



## **Pastoral Position Statement on Homosexuality**

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The goal of this document is to communicate the position of the CRCNA on homosexuality in a manner that is pastoral, clear, and relatively brief so that churches can use it in their own discernment and conversations as they strive to shepherd and care for the people in their midst while also living out of biblical truth. This document will cover the position, the posture, the promise, and the perils of the CRCNA stance on homosexuality.

### **Position**

In short, the position is this: Christ calls his church to be a place of love, care, grace, and welcome for all people, regardless of their sexual attractions. At the same time, our denomination believes that same-sex sexual relationships are incompatible with God's revealed will and plan for human sexuality.

Several synods have said that celibate, same-sex attracted people are not morally culpable for their attraction and are welcome to serve in all ecclesiastical offices. However, synods have also conceded that too few Christian Reformed congregations have been places where a same-sex attracted person can find the kind of gracious community where vibrant celibate living is plausible. Our call as churches is to be places where all who struggle with sexual brokenness (i.e., all of us) find gracious homes of acceptance and encouragement to live the often challenging life of radical obedience pointed to in Scripture.

Synods 2022 and 2023 have interpreted the Heidelberg Catechism's treatment of the seventh commandment (against adultery) to prohibit pornography, premarital sex, homosexual sex, and other sins. This confessional interpretation aligns with the historical Christian understanding of the seventh commandment to prohibit all kinds of sexual sin (Matt. 5:27).

### **Posture**

Though we have struggled to live it out, the CRCNA's position toward homosexuality has been pastoral. It recognizes that all of us—single, married, straight, and LGBTQ—are created in the image of God. Sexuality is a good thing, but sin and brokenness have touched all areas of our lives, including our sexuality. That brokenness affects our inclinations such that they can, and often do, lead us into sin. However, those inclinations, including same-sex attraction, are not, in and of themselves, sins. Instead, what matters is how we act on our inclinations. Recognizing our shared brokenness humbles us and gives us a common ground at the foot of the cross.

Regardless of our sexual orientation, Christ calls all of us to holiness and purity through the Spirit's power. For this reason, our synods have resisted the attachment of moral culpability to same-sex attraction and have cautioned against efforts to eradicate it through pastoral care or psychological interventions (i.e., "conversion therapy"). For all of us who succumb to

temptations common to humankind, Scripture teaches that the grace of Jesus is available and effective for everyone through repentance and restoration.

### **Promise**

In a world where God's good gift of sexuality is tainted by sin and where the brokenness of sexuality is evident inside and outside the church, CRC congregations have an opportunity to encourage healing, forgiveness, grace, hope, and holiness as a witness and alternative for a hurting world. The position that our denomination endorses has deep biblical and historical roots in the teachings of the church through the ages. The position aligns with God's emphatic "yes" to the gift of sexuality that he bestows on male and female (Gen. 1). It recognizes the beautiful, deep intimacy that can exist between a male and female in marriage, and it emphasizes that this intimacy reflects the deep union of Christ and the church. The position also emphasizes the warmth, grace, and welcome that reflects our Lord Jesus Christ, who loves all hurting people.

Without doubt, the CRC position is countercultural in North America today. However, what attracts people to the Lord is the unconditional love of Jesus demonstrated in the Spirit-directed words and actions of believers. In a time when people are confused and hurting with regard to sexuality, the timeless message of Scripture and an attitude of love, welcome, and care for everyone is a powerful witness of God.

### **Perils**

I want to conclude this pastoral reflection by mentioning some of the perils that we face in pursuing our denomination's position on same-sex sexual relationships. The first danger is hypocrisy. The more the church talks about the dangers of same-sex sex but avoids talking about other sexual sin, the more hypocritical we are. The world seeks and finds pornography, sexual abuse, premarital sex, and adultery running rampant in the church. Our hypocrisy hinders our ability to witness. As 1 Peter 4 reminds us, accountability starts with the church itself.

A second danger is the potential for the church to become the "people of no." Instead of presenting a positive view of sexuality for both singles and couples, the church's monocular focus is on limits and walls. God's positive vision for fruitfulness and abundance needs to come first.

