

An Important Message from the GLCC President,

I must apologize that as we've been working on the details and quickly disseminating information beforehand, we sent out a "cold" document containing a potential overture to the October GS meeting without a "warm" preface. The plan was to flesh out this overture at our training and prayer gathering on March 16th and then solicit questions prior to actual discussion and potential voting at the official business meeting on the 23rd. This has created some immediate reaction and confusion that I'd like to address in a personal and practical way.

We're simply asking that you prayerfully process and approach this Overture with an open mind. I recognize that in this long period of conflict we've become quick to fall into "labeling" everything that comes out as being about "right and left." I'd suggest we try to avoid assigning the conservative, moderate, liberal, and progressive labels that are so general and often inaccurate. These are "hot" labels that mirror the political landscape we live in. We can better listen to one another and perhaps build trust with one another if we acknowledge that we ourselves resent *being* labeled, and should therefore be hesitant to label others and their ideas quickly.

I will attempt to lay out the rationale for this proposal and what it hopes to accomplish. We've seen so many plans and proposals coming from the extreme ends of the conflict that we might miss that this re-visioning of R1 from the 2020 report is *not* meant to be either divisive or an appeal to the fringes. This is for the middle: People who don't want their churches voting on human sexuality and wish to retain the current standards and principles of the RCA with integrity.

The Overture - an overview:

This can be accomplished without a BCO change: Broadly speaking, the formation of Regional Synods is an administrative power of the General Synod. The formation and arrangements of classes is an administrative power of the Regional Synod. We do not need a 2/3 majority or years of wrangling to get this done. It seems unlikely any of the other 2020 recommendations in their current form could get passed.

This invites the vast majority in the "Middle Ground" to simply stay put: There is strong evidence that the vast majority of our churches concur with the current RCA standards, creeds and confessions, and statement on human sexuality. Let me be frank: Short of solemnizing same sex marriages and issues of ordination, these standards provide wide latitude for grace filled ministry to broken people by recognizing this means everyone. I'd add that our reformed understanding of Truth and Grace is prohibitive of judgment as we humbly pursue salvation by faith in Christ with all, encouraging them to seek his will in every aspect of life.

For GLCC churches who concur with these current standards, no congregational poll, vote, or declaration will become necessary. Unless a church finds itself at odds with these standards and wishes to function in ways inconsistent with current RCA polity, no action is necessary.

This restores integrity to those on both sides of the issue: In the present environment, those churches who have decided differently on these issues and reside in a classis that is supportive of their practices in terms of marriage and ordination simply function in discord with the RCA's ecclesiastical polity. Others may find themselves in conflict with their own classis in these issues. These would at least be afforded the opportunity to regain integrity within a regional synod that has established an affinity with their theological perception and practice.

This would in effect take the R1 concept of affinity classes to its logical conclusion and remove an additional layer of conflict, as each class would be in a regional synod that is in agreement. For those who concur with RCA polity and those who wish to modify it, each would be afforded the opportunity to pursue their mission with this same level of integrity.

This is better than 3 Regional Synods. Our Canadian siblings must necessarily remain distinct for legal and practical reasons. But some will ask why we wouldn't create more affinity synods? Why not 3 or 4? Maybe partition right from center-right, from center-left from left? Not only is this more divisive, you suddenly do need a slew of congregational votes. Whether or not we are able to entice the polar opposites to remain, this split is simply between current RCA policy and those who can no longer agree with it as it stands.

While I would suggest the advantages for the disagreeing churches is a lessening of conflict and a return to the integrity of having staled polity, this is most intended as an attractive solution for the many in the middle who wish to turn their attention from this conflict, remain reformed under all of our current standards and confessions, and get back to fruitful mission without complex political procedures.

The reality is this split is occurring already. Unmanaged, it will splinter us. This recommendation is to approach it like cutting a diamond in hopes of producing jewels of great value. The other way will be much like smashing a rock, leaving behind only rubble.

I do not resonate with the inference in the 2020 report that we need to let churches thinking about leaving *leave*, and *then* have a conversation as a family. I find that picture tragic and counter intuitive to the Gospel. This is meant to provide a means to have a reasonable conversation about a viable means to remain "Defined and connected" that may offer hope to some who would decide to remain among us.

Friends, I get it! I don't want this. But I refuse to accept the fatal diagnosis for the RCA without pursuing a therapeutic solution. And I personally never want my congregation to be forced to vote on some declaration one way or another to leave or stay or throw down on these issues. Nothing! Period. The goal is to have this administrated with minimal need for legislation and with isolated drama.

This will not resolve all the issues of human sexuality, but this truly is a prayerfully crafted solution for moving forward in the good order of the church, and a way to love others through our differences as we turn our attention from the conflict, remain reformed in this best fashion, and get back to fruitful mission.

I thank you for your care and concerns for Christ's mission, and pray that we can arrive at the "win-win" that has been so elusive. What's not elusive is the victory in Christ that is the result of our faith alone. In this, we all agree.

God Bless,

Dan Sewell
2020-21 President of the GLCC