



First Reformed Church of Sioux Falls

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Connect with God, **Grow** Together, and **Be Transformed** by the Holy Spirit

FRC Congregation & Members:

We are providing this information in accordance with the information presented at the December 13, 2020 annual congregational meeting and so that you can better understand the history of issues that divide within the RCA. This information is meant to help you better understand the current state of the RCA and Dakota Classis, and FRC's role in likely changes anticipated in 2021.

For those that are not completely familiar with how FRC (First Reformed Church of Sioux Falls) is positioned within the hierarchy of the RCA (Reformed Church in America) denomination, this is a brief overview:

- First Reformed Church (FRC) is a member of Dakota Classis
- Dakota Classis is a group of 34 RCA churches in South Dakota and North Dakota. Recently, some churches in southwest Minnesota have also asked to be moved to Dakota Classis from the Minnesota Classis.
 - Think of a "Classis" as a group of ships (in this case churches) all moving in the same direction.
- Dakota Classis is together with 6 other Classes in the Synod Of The Heartland. There are 144 congregations represented in the Synod Of The Heartland, a regional synod for the RCA.
- The Synod Of The Heartland is together with 7 other regional synods that comprise the General Synod of the RCA.
- The RCA has approx. 875 congregations with 138,000 communicant members. The RCA is governed by the Book Of Church Order (BCO).

History of RCA conflict and potential split:

Many believe that talk of a denominational split simply revolves around issues of homosexuality and gay marriage. The issue is actually much broader in context and complexity. While sexuality and the practice of homosexual behaviors have been at the forefront, they are really the symptoms of a deeper struggle – Biblical Authority, and an Orthodox (and historical) view of Scripture. And to a different degree, a struggle to live within the governance of the RCA's own Book of Church Order (rules).

Below is a brief history of the issues:

- In the 1970's the RCA began affirming that marriage is between a man and a woman.
- In 2005, the General Synod took action against a pastor, the sitting President of the RCA's New Brunswick Seminary, who performed a wedding ceremony for his daughter and her partner, suspending him as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the RCA.
- In 2011, the pastor was reinstated by his Classis.
- In 2012, the General Synod approved a statement strongly worded in favor of traditional marriage.
- In 2013, that statement was softened by the General Synod.
- Since that time, certain churches and Classes, mostly on the east coast, have been ordaining gay clergy and performing gay marriage.
- In 2016, talk of mending or splitting the RCA began with a report from the Jerusalem Council.
- In 2017, Delaware Reformed Church (Lennox, SD) consistory petitioned Dakota Classis Admin Team for a special meeting on sending a statement/overture to General Synod 2018 to uphold Biblical Authority, specifically regarding RCA theology in regards to sexuality and marriage.

- In 2018 the Dakota Classis statement/overture was approved by the General Synod committee to be addressed on the floor of General Synod, but by a narrow margin, General Synod referred the statement to the 2020 Vision Team.
- Over the course of 2 years, the 2020 Vision Team reached an agreement for the General Synod 2020 to consider 1 of 3 options:
 1. Stay together – the RCA continues as it is. Congregations that feel they cannot continue in this current tension are encouraged to leave the denomination.
 2. Radical reorganization – the RCA would be divided into 3 synods, described as Conservatives, Moderates, and Liberals. The RCA would then continue under one denominational umbrella.
 3. Grace-filled Separation - the RCA would graciously separate from one another.
- It was anticipated that Option #3 was to be the path forward, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced the 2020 General Synod meeting to be cancelled and be pushed to the 2021 General Synod meeting in June of 2021.
- Since both sides are solidly entrenched in their beliefs, and it takes a 2/3 vote of Classes to pass a resolution at General Synod, it is very unlikely that this issue will pass approval at General Synod 2021. It is widely believed that any action by the General Synod on this topic won't ever happen.
- Throughout all this, the actions of the more liberal churches continue to become more bold and brazen. Recent examples include:
 1. Celebrating communion to honor the “crucifixion” of Trayvon Martin by use of skittles and iced tea as the communion elements.
 2. Boldly claiming that their membership is not male nor female, but instead completely gender neutral in nature.
 3. Publicly posting statements about Christmas being a feminist holiday meant to celebrate “God choosing a woman to lead a revolution of re-organizing the structures of societal power by her leadership, tenderness, and faith.”
- The BCO does not allow one Classis to formally dispute or reprimand another Classis for actions they believe to be against Holy Scripture.
- The General Synod staff does not condemn this heresy and false teaching.

