

Minutes of a Meeting of CLASSIS HAMILTON OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Date: February 24, 2015 **Time:** 1:00 PM

Venue: Ancaster Christian Reformed Church, 70 Garner Road East (Hwy 53), Ancaster, Ontario

Chair: Bruce Adema
Stated Clerk: John den Otter

Vice-Chair: Joel Bootsma
Reporter: Rita Klien-Geltink

Synodical Deputies:

Hendrick Bruinsma	Classis Toronto
James Dekker	Classis Niagara
Jack Kerkhof	Classis Chatham

Attendees:

City	Church	First Name	Last Name	Type
Ancaster	Ancaster CRC	Rita	Klein-Geltink	Pastor Delegate
Ancaster	Ancaster CRC	Bruce	Dykstra	Elder Delegate
Ancaster	Meadowlands Fellowship	Everett	Vander Horst	Pastor Delegate
Ancaster	Meadowlands Fellowship	Harry	Van Dyke	Elder Delegate
Brantford	Hope	Ken	Benjamins	Pastor Delegate
Brantford	Hope	Fred	Reitsma	Elder Delegate
Burlington	Burlington	Joel	Bootsma	Pastor Delegate
Burlington	Burlington	Ted	Groenewegen	Elder Delegate
Burlington	Faith	Kevin	DeRaaf	Pastor Delegate
Burlington	Faith	Richard	Wiersma	Elder Delegate
Dundas	Calvin	Paul	Vanden Brink	Pastor Delegate
Dundas	Calvin	Jerry	Kralt	Elder Delegate
Flamborough	Calvary	Bernie	Voortman	Elder Delegate
Flamborough	Calvary	Bas	Hania	Elder Delegate
Hagersville	Community	Jeff	Klingenberg	Pastor Delegate
Hagersville	Community	Stuart	Heeg	Elder Delegate
Hamilton	First	Chris	Schoon	Pastor Delegate
Hamilton	First	JD	Alkema	Elder Delegate
Hamilton	Immanuel	Henry	Kranenburg	Pastor Delegate
Hamilton	Immanuel	John	Benjamins	Elder Delegate
Hamilton	Mt. Hamilton	Mark	Demik	Elder Delegate
Hamilton	Mt. Hamilton	Rita	VanTuyl	Deacon Delegate
Hamilton	New Hope	Aaron	DeVos	Non-Voting Delegate
Hamilton	New Hope	Tim	Brand	Non-Voting Delegate
Jarvis	Ebenezer	John	Huyser	Pastor Delegate
Jarvis	Ebenezer	Ray	Lenos	Elder Delegate
Simcoe	Immanuel	Jeff	Vandermeer	Pastor Delegate
Simcoe	Immanuel	Chery	Rutherford	Elder Delegate
Waterdown	Bethel	Bruce	Adema	Pastor Delegate
Waterdown	Bethel	Mike	Tigchelaar	Elder Delegate
York	Maranatha	Maurice	Elgersma	Elder Delegate
York	Maranatha	Joel	Knight	Elder Delegate

NOTE: Rita VanTuyl was given permission to leave at 6PM.

Meeting Details

1. OPENING WORSHIP

- 1.1. Rita Klein-Geltink of Ancaster Christian Reformed Church led the opening devotions after which she gave an overview of what is happening in the life of the church; from tragedies to joy and anticipation for what God is going to do in Ancaster.
- 1.2. Joel Bootsma led in a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing for Ancaster Christian Reformed Church as well as for the meeting itself.

2. CALL TO ORDER

The chair called the meeting to order at 1:40 PM

2.1. Attendance

The list of attendees is shown above. It was noted that all first time delegates did sign the Covenant of Office-bearers in the Christian Reformed Church.

On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** Deacon Rita VanTuyl of Mount Hamilton CRC be seated at this meeting

On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** the delegate list is approved.

2.2. Approval of Agenda

On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** the modified agenda as presented in the meeting is approved.

