

**Supplement to the Agenda for Classis Heartland
Saturday, March 9, 2024 - 8:30 AM**

The following items were received by the clerk after our deadline and need to be included in our deliberations as Classis Heartland.

1. Communication from Immanuel CRC re: “The Chosen” (p. 2)
2. Two Overtures to Classis Heartland re: Confessional Difficulty Gravamen from First CRC Sheldon (pp. 3–4)
3. Jordan Helming’s Autobiographical Statement (p. 5)
4. Jordan Helming’s Personal Statement of Faith (p. 6)
5. Request for Article 17a from Living Water Community Church (p. 7)
6. Separation and Severance Agreement (pp. 8–9)
7. Church Visitor Article 17a Recommendation Document (pp. 10–11)



Immanuel
RADIATING CHRIST'S LOVE

March 1, 2024

Rev. Philip Westra
Stated Clerk
Classis Heartland
612 W 3rd St.
Sanborn, IA 51248


Members of Classis Heartland,

Included in the classical agenda is a letter raising concerns about *The Chosen* and its creator, Dallas Jenkins. Having used this material in church programs and found it valuable, we would like to respond to what we perceive as misunderstandings.

Regarding connections with Mormonism, Jenkins has put out a 16-minute video that can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZrZ4meAoOk&t=11s> In it Jenkins categorically states first that he did not say that Mormons in general are Christians. Further he shares that he does not present Mormon theology in the show, he acknowledges the sufficiency of Scripture, and he clearly states that the show is not a replacement for Scripture.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism was written during the outworking of the Protestant Reformation in the context of Eastern Orthodox use of Icons and, especially, the Roman Catholic use of statues as means of prayer and worship. *The Chosen* is not presented as a means of prayer or worship. That some take it to that extent is certainly possible, but to reject it on that basis and be consistent one would need to reject Passion Plays, flannel graphs, and Bible story books that physically portray Jesus. This has not been the general stance of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Jesus was and is fully human and fully divine. May he not be physically portrayed as a human being? How is that different than the imperfect interpretation we provide every time we teach a Sunday School lesson, read a story from a children's Bible, or present a sermon about the Jesus presented in the Gospels?

In Christ's service,
The Council of Immanuel CRC


Rev. Kevin Muyskens, president


Mark Vander Pol, clerk

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Background:

The concept of confessional difficulty gravamen (CDG) was created within the CRC to allow officebearers to honestly question doctrinal matters contained in our confessions, giving them space to wrestle with the biblical accuracy of these doctrines, while also ensuring that there would be a season of pastoral care provided for the officebearer in his/her struggle and search for clarification.

A CDG occurs when “a subscriber expresses personal difficulty with the confessions but does not call for a revision,” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, 1). This kind of gravamen is submitted by a subscriber to a church council for “examination and judgment.” A CDG is defined as “a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, B, 2). Therefore, “examination and judgment” of a CDG occurs when the subscriber receives the information and/or clarification being sought – either from the church council, the classis, or concluding with synod.

Since 1) “no one is free to decide for themselves or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 3), and 2) the person signing the Covenant for Officebearers must affirm “without reservation all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5, A, 1), the process initiated by a subscriber submitting a CDG, should be time-bound and time-sensitive and should result in a final decision whereby some terminal action takes place. This is true because signing the Covenant for Officebearers requires all subscribers to affirm that the doctrines in the standards “fully agree with the Word of God” and that the subscriber “promises to be formed and governed by them,” and to “heartily believe... promote and defend their doctrines...” (Church Order Supplement, Art. 5).

This reflects the nature of a CDG in the historical development of this gravamen in the Harry Boer case from Synod 1976. Synod 1976 understood confessional-difficulty gravamina as a personal request for help in resolving their doubts. And the way a council, classis, or synod was to do that was by providing the officebearer with the “information and/or clarification” of the confessions (Supplement, Art. 5, B, 2). What Synod 1976 did not say and what no synod has ever said is that this type of gravamen is a way for someone to take exception to the church’s creeds and confessions. The CRC does not allow gravamina as exceptions to the standards. While the creeds and confessions of the CRCNA are neither inerrant or exhaustive, they are a comprehensive summary of everything deemed essential for the faith and life of our denomination.

