

A guide for where Churches in Classis BC NW can turn when folks – pastors, council members, etc. – don’t see eye to eye

All congregations experience moments of tension and times of conflict. Not only is conflict a normal part of congregational life, but it can be an important part as well. God uses conflict to shape, grow, and mature individuals and congregations. With the help of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of church leaders, conflict can teach patience, increase understanding, and deepen relationships.

Although conflict can be an opportunity for growth, it is often challenging and painful, too! Both our classis and our denomination offer resources to help congregations navigate these challenges. These resources are worth accessing – certainly at tense times, but accessing them earlier is wise. These resources are only helpful if congregations make use of them, and conflicts are best resolved when the pastors, council members, and congregants involved have already learned how to listen with grace, speak with truth, and persevere in communication in spite of tension and anxiety. We encourage you to review this summary of resources and identify which ones may be helpful for your congregation. If your congregation is not experiencing conflict at this time, consider working through one of the books listed below with your council in order to equip yourselves for times of tension down the road. If your congregation is experiencing conflict right now – whether it is mild, moderate, or serious – it is invaluable to make contact with someone and invite them to offer their perspective and support.

CLASSICAL CHURCH VISITORS

Every classis in the Christian Reformed Church has sets of “church visitors” -- teams of pastors and/or elders who visit councils regularly (yearly or alternate years) and to encourage congregational health. These visits are the ideal time to share concerns before they turn into serious problems. Councils and pastors are encouraged to be open and frank with the church visitors. Although the church visitors typically initiate their regular visits, councils may – at any time – request that a team come and consult with them.

The Church Visitors serving in Classis BCNW as of August 2011 are:

Team One

(Houston, Prince George, Smithers, Telkwa, & Terrace)

Elder Curt Gesch (250) 846-9511
curtgesch@hotmail.com

Rev Brent Vanderheide (250) 845-7578 work
pastorbrent5@hotmail.com

Team Two

(Burnaby, Maple Ridge, and Coquitlam)

Rev Albert Chu (778) 297-9400 work
albert@thetapestry.ca

Second member to be appointed

Team Three

(New Westminster, Richmond & Vancouver)

Rev Mary-Lee Bouma (604) 684-6863 (work)
mary_leebouma@yahoo.ca
W. Vantriet (?) (604) 526-1569

Rev Johannes Schouten (604) 435-4123 (work)
pastorjo@shaw.ca

Team Four

(Port Alberni, Nanaimo, Duncan, Victoria, Victoria CCC)

Rev Harv Roosma (250) 479-3227 (work)
pastorharv@shaw.ca

Rev Andrew Turkstra (250) 758-1513 (work)
pastorturk@shaw.ca

Council members are encouraged to read the document called “Guide for Conducting Church Visiting” found on the CRCNA website at http://www.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/resources/synodical/churchvisiting.pdf

REGIONAL PASTORS

Pastors are encouraged to contact their regional pastor for advice and counsel during challenging stretches. A regional pastor is a minister assigned by classis to offer pastoral care and counsel to the ministers in his or her area – “a pastor to pastors.”

The regional pastors for Classis BCNW as of August 2001 are:

For the northern churches

Rev Joel Ringma,
Terrace CRC
250-635-7278 (work)
jringma@hotmail.com

For lower mainland churches

Rev Andrew Beunk,
New Westminster CRC
604-521-0111 (work)
abeunk@nwcrc.ca

For the island churches

Rev Andrew Turkstra, Christ Community Church
(Nanaimo)
250-758-1513 (work)
pastorturk@shaw.ca

CLASSICAL CREDENTIAL QUESTIONS

Before each classis meeting, councils are asked to bring forward for discussion concerns and issues related to the life and ministry of their congregation. This forum offers a healthy opportunity to raise, in a general way, some of the issues that may be worrying your congregation. Delegates may have wisdom and resources to offer based on experiences in their own churches. The questions are scheduled for the floor of classis by the Committee for Advice to Classis.

Councils are asked to discuss the following questions prior to a classis meeting:

1. In what aspect of your ministry would you like the assistance of classis?
2. What aspect of ministry would you like to discuss at classis?

THE DENOMINATIONAL OFFICE OF PASTOR CHURCH RELATIONS

The Office of Pastor–Church Relations is a denomination–wide service. Serving councils, pastors and congregations during times of internal stress and conflict is a major aspect of their work though they are delighted to advise congregations about more proactive measures for congregational health. They also offer training and resources to help church deal well with conflict. Its website has useful, up–to–date information:
http://crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch_index.cfm

To learn more about how they may be able to support your church, contact the Pastor–Church Relations staff directly:

Rev Norm Thomasma (director),
616-224-0764
Rev Cecil VanNiejehuis,
616-224-0746

THE NETWORK

The Network is an on–line resource connecting Christian Reformed churches to each other and helping them share ideas. Part of the Network is a discussion forum, where people are able to ask questions and receive feedback. If you are wondering how other churches have dealt with what you are going through, consider posting your experience and beginning a discussion.
<http://network.crcna.org/discussion-networks>

The following posts seem particularly helpful in addressing church conflicts.

James Dekker, “Conflict: Inevitable, So Learn to Understand it and Lead Through it” (May 2010)

James Dekker, “The Conviction to Hope and Thrive – Again, or For the First Time” (May 2010)

Neil De Koning, “Facing a Trouble Congregational Past” (October 2010)

BOOKS AND OTHER RESOURCES

Many good books about church leadership, conflict, and healthy congregations are available. A few that pastors and councils may wish to study together include:

Alfred Poirier, *The Peace Making Pastor*
Ken Sanders, *The Peace Maker*
Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*

Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*
Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Be Calm and Courageous No Matter What*

Two websites worth checking out are Healthy Congregations (www.healthycongregations.com) and the Alban Institute (www.alban.org). These organizations provide training and resources for churches of many denominations. Check out their websites for articles and teaching tools.