

Overture:

The Consistory of Corinth Reformed Church overtures the Classis of South Grand Rapids to overture the General Synod to direct the General Synod Council to form a committee to meet with a representative committee from within the ELCA and to begin what would hopefully be a one-year process of conversation and clarification, under the provisions of the *Formula of Agreement*, meeting no less than two times and affirming the RCA's basis in biblical teaching on the topic of homosexuality and that this committee should keep the RCA informed about the results of these meetings and that this committee report back, if possible, to the General Synod of 2011 the results of these meetings, i.e., whether the ELCA indicates a willingness to restore biblically faithful teaching on this issue.

Reasons:

1. The appointment of a committee to meet with the ELCA is called for because the ELCA has adopted a position on homosexuality that is in clear contradiction of Scripture and the RCA's own clear and loving position on this issue:

- a. The ELCA summarizesⁱ its action:
 - i. **Resolution 1:** "Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships."
 - ii. **Resolution 2:** "Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church."
- b. Scripture gives dire warnings to those engaged in unrepentant sexual immorality, including homosexual behavior. For instance: *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.* (Romans 1:24-27, NIV; see endnoteⁱⁱ for further examples). From the beginning, God's plan for marriage has been one man and one woman as one flesh in the covenant of marriage: *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."... So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.* (Genesis 2:18, 21-25, NIV). Jesus reaffirmed this original design: *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."* (Matthew 19:4-6, NIV).

- c. The RCA has spoken clearly and lovingly that sexual immorality, including homosexual behavior, is contrary to Scripture. Our position remains: *To adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to scripture, while at the same time encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings. (MGS 1990: 461)* Indeed, we have published a number of clear statements on this matter. For instance, *Heterosexuality is not only normal; it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality.*ⁱⁱⁱ For further examples, consult the endnotes.^{iv}
 - d. While the RCA has completed a three-year dialogue on the topic of homosexuality, this has not been for the purpose of changing our position. The dialogue drew a clear distinction between *dialogue* which “provides opportunities to hear the viewpoints and experiences of others,” and deliberation, which “invites opposing speeches, and...settles issues by voting.” We have affirmed that “dialogue does not yield policy decisions.”^v Our willingness to dialogue as a church body does not change the fact that we have clearly spoken on this issue.
2. **The appointment of a committee to meet with the ELCA is called for because the RCA and ELCA, as fellow signatories of the *Formula of Agreement*, are bound by the biblical call to mutual admonition.**
- a. The *Formula* both celebrates and binds us to the call of admonition. It defines the term “full communion,” stating the signatories: *pledge themselves to living together under the Gospel in such a way that the principle of mutual affirmation and admonition becomes the basis of a trusting relationship in which respect and love for the other will have a chance to grow.*^{vi} Likewise, in celebrating five years of full communion with the ELCA, we reaffirmed our commitment to *joint ministry, witness, and service, as well as mutual accountability in making decisions about church life.*^{vii}
 - b. Scripture clearly teaches that true love must exercise confrontation for the purpose of restoration (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1).^{viii} Likewise, true worship dwells side by side with admonition (Col. 3:16).^{ix} Furthermore, as a biblically centered body, we must not forget that the Bible has been given to us “for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” so we can be “thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV). If, indeed, God has called us to pursue shared mission (i.e., “good work”) with the ELCA, we cannot ignore the task of correction and reproof.

Endnotes:

ⁱ See *A Brief Summary of Actions*, a summary of actions taken at the Eleventh Churchwide Assembly, August 17-23, 2009 in Minneapolis Minnesota. Also available here:

<http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/ELCA-Governance/Churchwide-Assembly/Actions/Voting.aspx>

ⁱⁱ Further examples:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV) Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21 (NIV) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:3 (NIV) But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=501>

^{iv} The following quotes can be found at <http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=501>:

In 1978, the General Synod voted to make a paper presented by the Commission on Theology available to RCA congregations. The paper stated that:

- When Paul rejects homosexual acts on the grounds that they are “against nature” he expresses and reaffirms the clear sense of Scripture: Human sexuality was created for heterosexual expression... When the subject of homosexuality is raised, the majority of modern opinion still seems to be: “People weren’t made to be that way.” If such opinion is expressed with fear, loathing or recrimination, as is often the case, it must be pitied and resisted. When the same statement is made in humility and with compassion, it may be considered biblical.
- Heterosexuality is not only normal; it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality.
- The homosexual invert [one who does not decide to become homosexual, but for whom genetic, hormonal, or psychosocial factors have influenced his or her sexual orientation] is no more to be blamed for his/her condition than a retarded child. It follows, then, that the church’s ministry to the invert may best begin with the attempt to lift a burden of guilt that need not be carried. Inverts may not idealize their orientation as a legitimate alternative, but neither should they blame themselves for their sexual orientation.
- While we cannot affirm homosexual behavior, at the same time we are convinced that the denial of human and civil rights to homosexuals is inconsistent with the biblical witness and Reformed theology. (MGS 1978: 233-239)

A report entitled “Christian Pastoral Care for the Homosexual,” presented to the General Synod in 1979, listed three areas of congregational life with which the church must come to terms if it is to witness effectively to the homosexual:

- Elimination of the double standard of morality applied to the homosexual. It often seems as though the church places certain sins, homosexuality among them, beyond its own responsibility for ministry and, by implication, beyond the reach of God’s grace.
- The church should acknowledge its sins against the homosexual. Homosexuality is neither to be celebrated nor persecuted. Homophobia must be replaced by a sense of common humanity, the desire to understand, and the determination to put away the sins commonly committed against the homosexual, including stereotyping, caricaturing, and enjoying disparaging humor at the homosexual’s expense.
- The church should make a genuine effort to understand homosexuality. The church must be willing to understand and deal with the concrete life situation in which [the homosexual] finds himself. There is much we do not know about homosexuality, but we do know that it is a complex phenomenon. (MGS 1979: 130-131)

In 1980, General Synod voted to adopt a resolution

To bring to the awareness of RCA members, congregations, classes, and synods competent programs and persons which can successfully help the practicing homosexual and lesbian, minister or layperson, overcome his or her homosexual behavior. (MGS 1980: 97)

The 1990 General Synod voted to adopt an official position on the issue of homosexuality, as some classes felt there was confusion within the church as to the status of the 1978 report on homosexuality. The advisory committee recommended:

To adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to scripture, while at the same encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings. (MGS 1990: 461)

^v <http://images.rca.org/docs/mgs/2009MGS-GSC-Referrals.pdf#page=23> In context:

Dialogue is a form of human interaction which provides opportunities to hear the view- points and experiences of others and to understand how they, being different from our- selves, understand issues about which both of us care. Reciprocally, participants also enjoy the opportunity to be heard and understood. Dialogue differs from deliberation. Deliberation invites opposing speeches, and it settles issues by voting; the church's assemblies such as classes or General Synod engage in deliberation.

This is consequently not a position paper; it is a report on a process. The dialogue coordinator and steering committee designed and directed a dialogue program of several sessions for the purposes of listening and encounter within the RCA on the emotionally loaded subject of homosexuality and church life. The sessions brought about increased understanding of the issues involved and increased acceptance of differences among participants. In that sense, the dialogue sessions "worked."

^{vi} <http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=434>

^{vii} <http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=440>

^{viii} Matthew 18:15-20 (NIV) "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be[d]bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Galatians 6:1 (NIV) Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

^{ix} Colossians 3:16 (NIV) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.