Overture #1:

The council of First Christian Reformed Church, Sheldon overtures Classis Heartland to approve the following process for Confessional Difficulty Gravamina (CDG) within Classis Heartland for officebearers:

1. An officebearer who has an unresolved CDG cannot be delegated to a higher body (classis or synod).
2. During the time the officebearer has a CDG, the individual must teach, act, promote, defend, and live in unity with the confessions of the church in all areas of life. The individual may not contradict the confessions openly and deliberately while the gravamen is still unresolved and must diligently work towards resolving the confessional difficulty.
3. A council has six months, or until the next classis meeting, whichever is greater, to provide the necessary information and/or clarification being sought. If the CDG is forwarded to classis, classis shall have six months, or until agenda items for the next synod must be submitted. If at the end of these periods the officebearer still has confessional difficulty, he or she must appeal to synod or be honorably released from office.

Grounds:

1. It is necessary to have a delineated process that guides churches and classis according to the purpose of gravamina in order to preserve confessional unity and the integrity of our confessional covenant.
2. Classis lakota adopted these guidelines in Fall 2023. Since Classis Heartland and lakota share licensed exhorters, as well as many other ministries, it would seem good and proper for us to share the same policy on dealing with CDG as well.
3. Adopting this procedure sets a godly and proficient example for our denomination as they deal with CDG.

Overture #2:

Since synods 2022 and 2023 have already defined unchastity in HC 108 as confessionally binding, the council of First Christian Reformed Church, Sheldon overtures Classis Heartland to instruct those who have taken a Confessional Difficulty Gravamen with respect to the definition of unchastity to resolve their difficulty by affirming the standards, resigning, or being suspended from office by the end of the year in which the CDG was filed. This would also include, if applicable, the officebearer's resigning from any position(s) on broader assemblies, boards, or committees.

Grounds:

1. The decision regarding the definition of unchastity has already been examined and judged by Synod 2022 and 2023.
2. There is no need to file a Confessional Revision Gravamen unless new grounds are provided, since Synods 2022 and 2023 have affirmed the definition of unchastity as settled and binding.

“On a separate sheet of paper, write a 250-500 word autobiography. Include information on your childhood, education, volunteer experiences, interests and hobbies, and other aspects of your life. Attach your autobiography to this application.”

I was raised in a military household. My father was active duty Air Force for 26 years. We lived out of the United States from when I was 3 until I was 12. Eventually, the Air Force brought us to Offutt AFB in Bellevue, NE, which is what I refer to as my home town.

I was brought up in a household that placed little importance on religion. My mother is Catholic and my father does not practice any type of religion. My sister and I went to Catholic Mass with my mother every Sunday, though we paid little attention. Looking back, I can see that God was working in my life at the time, but I was certainly not a Christian.

Near the end of high school, a friend invited me to Calvary Christian Church (non-denominational). I attended the Sunday services and Wednesday youth group programs. It was here that I first experienced a call to repentance and experienced the love of Jesus Christ for the first time. I was 17 at the time of this transformation.

While attending the University of South Dakota, I attended Hillside Community Church (Christian & Missionary Alliance). Here, I met my wife who was a member. We were both involved in Campus Crusade for Christ, including serving as student leaders, and leading prayer meetings. We continued to attend Hillside until moving to Sioux Center, IA in 2013.

We have enjoyed our time in Northwest Iowa and learning about the Reformed faith tradition. We both have known the experience of “finding the right fit”, realizing that we have held a Reformed faith all along, but not having a good understanding of what it meant. Joining CRC churches here gave us the language to articulate our beliefs and worship in a community of faith committed to God’s Word.

I had felt a call to ministry from the time I first knew Christ that took a long time for me to understand. Exploring the faith through seminary affirmed that God was bringing me to a chaplaincy in the Army. I have served in the Chaplain Corps for about 6 years, and it has been a challenging, but delightful ministry. Working at 1st Christian Reformed Church has been a great joy for me, and I reminded regularly of the significance of my work among our sick, elderly, and shut-in.

In my free time I enjoy cooking, and spending time outdoors with my family. Most weeks, I challenge myself to cook a more complex dish or something I have never tried before. I have enjoyed the community of the VFW and American Legion. I also have enjoyed coaching soccer for about 3 years in Sioux Center, and currently in Orange City. Living in Europe for 6 years as a child instilled a love for soccer that continues to this day, and it is a blessing to volunteer and give back to Orange City Christian School.

“On a separate sheet of paper, Write a 500-750 word personal statement of faith. Include an indication of your love and commitment to Christ and his Church, a summary of your personal faith, and describe your sense of calling to the ministry.”

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. Christ, through His Spirit, sought me out, and transformed a stubborn soul. He gave life to a lifeless heart and transformed a sinner into a believer. This came to me through Christ’s church. I was not left to discover it on my own, but through believers and gathering in worship, I came to know of the desperate and urgent need to submit myself wholeheartedly to Jesus. I have come to recognize deeply that Christ alone is the Water of Life for all who believe, and the overflowing source of all good, and the only true hope for this life and eternity.

