMEND BCO ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR AGENCIES AND COMMISSIONS

9. The Classis of Central California overtures the General Synod to amend the Bylaws of the General Synod (Book of Church Order Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 2, “Eligibility” [2017 edition, p. 108]) by inserting the following:

Membership on General Synod agencies and commissions shall be open to all confessing members of the RCA who uphold our Constitution, General Synod statements, positions, and interpretations, which includes
the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman. An employee may not hold membership on the agency or commission to which that person is accountable unless specifically provided in the agency constitution or bylaws; nor may an executive employed by the General Synod or any of the regional synods hold other than ex-officio membership on the General Synod Council.

Reasons:
1. The General Synod bylaws provide the process for amendments in Article 11, which do not require a two-thirds classis approval and can provide General Synod accountability for its agencies and board members. “The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod may be amended at any stated meeting of the synod by vote of a majority of all the members present, provided that due notice of the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing at a previous stated session and has received the approval of a majority at that session. An amendment to the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order shall go into effect upon announcement by the president of the Synod of favorable action under this provision” (BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 11 [2017 edition, p. 122]).

2. Confessing members who are representing and working under the authority of General Synod on our General Synod agencies and commissions shall uphold our Constitution and General Synod statements, positions, and interpretations. An example is General Synod 2017–passed R 17-29, which states: “To affirm that the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns ‘all unchastity,’ which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA’s Standards, therefore, entails the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman” (MGS 2017, p. 161). Therefore, our General Synod agency and commission members must uphold this position whether individual members disagree with the statement or not. Members are not working under the authority of lower assemblies but on behalf of General Synod. Neither shall any member put the agenda of any non-RCA organization above the work of the General Synod. It is a known fact that this practice takes place, so an amendment of this nature will help with consistency. Further General Synod statements and positions can be found at www.rca.org/positions.

In response to Overture 9, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

OV 18-9
To refer Overture 9 to the 2020 Vision Group.
(ADOPTED)

PROVIDE GUIDE ON DECLARATIVE AUTHORITY

10. The Great Lakes City Classis overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to provide a guide in the workbook for each future General Synod meeting that clarifies the authority and scope of the declarative authority of the General Synod.

Reasons:
1. At the 2017 General Synod, there were a number of overtures requesting that the General Synod make a number of declarations. With the exception of one overture, it was ruled that those overtures were requesting the General Synod to do something that was outside of its scope.
2. Yet the General Synod clearly does have declarative authority. The Preamble of the Book of Church Order states: “All authority exercised in the church is received from Christ, the only Head of the church. The authority exercised by those holding office in the church is delegated authority. Their appointment to their special tasks is by the Spirit of the Lord, and they are responsible first of all to the Lord of the church. Their authority is of three kinds: ministerial, declarative, and spiritual. Ministerial authority is the right to act as Christ’s servants. Declarative authority is the right to speak in his name within the limits set by Scripture. The church shall declare what is in the Word and act upon it, and may not properly go beyond this. Spiritual authority is the right to govern the life and activity of the church and to administer its affairs” (italics added for emphasis; 2017 edition, p. 2). The reports made to the 2013 General Synod by three commissions of the RCA on the subject of “Constitutionality” (MGS 2013, pp. 354–363) and the 2014 paper addressing the question of General Synod Authority on Doctrine and Interpretation of Scripture (MGS 2014, pp. 240–242) provide helpful guidance on this question that can easily be forgotten. It would be helpful to include a brief summary of these papers in the General Synod workbook.

In response to Overture 10, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

**OV 18–10**

To deny Overture 10. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. There is a lack of clarity for implementation.

**DECLARE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE CONSTITUTIONAL**

11. While our denomination has recently attempted to produce a definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman in a form that has constitutional authority, it is the opinion of the Classis of British Columbia that this definition already is constitutional.

Therefore, the Classis of British Columbia overtures the General Synod 2018 to recognize that existing marriage liturgies of the RCA express the theological standards of the church and therefore have constitutional standing within our churches. Further, we request that the General Synod Council or designated representative send a clarifying letter to all the classes.

Reasons:
1. The Liturgy is part of our Constitution (as per the Preamble to the BCO [2017 edition, p. 1]).
2. Every liturgical order is an expression in liturgical language of an underlying theology. As stated in the 2013 General Synod report on “Constitutionality in the Reformed Church in America”: the Constitution “embodies our shared theological values and commitments,” and again, “the Standards, the Liturgy, and the Government contain theology, our theology” (MGS 2013, p. 354). Reformed liturgy has always been based on Reformed theology as far back as the 1568 Synod of Wesel of our Dutch mother church, which produced the first edition of the “Netherlands Liturgy.”
3. However, when the 2013 report makes a distinction between “constitutional liturgies” (e.g. sacraments, ordination), whose use is required in the RCA, and other liturgies (such as on marriage) which are not “constitutional,” this has been understood by
many in the church to mean that such other liturgies have no constitutional standing at all. This cannot be. “The shared theological values and commitments” (see reason #2) are embodied to some extent in every liturgy approved for use in the RCA, and to that extent have constitutional standing.

4. For the sake of the seriousness of the issue before us, we must affirm the obvious: the theological core of the marriage liturgies of the RCA is that Christian marriage is between one man and one woman. The specific language of these liturgies can be and has been revised by simple majority votes at the General Synod. For example, the wording of the 1987 marriage liturgy has the words: “Christian marriage is a joyful covenanting between a man and a woman.” Older liturgies have the expression “holy wedlock.” Removing words such as “joyful” and “holy wedlock” do not necessarily affect the Standards, but removing the words “a man and a woman” do (cf. Heidelberg Catechism 87 and 109). The Standards are unalterable and so are the specific parts of the marriage liturgies that reflect those Standards.

5. Therefore, unless and until, by a two-thirds majority vote, the General Synod and the classes decide to alter or adjust our Standards of Unity, the core theological truth of Christian marriage as between a man and a woman has the standing of constitutional authority in our churches, classes, and seminaries.

In response to Overture 11, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

**OV 18-11**
To deny Overture 11. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. While the committee finds the spirit of the overture meritorious, the issues it aims to address will be considered more comprehensively as part of the work of the 2020 Vision Group.

**CHANGE NATURE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT**

12. Zeeland Classis overtures the General Synod to change what has been known as the “theological education assessment” to a “theological asking.”

Reasons:
1. It is our belief, as those who hold to the General Synod’s stated positions regarding human sexuality, that we are not being served well regarding the above by those who receive this funding.

2. This change would allow congregations who do not feel that they can support the teachings of organizations receiving this funding to withhold this support rather than feeling pressured to leave the RCA.

In response to Overture 12, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

**OV 18-12**
To deny Overture 12. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Dialogue is already occurring and our committee encourages continued and deeper dialogue.
2. This overture will disproportionately affect the MFCA by significantly reducing their funding.
3. Currently, the MFCA has no significant means of funding outside the theological education assessment.

AFFIRMATION REGARDING INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

13. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester overtures the General Synod to affirm that the Bible is God's living Word, which, rather than being static, is continually reinterpreted by the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of human beings, and that this reinterpretation reveals a continuous arc toward greater mercy, acceptance, and justice, reflecting a divine love that has no limit and transcends our human formulations.

Reasons:
1. We must commit ourselves anew to stand as Reformed—not fundamentalist—Christians.
2. Scripture, in numerous instances, models its own reinterpretation: Hosea knew what Scripture commanded regarding sacrifices and offerings, and yet God speaks through him to say, “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6; to understand this prophetic word is Jesus’ explicit command to the Pharisees in Matthew 9:13). Jesus continually reframes the law in terms of its intent to bless people by helping them love God, neighbor, stranger, and enemy. Peter and the other apostles knew without question what the law commanded regarding dietary laws and consorting with Gentiles, but the Holy Spirit moved to direct them away from the letter of the law toward its ultimate purpose (see Acts 10:1–11:18), which Paul stated simply, that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10).
3. Scripture implicitly reveals the slowness and struggle of God’s people to comprehend God’s true nature. The self-revelation of God occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures under the shadow of human culture and practices. In the New Testament, Peter and others backslide from the revelation of God’s wider welcome, and the dispute between circumcised and uncircumcised continues to obsess the church; nevertheless, the Spirit moves the church at last to heed God’s will. Jesus himself intimates that the church will be given understanding beyond what even he has spoken, through the Holy Spirit: “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything …” (John 14:25-26a), and, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth …” (John 16:12-13a).
4. When the church tries to stop this process of leading, sanctification, and transformation by the Holy Spirit, it becomes concretized, constricted in spirit, and fearful in heart. God has sent prophets of reform, as we note God called Martin Luther 500 years ago to summon the church away from the idolatry of its own self-satisfied certainty.
5. We must address the ways in which we choose particular passages of Scripture to interpret literally in order to confirm our own preconceptions or prejudices. This slavish misuse of Scripture blinds us to the true intent of the gospel and the leading of the Spirit.
6. LGBTQ inclusion discussion at the 2016 Special Council and at General Synods 2016 and 2017 was obstructed by disputes about scriptural interpretation. This and other issues will remain intractable until we reclaim a reasonably unified understanding of Scripture.
7. Similar overtures to General Synod 2017 were not given sufficient consideration or a serious response.

