

Resolution to Disaffiliate from the Christian Reformed Church in North America

It is with heavy hearts that we, the Council of Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church, hereby initiate the process of disaffiliation from the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

In a communication to Classis Grand Rapids East and Synod 2024 this past February, Neland's Council expressed its hope that Synod 2024 would (1) give Neland room to live out its mission by allowing officebearers to continue utilizing an unrestricted gravamina (objections) process, and (2) refrain from punitive discipline of Neland's leaders and congregation. Neland went on to say that "if Synod should act to prohibit or inhibit this work—which we believe God's Word and Spirit are clearly calling us to do—it would sadly be closing the door on our participation in this denomination." By its actions (see *Acts of Synod*, arts. 69, 76), Synod 2024 shut that door very tightly.

Grounds for Disaffiliation:

1. When Synod 2022 changed the CRC's denominational position on human sexuality from pastoral advice to an interpretation with confessional status, it thereby expected every professing member and every officebearer to comply with this position as a condition of membership and/or holding office in the CRC or be subject to the discipline of the church. The membership of Neland Church represents a range of perspectives on matters of sexuality, and this decision of confessional status compromises our life together. Our members who do not comply with this position are regarded as members and/or officebearers in good standing. This creates an intractable conflict between Neland Church and this new confessional interpretation of the Christian Reformed Church.
2. Up until Synod 2024, the CRC Church Order had a conscience clause (called a gravamen) whereby officebearers who have disagreements with CRC confessional teaching (about matters such as reprobation, infant baptism vs. believer baptism, and premillennial vs. amillennial views of the end times, to name just a few examples) could still function with integrity in spite of intractable conflicts. Restrictions on the gravamen process approved by Synod 2024 now make it impossible for most Neland Church officebearers to sign the Covenant for Officebearers with integrity, thereby leaving Neland Church with an incapacitating leadership vacuum for the future.
3. By redefining a gravamen (as described in #2 above) and creating such a swift and harsh path of expulsion for churches with differing biblical interpretations on complex matters, Synod 2024 has created a denominational culture of suspicion and intimidation around important theological inquiry and honest struggles of biblical interpretation. Such a culture is alien to a Reformed approach to Scripture and life—an approach that encourages rigorous theological exploration, expects ongoing biblical interpretation, and affirms Christ's lordship over all.
4. The official CRC views on human sexuality (1) are based largely on the flawed premises of the HSR, resulting in conclusions that are erroneous and vastly oversimplified; and (2) do not have adequate biblical grounds to justify elevating them to confessional status. These views are harmful to LGBTQ+ Christians and those who love them, and further ostracize people who have been historically marginalized within the CRC. Neland Church has played its part in these past failings, but cannot stand by in good conscience while these wrongs are perpetrated as biblical and confessional imperatives.
5. Recent CRC synods have violated CRC church order in egregious ways that seriously threaten the relative autonomy of the local church (a bedrock principle of Christian Reformed polity) and harm Neland Church. Synod 2022 took action that entailed special discipline against a deacon of Neland Ave. CRC, a violation of Church Order Articles 82-83 that give responsibility to the local council for special discipline of officebearers. And Synod 2024 took action that entailed general discipline and special discipline against dozens of congregations, including Neland Church. This action includes the "limited suspension" of all officebearers in those congregations as well as threats to "remove the council, revert the church to an

emerging status, [and] plac[e] the church under the authority of a neighboring council.” These decisions are indicative of a growing imbalance in the traditional tension in CRC polity between *limited synodical authority* and *relative local autonomy*. They flagrantly disregard and dishonor the CRC church order, the historical interpretation and application of the church order, and the thoughtful and careful work of past synods who heeded the church order’s final caution, echoing the words of Abraham Kuyper, that “No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer” (CO Art. 85).

6. Synod 2024’s disciplinary and punitive approach to members and churches that do not comply with the denomination’s new confessional interpretation of human sexuality perpetuates a growing denominational culture of harm and disunity that runs counter to the church’s mission of proclaiming the reconciling love of Christ, as well as to Neland’s mission to “be a community of hope where all will experience and extend the deep welcome of Christ.”

With sadness and with trust that one day Christ will bring us together,

The Council of Neland Ave. Christian Reformed Church
September 27, 2024