Where is FRC currently in this situation?

FRC has been in communications with Dakota Classis as we navigate these troubled waters together:

1. FRC Consistory condemns the false teaching of other churches in the RCA and stands with the other churches in Dakota Classis condemning these false teachings.
2. Dakota Classis sent a survey to their member churches in September 2020 asking some basic doctrinal questions be answered about where the Consistory at FRC stands and whether or not FRC would continue on this path of gracious separation from the RCA. FRC's Consistory affirmed our intent to stand with Dakota Classis.
3. Dakota Classis hosted an informational meeting with all member churches in October to provide answers to questions about the information surrounding a likely separation from the RCA.
4. On November 30 and December 1, Dakota Classis President Seth Sundstrom participated in a gathering of 11 like-minded denominational leaders to discuss the path forward with separation from the RCA. It was determined that a new denomination will be formed and it is likely that Dakota Classis will separate from the RCA and join this new denomination along with other like-minded churches/Classes.
5. On December 9, 2020 Dakota Classis sent out communications to all of Dakota Classis with an update on the process/progress and provided a sample “Petition Letter” for review (see attached).
6. On December 13, 2020 Dakota Classis Pastor/President Seth Sundstrom attended the FRC annual Congregational Meeting and provided an update on this situation and answered congregational questions at that time.
7. FRC Consistory has been asked to participate in a special meeting of Dakota Classis on January 30, 2021 to discuss the path forward likely separating from the RCA.

8. Apathy or indifference is not an option for FRC because we are joined by covenant to Dakota Classis, nor would we desire for FRC to be apathetic. Once a member church decides to formally produce papers to Dakota Classis to seek separation from the RCA, all of the Dakota Classis churches will be required to make a decision on their action of separation. It is very likely that one or more of the churches in Dakota Classis will begin this process soon, before the June 2021 General Synod meeting.
9. Dakota Classis Admin Team has provided a sample letter for Dakota Classis churches to consider as we move toward grace-fill separation from the RCA. A copy of that letter is attached.

For additional, more detailed information regarding the history of conflict within the RCA and Dakota Classis' actions since 2016, please refer to this more detailed document found on the FRC website here:

<https://www.frCSIouxfalls.com/dakota-classis-document.html>

Congregation Informational Meeting:

The Consistory of FRC will be holding a special informational meeting on **Sunday, January 24, 2021 at 5:00pm** in the sanctuary at FRC, to further discuss any questions members may have regarding this information and the path forward for FRC. ***Please mark your calendars and plan to attend this important meeting.***

Please continue to pray for our church, Dakota Classis, and the RCA denomination in the weeks and months ahead as difficult decisions are on the horizon. Pray that God's will be done and that we are faithful to His calling as His church.

Respectfully,

FRC Consistory

Pastors:

- Ken Eberline
- Craig Pederson

Elders:

- Jeff Christensen
- Chuck Hoelscher
- Larry Kaschmitter
- Tim Klein
- Jeff Spaans
- Dave Van Nieuwenhuyzen

Deacons:

- Steve Chrisopoulos
- Collin DeWitt
- Sean Guthmiller
- Greg Hegstad
- Kevin Huls
- Ryan Hutchinson

Attached: Petition Letter

Greetings, Classis,

This is an update of information and a requested response to developments regarding our relationship with the RCA.

Update

If you were part of the recent Cluster informational gatherings, you'll recall that a special meeting of leaders was planned for December 1 in Chicago. While the virus prevented the in-person meeting, the group did meet via Zoom and accomplished some good work. After discussing each of the pathways (RECA, ECO, 2-Synods, and CORE), the group consensus was that all have good elements and melding them into one agreeable plan is possible.