In response to Overture 13, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

**OV 18-13**
To deny Overture 13. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. While the committee finds the spirit of the overture meritorious, the issues it aims to address will be considered more comprehensively as part of the work of the 2020 Vision Group.

**CLARIFY ROLES OF CLASSIS AND MFCA IN CERTIFICATE OF FITNESS FOR MINISTRY PROCESS**

14. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester respectfully overtures General Synod to recommend to the classes for approval the following changes to the Book of Church Order regarding the roles of the classis and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency in supervising students of theology and awarding Certificates of Fitness for Ministry (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 2

a. A candidate for the ministry who has received the degree of Master of Divinity or an academically equivalent degree from a seminary not officially related to the Reformed Church in America upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies, is found by the candidate’s supervising classis in consultation with the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) to be qualified, and is adjudged by the supervising classis to be a fit candidate for the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America, shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency—MFCA a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which is entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination. The MFCA shall ensure candidates demonstrate adequate academic preparation and denominational identity, including a thorough understanding of the history, polity, liturgy, and confessions of the RCA and an adherence to the same. In the event that the MFCA and supervising classis disagree about a candidate’s readiness for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for reasons other than academic preparation, the supervising classis shall determine the outcome.

Reasons:
1. As currently written, Chapter 1, Part II, Section 2a is not clear about who judges the fitness of a candidate for ministry (2017 edition, p. 46). These proposed changes would locate the final authority of a candidate’s fitness for ministry within the supervising classis for which the candidate was initially brought under care.
2. The BCO states clearly in other areas that the classis is the ultimate arbiter for overseeing a ministry candidate’s development as well as calling ministers to churches
within its bounds, specifically in Sections 7–9 of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2: “Sec. 7. The classis shall exercise a general supervision over all students of theology subject to its jurisdiction. Sec. 8. The classis shall examine students of theology for licensure, and licensed candidates for the ministry for ordination. Sec. 9. The classis shall ordain, install, commission, transfer, suspend, depose, declare demitted, declare inactive, and declare retired ministers” (italics other than section headings added; 2017 edition, p. 30).

3. The Preamble of the BCO reminds us that governance in the Reformed tradition is presbyterial, consisting of consistory, classis, regional synod, and General Synod. Crucially, “the governmental functioning of these of offices takes place, not apart from, but in harmony with the understanding of the mission of the church and the nature of its ministry” (italics added; 2017 edition, p. 1). Furthermore, “Reformed governance understands that the greater assemblies care for the ministry that extends beyond the purview of the lesser assemblies without infringing upon the responsibilities of the lesser. Consistories, classes, and synods work together in mission and ministry within their shared boundaries” (italics added; 2017 edition, p. 3).

15. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester respectfully overtures General Synod to recommend to the classes for approval the following changes to the Book of Church Order regarding the roles of the classis and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency in supervising students of theology and awarding Certificates of Fitness for Ministry (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 2

c. The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and the supervising classis shall determine that the candidate meets minimum competencies as determined by the standards established by the General Synod and designated as indispensable for the proper exercise of the ministerial office of the church. If a candidate comes under the jurisdiction of a new agent of the General Synod, the classis in which the candidate is enrolled shall apply to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency on behalf of the candidate. If the candidate has completed less than half the process toward reception of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, the relevant agents of the General Synod shall effect the transfer. If the candidate has completed half the process or more, the original agent shall award the Certificate in consultation with the supervising classis. If the applicant has previously been asked to terminate studies, has withdrawn under duress, or has been denied the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry at a Reformed Church in America seminary or the MFCA, further supervision and/or examination of the applicant shall only be carried out by or with the consent of the seminary or agent within whose program the candidate had previously been enrolled. Any further supervision and/or examination will occur in partnership with the supervising classis.

Reason:
1. This language clarifies and affirms the role of the supervising classis as the ultimate arbiter for overseeing a ministry candidate’s development and how the supervising classis and MFCA work together to prepare candidates for ministry.
16. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester respectfully overtures General Synod to recommend to the classes for approval the following changes to the Book of Church Order regarding the roles of the classis and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency in supervising students of theology in the Approved Alternate Route and awarding Certificates of Fitness for Ministry (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 4

   e. When the candidate has completed the program, the candidate shall be examined for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and the supervising classis. The method of assessment shall be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

   f. When the candidate passes the examination, the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency may award the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. In the event that the MFCA and supervising classis disagree about a candidate's readiness for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for reasons other than academic preparation, the supervising classis shall determine the outcome.

Reason:
1. This language clarifies and affirms the role of the supervising classis as the ultimate arbiter for overseeing a ministry candidate’s development and how the supervising classis and MFCA work together to prepare candidates for ministry.

In response to Overtures 14, 15, and 16, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

OV 18-14
To direct Overtures 14, 15, and 16 to the Commission on Church Order with instructions that, in consultation with the Pastoral Formation Coordinating Committee (present body)/Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (proposed body), the commission review the overtures and, if warranted, that the commission present possible amendments to the Book of Church Order to the 2019 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. It is important to connect all the agents of General Synod on issues regarding the granting of certificates of fitness for ministry.

SEEK PATH TO RECONCILIATION WITHIN RCA

17. The Reverend Classis of Passaic Valley respectfully overtures the Reverend General Synod to strongly encourage the classes to immediately cease all conversations of a division of the denomination and instead begin to seek a path to reconciliation. We affirm the understanding of living in unity, purity, and peace as stated in our membership promises. We believe it is both biblically supported as well as a witness to a divided nation and world for the RCA to return to our common unity in Christ as the only means to preach the gospel in the world today.
Reasons:

1. 2 Corinthians 5:18 states, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation …”

2. In Preparatory Service I: Before the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper, it states, “Let us acknowledge our sin before our merciful God, with full intention of amending our lives. Let us make restitution for all injuries and wrongs done to others. Let us forgive those who have offended us, as we ourselves have been forgiven. All children of the covenant, be reconciled with one another and then come joyfully to the banquet” (Worship the Lord, p. 18).

3. Through the historic description of the tenants of the faith (the five “Solas”), we profess that our life together is formed by Christ alone and not according to a human or common understanding of an appropriate response to questions of life in the twenty-first century.

4. If we continue on the path to separation, how many times will we divide over social issues upon which we do not agree? We believe that with the power of the Holy Spirit we can indeed engage in discussion with one another to come to unity—not necessarily unanimity—in service to a world that needs the witness of our blessings in order to be a blessing to those around us (Genesis 12:2-23).

5. We concur with, support, and recommend the Pastoral Letter to the Reformed Church in America from November 7, 2017, written by former general secretary Wes Granberg-Michaelson.

6. As we learn about and long for the promised shalom of God, we must ourselves be willing to gather in humility, gracious kindness, and good order to struggle together to find our way to be together God’s church in the world and not be splintered by our disagreements. For that reason, we invite all of the Reformed Church in America to seek reconciliation and God’s peace.

In response to Overture 17, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

OV 18-15
To deny Overture 17. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

1. While the committee finds the spirit of the overture meritorious, the issues it aims to address will be considered more comprehensively as part of the work of the 2020 Vision Group.

DEFINITIVE RESOLUTION AND DIRECTION TO LGBTQ ISSUES

18. The Classis of Rocky Mountains overtures the 2018 General Synod to request the GSC, the regional synods, and each classis to engage in discussions regarding a definitive path forward for the Reformed Church in America at their next stated meetings. Given our current state of contention and division regarding scriptural interpretation and application of LGBTQ individuals’ status and participation issues at all levels of denominational polity, the time has come to determine the future of the RCA. These issues have been detrimental to the creative energy and efficiency of the denomination, particularly during recent years, and we need to progress toward a resolution that is compatible with the scriptural interpretational beliefs of all involved.

Though the questions submitted via R 17-18 at the 2017 General Synod were
meaningful for discussion, in their present format they do not lead toward definitive resolution of these issues. Given that, a set of questions for further discussion at all levels is proposed herein. Results of these discussions are to be summarized and shared with the 2019 General Synod by the general secretary and/or his appointed representative. This should be accomplished in consultation with the GSC, regional synod executives, and classis pastoral and/or elder representatives as appropriate.

