

April 24, 2025



Dear Bethel,

Thank you for your prayers, questions and encouragement as we seek to follow God's will for us as a church. In January of 2025, we gathered for a listening session related to the Human Sexuality Report (HSR) and Synod's decisions over the past few years. The intention behind this session was for us as a Council to hear the questions, responses and concerns shared within our community so that we can best discern how to lead and serve our church.

From this session, we have provided a summary which has been sent out jointly with this letter. Through the following, we would like: 1) to clarify how Synod's decisions impacts us as a church; 2) to provide direction for how we plan to respond to these challenges; 3) to re-affirm our posture for compassionate and missional ministry at Bethel.

Clarity

The primary cause for discussion and discernment has been due to Synod's act to hold its recent decisions about sexuality as confessional, affirming that 'unchastity' in the Heidelberg Catechism (HC) Q. and A. 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extra-marital sex, polyamory, pornography and homosexual sex. To be clear, these positions of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) are not new, but were previously recommended to churches as pastoral advice. However, Synod gave its interpretation of HC Q. and A 108 confessional status which means that officebearers are now required to subscribe to the same view. For context, officebearers in the CRC include pastors, elders and deacons.

At Bethel, our discernment process has primarily been about how we continue as a Christian Reformed Church to offer a vibrant ministry as part of the CRC's wider network of congregations. We believe this best aligns with Bethel's values and commitments as a congregation. Some in our community experience tensions with Synod's decisions. For example, we have some members who feel they can no longer sign the [covenant of office bearers](#). Truthfully, we lament how the process for these decisions may have caused some to feel discouraged about what is a vital part of our call as Christians—to love and welcome our neighbours in Christ.

It is also good for us express gratitude for the clarity Synod's decisions have offered us. Our pastors are committed to serving the church in this direction. We believe in a biblical response to our culture today to which our denomination's position directs us. Also, this means that for new officebearers, elders and deacons, each would need to affirm the [covenant of office bearers](#) with Synod's interpretations in mind. While this does not have a direct impact on membership, these decisions shape our teaching around sexuality as we faithfully respond to sin and the world around us.

Our position at Bethel: We commit to faithfully follow Jesus in community as a Christian Reformed Church within the defined expectations of its officebearers.

Direction

The listening session raised a number of concerns for us to consider. The following are some of our responses to them, as we continue to listen and reflect on how best to offer leadership and direction.

1. What will we do if we have fewer people to serve as officebearers (i.e. elders and deacons)?

We understand and celebrate that our church is comprised of a diverse community of believers coming from different Christian traditions. We do not want this to change so long as the essential priorities of faith in Christ remain the primary guide to our formation and witness. We also believe in leadership and participation in many levels throughout the church. Every area of ministry and leadership matters and is not to be considered “less than” in any way.

- We will work to create different space for leaders to serve at Bethel in non-Council roles. Recently, Pastor Wendy has been working with Shepherding Elders to equip pastoral care workers who can partner with elders and pastors in the care of the church.
- Many Bethelites already contribute in incredible ways to diaconal work. We hope and pray that even more people in our church will join with the deacons in responding to the needs of the wider community. We will create tangible opportunities for this throughout the year.
- Most of our committees are supported by leaders not in Council roles (i.e. Facilities, Finance, HR, Refugee Committee, etc.). We pray that this strong leadership can continue.

Yes, our leadership structure may change; perhaps we may operate with a smaller council. That said, this does not mean less leadership. In fact, it may mean we have more leaders involved in vital ministry within and beyond our church.

2. How will we address questions around Scripture and theology as it relates to sexuality?

We will coordinate with our pastors to offer opportunities for teaching and learning this year around sexuality, most likely in contexts outside of Sunday morning. These will also be contexts where questions around church polity, confessionality and governance can be asked as we realize many in our church come from different Christian traditions. Even by stating a position about our intent to continue fellowship and mission with the CRC, we understand and expect questions and concerns will remain. We commit to continue listening and walking alongside one another as we follow Jesus together.

3. Is local decision-making possible rather than strictly following Synod’s decisions?

While we understand the heart of this desire, within our church polity, this is not a workable path. As a Christian Reformed Church, we are part of a greater communion of churches with expectations that offer both support and accountability to us. As we do not see a strong desire for Bethel to leave the CRC, we are primarily focused on offering the best leadership to Bethel with the new stated expectations of its officebearers.

Posture

While we want to provide clarity around our position as a church, we do not want the scope of our ministry and its heart to be defined simply by position but also by posture. We believe in a compassionate missional posture with one another and specifically with those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. As we follow Christ more deeply, the more will our compassion for others deepen. This is why listening matters and it is also why clarity matters. We need the best resources and the best hearts engaged in how we welcome and support all our neighbours.

- To this end, Bethel is involved in a hospitality cohort with other churches in Classis Alberta North to more deeply explore pastoral care for those in the LGBTQ+ community.
- Sessions led by pastors on biblical teaching about sexuality will also keep in mind how we can and should respond to others in love.

We do not intend for this communication to be received as a closed loop for conversation. We desire to continue listening to one another. Please continue sharing your hopes and desires with us as a church. Please continue to ask questions, and expect the best of the leaders serving you. We humbly agree—God has far more in store for us together than apart.

As stated above, we commit to faithfully follow Jesus in community as a Christian Reformed Church within the defined expectations of its officebearers. We thank you in advance for your prayers and for your valued participation in God's mission at Bethel.

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” (1 Corinthians 12:13-14)

May we continue to build a house of belonging unto God where we can all embrace the journey of *becoming like Christ and sharing him with others*.

Together in Christ's service,

The Council of Bethel Community Church