3. EXECUTIVE SESSION: ARTICLE 17

Classis moved into Executive Session for items 3.1 and 3.2

3.1. Article 17 (a) Separation: Faith CRC, Burlington and Rev. Peter Janssens.

(Note: Neither Peter Janssens nor the delegates from Faith CRC were present for the discussion and voting of the following resolutions)

The Advisory Committee was Meadowlands Fellowship CRC (Ancaster) and Hope CRC (Brantford)

- a. On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** Classis grants that Pastor Peter is released from active ministerial service at Faith CRC according to article 17a of the Church Order effective immediately.

Grounds:

1. There are weighty financial constraints that make it difficult for Faith Church to support two pastors.
2. Both parties have agreed that an article 17a separation is the best way to move forward.
3. The Church Visitors concur in this decision.

The Synodical Deputies concurred with this decision of Classis.

- b. On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** Classis approve the compensation package.

Grounds:

1. Both sides have agreed to the package in writing
2. The package meets the requirements of the Church Order.

- c. On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** Classis provide the Church Visitors the necessary resources and/or personnel required in the next year to ensure the best possible reconciliation between Pastor Peter and Faith Church.

Grounds:

1. In recent months the relationship between Pastor Peter and Faith church has become unduly strained.
2. Reconciliation is best provided when appropriate Classical oversight is provided.

- d. On motion duly made, seconded and Carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** Classis instruct the Church Visitors to create a “Pastoral Care Team” of no less than three people (agreed upon by Rev. Peter Janssens, Faith Church, and the Church Visitors) to provide pastoral care and encouragement for Pastor Peter and oversee spiritual, emotional and professional readiness for call. When deemed appropriate the Pastoral Care Team will ask Shalem Christian Counseling, in consultation with the Pastor-Church Relations Committee to determine Pastor Peter’s readiness for call. Any concerns raised that potentially affect future ministry will be brought to the attention of this Pastoral Care Team which will recommend to Classis any further actions that may be required. Such recommendations, including declaration of readiness for call, will be adjudicated by Classis.

Grounds:

1. A Pastoral Care Team best serves the welfare of the churches and the personal needs of Pastor Peter.
2. Allowing the Pastoral Care Team to declare Pastor Peter ready for ministry on behalf of Classis forgoes any unnecessary delays—freeing him to seek ministry employment that will allow him to provide for his family.

The Synodical Deputies concurred with this decision of Classis.

- e. Paul Vanden Brink led in prayer for both Pastor Peter and Faith church.

3.2. Article 17 (c) Extension of Ministerial Credentials for Rev. Jim Pot

On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** Rev Jim Pot’s request for a one year extension to his ministerial credentials is approved.

The Synodical Deputies concurred with the decision of Classis

The Executive Session concluded

4. CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE (*Clerk's note: this item is not chronologically in the correct spot but put here for ease of reading the minutes*)
- 4.1. Ancaster CRC requested that Classis has a discussion on the disbursement of Denominational Ministry Quotas

On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED** THAT: this item be passed on to the Classis Ministry Team for implementation in a future Classis meeting.

- 4.2. Ebenezer CRC requests that with regards to our overture for communication to Synod 2015 regarding our concerns for the study committee on same sex marriage, Pastor Daryl DeKlerk is prepared to speak to this overture.

THE CHAIR RULED in favour of this request.

- 4.3. Ebenezer CRC requested that Pastor John Huyser not be included on the ballot for delegates to Synod 2016.

THE CHAIR RULED that this is received for information

- 4.4. Bethel CRC requested an education session on Church Governance as it relates to a Corporation in the Province of Ontario, at an upcoming Classis meeting. (*Details are in the addendum*)

On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED** THAT: this item be passed on to the Classis Hamilton Ministry Team for future implementation at a Classis meeting - perhaps at a special evening session.