The questions proposed for discussion are:

1. Does scriptural interpretation provide that alternative sexual lifestyle behavior is a “disputable matter” rather than one that is indisputable? (See Romans 14.) If so, what are the reasons, and what should the related action be? A possible resolution could be the development of “conscience clauses” within each level of church polity (church, classis, regional synod, General Synod) to establish policy for scriptural acceptability of alternative sexual lifestyle behavior. The resultant action might then be the maintaining of the unity of the Reformed Church in America as one denominational body, allowing for differences in scriptural interpretation of these issues.

2. Does scriptural interpretation provide that alternative sexual lifestyle behavior is not a “disputable matter” but one over which to “break fellowship” and begin disciplinary action? (See 1 Corinthians 5.) If so, what are the reasons, and what should the related action be? A possible resolution could be to begin disciplinary procedures through our judicial system, as outlined in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2.

3. Does scriptural interpretation provide that alternative sexual lifestyle behavior is not a “disputable matter” but one over which to “separate for mission” and initiate the process of a peaceful separation? (See Acts 15:36–41.) If so, what are the reasons, and what should the related action be? A possible resolution could be the orderly creation of different denominational entities that would be compatible with their own scriptural viewpoints and convictions surrounding LGBTQ issues.

As with any proposal having significant import to the future of the denomination, the entire process should be constantly covered in prayer, focused on Holy Scripture, and provide an open and accepting environment for authentic and honest discussion within relevant assemblies and with one another to further God’s purposes within the Reformed Church in America and the world we are called to serve.

Reasoning:
The 2017 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America requested, via R 17-18, that a denomination-wide discussion take place “in light of our current state of contention and division” (MGS 2017, p. 136). The RCA provided three questions to address in this discussion:

1. How do we understand the biblical calling to live together in a unity of fellowship and love for one another?
2. Are we willing to see the Reformed Church in America embark on a serious division, and what is our part in bringing reconciliation and restoration?
3. What do we believe is God’s intended future for the Reformed Church in America?

As a denomination, if we engage only in generalities like those of the questions above, we cannot achieve significant progress toward meaningful resolution of LGBTQ issues. If we do not ask the right questions, our denominational discussions will continue to be largely unproductive in resolving our differences, and we will find ourselves—yet again—“kicking the proverbial can” further down the road.

The Rocky Mountain Classis Executive Team (RMCET) asserts that if we, as a denomination, want to move toward resolution, we have to do three additional, specific things, which the questions of R 17-18 do not address:

1. Name the “current state of contention and division.”
2. Discuss the actual nature of the contention.
3. Resolve clearly at each level of polity how we believe the Lord is calling us to move forward as a denomination.

Naming the Issues

The RMCET believes there is already general agreement regarding our denominational dilemma. The issues aren’t simply beliefs and convictions about the LGBTQ community. The issues aren’t just the authority of Scripture on these issues. From the RMCET’s perspective, the most important reality to name is this: we have leaders within the RCA (pastors, church planters, elders, professors, and teachers) who have extremely divergent convictions regarding LGBTQ issues. We do not have unity in belief or practice.

On one side of the LGBTQ debate are the self-identified “conservatives” or “traditionalists” (pastors, church planters, elders, professors, and teachers) who see these issues through a lens of righteousness and sin. These leaders hold a traditional view of marriage and sexuality: any sexual activity between two persons of the same sex is considered sin. These leaders see their position as clearly supported in Scripture, as well as through a historical, orthodox interpretation.

On the other side of the LGBTQ debate are the self-identified “liberals” or “progressives.” These leaders (pastors, church planters, elders, professors, and teachers) believe that a same-sex covenantal relationship can fall under the blessing of God. They are “open and affirming” of these relationships, including marriage. They advocate for gay persons in same-sex marriages to serve at every level of leadership within the church. Some of these leaders are currently advocating for constitutional change within the RCA, allowing the denomination as a whole to become “open and affirming.” Other progressive leaders simply want to live out their convictions without facing reprisal or discipline by the RCA.

Three Pauline Resolutions

In the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, we find him handling a number of different issues and disagreements. Depending on the nature of the problem, he gave different counsel and wisdom. Paul prayerfully considered each situation and then specified a course of action based on the nature of the circumstances. Paul utilized three basic approaches to solve various issues and the RMCET believes these three approaches can be used as a framework to promote resolution of the issues the denomination faces at this time.
1. Disputable Matters
This phrase comes from Paul in Romans 14. He confronted a few controversial issues at the time and said, “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters” (Romans 14:1, NIV). One matter that Paul considered “disputable” was if it was appropriate for a follower of Christ to eat food sacrificed to an idol. He encouraged the Christians not to quarrel but to love one another even though they might disagree on this issue:

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. (Romans 14:13, NIV)

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Romans 14:19, NIV)

Thus, a legitimate, important discussion is not necessarily what everyone believes regarding homosexuality but rather if this could be a “disputable” issue and if we would need to love one another well in the midst of disagreement. If Paul were the leader of the RCA today, would he speak verses 13 and 19 to us about LGBTQ matters?

Notice that Paul had his convictions about this subject (verse 14) yet decided not to argue his point. Instead, he argued for unity in the midst of diverse opinions.

If we believe that the issues surrounding homosexuality fall into the category of “disputable matters,” then we should let the words of Jesus in his priestly prayer be a lens through which we proceed:

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. (John 17:22-23a, NIV)

A modern day “disputable matter” in the RCA is infant baptism. Although the denomination has clear views on the subject, in practice, we allow our leaders and churches to operate with diverse convictions and practices. The RMCET asks, couldn’t we handle issues surrounding homosexuality in the same manner as we do with infant baptism? We think there are leaders on both sides of the LGBTQ issue who would advocate such a pastoral approach. Let’s allow them to express the reasons why they believe we could handle our present conflict as a “disputable matter.” If so decided, this should not simply be a temporary fix until one side “wins” but an established, permanent approach.

2. Breaking of Fellowship
Another Pauline approach is not to encourage unity in the midst of diversity but instead to deal with sin. Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for celebrating sexual sin rather than removing the perpetrator from their midst.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, NIV)
Paul did not invite discussion on this matter. He had already passed judgment (verse 3) and was reprimanding the church for inaction. This is not unlike the words of the resurrected Christ to the church in Thyatira: they tolerated a false prophetess and her teachings (see Revelation 2:20).

If we believe that the issues surrounding homosexuality fall into the category of “breaking of fellowship,” we can heed the words of Jesus in Matthew 18. Dealing with sin is the lens through which we consider the matter.

If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matthew 18:17, NIV)

A modern day example of this approach is the exclusiveness of Christ. The RCA has removed pastors or churches for being Universalists. No one suggested this was an issue about which to live in unity. It had to be dealt with and the person(s) “removed from community” if they did not repent. Is homosexuality this kind of issue?

Let us ask this question to those on both sides of the issue. There are both conservatives and progressives who do not believe we can live with different approaches to this matter. The progressives think LBGTQ matters are a subset of social justice—trying to be fair to all in a diverse society. Therefore, they say, “We must do everything to ensure justice for LGBTQ people. We cannot compromise on this.” If, on the other hand, homosexual activity is exclusively a matter of righteousness and sin, then the conservatives say, “We must not compromise or tolerate it in any way.” Let us allow people with these convictions to discuss their points of view. Why do they believe that this is a “deal-breaker” for them and not a “disputable matter”?

3. Separate for Mission
Think now about one more approach Paul used to deal with disagreements. It is less clear and precise but worthy of consideration. In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas successfully advocate for Gentile believers at the Jerusalem Council. Then, just after that, surprisingly and somewhat sadly, Paul and Barnabas disagree about whether to bring John Mark on their next journey. (John Mark had abandoned them previously.) Their disagreement was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas separated.

They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:39-40, NIV).

Barnabas and Paul still considered each other “brothers in Christ.” They were still connected to the church of Antioch and to each other. Yet they separated to pursue God’s next mission in different directions with different companions. Later we learn that this separation was only for a time; somehow, it was resolved (see 1 Corinthians 9:6 and 2 Timothy 4:11).

No RCA example of this comes to mind; however, another denomination may provide one. Our Episcopalian/Anglican sisters and brothers have separated over these very same LGBTQ issues. They avoided a complete split by establishing a
three-year agreement of separation, though they are still unsure how this will be resolved in the coming years.

The RMCET suggests that a similar separation could be considered. If the RCA is not yet confident in calling the LGBTQ issues “disputable,” or as something we must break our unity over, why not weigh the pros and cons in a time-bounded separation?

As a denominational, pastoral response, this course of action at least seems worthy of consideration. What might this look like for the RCA? How could we begin the process of separation and still maintain the possibility to explore and evaluate further? People of this perspective should be able to share their thoughts.

