

Classis of North Grand Rapids Meeting Minutes

Special Session
Third Reformed Church
February 21, 2017

Opening:

Devotion led by Jen Petersen

Business Meeting Called to Order by Jen Petersen, President at 7:05 PM.

Roll Call (completed by signature)

A – Excused Absence U – Unexcused Absence

Church	Clergy	Elder	Elder
Aberdeen Reformed	Ryan Landt	Gwen Riordan	
Casnovia	Vacant	Jason Vermeulen	Joan Moore
Central Reformed	Vacant	Helen Phillips	Jeff DeVree
	Katie Baker	Marla Lunderburg	
Church of the Master	David Mayer	Deb Schmidt	
The Community - Ada	William Norden (A)	Bob Engelsman	
	Mara Joy Norden		
Fourth Reformed	Eric Schalk	Branson Parler	Tom Boehm
Knapp Street Reformed	Les Wiseman (A)	Russell Ripma	Dave Decker
		Cathy Millard	
Oakview Community Church	Gerald Vander Velde (MUC)	John Dykema	
Orchard Hill Reformed	Bob Karel (A)	Michael Bart	William Hahn
	Kathy Bartels (MUC) (A)	Henry Smitter (A)	
	Laura Claus		
Remembrance Reformed	Eric Cook	Steve Chanter	Ed DeGroot
	Todd Schmidt	John Jacobitz	
Resurrection Reformed	Doug Kiel	Pat DeMoss	
	Kristi Kiel		
Richmond Reformed	Christopher Westerbeek	Ray Van Portfliet	Mark Mulder
Rockford Reformed	Paul Bradford (A)	Scott Brownell	Craig Vander Heide
Servant's Community	Vacant	Cindy Bennett	Jody Horton
		Kurt Reppart	
Standale	Jessica Shults (A)	Lin Cline	
Third Reformed	Jeff Petersen	Ron Schollaart	Tammy Schollaart
Trinity Reformed	Ben Bruins	Kerri Vryhof	
	Sarah Bruins		
Specialized Ministers/Ministers Without Charge/Inactive			
Lee Ausema (A)	Nancy Boote (U)	Eric Branch (U)	Nancy Claus
Susan Cleveland	John Delger	Marcia Elders (U)	Lisa Henderson (U)
Sarah Juist (A)	Kate Kooyman (U)	Steve Luchies	Diane Maodush-Pitzer (A)
Tim Meendering	Cheryl Molhoek	Adam Navis (U)	Robyn Saylor (U)
Steve Wolters (A)	David Veldt		
Rachel Bush	Brad Olson (U)	Jennifer Petersen	Jonathan Tice (U)
Susan VanderWall (U)	Bill VanderWerp (U)	Aaron Wetzal (A)	
Andre Daley			
Retired Ministers			
Roger Eernisse	Bill Fennema	Lou Lotz	Don Veltman

Dennis Wilcox			
Associates In Ministry, Commissioned Pastor			
Willa Brown (A)	George VanderHyde		
Joel Bengelink (A)	Mike Gafa	George Werkema	
Guests			
Scott Rose			

Meeting Purpose

The special session was called to continue discussion of two of the proposed changes to the Book of Church Order: Adoption of *“Order for Christian Marriage” as part of the liturgy of the Reformed Church in America, and Marriages Solemnized in a Church or Congregation*. The following content was provided and discussion followed.

1. Branson Parler, student under care and *Associate Professor of Theological Studies* at Kuyper College made a general presentation on Biblical Interpretation.
2. Jen Petersen, President, presented a spectrum of views regarding homosexuality, acknowledging the limitations of any presentation of this type to address all views or issues of human sexuality.
3. Jen and Branson each presented their individual understanding of the role of marriage as seen in the Biblical Narrative and as applied to current realities.
4. Participants divided into small groups and discussed the following topics.
 - How does the Biblical text shape the way you think about the churches response to homosexuality?
 - How does the Biblical text shape your understanding of the role of marriage today?
 - What other issues are important for you to consider when you think about the two proposed amendments to the RCA's constitution regarding marriage.
5. The small groups shared a summary of their discussions.

Resolutions

Motion made, supported, and approved to excuse the absences of Lee Ausema, Kathy Bartels, Paul Bradford, Willa Brown, Roger Eernisse, Sarah Juist, Bob Karel, Diane Maodush-Pitzer, Billy Norden, Jess Shults, Henry Smitter, Aaron Wetzel, Les Wiseman, and Steve Wolters.

Closing

Motion made, supported, and approved to close the meeting.