The Holy Spirit gathers for Himself a people, set apart to be God’s own people. While God grants to individuals a saving faith, He never intends for believers to be alone. The church, at its best, is a blessing to all who attend, and a blessing to the object of true worship, the Triune God. Through the church, God strengthens the faith of His people and preaches His Gospel to the lost.

My personal faith is best summarized with a paraphrase of a familiar statement: I belong to God. Through every season of my life, including my many lost years, I have belonged to God. It has been apparent through the subtle encouragements, the people who moved into my life in unexpected ways, and God’s guiding hand preparing me for the salvation and ministry that awaited. When faced with my first real possibility of dying in a war zone, I had a peaceful clarity knowing that on that day, I would either go to meet my Savior, or I would do the sacred pastoral work set before me. Whether I lived or died, my life and ministry were (and are) in God’s hands.

I sensed a call to ministry near the time I first knew genuine faith. While I didn’t know what it was specifically, and my own stubbornness would stand in the way for years, I sensed that God would use me to advance His Kingdom. When I enlisted in the Army, I experienced a new thing: compassion. Despite the Soldiers around me leading troubled, self-destructive lives, and my own hardness of heart which typically kept those types of people at arm’s length, I recognized an unfamiliar urge to move towards them. I could listen to them without judgment, and care for them when they faced the consequences of their own poor decisions. I found that I could speak truth to them in a gracious way, rather than my own natural cynicism and harshness. I realized that this compassion and love was not mine, but God’s. I was certain that God loves Soldiers, and God was sharing that love through me. This prompted me to talk to my pastor and discern a path to ordination for military chaplaincy.

I have found again that God loves His church. Whether I am qualified or prepared well enough seems not to matter. God speaks grace to His people through me, and comforts the lonely people that I visit. He goes before me to love His church, in spite of my occasional faithlessness. He has equipped me well enough to remind the people that no matter their circumstances, they belong to God.

MEMO

TO: Pastor Nathan Kuperus and Pastor Brian Dunn (Classis Heartland Church Counselors)
FROM: Administrative Council Members from Living Water Community Church
Orange City Campus - Rod De Boer, Rick Droog, Sean Schuller, Gary Vande Vegte
Sheldon Campus - Randy Brands, Ross Bootsma, Gary Hibma, Jay Schemper and
Pastor Jesse Walhof
DATE: Monday, March 4, 2024
RE: Requesting Classis Approval of Article 17a

Due to continued challenges over the past 18 months, as well as Pastor Garry Nyenhuis's desire to leave his position at Living Water Community Church in Orange City, we have come to the very difficult decision of working with Pastor Garry to request approval by the classis to move forward with Article 17a which would end his call to Living Water Community Church (the Orange City campus), but not end his call to ordained ministry.

We, the administrative council of Living Water Community Church, in agreement with Rev. Garry Nyenhuis, are requesting separation according to Article 17a of the church order which states:

Article 17a: Ministers who are neither eligible for retirement nor worthy of discipline may for weighty reasons be released from active ministerial service in a congregation through action initiated by themselves, by a council, or jointly.

We have appreciated Pastor Garry and Sandra and the many ways they have served and blessed Living Water Community Church. Pastor Garry has many gifts, has loved on and led our youth well, and has delivered the Word faithfully to the congregation of Living Water. Sadly, we did not expect to be at this point, but we are at a crossroads and do not see any other way forward than to seek approval with Pastor Garry for an Article 17a.

Pastor Garry has shared with us that he is burned out and his anxiety has grown, he does not want to engage in any planning or goal setting, and he has told the council he wants to be done. We do not believe it is healthy to try and keep finding ways to keep Pastor Garry at Living Water if he does not feel called to be there anymore and feels that it is best for him to be done. We believe it is important and have attempted to do all we can to try to work with Pastor Garry to provide a smooth transition for the sake of him, his family, and the congregation of Living Water. We have prayed about this fervently and worked hard to try to follow a good process, and drafting a separation agreement that will provide well for Pastor Garry and his family while he seeks what God is calling him to do next.

We ask for your approval of this request and will do our best to answer any questions you might have.

The Administrative Council
Living Water Community Church

Separation & Severance Agreement

This separation and severance document is between Pastor Garry Nyenhuis and Living Water Community Church dated this ____ day of _____ 2024.