Determining a Way Forward

The RMCET is not writing from a “conservative” or a “progressive” position. We just long for resolution to this current conflict in order to focus time, energy, and other resources on our core mission. Yes, we do have strong theological convictions about homosexuality but are undecided regarding the best way forward. Discussing these Pauline, pastoral responses in the context of the questions proposed in the accompanying overture could be fruitful in determining the direction we as a denomination should take.

If a majority of the assemblies who will have this discussion on LGBTQ matters found themselves supporting one of the three options described above, it would bring more clarity and direction for future General Synods to proceed meaningfully.

Recommended Process and Questions to Determine a Way Forward

Seeking the presence and the counsel of the Holy Spirit, the RMCET submits this suggested process for discussion at each denominational level:

1. **Forming the discussion:** Distribute this overture and the support paper, which builds the argument for shaping our discussion around Paul’s three pastoral responses.
2. **Pre-discussion study and prayer:** In preparation for the discussion, invite participating members at all denominational levels to study and pray through the following three passages: Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 5, and Acts 15.
3. **Questions for discussion:** At each denominational level, discuss the following questions and which of the three positions in the overture your entity would consider as valid and why. Provide your assembly’s position in writing to the General Synod and/or general secretary prior to March 31, 2019. Also, respond if the assembly does not support any of these three positions and the reasons why.
   a. What do you think makes an issue a “disputable matter”? What makes an issue one over which to “break fellowship”? What makes an issue something over which to “separate” in order to focus on mission?
   b. In your opinion, do you think the questions and convictions surrounding the LGBTQ community should be handled as a “disputable matter,” a “breaking fellowship” matter, or a “separate for mission” matter? Why or why not?
   c. In what ways would the RCA be able to “live in unity in the midst of disagreement” with regard to the LGBTQ community?
d. What are the options or possibilities before the RCA if we ultimately decide to “break fellowship” over these issues?

e. In light of this discussion, what do we believe is God’s intended future for the Reformed Church in America?

f. Is there enough unity within our classis (or other assembly) to make a recommendation on how to move forward, or should we simply report the content of our discussion?

g. If we have enough unity as a classis (or other assembly), what recommendations can we make?

In response to Overture 18, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

OV 18-16
To urge each classis, at a stated meeting, to engage in discussions regarding a definitive path forward for the Reformed Church in America using the questions noted in Overture 18. Results of these discussions are to be summarized and shared with the 2020 Vision Team by March 31, 2019.

Reasons:
1. This study will be complimentary to the work of the 2020 Vision Team.
2. The study provides opportunity for input across the denomination.

A motion was made and supported to refer OV 18-16 to the 2020 Vision Team.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To not adopt the motion to refer.

OV 18-16 was again before the house.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt OV 18-16.

OV 18-16
To urge each classis, at a stated meeting, to engage in discussions regarding a definitive path forward for the Reformed Church in America using the questions noted in Overture 18. Results of these discussions are to be summarized and shared with the 2020 Vision Team by March 31, 2019. (ADOPTED)
COMMEND CATECHISM ON MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY FOR STUDY

19. The Great Lakes City Classis overtures the General Synod to commend the attached Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality [see pp. 155–160] to all RCA churches and classes for reflection, study, and response for the next two years as a means of deepening our understanding of biblical teaching on human sexuality and finding a pathway toward a new standard of unity on the questions regarding marriage that have divided us, and that the Commission on Theology be instructed to gather responses from the churches and classes within the RCA and to file reports to the General Synod on this discussion each year that the General Synod meets, beginning in 2019.

Reasons:
1. Creeds and confessions are not meant to be exhaustive statements of everything that Christians believe and practice. Rather, as church history unfolds and issues are raised, confessions are written as the church seeks to interpret and apply Scripture faithfully. For example, the need for a christological creed arose precisely because people began saying new things about Jesus’ identity that didn’t fit with Scripture. So why don’t we already have a creed or confession about marriage? In part, because it simply hasn’t been an issue until recently.
2. It is hard to think of a topic that has maintained more agreement throughout church history than defining marriage as between a man and woman and condemning all forms of same-sex sexual activity. Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant thinkers have been united on their views on this subject until the last few decades as deeper divisions developed in how we read and interpret Scripture and what discipleship and transformation by Christ actually look like.
3. The 2017 General Synod approved the following motion: “To affirm that the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns ‘all unchastity,’ which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA’s Standards, therefore, entails the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman” (MGS 2017, R 17-29, p. 161). A better and more permanent solution to our disagreements about God’s design for marriage can be found in the adoption of a confessional statement on marriage and sexuality.
4. The Belhar Confession, the newest standard of unity of the Reformed Church in America, was adopted by General Synod in 2009 and ratified in 2010 after a period of study as a means of deepening the RCA’s commitment to dealing with racism and strengthening its ecumenical commitment to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and other Reformed bodies. Adoption of a doctrinal statement on human sexuality will help to bring clarity to the church’s teaching on human sexuality and will strengthen our ties with our ecumenical partners who share a commitment to defend a traditional view of marriage.

ADOPT CATECHISM ON MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY AS STANDARD OF UNITY

20. The New Thing Classis humbly overtures the 2018 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to adopt the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality as the fifth Standard of Unity of the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:
1. Adding to the constitution of the Reformed Church in America by adopting an additional doctrinal Standard (please see pp. 155-160 for the text of the Great Lakes
Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality) is not something that should be undertaken lightly. We recognize that not every controversial issue requires adopting a statement that is binding upon our officeholders and embedded into the fabric of our denomination. However, our denomination has become so embroiled in discussion and disagreement on human sexuality that at many levels—especially our higher assemblies—we are almost entirely focused inward. Instead of discussions at General Synod on how to effectively reach the lost and minister to the broken, we discuss orderly separation and seasons of restraint on leaving the denomination. The 2017 General Synod saw a record number of overtures, and a large number of them were focused on the issue of human sexuality. No longer do we see in the various commissions of our denomination and gatherings of our assemblies discussing how to present the timeless truths of the gospel in an effective way to the world; but rather, the emphasis is narrowed to the issue of human sexuality to the point of excluding the mission of the church “in calling all persons to life in Christ, and in proclaiming God’s promise and commands to all the world” (*Book of Church Order*, Preamble [2017 edition, p. 2]).

2. In addition to this being a time of great confusion—both within and without the church—we realize that, especially for our beloved denomination, this is a time of significant division. For decades, we have been debating the issue of human sexuality. While the position of our denomination has yet to change, many people act as though our position has changed and act with blatant disunity toward their fellow brothers and sisters by officiating same-sex marriage ceremonies or by the ordination of those in committed same-sex relationships. A Special Council and season of restraint on this issue were openly disregarded by regions of our denomination, and some classes responded by seeking to dual-affiliate with other denominations or even ordaining someone in a committed same-sex relationship who had their Certificate of Fitness revoked. As pastors, classes, and regional synods act divisively toward the church body, we accept that a new Standard of Unity is needed for our church. The time has come for our church to live out the implications of our Constitution that “the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice in the Reformed Church in America” (*BCO*, Preamble [2017 edition, p. 1]) by adopting a catechism that is deeply biblical, culturally relevant, pastorally useful, and doctrinally sound on the issue of human sexuality.

3. Catechism, from the verb catechize, is the process of learning by which people are instructed in the doctrines of the Christian faith. As a church, we already recognize the importance of catechism as it relates to the faith of a Christian, hence our adoption and sincere appreciation of the Heidelberg Catechism. It isn’t simply that its contents warm our souls; it is the accessibility of its teaching that blesses the church. So too with the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality: its doctrine warms our soul as it both convicts and encourages us, while at the same time it blesses the corporate church and individual families with a tool that is especially necessary during this time of great confusion.

4. Indeed, as we survey the confusion in the world around us, and regrettably, throughout much of our denomination, we recognize that the time is right for a new catechism. While this isn’t something that our denomination has done frequently, historical Protestantism has not avoided the creation of catechisms for clarity of teaching. In 2012, when The Gospel Coalition released the New City Catechism, they addressed the inevitable “why another catechism” question that so many had. They wrote:

> Most people today do not realize that it was once seen as normal, important, and necessary for churches to continually produce new catechisms for their own use. The early Scottish churches, though they had Calvin’s *Geneva Catechism* of 1541 and the *Heidelberg Catechism* of 1563, went on to
produce and use Craig’s Catechism of 1581, Duncan’s Latin Catechism of 1595, and The New Catechism of 1644, before eventually adopting the Westminster Catechism.