As we discussed potential futures, it was clear that staying with and/or fighting to keep the RCA does not have much support. Rather, the group favored a plan that would birth something new out of the current RCA, which may include some "asks." These "asks" aren't yet set, but could include some seed monies and church assets. The team has agreed to continue meeting frequently to create a birth plan, which could ultimately be presented at General Synod 2021.

There are a lot of details to be determined, but here are few bullet points from that meeting that should be encouraging to our churches:

- Biblical authority is paramount
- God's Mission is primary
- Reformed doctrine is central
- Covenant relationships are valued
- An updated polity is needed

Next Steps

Engaging the RCA's Process

Our Classis Admin Team has remained open to a movement of God that saves and restores our denomination. While this door appears to be closing, we believe it is important to remain engaged with the RCA through General Synod 2021. Our rationale is two-fold:

1. Our Classis made a resolution that only "gracious separation" would be considered. The 2020 recommendations address this via "generous separation." Being faithful to our word means showing up at General Synod 2021 and engaging the debate.
2. Our collaboration with RECA and CORE (above) will likely produce a recommendation to birth a new denomination from our existing one. This may include funds to assist churches making the transition. This would happen through General Synod.

Petitioning to Leave the RCA

If our request to birth something new fails, and should it become necessary, we want to be ready to move. Thus, we are suggesting the following so that we can be prepared to act very soon after General Synod 2021. Regardless of the final product, our current *BCO* requires that churches, not Classes, petition to leave the denomination. The Classis Admin Team believes it is time for our churches to initiate that process together. In this way, we would remain united as we commit to the principals above that are guiding our discernment of a new home.

Therefore, we are providing a template letter and recommending that each consistory review, sign, and submit a petition to leave the RCA. This action will help us in several ways:

1. It will start the *BCO* process.
2. It will communicate our unity and sincerity. This united action will add weight to our words and potentially help us negotiate a fair separation at GS2021.
3. It *isn't* binding. If we change our minds later, we can rescind.

Meeting for a Special Session of Classis

In addition to the petition to leave, we are calling a special session of Classis on **Saturday January 30th at 1pm in Brookings, SD**. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss and build consensus around our way forward. Please be mindful that navigating 34 churches isn't an easy task, and it requires clear communication. We need your committed presence in this discussion, whether in person or via Zoom. In addition, we depend on you to disseminate this information to your congregation(s).

If any of this information is confusing or too overwhelming for you to communicate well with your church, please ask for help!

Seth Sundstrom, Classis Pastor
On behalf of the Classis Admin Team:

Cody Raak, President
Dennis Olsen, Vice President
Brenda Van Beek, Clerk and Treasurer
Gary Mulder, SW Cluster Coordinator
Fred Wilgenburg, SE Cluster Coordinator

Rick Van Ravenswaay, EC Cluster
Coordinator
Jared Lee, N Cluster Coordinator
Craig Pahl, Elder
Duane Wolbrink, Former President

Please send your letters to:

Brenda Van Beek - Classis Clerk
604 E Maple St, Harrisburg 57032

Letter of Petition to Leave the Reformed Church in America *(modify as needed)*

Date: _____, 202_

To: the Administrative Team of the Classis of Dakota
The Administrative Team of the Regional Synod of the Heartland
The General Synod Council *(optional)*
The General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America *(optional)*

From: the Consistory of _____

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

In unity with the other churches of the Classis of Dakota, we write to petition to withdraw from the Reformed Church in America for the purpose of affiliating with another denomination. We also send this as information to the Regional Synod of the Heartland *(the General Synod Council, and the General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America)*.

We hereby petition the Administrative Team of the Classis of Dakota that our congregation be transferred out of the Reformed Church in America with our financial assets and liabilities, as well as our property. We will work with the Classis in regard to the final assessments that need to be fulfilled.

It is our intent, upon the approval of the Classis of Dakota, to join an existing or newly formed denomination after General Synod 2021. As our discernment process moves ahead and this organization is identified, we will communicate it to the Classis and Regional Synod.

Sincerely,

the Consistory of _____ Reformed Church.

(modify the offices and number of consistory members according to your consistory)

_____ Pastor

_____ Vice President

_____ Clerk

_____ Elder

_____ Deacon

_____ Elder

_____ Deacon