When in the course of a pastoral relationship, except for in the case of retirement, it becomes desired by the pastor or the church (or both) to terminate their working arrangement and proceed to a new stage in the life of each, a clear and written agreement as to the terms of this separation is helpful to both parties. Such an agreement can promote clear communication, joint decision-making, and attention to the long-term benefit of the church and the pastor. This document is intended to provide a checklist of standard arrangements designed to complete a ministry appointment and begin the transition process.

This agreement is to be signed freely by Pastor Garry Nyenhuis and duly authorized by representatives of Living Water Community Church, for the purposes of defining a legally binding understanding of the terms under which the pastor will resign his authority as the pastor of Living Water Community Church. As is customary for most separation and severance agreements, this document, if signed by Pastor Garry Nyenhuis, states that Pastor Nyenhuis hereby generally releases Living Water Community Church (including the church's present and former officers, trustee members, or employees) from any and all claims he may have against any of them with respect to the pastor's service of the church, except for the duties and obligations set forth herein to be performed by the church after the execution of this agreement. The mutual assent of both parties gives this agreement the force of contractual authority, and both agree that the terms of the agreement may be changed only by a jointly signed written statement.

Transition Details:

The following details are agreed to by Pastor Garry Nyenhuis and Living Water Community Church:

1. The pastor agrees that this mutual separation between Pastor Garry Nyenhuis and Living Water Community Church will take effect on **April 14, 2024**.
2. The pastor agrees that the last Sunday on which he will officiate will be on **April 14, 2024**.
3. An agreement has been made by Pastor Garry and the church to engage in a transition time of six weeks to run from **Sunday, March 10, 2024, through Sunday, April 14, 2024**. An announcement about Pastor Garry's desire to leave his appointment at Living Water Community Church will be shared with the congregation on Sunday, March 10. This announcement will be done by both Pastor Garry Nyenhuis and the Living Water Community Church – Orange City Administrative Team (including Gary Vande Vegte, Rod DeBoer, Sean Schuller, and Rick Droog) with mutually agreed upon talking points.
4. During this transition period Pastor Garry will execute his pastoral duties as usual, including preaching, leading youth group, leading staff meetings, attending council,
 - i. preaching
 - ii. leading youth group
 - iii. leading staff meetings
 - iv. attending council care
 - v. leading team meetings
5. Pastor Garry will work on any transitional documents and duties as needed.
6. If Pastor Garry determines that he cannot officiate/preach through April 14, 2024, he will notify the administrative council and they will determine a new end date, adjust the details of this separation and severance agreement accordingly, and find pulpit supply. It is the desire of the Administrative Council to support Pastor Garry and help him finish well and provide the flexibility and support needed during this transition time for him, his family, and the Living Water Community Church family.

Severance Package:

The six- and half-month severance package will include:

- Full salary and benefits through October 31, 2024, with the last paycheck to be received on October 31, 2024.
- Full benefits to continue through October 31, 2024.
- Continued payments into the RCA Life & Disability Insurance and the RCA Pension with the last contribution to be made as of October 31, 2024.
- Counseling benefits: Living Water Community Church agrees to pay for the cost of outpatient counseling that Pastor Garry may wish to engage in during the time of this severance period.

Expectations Related to the Separation & Severance

- **Process if Pastor Garry obtains new employment during the severance period:** Should Pastor Garry Nyenhuis accept a call to another church or agree to accept employment at another business or ministry before the six-month separation concludes, the severance payments and benefits will conclude at the end of the month in which he begins new employment. For example, if Garry would accept employment that begins August 15, 2024, his final paycheck will be on August 31, 2024, and his benefits will go through August 31, 2024, and no further compensation or benefits will be issued. Pastor Garry is asked to inform the Administrative Council at least two weeks before beginning a new position so that the appropriate arrangements can be made related to this agreement.
- **Remaining Vacation Time:** It should be noted that the severance offered in this document is in lieu of any remaining vacation time that has not been used. Any paid vacation time that has not been used by April 14, 2024, will be forfeited in lieu of this severance package.
- **Reference Request Procedure:** If a potential employer (or church) is seeking a reference for Pastor Garry about his work here at Living Water Community Church, the LW Administrative Council would first get Pastor Garry's written permission to talk to that employer. If we do not have Pastor Garry's written permission to answer reference questions about his service here, all that the LW Administrative Council will share will be the dates that he served here as an employee.
- **Non-Disparagement Clause:** By agreeing to the terms of this separation and severance agreement, both parties (Pastor Garry Nyenhuis and the Living Water Community Church Administrative Team) agree to not share the terms of this separation agreement or talk in a disparaging way about the other. Pastor Garry is expected to not say anything negative or disparaging about Living Water Community Church, the staff, or any current or past office-bearers. The current office bearers from Living Water Community Church are also expected to not comment on or share anything that would reflect negatively on Pastor Garry Nyenhuis. Any disparaging comments made about Living Water Community Church could lead to the immediate termination of this severance agreement.