The Puritan pastor Richard Baxter, who ministered in the 17th century town of Kidderminster, was not unusual. He wanted to train heads of families to instruct their households in the faith. To do so, he wrote his own Family Catechism that was adapted to the capacities of his people and that brought the Bible to bear on many of the issues his people were facing at that time (The Gospel Coalition, “Introducing New City Catechism,” www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/introducing-new-city-catechism).

We echo their sentiment: we wish to see a catechism that is “adapted to the capacities of” our church and brings “the Bible to bear on” the issue our people are facing at this time. We believe, wholeheartedly and without reservation, that the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality does just that. It is biblical, theologically sound, it is Reformed, and it is a good fit for our confessional identity.

5. Simultaneously, we understand that to adopt a new Standard of Unity makes this catechism become—for us—a timely and timeless piece of doctrine. Just as Dort was relevant in the seventeenth century and continues to be relevant today, this new catechism will also be relevant for generations to come. We believe the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality will be a useful catechism for the local church, classes, regional synods, and the entire denomination from this point forward until Christ comes to judge the living and the dead.

In response to Overtures 19 and 20, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

** OV 18-17  
To deny Overtures 19 and 20. (ADOPTED)  

Reason:

1. These overtures are redundant in light of the recommendation to be considered in response to Overture 24.

** DECLARE COMMITMENT TO PERSONAL RECONCILIATION OVER DISCIPLINE  

21. The Mid-Hudson Classis respectfully overtures General Synod to declare the following: “We call upon all members of the RCA to honor the spirit of Christ’s words in Matthew 18:15-17 by seeking personal reconciliation before pursuing any further forms of formal discipline or constitutional change.”

Reason:

1. We, the members of the Mid-Hudson Classis, believe Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 18 emphasize that the better part of the wisdom is to deal with conflict relationally. However, we also realize better relationships across the RCA cannot be pursued through a single assembly (General Synod) that only meets once a year, with only a small portion of the church present in its deliberation. To that end, we hope General Synod will recognize its limited capacity to hold the RCA together during its current state of conflict and instead point all members of the RCA (particularly those who are in conflict with each other) back to the nature and form of Christian discipline in
the Book of Church Order, which starts with Matthew 18:15-17. Too often we have focused on Christian discipline in its formal forms and forgotten that all Christians (regardless of judicatory) are called to work out their conflicts with each other first in personal relationship. The fact that this focus has shifted in our discourse about human sexuality reveals we do not have the relationships necessary to conduct Christian discipline faithfully, and we are out of order with the spirit of our covenantal bonds. Moreover, anyone who has sought formal forms of discipline or tried to change the Constitution to do so without first engaging in a restorative, pastoral communication with those they believe have erred are, in fact, working outside the vows they have made before God and the church. We strongly urge those who continue to believe in the witness of the RCA and truly want to work for peace to be empowered by General Synod to relationally (through pastoral and restorative means) admonish those who have sought conflict resolution without first engaging in rebuke and admonishment on a personal level.

In response to Overture 21, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

**OV 18-18**
To call upon all members of the RCA to honor the spirit of Christ’s words in Matthew 18:15 by seeking personal reconciliation.

*(ADOPTED)*

Reason:
1. We believe Jesus’s instructions in Matthew 18 emphasize that the better part of the wisdom is to deal with conflict relationally. However, we also realize better relationships across the RCA cannot be pursued through a single assembly (General Synod) that only meets once a year, with only a small portion of the church present in its deliberation. To that end, we hope General Synod will recognize its limited capacity to hold the RCA together during its current state of conflict and instead point all members of the RCA (particularly those who are in conflict with each other) back to the nature and form of Christian discipline in the Book of Church Order, which starts with Matthew 18:15-17. Too often we have focused on Christian discipline in its formal forms and forgotten that all Christians (regardless of judicatory) are called to work out their conflicts with each other first in personal relationship. The fact that this focus has shifted in our discourse about human sexuality reveals we do not have the relationships necessary to conduct Christian discipline faithfully, and we are out of order with the spirit of our covenantal bonds. Moreover, anyone who has sought formal forms of discipline or tried to change the Constitution to do so without first engaging in a restorative, pastoral communication with those they believe have erred are, in fact, working outside the vows they have made before God and the church. We strongly urge those who continue to believe in the witness of the RCA and truly want to work for peace to be empowered by General Synod to relationally (through pastoral and restorative means) admonish those who have sought conflict resolution without first engaging in rebuke and admonishment on a personal level.
BCO PROVISION FOR BAPTISM OF CHILDREN WHEN PARENTS ARE NOT MEMBERS

22. The Regional Synod of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order and the Commission on Theology to explore changes to Chapter 1, Part 1, Article 5, Section 2 of the Book of Church Order, so that the requirements for an infant/child to receive the sacrament of baptism may be expanded to include provisions that allow for the baptism of children whose parents are not confessing members of the church.

Reasons:
1. Chapter 1, Part 1, Article 5, Section 2a states that the board of elders “shall consider requests for infant baptism, providing at least one parent or guardian is a confessing member of the church to which the request is presented. A request for baptism from a parent or guardian who is not a confessing member of the church to which the request is made shall first be submitted for approval to the governing body of the church where the parent or guardian has membership.” This presupposes that every child who may be a candidate for baptism has a parent or guardian who is a member of a church. However, in the complexity of the twenty-first century church and world, it is entirely possible for a child to participate in the life and ministry of a church even though that child’s parent or guardian has no faith commitment. These children should not be prohibited from receiving the Sacrament that signs and seals them in the visible membership of the holy catholic church.

2. Our Reformed understanding of baptism is rooted in God’s covenant. In declaring God’s covenant with Abraham, God said, “I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your offspring after you” (Genesis 17:7). In his Pentecost sermon, the apostle Peter proclaimed, “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39). These Scriptures place no limits on those whom God calls to be included as a child of God’s covenant promises.

3. In the “Order for the Sacrament of Baptism,” the minister or elder asks this question of the parent(s) or guardian(s): “Do you promise to instruct this child/these children in the truth of God’s word, in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; to pray for them, to teach them to pray; and to train them in Christ’s way by your example, through worship, and in the nurture of the church?” The minister or elder asks this question of the members of the congregation: “Do you promise to love, encourage, and support these brothers and sisters by teaching the gospel of God’s love, by being an example of Christian faith and character, and by giving the strong support of God’s family in fellowship, prayer and service?” The wording of these questions implies that, since the second is addressed to the faith community, the first is being addressed to the person(s) who have custody of that child. As previously noted, not every child has a custodian who is a member of a church.

In response to Overture 22, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

OV 18-19
To deny Overture 22. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. We recognize the pastoral difficulties with this issue; however, the overture does not appear to be consistent with our covenantal theology.
23. The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes overtures the General Synod to create and authorize a task force with representation from each of the regional synods to research potential futures (courses of action) in order to recommend steps toward implementation of a grace-filled and orderly realignment that will include the possibility of our churches, classes, and regional synods uniting with other Reformed bodies.

Reasons:
1. The RCA has not found a constitutional way forward on the issues that separate us.
2. Without a resolution of the divisive issues, the denomination may have to endure endless judicial actions.
3. If no effective action is taken, we expect that large numbers of churches will leave the RCA, and many of our church plants will choose not to organize as RCA churches.
4. This overture is designed to implement a process that may bring peace to the church sooner rather than later. Planning for a positive future of unity and peace is better than watching our denomination fragment into many pieces. Our ability to be honest and clear about where we stand, even if in different places, is a gift and an aid for the mission of the church.

In response to Overture 23, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

OV 18-20
To deny Overture 23. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. While the committee finds the spirit of the overture meritorious, the issues it aims to address will be considered more comprehensively as part of the work of the 2020 Vision Group.

24. The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes overtures the General Synod to commend the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality for reflection, study, and response by RCA churches and classes for the next five years as a means of deepening our understanding of the biblical teaching on human sexuality and finding a pathway toward unity in mission and ministry through the possible adoption of a new standard of unity following this period of study.

Reasons:
1. Creeds and confessions are not meant to be exhaustive statements of everything that Christians believe and practice. Rather, as church history unfolds and issues are raised, confessions are written as the church seeks to interpret and apply Scripture faithfully. For example, the need for a Christological creed arose precisely because people began saying new things about Jesus’ identity that didn’t fit with Scripture. So why don’t we already have a creed or confession about marriage? In part, because it simply hasn’t been an issue until recently.
2. It is hard to think of a topic that has maintained more agreement throughout church history than defining marriage as between a man and woman and condemning all forms of same sex sexual activity. Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant thinkers
have been united on their views on this subject until the last few decades, as deeper divisions developed in how we read and interpret Scripture and what discipleship and transformation by Christ actually look like.