- 4.5. Bethel CRC requested that Classis Hamilton ask the Canadian Ministries Director of the CRC in NA to lead a process to give priority to and facilitate an agency-wide and every-congregation engagement for sponsoring refugees from the Middle East, particularly from Syria. This process may include raising awareness about their plight in countries of first asylum, the status of their protection with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other issues of Human Rights, and together with mandated Agencies of the CRC; and working together with other denominations and faith communities in order to welcome for settlements in Canada a greater number of Refugees than could be accommodated by our Government alone.

Grounds:

1. God's Word calls us to seek justice and practice compassion for the homeless.
2. Our churches have a commendable record of experience and expertise in sponsorship and resettlement.
3. The overwhelming numbers of homeless and persecuted people in countries of first asylum cannot be cared for in present shelter camps for long.
4. Their return to homeland is neither foreseeable nor safe.

5. While the numbers of Refugees has grown alarmingly to millions, Canada's reception has declined to mere hundreds.
6. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on January 7 announced that Canada will welcome 10,000 Syrians and 3000 Iraqi refugees. However, without prior consultation with us, he says that Canada will rely on private sponsors and Sponsorship Agreement Holders (as the CRC and World Renew) to carry out sixty percent of these sponsorships.

On motion duly made, seconded and carried, **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** the clerk will send this communication to the Canadian Ministries Director.

5. INTERIM COMMITTEE

5.1. Shalom Chaplaincy

Due to lack of time, this item was tabled for the next meeting

5.2. Election of Delegates for Synod 2015

The following pastors were elected as delegates:

Rita Klein-Geltink (Ancaster CRC, Ancaster), Henry Kranenburg (Immanuel CRC, Hamilton)

The following elders were elected as delegates:

Mike Tigchelaar (Bethel CRC, Waterdown), Ed Scharringa (Calvin CRC, Dundas)

The following pastors were elected as alternates:

1. Jeff Vandermeer (Immanuel CRC, Simcoe), 2. Everett Vander Horst (Meadowlands Fellowship CRC, Ancaster)

The following elders were elected as alternates.

1. Fred Reitsma (Hope CRC, Brantford), 2. Gary Sytsma (Ebenezer CRC, Jarvis)

5.3. Election of Stated Clerk

Dick Kranendonk was affirmed as Stated Clerk for Classis Hamilton.

5.4. On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** the work of the Classis Interim Committee and that of the Stated Clerk as reported is approved.

5.5. On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT:** the ballots be destroyed.

6. OVERTURES COMMITTEE

6.1. Overture to Synod re: Article 23

On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT** the overture submitted by the Classis Interim Committee detailed in Appendix #1 be sent from Classis Hamilton to Synod 2015.

6.2. Communication to Synod re: Synodical Study Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance Regarding Same-Sex Marriage.

On motion duly made, seconded and carried **IT WAS RESOLVED THAT** the communication detailed in Appendix #2 be sent from Classis Hamilton to Synod 2015.

7. Classis Ministry Team/Mission Director

After the chair of the Classis Ministry Team, Judy Cook, spoke about the work of the CMT Marian Lensink informed Classis of some of the activities happening in in our region including items pertaining to the True City Conference, Safe Church and its need for additional leadership talent, the Youth Leaders' Breakfast, and the upcoming Prayer Summit.

John Veenstra was also introduced as the Classis Prayer Coordinator.

The Chair **RULED THAT:** the work of the CMT, as reported, is approved. *Note: this was done at the conclusion of the meeting at which time the delegates confirmed this ruling by clapping.*

8. Health of the Churches

Pastor Jerry Hoytema gave a presentation on the State of the Churches in Classis Hamilton as observed by the church visitors.

Some trends that they have observed include:

- Declining membership and evangelistic growth or the lack thereof.
- A shift in church governance structure
- The perception or reality that in the area of preaching there is an increased emphasis on thematic-series preaching, with less emphasis on expository and redemptive historical preaching.
- Pastoral care and how it is practiced in our churches has changed

Some statistics pertaining to Classis Hamilton for the period 2011 - 2014

- Received through evangelism – 54
- Received from other denominations – 135
- Left for other denominations – 217
- Children baptized – 392; Deaths 138
- Reversions - 467
- Inactive professing members in 2014 – 634

Time only permitted a brief discussion in small group plenary.

