

January 2023 Classis East of the PRCA

At 8:00am on January 11, 2023 thirty-eight delegates from the nineteen member churches gathered together to conduct the business of Classis East (CE).

The meeting began with Rev. Jacob Maatman, chairman of the previous meeting, reading 1Peter 5 and opening with prayer. He read the names of the delegates from the credentials sent by their consistories and asked for a motion to accept the credentials. After the motion carried, Rev. Maatman declared classis properly constituted and turned the chair over to Rev. J. Mahtani (next in line alphabetically).

Rev. Mahtani presided over the rest of the routine matters that often take place at the beginning of a meeting of classis. He called for the first-time delegates to sign the Formula of Subscription (five elders and one deacon signed); led classis through the approval of the minutes of the September 14-15, 2022 meeting of CE; asked the questions of Article 41 of the Church Order, asked for reports from the Stated Clerk (secretary) of CE, the Classical Committee, the Church Visitors, and a committee to investigate a sexual abuse case. CE approved the work of each of these functionaries/committees.

Two consistories of CE asked for advice in the exercise of Christian discipline. One consistory reported on their labors with a confessing member who remains impenitent in sin. Classis advised the consistory to proceed to announce the member's name before the congregation in accordance with Article 77 of the Church Order. The other consistory reported on their labors with a baptized member who continues to walk in sin without turning. Classis advised the consistory to proceed with the erasure of this member.

Rev. Mahtani completed the final routine matter of Wednesday morning by appointing nine committees of pre-advice.

Committee One treated an appeal by a woman who disagreed with a consistory about how it handled her case as a victim of sexual abuse she suffered as a minor. CE treated the appeal in closed session. Classis declared the appeal legal and made significant decisions regarding the appropriate treatment of an abuse case. Classis ruled that when dealing with cases of confirmed sexual abuse, the consistory must provide sufficient warning to the congregation about the full nature and extent of the sexual abuse committed, disclose to the congregation the safeguards they have adopted to protect the members of the congregation, and work closely with victims in the handling of their case. Classis also approved the appointment of a committee of two elders and two ministers to be available to assist the consistory in this case.

Committee Two advised classis regarding a letter from First PRC of Grand Rapids informing classis of the resignation of Rev. Rodney Kleyn from the ministry of the PRCA and the end of his membership in the PRCA. Classis approved the decision of the consistory "in granting Mr. Rodney Kleyn a 'Ministerial Certificate of Dismissal', and also their work of admonishing him about his responsibility to uphold the vows he made at his installation into office."

Committee Three's task was to provide advice regarding an overture from Providence PRC. The overture proposes that our denomination commission an organization (GRACE; Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) "to perform a full, independent, third party investigation into her [the denomination's] handling of abuse." Providence sent the overture to CE for its approval to forward it on to Synod 2023. Classis adopted three significant recommendations as proposed by Committee Three:

- A. That Classis East appoint a special committee to give more definition to the overture in order to submit it as a classis to Synod 2023. The work of the committee shall include:
 1. Clearly define a scope of work.
 2. Research and vet third-party organizations and bring a recommendation to classis.
 3. Address possible church political matters concerning implementation of the proposal.
- B. That the committee be composed of Mike Potjer, Bernie Kamps, Rev. Eriks, Rev. Maatman, Tom Bergman, Rev. McGeown, and Mike Gritters.
- C. That Classis reconvene March 15 at which the committee shall bring its proposal to classis to forward to Synod 2023.

Committee Four recommended that CE give Grace PRC (Standale, MI) permission to distribute a letter providing clarification of a statement made in a document previously distributed in the denomination. CE granted permission, and Grace PRC distributed the letter on Sunday January 15, 2023.

Committee Five presented a classical appointment schedule for helping the vacant churches of First PRC of Grand Rapids, Georgetown PRC, and Hudsonville PRC in CE and for Hull PRC in Classis West (CW) on two dates in February. CE will likely provide more help for the western churches in the coming months where five of the fourteen churches do not have pastors.

Committee Six provided advice for the expenses of the meeting of CE and for the subsidy requests of three needy churches in CE. The expenses of the meeting totaled \$1,629.87. CE approved subsidy requests for 2024 in the amount of \$50,000 for Kalamazoo PRC, \$90,000 for Pittsburgh PRC, and \$45,000 for Providence PRC. These requests will be forwarded to Synod 2023 for its consideration.

Committee Seven served classis by counting ballots for various elections. The results of the elections follow:

- Primi Synodical Delegates: Elders Randy Dykstra, Joel Minderhoud, Tim Pipe Jr., John Van Baren, Dan Van Uffelen and Revs. Decker, Eriks, Langerak, Mahtani, Spronk.
- Secundi Synodical Delegates: Elders Andy Bylsma, Josh Hoekstra, Steve Kuiper, Peter VanderSchaaf, Dirk Westra and Revs. Bruinsma, Dykstra, McGeown, Noorman, Smidstra.
- Primi Synodical Deputies from the East: Revs. Decker, Mahtani, and Spronk
- Secundi Synodical Deputies from the East: Revs. J. Holstege, Smidstra, and Noorman
- Classical Committee: Revs. Lee, Smidstra, and J. Holstege
- Primary Church Visitors: Prof. Dykstra and Rev. Langerak
- Alternate Church Visitors: Revs. Eriks and Spronk

Committee Eight presented advice, which CE adopted to proclaim a day of prayer. The decision is worth quoting in full:

Recommendation: That Classis call a special day of prayer on Tuesday, January 31, 2023, in response both to the recent and past cases of abuse in our denomination with a threefold purpose as requested.

Grounds:

1. Article 66 of the Church Order allows that in times of "great afflictions, the pressure of which is felt throughout the churches" it is "fitting that the classis proclaim a day of prayer."
2. Sexual abuse (as well as every form of abuse) is horrible evil that affects not only individual members against whom it has been perpetrated, but deeply affects entire families, entire congregations, and indeed our churches as a whole.
3. Having our churches gather for prayer and lament is one tangible and meaningful way that we can with one voice, communicate care and compassion to those who have been wounded by abuse, as well as seek the Lord's help in dealing with the terrible sin.

Committee Nine did not have opportunity to report to this session of CE, but we expect that when CE reconvenes on March 15 that chairman Mahtani will report that he thanked the Grandville PRC kitchen committee for its faithful service in providing coffee, snacks, and meals for the delegates.

Classis recessed around 7:30pm on Thursday January 12, 2023. The delegates plan to return to Grandville PRC on March 15 at 8:00am. Until then we pray for God's blessing on the special committee as it works to prepare a report for the delegates to consider at the meeting. We also pray to God expressing thanks for the unity He has given our churches in the work of serving Jesus Christ and asking that He will use the decisions already made for the welfare of our churches.

Rev. C. Spronk, Stated Clerk of Classis East