3. The 2017 General Synod approved R 17-29 (MGS 2017, p. 161), which states, “To affirm that the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and 109 categorically states that God condemns ‘all unchastity,’ which includes same-sex sexual activity, and that faithful adherence to the RCA’s Standards, therefore, entails the affirmation that marriage is between one man and one woman.” A better and more permanent solution to our disagreements about God’s design for marriage will be to move toward the adoption of a confessional statement on marriage and sexuality.

4. The Belhar Confession, the newest standard of unity of the Reformed Church in America, was adopted by General Synod in 2009 and ratified in 2010 after a period of study as a means of deepening the RCA’s commitment to dealing with racism and strengthening its ecumenical commitment to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and other Reformed bodies. Adoption of a doctrinal statement on human sexuality will help to bring clarity to the church’s teaching on human sexuality and will strengthen our ties with our ecumenical partners who share a commitment to defend a traditional view of marriage.

In response to Overture 24, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

OV 18-21
To commend the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality for reflection, study, and response by the Commission on Theology and RCA churches and classes as a means of deepening our understanding of the biblical teaching on human sexuality and finding a pathway forward toward unity in mission and ministry.

Reasons:
1. Creeds and confessions are not meant to be exhaustive statements of everything that Christians believe and practice. Rather, as church history unfolds and issues are raised, confessions are written as the church seeks to interpret and apply Scripture faithfully. Or example, the need for a Christological creed arose precisely because people began saying new things about Jesus’s identity that didn’t fit with Scripture. So why don’t we already have a creed or confession about marriage? In part, because it simply hasn’t been an issue until recently.

2. It is hard to think of a topic that has maintained more agreement throughout church history than defining marriage as between a man and woman and condemning all forms of same sex sexual activity. Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant thinkers have been united on their views on this subject until the last few decades, as deeper divisions developed in how we read and interpret Scripture and what discipleship and transformation by Christ actually look like.

3. The Belhar Confession, the newest standard of unity of the Reformed Church in America, was adopted by General Synod in 2009 and ratified in 2010 after a period of study as a means of deepening the RCA’s commitment to dealing with racism and strengthening its ecumenical commitment to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and other Reformed bodies. Adoption of a doctrinal statement on human sexuality will help to bring clarity to the church’s teaching on human sexuality and will strengthen our ties with our ecumenical partners who share a commitment to defend a traditional view of marriage.
4. The reflection and study on this document could stimulate conversations that could result in the development of a contrasting catechism using a different hermeneutic. The intent of this is to foster a deeper discussion of the RCA position on this topic.

A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-21 as follows (deletions are stricken, additions are underlined):

To commend
the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality to the Commission on Theology for reflection, study, and response by the Commission on Theology and RCA churches and classes as a means of deepening our understanding of the biblical teaching on human sexuality and gender and study in consultation with outside organizations, including but not limited to Christians for Biblical Equality, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the American Psychological Association, and our Formula of Agreement partners, and to direct the Commission on Theology to report to General Synod 2019 how both biblical teaching on and general revelation in regard to human sexuality and gender might lead us to finding a pathway forward toward unity in mission and ministry.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To not adopt the amendment.

A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-21 as follows (deletions are stricken):

To commend the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality for reflection, study, and response by the Commission on Theology and RCA churches and classes as a means of deepening our understanding of the biblical teaching on human sexuality and finding a pathway forward toward unity in mission and ministry.

A motion was made and supported from the floor to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To not adopt the amendment.

A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-21 as follows (additions are underlined):

...finding a pathway forward toward unity in mission and ministry, and further, to refer both the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality and response by the Commission on Theology to the 2020 Vision Task Force.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To not adopt the amendment.
OV 18-21 in its original form was again before the house. A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To adopt OV 18-21.

**OV 18-21**
To commend the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality for reflection, study, and response by the Commission on Theology and RCA churches and classes as a means of deepening our understanding of the biblical teaching on human sexuality and finding a pathway forward toward unity in mission and ministry. *(ADOPTED)*

**SEEK RECONCILIATION WITH ANABAPTIST CHURCHES**

25. The Regional Synod of New York respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to begin a process seeking reconciliation—one which would have application with the local congregation on through to our wider ecumenical witness—with the Anabaptist churches, in which the RCA officially acknowledges our role in fracturing the Body of Christ.

**Reasons:**
1. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Godself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

2. The RCA position regarding our Belgic Confession: With regard to the harsh words about Anabaptists and others in Article 36, the RCA stated that “in publishing the Articles of Faith, the Church determined to abide by the words adopted in the Synod of Dordrecht, as most expressive of what she believes to be truth; in consequence of which, the terms alluded to could not be avoided. But she openly and candidly declares that she by no means thereby intended to refer to any denomination of Christians at present known, and would be grieved at giving offence, or unnecessarily hurting the feelings of any person.” To “openly and candidly declare” needs to be fleshed out more relevantly as in seeking reconciliation.

3. The Preamble of the *Book of Church Order* states,

    The Reformed churches confess that the church of Jesus Christ in the world is one church, the “Holy Catholic Church.” The church is the living communion of the one people of God with the one Christ who is their Head. Their oneness in him is a “communion of the saints” with Christ and with one another in the divine blessings (p. 2).

And continues [in A Historical Note, *BCO* p. 5],

The RCA is grateful to be recognized as a church that emphasizes giving an account of the hope we have in Christ Jesus in word and deed; the RCA values faithful and articulate theology and has demonstrated a deep commitment to
ministries of mission. The RCA celebrates its bond of community with all other churches of Christ and values the heritage it shares with other faith communities who call on the God of Abraham.

We need to live into our constitutional identity.

4. The Belhar Confession calls us to reconciliation.

5. The RCA finds itself amidst a culture where the spirit of division is running rampant to and fro around the church. In light of the divisions and the consequences of sin, we are called to be bearers of God’s reconciling work in Christ.

6. While our confessional identity need not change, in an ever-changing world, we need to continually testify to the hope that is within us, to live in the nuances of our differing theological perspectives even within the one body of Christ.

In response to Overture 25, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

OV 18-22
To deny Overture 25. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Our committee is unaware of a fracture between the RCA and the Anabaptists.
2. The Regional Synod of New York may resubmit an overture that will clarify the fracture between the RCA and the Anabaptists.

FROM THE REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS

Proposal 1 from the Report of the Interim General Secretary and Proposals 2 and 3 from the Report of the President were referred to the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business.

In response to Proposal 1 from the Report of the Interim General Secretary, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

OV 18-23
To appoint a 2020 Vision Group to work, in consultation with whatever staff, commissions, councils, agencies, and/or outside consultants the vision group deems necessary, to identify possible scenarios, strategies, and consequences for these future options for the Reformed Church in America:

- Staying together
- Radical reconstituting and reorganization
- Grace-filled separation

This should include, but not be limited to, consideration of one denomination with three or more affinity assemblies within it. Care should be given to the administrative, legal, financial, real estate, and emotional burdens of each option. Any potential new bodies should be identified by what they are “for” rather than what they are “against” and should be consistent with Reformed theology. This should be done in ways that affirm all parties. This must be bathed in denomination-wide, hope-filled prayer that God will show a way.
As the vision group engages these options, its work should include, but not be limited to:

- A commitment, as much as is possible, to the unity of the church in its being, spirit, covenantal relationship, mission, and kingdom witness in the world
- An understanding regarding the foundational role that biblical hermeneutics and Reformed exegesis play in the life and witness of the church, and a commitment to articulate how those methods are operative in the church’s way forward
- An analysis of the role that the RCA’s theology, Standards of Unity, and liturgies play in the present and future life of the church

The vision group will consist of 10-12 members named by the interim general secretary and general secretary, in consultation with GSC, and its makeup should reflect the wide diversity of the Reformed Church in America. The general secretary will serve as an ex-officio member without vote. Expenses for the vision group and any attendant costs, such as consulting or legal fees, will be taken out of GSC reserves, not to exceed $250,000.

The vision group shall present semi-annual reports to the GSC, an interim report to the General Synod of 2019, and a final report with recommendations to the General Synod of 2020.

Reasons:
1. This recommendation shows a desire to move forward into dialogue with an emphasis on God’s intended future for our denomination rather than standing still in argument or debate.
2. Broad consultation has gone into the development of this proposal.
3. This proposal gives the context for a holistic and comprehensive process for addressing issues present in a number of overtures to this synod into dialogue.

A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-23 as follows (deletions are stricken):

- Grace-filled separation

This should include, but not be limited to, consideration of one denomination with three or more affinity assemblies within it. Care should be given to the administrative, legal, financial, real estate, and emotional burdens of each option. Any potential new bodies should be identified by what they are ‘for’ rather than what they are ‘against’ and should be consistent with Reformed theology. This should be done in ways that affirm all parties. This must be bathed in denomination-wide, hope-filled prayer that God will show a way.