9. Prayer

Jeff Klingenberg closed this portion of the meeting with prayer after which the meeting recessed for dinner.

10. Evening Session

The evening session was devoted to a time of prayer. Missions Director Marian Lensink and Prayer Coordinator John Veenstra led the attendees through a series of prayers based on the ACTS model.

11. Closing Prayer

Chair of Classis, Bruce Adema, closed this meeting of Classis Hamilton with prayer.

OVERTURE TO SYNOD FROM CLASSIS HAMILTON REGARDING ARTICLE 23

Back Ground

Classis Hamilton has been privileged in the last number of years to approve and supervise a number of Commissioned Pastors in their role as chaplains and missionaries. We are grateful for the way Article 23 of the Church Order allows for individuals, who are called to ministry, to be ordained for particular roles of service. In some instances, however, the process for approving the position and examining the candidate has been met with confusion, awkwardness and embarrassment for some—if not all—of the parties involved. Questions and disagreements have arisen over the transfer of credentials, changes to job descriptions, and the termination of Commissioned Pastor positions. Part of the problem stems from different interpretations of the Church Order and perceived (mis)understandings of the requirements of Article 23 and its Supplement. We believe it is prudent that Synod clean up the language of the Church Order and clarify what is to be understood and expected in the process of approving, ordaining and supervising Commissioned Pastors under Article 23.

Overture

Classis Hamilton overtures Synod to provide further explanation and clarification regarding the following five areas associated with Article 23:

1. The Principle.

There is a misunderstanding of the principle of article 23. Because there is a long and complicated history behind this article, the church is sometimes confused by its current intended purpose. In 2012 Synod changed the name of the office associated with article 23 from “Ministry Associate” to “Commissioned Pastor”—giving the impression that article 23 now allows people to be ordained into a “mini-minister” or “minister-lite” position. This is not the intended purpose of the name change. The intended purpose of article 23 is to provide *limited* but *real* ecclesiastical authority for a *specific* ministry role (be it in education, music, mission/evangelism, chaplaincy, etc.) for a *particular* area of ministry in God’s kingdom (be it the local church, mission field, educational institution, etc.). We believe Synod should reaffirm and clarify this intended purpose of article 23.

2. Classical Approval.

There is lack of clarity on how Classis approves the position and the person seeking ordination under article 23.

- i. The process for approving an article 23 position involves two steps. First the *position* must be approved (with the concurrence of Synodical Deputies); then the *person* called to this position must be examined and approved. It has become frequent practice that these two steps occur on the same day at the same classis meeting. We believe this is not according to the spirit of the Church Order. An article 23 position should be thoroughly critiqued and approved *before* a candidate can even be legitimately called (and approved) for such a position. A proper approval process should ordinarily involve *two* Classis meetings: At the first

meeting the *position* is critiqued and approved—providing the *right* for a candidate to be called to it. At the second meeting the person is then examined and approved. An awkward situation occurs when a position is not approved (or should not be approved) but a candidate is standing ready to be ordained into it. Synod should clarify *that a candidate cannot be called to a position that has not been approved by Classis with the concurrence of the Synodical deputies.*

- ii. Sometimes it is difficult to discern what constitutes a legitimate job description. *Synod should provide more guidelines to help a Classis evaluate a proposed job description for a Commissioned Pastor position.*
- iii. It sometimes happens that *after* a job description has been approved by Classis that it begins to change and evolve into something different. Neither the Church Order, nor the Supplement, provides guidelines for how Classis should be involved in this. How much change is allowed before Classis should review a Commissioned Pastor's job description? *Synod should specify an appropriate procedure and mechanism to evaluate and approve changes that need to be made to a previously approved job description.*

3. Supervision.

There is lack of clarity over how a Commissioned pastor is supervised with integrity.