A third peril is that while maintaining our position on sexuality in a changing culture, we may neglect to show love and grace to LGBTQ people among us. When we become so concerned with guarding lines of right and wrong, we can neglect the other fundamental and often messy parts of being the church, such as witness, welcome, community, and discipleship. As we all should know, LGBTQ people suffer higher rates of mental illness and suicide than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts do. They also often experience bullying online and in person. This includes members of our churches. God forbid that the church would neglect, bully, ostracize, or avoid those whom God has called it to shepherd.

## Conclusion

In accord with the directions of Synod 2023, the general secretary, with the assistance of the agencies of the CRCNA, has taken an initial step at identifying resources “to equip congregations for pastoral ministry with and to our LGBTQ+ members and neighbors” (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1023). Some of these resources are intended to support congregations in their discernment about how to become places of love, grace, and truth. Some of these resources are intended for LGBTQ members and those who care for them. All of these resources are offered with grace and humility in a desire to assist and encourage congregations and their members.

We also acknowledge that wise, pastoral care is contextual and ongoing. New resources on this topic are being developed all the time. Denominational agencies will continue to work on gathering and sharing them in the year ahead.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ, who can do “immeasurably more than all we ask and imagine,” “equip you with everything good for doing his will” (Eph. 3:20; Heb. 13:21).

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## Resources for Churches and CRC Members

Synod 2023 affirmed the CRCNA's "commitments to manage disagreements within our congregations, and among churches, with love, charity, and grace, and to ensure that all who seek to follow Christ are afforded a respectful place to honestly share their views and listen to those of others." Synod also urged our congregations "to, in accordance with Scripture and our confessions, be places of belonging for LGBTQ+ members seeking to follow Christ." And it instructed "all congregations of the CRCNA to show love to all people groups, including our LGBTQ+ members and neighbors, by condemning hateful or demeaning speech and violent or demeaning actions" (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1023).

Synod 2023 also directed "the Office of General Secretary to develop resources and tools, or endorse existing external resources and tools, that align with our Reformed doctrinal standards (as articulated in previous synodical decisions), to equip congregations for pastoral ministry with and to our LGBTQ+ members and neighbors" (*Acts of Synod 2023*, p. 1023).

The following list was developed through the extensive efforts of CRCNA staff, synodical study committees, and the recommendations of a team of reviewers (CRC pastors and other leaders). This list is a work in progress and will be updated over time as we hear from churches and discover new tools that have been useful in a variety of contexts.

### **CRCNA Resources**

[Next Steps Discernment](#) is a resource that helps congregations hold grace and truth while learning, discerning, deciding, announcing, and living well with decisions around challenging issues, which could include human sexuality. The main tools are spiritual practices, fair process, listening circle scripts, and facilitator training.

### **Human Sexuality Report**

Along with former reports of synod, the Human Sexuality Report contains a wealth of insights and recommendations regarding best practices for pastoral care and discipleship.

## **Resources Recommended in the Human Sexuality Report**

### On gender identity

- Beilby, James K., and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2019).
- Fine, Cordelia. *Testosterone Rex: Myths of Sex, Science, and Society* (New York: Norton, 2017).
- Jeffreys, Sheila. *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* (Melbourne: Routledge, 2014).
- Kivel, Paul. *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence that Tears Our Lives Apart* (New York: Ballantine, 1992).
- Pearcey, Nancy. *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions of Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2018).
- Rippon, Gina. *Gender and Our Brains: How New Neuroscience Explodes the Myths of the Male and Female Mind* (New York: Pantheon, 2019).
- Van Leeuwen, Mary Stewart. *Gender and Grace* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990).
- Van Leeuwen, Mary Stewart. *Am I My Brother's Keeper? What the Social Sciences Do and Do Not Tell Us about Masculinity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002).
- Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

### On sexuality

- Allberry, Sam. *Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?* (Purcellville, Va.: The Good Book Company, 2020).
- Forston, S. Donald, and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scriptures and Tradition* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2016).
- Gagnon, Robert A. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2001).
- Grenz, Stanley J. *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998).
- Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011).
- Hirsch, Deborah. *Redeeming Sex: Naked Conversations about Sexuality and Spirituality* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2015).
- Shaw, Ed. *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2015).
- Sprinkle, Preston. *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2015).
- Pastoral letter from Rev. David Beelen, "A Letter to Madison Church: Same-Sex Attraction" ([madisonsquarechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/15.10.28-Letter-from-Pastor-Dave.pdf](http://madisonsquarechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/15.10.28-Letter-from-Pastor-Dave.pdf)).