As the vision group engages these options, . . .

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment.
A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-23 as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

…for these future options for the Reformed Church in America:

- **Staying together**
- Radical reconstituting and reorganization
- Grace-filled separation

To present an interim report to the 2019 General Synod that outlines plans, structures, timelines, and outcomes for each of the two options for the purpose of choosing one option to be recommended for final approval to the 2020 General Synod.

This *process* should include, but not be limited to, consideration of one denomination with three or more affinity assemblies within it…

The vision group shall present semi-annual reports to the GSC, an interim report to the General Synod of 2019, and a final report with recommendations to the General Synod of 2020.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To not adopt the amendment.

A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-23 as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

. . . This should include, but not be limited to, consideration of one denomination with three or *more* affinity assemblies within it. Care should be given. . .

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To cease debate.

**VOTED:** To not adopt the amendment.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

**VOTED:** To not cease debate.

A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-23 as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

The vision group will consist of **10-12** members named by the interim general secretary and general secretary, in consultation with GSC, and its makeup should reflect the wide diversity of the Reformed Church in America. The general secretary will serve as an ex-officio member without vote. Expenses for the vision group and any attendant costs, such as consulting or legal fees, will be taken out of GSC reserves, not to exceed $250,000.
A point of order was raised questioning the propriety of making sequential amendments to the same recommendation. In response the president instructed the delegate who made the foregoing motion to combine all of his intended amendments into a single motion.

In response a revised motion was made by the delegate and supported to amend OV 18-23 as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

. . . The vision group will consist of 10-12 members named by the interim general secretary and general secretary, in consultation with GSC, and its makeup…

The vision group shall present semi-annual reports to the GSC, an interim report with potential recommendations that identify the administrative, legal, financial, real estate, and emotional burdens of each option to the General Synod of 2019, and a final report with recommendations to the General Synod of 2020.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt OV 18-23.

OV 18-23
To appoint a 2020 Vision Group to work, in consultation with whatever staff, commissions, councils, agencies, and/or outside consultants the vision group deems necessary, to identify possible scenarios, strategies, and consequences for these future options for the Reformed Church in America:

- Staying together
- Radical reconstituting and reorganization
- Grace-filled separation

This should include, but not be limited to, consideration of one denomination with three or more affinity assemblies within it. Care should be given to the administrative, legal, financial, real estate, and emotional burdens of each option. Any potential new bodies should be identified by what they are “for” rather than what they are “against” and should be consistent with Reformed theology. This should be done in ways that affirm all parties. This must be bathed in denomination-wide, hope-filled prayer that God will show a way.

As the vision group engages these options, its work should include, but not be limited to:
• A commitment, as much as is possible, to the unity of the church in its being, spirit, covenantal relationship, mission, and kingdom witness in the world

• An understanding regarding the foundational role that biblical hermeneutics and Reformed exegesis play in the life and witness of the church, and a commitment to articulate how those methods are operative in the church’s way forward

• An analysis of the role that the RCA’s theology, Standards of Unity, and liturgies play in the present and future life of the church

The vision group will consist of 10-12 members named by the interim general secretary and general secretary, in consultation with GSC, and its makeup should reflect the wide diversity of the Reformed Church in America. The general secretary will serve as an ex-officio member without vote. Expenses for the vision group and any attendant costs, such as consulting or legal fees, will be taken out of GSC reserves, not to exceed $250,000.

The vision group shall present semi-annual reports to the GSC, an interim report to the General Synod of 2019, and a final report with recommendations to the General Synod of 2020. (ADOPTED)

In response to Proposal 2 from the Report of the President, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

OV 18-24
To urge the general secretary to explore possibilities for establishing a global church planters’ leadership collaborative to facilitate ongoing interactions between North American church planters and counterparts in selected countries where the RCA is engaged with indigenous global mission partners. The general secretary shall provide a progress report to the 2019 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. We believe that future interactions between the RCA’s North American church planters, their Brazilian counterparts, and others elsewhere would be mutually beneficial for all concerned, boosting kingdom impact.
2. While the Christian population percentage in North America and Europe has declined since 1970, the church has been flourishing in parts of Africa, South America, and Asia.

In response to Proposal 3 from the Report of the President, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended the following:

OV 18-25
To urge the general secretary to help facilitate the launch of small church leadership collaboratives in at least three different RCA regional synods. Each leadership collaborative would seek to foster ongoing interactions among leaders of small churches (averaging
fewer than 100 in worship). The general secretary shall provide a progress report to the 2019 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
1. Ministry in congregations with fewer than 100 in worship can be uniquely challenging. Smaller budgets, reduced personnel availability, and isolated geography can contribute to exhaustion and discouragement among the leaders of these important churches. The advisory committee maintains that the networking and resources available via formal learning communities can equip and strengthen the congregational leaders serving in these critical contexts.

In response to the item of new business referred to it by the Committee of Reference (regarding the transfer of City Classis to the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics), the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

OV 18-26
To transfer City Classis, including its eight organized churches, two church plants, and all ministers and candidates under care from the Regional Synod of the Far West (RSFW) to the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics (RSMAt) by a date suitable to all parties but no later than September 30, 2018.

Reason:
1. The mutual understanding of representatives of City Classis, the Regional Synod of the Far West, and the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics is that City Classis can best serve the kingdom as a part of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics.

A motion was made and supported to amend OV 18-26 as follows (additions are underlined):

To transfer City Classis, including its eight organized churches, two church plants, and all ministers and candidates under care of City Classis from the Regional Synod of the Far West (RSFW) to the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics (RSMAt) by a date suitable to all parties but no later than September 30, 2018.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment.

OV 18-26 as amended was before the house.

A motion was made and supported to cease debate.

VOTED: To cease debate.

VOTED: To adopt OV 18-26 as amended.

OV 18-26
To transfer City Classis, including its eight organized churches, two church plants, and all ministers and candidates under care of City Classis from the Regional Synod of the Far West (RSFW) to the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics (RSMAt) by a date suitable to all parties but no later than September 30, 2018. (ADOPTED)
1 Q: Is human sexuality a good thing or not?
A: It is good! We see in Scripture that God created us male and female as part of the creation order,
    that our sexuality is an inherent part of being human,
    and that our sexuality is part of what God calls “very good” in the beginning.1

Moreover, God created man and woman as full partners,
    together bearing God’s image2
    and together receiving God’s blessing and call to
    “Be fruitful and increase in number;
    fill the earth, and subdue it.
    rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky
    and over every living creature that lives on the ground.”3

2 Q: But isn’t the body or the “flesh” the root cause of our sin and temptation?
A: Certainly not! Our sin problem is not ultimately a body or sex problem;
    it is a heart problem—
    we do not desire God as we should
    and so we desire other things in a way we should not.4

3 Q: May we then look to our bodies and sexual desires to learn what is right?
A: No. Our expressions of sexuality are distorted and twisted by sin.
    Sin warps us in many ways,
    including our desires, thoughts, and actions pertaining to our sexuality.

Because our sexuality is affected by the fall,
    we should not act on our desires, inclinations, or thoughts
    without first testing them by what Scripture teaches is honorable, right, pure,
    and lovely.5

4 Q: So Scripture is the source from which we learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in our sexual lives?
A: Yes. Scripture is the infallible rule for our lives.6
    This means that we look to it to understand
    who God is and who we are called to be as God’s people.

In this world, we are called to test all teaching about marriage and sexuality
    by Scripture,
    and we must not put human writings,
    custom or tradition,
    the majority opinion,
    the thinking of our own time and place,
    or even past decisions of the church,
above the truth of God,
    For God’s truth is above everything.7

1 Gen. 1:31
2 Gen. 1:27
3 Gen. 1:28
4 Jer. 17:9; James 1:14-15
5 Phil. 4:8
6 Belgic Confession, art. 7
7 Belgic Confession, art. 7
5 Q: Who should we consider our family?
A: Though many may consider their biological family their first family, Jesus teaches us that those who are his disciples, who are united by one Lord and one baptism into God’s covenant people, should be considered our primary family.

6 Q: Does this mean our earthly families are unimportant?
A: No. In fact, Scripture teaches us that we are to honor our parents,\(^8\) and that we should faithfully love our spouses and children.\(^9\) Nevertheless, we are called to seek first the kingdom of God.\(^10\) God’s mission and vocation must shape all my relationships. Though earthly families are good and a blessing, they may become an idol if we make them our ultimate priority or loyalty. All earthly loyalties and obligations, including those of family, must be subject to the lordship of Jesus.

7 Q: Since marriage and family are good, is it necessary to be married?
A: No. During his earthly ministry, Jesus showed us that true human fulfillment does not need to include marriage or sex. Yet, the life of Jesus most certainly included close, intimate relationships with those he called family.