Acknowledgment:

This agreement has been reviewed and signed by the following parties. Pastor Garry Nyenhuis will be given 1 week to review and consider this separation and severance agreement from the date he is sent this document. Pastor Garry is encouraged to seek legal or personal council to review this agreement with the expectation that the details of this severance and separation document will be kept confidential except for those parties (i.e., spouse, legal counsel, financial advisor) which he may consult about this agreement as he finalizes this decision.

Recommendation

After meeting with Pastor Garry Nyenhuis as well as the full council of Living Water Community Church (LWCC) in their request for a mutually agreed upon separation, we, as Church Visitors for Classis Heartland (Rev. Brian Dunn & Rev. Nathan Kuperus), concur with their desire for separation via Article 17-a of the church order and would recommend Classis Heartland concur as well with the following recommendations:

For Pastor Garry

Due to considerable “burnout” it is our recommendation that Pastor Garry following the conclusion of his time at LWCC take time for respite and recovery. We believe a period of 3 months is adequate during which time Pastor Garry should refrain from seeking other calls and remain out of pulpit to process, decompress and alleviate the burnout. Pastor Garry is currently receiving counseling and we would recommend he continue to do so on a weekly basis for the 3 month “cool down.” Our recommendation is Pastor Garry use some of these counseling sessions to explore the cause of his burnout and address some of the triggers that may have caused him to shut down toward the council. An oversight committee should be established and see to it that these requirements are being met (see the supplement to Article 17-a).

It is our recommendation that Rev. Brian Dunn, Rev. Troy Van Beek (RCA) and a member of LWCC Orange City Admin. Council Mr. Rod De Boer serve on this committee.

LWCC has offered a severance package which is essentially six months of continued salary and benefits which will cease on October 31, 2024. In this agreement, LWCC agrees to pay for Pastor Garry’s counseling services in addition to the continued salary and benefits. This arrangement is acceptable to the church visitors with one stipulation. Pastor Garry and LWCC have agreed to a six-week transition period ending his employment on April 14th, 2024. We feel this time frame is too long. This is a length of time that often happens when a pastor leaves a church for a new call. Even in those situations, transitions can be challenging even when it is a positive transition. An extended transition could cause rumors to start, people to be hurt, even bitterness to set in. Therefore, we would recommend an end date of March 17th, 2024. This would change the end of the severance package to Sept. 30th, 2024. While this is more sudden, it will allow for Pastor Garry to tie up any “loose ends” and then begin a process of respite and healing.

Note: Due to Pastor Garry’s ordination held in the RCA what we recommend as a classis is only enforceable by Pastor Garry’s RCA classis. Therefore, this is why we recommend a member of the RCA classis to be present on this committee.

For LWCC

LWCC is a council full of strong personalities very focused on process. This is a good thing. It is something often more “traditional” churches lack. However, we are concerned things can get lost in the process and that may have happened as they seemed ready to move forward and Pastor

Garry was not. We recommend classis appoint a committee to oversee and work with the council in addressing emotional health issues before extending a call to another pastor. This may entail hiring a Strategic Transitional Minister (STM) or using programs through Timothy Leadership Training or other evaluative tools offered through Thrive Ministries resources.

A committee should be set up to oversee this process as laid out in the supplement to article 17-a (section b of the supplement). It is our recommendation that Rev. Nathan Kuperus, Rev. Brian Dunn, the assigned church counselor, and one additional member be part of this committee.

Recommendations

1. Pastor Garry observes a three-month hiatus from entertaining calls and pulpit ministry for recovery and respite.
2. Classis appoint a committee to oversee Pastor Garry's recovery and to make sure he works toward the requirements to rest and explore root causes through counseling. This committee should be made up of Rev. Brian Dunn, Rev. Troy Van Beek (RCA) and Mr. Rod De Boer.
3. Classis approve appointing a committee to oversee LWCC and work with the council for their future work and exploring their emotional help and transition. We recommend appoint Rev. Nathan Kuperus, Rev. Brian Dunn, the assigned church counselor and one additional member to this committee (four members in total).
4. Classis approve the severance package between Pastor Garry and LWCC with the amended final day of service as March 17, 2024, with the completion of the severance package Sept. 30, 2024.
5. With these conditions agree upon, Classis concur with LWCC and Pastor Garry's request for a separation via article 17 a.