- i. Some Commissioned Pastors work among several agencies, ministries and para-church organizations that supposedly interconnect together. Sometimes it is difficult to see *where* or *how* the supervision takes place. Synod should reaffirm that a proposed article 23 position should clearly indicate—not only that lines of accountability are in place—but *how the lines operate together to form a consistent whole.*
- ii. Our current Church Order does not provide enough guidance for how a local church ought to supervise the doctrine and life of a Commissioned Pastor. For example, how does a local church supervise a missionary who lives in a foreign country? How does a Council supervise his or her preaching and the administration of the sacraments? (Incidentally, this concern applies to Ministers of the Word who work as missionaries as well) We ask Synod to *provide guidelines, methods and procedures that churches can adopt for their unique circumstances so that Classis and Synodical Deputies can be confident that honest and real supervision will take place.*

4. Termination and Transfer of Ministry.

Some are led to believe that a Commissioned Pastor retains his or her office even though he or she no longer serves that particular ministry. *Synod should clarify that once a Commissioned Pastor leaves a specific ministry role the office associated with that ministry is terminated. Synod should further clarify that a person can only retain his or her office if the Classis has granted special permission due to special circumstances (for example: The Commissioned Pastor leaves one field of service to join another which is virtually identical to the first). Synod should also clarify under what circumstances a Commissioned Pastor should be re-examined in order to enter a different position under article 23.*

5. Moving Credentials from One calling Church to another.

It sometimes happens that a Commissioned Pastor leaves his or her calling church to join another. The Church Order does not address how the credentials ought to be transferred. We request Synod to clarify *that a transfer can only happen if:*

- i. The sending church and the receiving church agree to the transfer—with the understanding that the receiving church agrees to take over the supervision of the doctrine and life of the Commissioned Pastor.*
- ii. The job description remains unchanged. Alteration of the position's job description requires the approval of Classis and the concurrence of the Synodical Deputies.*
- iii. Classis formally approves the transfer.*

Respectfully submitted,
Classis Hamilton

Recommendation:

That Classis Hamilton send the following communication to Synod 2015:

In session February 24, 2015, Classis Hamilton delegates discussed a concern raised by one of the churches about the makeup of the Synodical Study Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance Regarding Same-Sex Marriage.

We recognized with sadness a climate of uncertainty, distrust, and question about how we are to resolve, let alone live within, the widely diverse opinions associated with the work of this committee and our intentions as a denomination to both be pastoral and give pastoral advice.

While we do not have answers for the work of this Synodical Study Committee, we as Classis Hamilton acknowledged that some decisions have fostered the difficult climate in which we find ourselves. One specific concern brought to the floor of Classis is the appropriateness of having members on this Synodical Study Committee who appear to have advocated for positions outside the parameters of previous Synodical decisions (1973 and 2002) or the mandate of the current Synodical Study Committee (Acts of Synod 2013, article 89) through public writing. Some activities of the committee membership have raised the level of uncertainty and distrust regarding the work and forthcoming recommendations from the Synodical Study Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance Regarding Same-Sex Marriage.

As Classis, we have not discussed the work of this Synodical Study Committee, nor have we discussed the capacity of individual committee members to meaningfully contribute to the work of this committee. However, we do believe that having members serve on this Synodical Study Committee whose personal and public beliefs appear to fall outside the foundational parameters of the Committee, namely to ‘guide and clarify application of the biblical teachings’ expressed with the 1973 and 2002 Synodical reports, has raised uncertainty about the Committee’s work on behalf of Synod and the congregations of the CRCNA. In our context, some external activities of committee members have raised concerns about the ability of this particular study committee to gain the confidence of some of our churches, which in turn has contributed to heightened distrust and detracted attention from the important work of the Committee.

We are not requesting any action from Synod. However, given the weight of our denominational discussions around same-sex relationships, as we have experienced within Classis Hamilton, we want to communicate our concern regarding this matter to Synod.

For Classis Hamilton,