8 Q: But why do many people in my church expect young adults to get married and raise a family?
A: The goal for all Christians is not marriage, but, whether married or single, to live decent and chaste lives.\(^11\)

In the beginning, God blessed marriage and he calls many Christians to live out their discipleship in the context of marriage. Nevertheless, Christians sometimes idolize marriage and family and promote the unbiblical teaching that a person can only find fulfillment and happiness in the context of a marriage and family.

However, this expectation is contrary to Scripture, which teaches that many Christians will be unmarried,\(^12\) whether through choice or circumstance, and that they live a true, fully human life, as our Savior did.

9 Q: How then should we view the single, celibate life?
A: Singleness can serve as a sign and reminder to married people that our most basic calling is to seek first the kingdom of God,\(^13\) not our earthly families.

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\(^8\) Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1
\(^9\) Eph. 5:21-6:4
\(^10\) Matt. 6:33; Matt. 12:46-50
\(^11\) Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 108
\(^12\) 1 Cor. 7:29-40
\(^13\) 1 Cor. 7:33-35; Matt. 6:33
In addition, the single person’s life points us ahead to the life to come, when we will neither marry nor be given in marriage.\[14\]

**10 Q: Why did God institute marriage between man and woman?**

A: Though many see marriage simply as a path to personal fulfillment, happiness, or self-realization, or a relationship that may be dissolved if they are dissatisfied, Scripture teaches that God instituted marriage between a man and woman as a sign of Christ and the church,\[15\] as a state of mutual help for life’s journey,\[16\] as a relationship in which married Christians are sanctified,\[17\] and in order to provide for the continuation of the human race\[18\] and the raising of children into a life of faith in Jesus Christ.\[19\]

**11 Q: Should we view the duties and obligations of marriage and family as a hindrance to the truly spiritual life?**

A: No. When properly understood, we see that faithful devotion to one’s spouse and faithful care of one’s children are not merely “earthly” or “natural” matters but are in fact key elements of a faithful walk with Christ.\[20\]

Furthermore, the married person is a sign and reminder to single people that, just as a husband or wife has obligations to their spouse and family, so we all have obligations to the family of God.

**12 Q: What is the meaning of sexual union?**

A: God created man and woman to be able to unite not only our bodies, but our very lives and selves as husband and wife.

In marriage, husbands and wives give themselves completely to one another, and the one-flesh sexual union embodies the fact that these two persons are no longer two, but one flesh.\[21\]

**13 Q: But isn’t sexual union just a physical act?**

A: No. It is certainly more than that.

In fact, when we reduce sex to a merely physical or biological act, we end up reducing other image-bearers of God to mere objects to be used.

We see this abuse and hatred of our neighbor all around us,\[22\] in pornography, prostitution, rape,

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\[14\] Matt. 22:30
\[15\] Eph. 5:31-32
\[16\] Gen. 2:18
\[17\] John 13:34; Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:3; Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5; 1 Cor. 7:4-5; Gal. 6:2; 1 Thess. 5:11
\[18\] Gen. 1:28; Ps. 127:3
\[19\] Deut. 6:4-9
\[20\] Eph. 5:21-6:4
\[21\] Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31
\[22\] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 5
promiscuity,  
cohabitation apart from marriage,  
and sexual union outside of the covenant of marriage.

14 Q: How, then, should we understand sexual union?  
A: Sexual union is a part of the total giving of oneself—  
body and soul, indeed one’s whole self—  
to one’s spouse,  
just as God in Christ gave himself completely to his bride, the Church.  

And just as God is a faithful God who gives himself to us in covenant,  
so sexual union is a covenantal act  
that commits one to faithful, lifelong love to one’s spouse.  

Sexual union is also meant to be a free act, entered into without coercion,  
but freely and graciously,  
as God in Christ freely and graciously loves us.  

And finally, God created husband and wife so that  
they fruitfully participate in the miracle of new life.  
Just as God’s life and creativity brought us forth,  
so children are not to be seen as a nuisance or impediment  
to the marriage relationship  
but as gifts of God,  
disciples to be raised in the training and instruction of the Lord.  

15 Q: Does Scripture limit marriage and sexual union to a husband and wife?  
A: Scripture consistently teaches that the difference  
between a woman and man in marriage is essential  
to properly represent, symbolically, Christ and the church,  
to the one-flesh act of sexual union  
and one-flesh relationship of covenantal marriage,  
and for the bringing of children into the world.  

In Scripture, bodies matter.  
We are saved by the body of Christ, broken for us,  
and his blood, shed for our sins.  
Without Christ’s body, we cannot be saved.  

Furthermore, in the sacraments, we see that the material elements matter.  
God does not merely give us grace through invisible means  
but gives us visible signs and seals,  
which are not empty and hollow signs  
but which have their truth in Jesus Christ,

23 Phil. 2:5-8  
24 Ex. 34:6-7  
25 Mal. 2:16.  
26 Rom. 8:32  
27 Gen. 1:28; Ps. 139:13-14  
28 Gen. 2:4-7, 18-22; Job 10:8-9.  
29 Ps. 127:3-5; Gen. 21:1; Gen. 30:22; 1 Sam. 1:19; Ps. 139:13-14  
30 Eph. 6:1-4; Deut. 6:4-9
without whom they would be nothing.\(^{31}\)

In a similar way, bodies matter in marriage, which is defined in part by the sexual difference of male and female, who together—body and soul—bear the image of God and symbolize Christ and the church. Thus, marriage is not defined merely by the will or desire of any individual but by the recognition that our Creator and Redeemer God has instituted marriage to take a certain form, with certain kinds of bodies: “A man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”\(^{32}\)

16 Q: Does Scripture really condemn all same-sex sexual activity?  
A: Yes. Scripture consistently and categorically condemns sexual activity between persons of the same sex as immoral. Genesis 1-2 presents the male-female relationship as God’s design for marriage. The Torah given by God to Israel teaches that same-sex sexual activity is wrong.\(^{33}\) Jesus re-affirms the teaching of Genesis on marriage, that marriage is between a man and woman.\(^{34}\) The early church condemns same-sex sexual activity when they condemn “sexual immorality,” a term that points back to Leviticus 18 and encompasses all forms of sexual sin,\(^{35}\) and the New Testament writers re-affirm the sexual ethics of Torah, including specific condemnations of incest, adultery, and same-sex sexual activity.\(^{36}\)

17 Q: Does the Bible especially condemn same-sex sexual activity above other sins, sexual or otherwise?  
A: No. Scripture never singles out same-sex sexual activity as a worse sin than others.

18 Q: What should characterize our attitudes and actions toward those who are same-sex attracted, whether inside or outside the church?  
We must first remember that there is a difference between being same-sex attracted, and acting sexually on that attraction. Just as there is a difference between being attracted to people of the opposite sex, and acting sexually on that attraction.

Furthermore, though Scripture condemns sexual sin, it also condemns all forms of mockery, degrading words and thoughts, economic oppression,

\(^{31}\) Belgic Confession, art. 33  
\(^{32}\) Gen. 2:24  
\(^{33}\) Lev. 18:22  
\(^{34}\) Matt. 19:1-10  
\(^{35}\) Acts 15:19-20  
\(^{36}\) 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 1 Tim. 1:10
abuse, threats, and violence against anyone based on their sexual identity or activity.\textsuperscript{37}

Anyone involved in such behavior must repent and walk in obedience to Jesus’ command to love.

\textbf{19 Q: What about those who fail to keep fully Scripture’s teaching on marriage and sexuality? How should we view them?}

A: We must first remember that “they” are us!\textsuperscript{38}

We are all sinners saved by God’s extravagant grace.

We must therefore see all people with the eyes of Jesus, who looks on us with compassion.

We must also remember that we should not expect people who are not disciples of Jesus to act as though they are.

Indeed, Scripture teaches us that we should expect to interact and associate with those who are idolaters and sexually immoral as part of our daily life in this world.\textsuperscript{39}

But as disciples of Jesus, we are also called to teach, rebuke, correct, and even discipline one another,\textsuperscript{40} for we know that without discipline, we dare not call ourselves the church of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{41}

And we do not love one another in this way merely for the sake of following the rules or keeping human traditions but because God’s life-giving Spirit empowers and equips us for a life of faith and gratitude,\textsuperscript{42} for which we were made and to which we are called.

\textsuperscript{37} Belhar Confession, art. 4. Luke 6:31; Lev. 19:9-18; Prov. 6:16-19
\textsuperscript{38} Romans 2:1-4
\textsuperscript{39} 1 Cor. 5:9-10
\textsuperscript{40} Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-11
\textsuperscript{41} Belgic Confession, art. 29
\textsuperscript{42} Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 32 & 33