## On singleness and celibacy

- De Young, Rebecca Konyndyk. *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2009).
- Fairlie, Henry. *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).
- Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010).
- Lasgaard, Mathias, Karina Friis, and Mark Shevlin. “Where Are All the Lonely People? A Population-Based Study of High-Risk Groups across the Life Span,” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 51 (2016), pp. 1373–84.
- Simon, Caroline J. *Bringing Sex into Focus: The Quest for Sexual Integrity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2012).
- Smit, Laura A. *Loves Me, Loves Me Not: The Ethics of Unrequited Love* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005).
- Wehr, Kathryn. “Virginity, Singleness, and Celibacy: Late Fourth-Century and Recent Evangelical Visions of Unmarried Christians” in *Theology and Sexuality* 17, no. 1 (2011), pp. 75-99.
- Mary Hulst, “Belong,” [soundcloud.com/crcna/inspire-2019-2019-08-01mary-hulst](https://soundcloud.com/crcna/inspire-2019-2019-08-01mary-hulst)

## **Resources that CRC Congregations Have Found Helpful**

Some congregations have begun seeking out additional resources and support. They have let us know that the following have been helpful to them in their contexts. While CRCNA staff have not thoroughly vetted them, we pass them along to you, based on the recommendations of several CRC congregations. If you have other resources you’d like us to share, please email [communications@crcna.org](mailto:communications@crcna.org).

### **Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender**

This organization has been used by several Christian Reformed congregations. It has at least four small group series (listed below) related to issues addressed in the Human Sexuality Report. The chair of the organization’s board is Rev. David Beelen<sup>1</sup> (CRC minister emeritus) and includes Rev. Dr. Branson Parler, author of *The Great Lakes Catechism*.

#### 1. Grace and Truth

Grace/Truth is an interactive, small-group learning experience that introduces Christians to LGBT+ people, the language to use and avoid, a theologically faithful view of marriage and sexuality, and practical guidance on how to embody the love of Christ toward sexual and gender minorities.

#### 2. Journeys of Faith

Stories of Love and Purpose from LGBTQ/SSA Christians

#### 3. Parenting LGBTQ Kids

Love your kids like Jesus. This 11-part series helps Christian parents navigate the journey of raising and walking alongside their LGBTQ child.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Beelen is also teaching a course for ARC churches on gender and sexuality.

#### 4. Faith, Sexuality, and Gender (Digital Leaders Forum)

A comprehensive course on faith, sexuality, and gender for Christian leaders and pastors taught by Dr. Preston Sprinkle. The online course includes 22 sessions, eight hours of video content, LGBT and pastoral panels, and hours of bonus material. This product is available only through their website.

#### [Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality](#)

Written by Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC) pastor and professor Branson Parler, the Great Lakes Catechism was recommended by the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality at the time of their interim report to Synod 2019. It contains 19 questions and answers that seek to address a variety of human-sexuality issues through a Reformed theological, biblical, and pastoral lens.

#### [Heavy Burdens](#) by Bridget Eileen Rivera

Rivera served with Preston Sprinkle's Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender, and her book is a revealing and raw examination of the inconsistencies and insensitivities within the Christian church toward LGBTQ+ people.

#### [Still Time to Care](#) by Greg Johnson

Johnson is a gay, celebrate pastor who served for years in the PCA before he was recently expelled for maintaining that someone can, in fact, be both gay and Christian. His book is one-part history of the pastoral care that people such as C.S. Lewis, Billy Graham, John Stott, and Francis Schaeffer offered LGBTQ+ friends; one-part history of the conversion therapy movement (specifically Exodus International and its affiliates); and one-part guidance for charting a gospel-centered pastoral path forward.

#### [The Foundry](#)

A Grand Rapids (Mich.)-based organization dedicated to the training of all levels of ministry leadership. The Foundry's team includes Rev. Dr. Jeff Fisher, a CRC minister (Madison: North CRC); Rev. Dr. Branson Parler, former professor and dean at Kuyper College (see Great Lakes Catechism); and Sarah Behm, member and former officebearer at River Rock CRC in Rockford, Michigan. The Foundry has provided leadership development training for churches in the Kingdom Network and the Alliance of Reformed Churches, including training around issues of sexuality and gender.

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