Closing Prayer by [name]

Next Classis Meetings

Stated Session –March 21 2017, Fourth Reformed Dinner 5:45 PM; session 6:45 PM

Student Exams – July 11, 2017 at Knapp (no dinner) 6:30 PM

Jennifer Petersen, President

Robert J. Teitsma, Stated Clerk

At the February 21st special session of Classis, participants were asked to share their responses to each of these three questions:

1. How does the Biblical text shape the way you think about the church's response to homosexuality?
2. How does the Biblical text shape your understanding of the role of marriage today?
3. What other issues are important for you to consider when you think about the two proposed amendments to the RCA's constitution regarding marriage?

After small group discussions around these questions, each person was given an opportunity to articulate one thing they'd like to share with the large group as a result of their small group discussion. The following are those responses. I (Jen Petersen) have done no editing or clarifying; they have simply been copied directly from the papers from each group.

- Grace and truth equally exercised
- A reflection of Christ and the church, thus a light to the lost
- They point to the inability of God's people to stand on the word together.
- Watering down the word of God to meet society's view point.
- Worried about witness of Jesus today.
- Worried the RCA will split with these amendments
- What will the impact of approving these 2 constitutional questions have on each congregation?
- The love of God encourages much more than a narrow reading of scripture.
- What is the difference between now and then after this vote?
- The proposal is the antithesis of saying we are reformed and reforming.
- The recommendations are bad polity.
- These proposals seek to divide (congregations, people) when we need unity.
- These recommendations are political and divisive.
- Worried about splitting the RCA no matter which way the vote goes.
- Elevating marriage liturgy to a constitutional level isn't true to the Reformed tradition.
- Reformed polity has a tradition of living in tension – accepting differences.
- We're better served by living into the tension of God and faith than regulating the "non-salvific" issues.
- Balance of grace and truth is what we need to seek and then figure out how to live.
- Concerned that we continue to seek ways to live in love/accept that in the fallen world we have different views – listen to and learn from each other.
- Is there a way we can move forward without creating a situation in which one side "wins" and one side "loses"?
- Should this be a primary issue of the church's focus? (taking attention from other urgent matters, like evangelism)
- Concerned about people I know and love who have a more traditional view of marriage and family - being demonized/stigmatized as "bigots" as gay marriage is seen more culturally as a "civil rights" issue/justice issue.
- We're glad we're able to have conversation about these issues but remain connected and honor each other's thoughts and opinions. Amen!
- I lament the lack of unity.
- Learning to love in the midst of disagreement.

- Stand firm in a loving way.
- I feel the framework of the conversation is too small.
- Biblically it's clear what is sin and what's not. We need to hold each other accountable in the church to flee from sin.
- God works through diverse interpretations of scripture – we need to figure out how to embrace diversity of faithful interpretations and trust that God is working.
- I want to be a follower of Jesus in all things – I believe we need to keep working at this questions for further understanding.
- We are accepting that none of this is the perfect picture, so we keep searching and are careful about exclusion.
- May we always be stuck in the search!! and avoid excluding God's children from partnership in the meantime.
- May we tolerate and investigate always.
- We don't work toward restoration by drawing absolutes; the greatest is love.
- I'm worried that since lots of people don't know scripture, we risk letting scripture come between us and the people, us and God.
- My hope is that we extend grace to one another and remain in conversation with one another
- More conversation needs to be had to seek every avenue for unity, and drawing a line in the sand in this particular way, using liturgy, will be damaging.
- Regardless of your position, consider the POLITY implications of these decisions for our life together.
- Given the breadth of different interpretations, can we agree to disagree for the sake of unity, purity, and peace?
- Does the act of sexual union mean anything intrinsically?
- Polity => I've been disappointed, even angry at times, with activists on both sides of the same-sex marriage issue for their apparent willingness to blow up the church over this. Through 400 years we have found the grace to tolerate different points of view on important issues, and live with the tension of disagreement, for the sake of the Gospel. Why not this? What makes this different from divorce, abortion, or other areas of continuing disagreement?
Hypocrisy => In 1979 we said no double standard of morality. Well said, but not so well executed. Consider divorce, for example, and remarriage in cases that don't seem to fit any of the Scriptural exceptions. I'm just as uncomfortable with that as I am with same sex marriage. Yet we routinely accept, and often perform, second marriages in the church. What makes same-sex marriage different?
Theology => Gen 1:26-27 and 2:24. Men and women may each separately reflect the image of God. This is one view of gender equality. But when God says, according to the NRSV, "Let us make humankind in our image," the statement seems to be coming from the Trinity. Maybe there's something about the union of a man and a woman (two in one) that reflects the union of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (three in one). This is another view of gender equality; maybe neither can be complete without the other. Besides, looking at body and soul, you don't need an engineering degree from MIT to see how this was supposed to work. So I don't believe that same-sex union is what God intended. But on the other side of the fall, the union of a sinful man and a sinful woman will never be quite what God intended either. Two sinful people of the same sex might do just as well. Should the church permit one, but not the other?
More questions than answers ...