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Reasons for Requesting an Article 14

Making the decision to take a call in a different denomination was incredibly tough. The CRC has been such an important part of my life, and those in the CRC are my brothers and sisters in Christ. Even though I am leaving on a difficult note during an unstable time in the CRC, I think of the CRC fondly and want the denomination to be healthy and to thrive.

Throughout my time in Classis Alberta North, I have done a lot of presentations on the 1973 Report on Homosexuality and the prejudice, shame, and loneliness gay people often experience. The '73 Report was one of the reasons why I was drawn to join the CRC because I felt understood for the first time, and even as I leave, I feel understood by the '73 Report.

When I first read the '73 report it was during a very fragile period in my life. My faith was in pieces after going through a couple of years of conversion therapy and I just finished working a summer at a Christian camp that did not go well. At that camp I missed a week of work to go to a conversion therapy conference and told my supervisors why I was gone, and they deemed me unsafe to work with kids because I was gay, so I became a janitor at the camp. I was so hurt and spiritually lost. I wanted to follow the faith of my parents, but up to that point my faith caused a lot of pain and I did not know what to believe.

Then I read the '73 Report. That report uniquely understood that the topic of homosexuality was more than sexual ethic but should also include how gay people are treated within the Christian community. This report gave me hope that I would be able to hold onto my theological convictions while being accepted into community. I had hopes in joining the CRC that people would identify me with Christ and not identify me with my sexuality.

When I decided to come out to my church, I feared being rejected. It took months of planning and preparing myself emotionally. It was on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017, at 7pm. My church was incredible. They saw me as a Christian first and foremost and accepted me into the community. Interestingly, over time it seemed like my church forgot that I was gay and I seemed to have forgotten that as well. I was seen as a person who loved Jesus and wanted to serve the church.

My church lived out this section of the '73 Report,  
*Within this fellowship of love the homosexual who has also been justified and sanctified by Christ must be accepted in his homosexuality, so that in the congregation he does not need to wear a mask and conduct himself like a hypocrite, living in constant fear of discovery and exposure. Nor, when his identity is known, should he receive the painful rejection homosexuals so often experience. He deserves the same acceptance, recognition, compassion and help that is given to any person.*

I experienced a lot of healing from my church. New Life Fellowship is a very special community to me. One of the realities that I know from my gay friends who went through conversion therapy with me is that so few stayed with the church or believe in Christ. I often wonder why I

still believe in Christ, and I truly believe it is because of God working through the local body of believers. Being an active member in the local church is essential for faith.

However, I did not always experience this acceptance through classis or the denomination. I want to be incredibly careful here because I have experienced love and acceptance from so many people all across the traditional and progressive spectrum. I also want people to know that even now I deeply love the CRC, I am not saying these things out of bitterness or grievance. I am saying these things so that the CRC can consistently live out its faith even though I will no longer be in the denomination.

I experienced prejudice, shame, and loneliness within the denomination in a variety of ways.

One of the things I hear on a very regular basis is that people should not base their identity on their sexuality but on their identity in Christ. And I agree that one's union with Christ is the most important identity there is. Even though people say this, more traditional straight people often have a laser focus on sexual identity and this tends to overshadow my identity in Christ. When I visited other churches, my sexuality was often brought up. After a while, I became so weary to interact with other churches because I did not know what type of conversations would take place. I knew that once I came out I would likely become the token gay guy in the CRC, and that there was the real danger that people would only see me as a gay person. This is the tricky spot that I was in. I hoped that if I did presentations at churches that it would educate people and bring a cultural change. But I also knew that this would put my sexuality front and center even though I would rather ignore it. This increased the shame I continually felt because my difference within the church was always amplified.

Language used about me and other gay people has also caused a lot of pain. I am going to be quite blunt, I have been called a lot of derogatory things by people within the CRC. I have been called an abomination, unbiblical, a groomer, cursed, a danger to kids, gross, promoting a non-Christian lifestyle, etc. I kept on trying to remind myself that these things were often stirred up by cultural debates and media, but it left painful marks.

As a result, the call to be confessional is hollow to me. The Heidelberg Catechism on the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment says, "I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be party to this in others; By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly toward them, to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies." If we were actually focused on being confessional we would be focused on how we continually break the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment in our language concerning gay people. Language can do incredibly harm to one's faith and well-being. We cannot say that we need to follow the confessions on the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment and ignore the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment.

Another area of great struggle for me is that I was often ignored by both traditional and affirming people. As an illustration, there was a classis meeting in which it was recommended that Classis use some of its surplus funds to form a ministry that would walk alongside the LGBTQ people in our congregations. I spoke in favour of this recommendation. After me, someone who held to a

traditional view of marriage said that they did not know what ministry to gay people looked like outside of asking them to repent. Then after this someone on the other side of the issue said that gay people did not want this recommendation, instead they wanted to be fully included. Both sides of the aisle ignored the fact that a gay person was hoping for this recommendation to be passed.

*The '73 report says, It is imperative for us to enter sympathetically into the plight of the homosexual. It is one of the great failings of the church and Christians generally that they have been lacking in sympathy and concern for the plight of the homosexuals among them... we have far to go in achieving a Christian awareness of the homosexual's problems and his need for love and acceptance as a person.*

There are so many in the CRC who are not entering sympathetically into the plight of the homosexual. All of this reached a culminating point at Synod 2022. When I was a delegate on the HSR advisory committee there was an intense discussion on including conversion therapy into the prayer of repentance that we included in our report. The prayer request made it into the prayer of repentance, but during the discussion it felt like something snapped within me.

I had hopes that the CRC would be different from the churches I grew up in. I thought the '73 Report had set a different trajectory. My convictions on sexuality began to unravel. By the time I came to Synod 2023, I no longer knew what I believed concerning the HSR. My spiritual, mental, and physical health was just in the gutter. I no longer had the resilience to continue, and decided it was time to leave. I immediately applied for Privilege of Call in the United Church of Christ and spent the next year getting approved for ordination in the UCC.

Again, the '73 Report understands this well,

*In order to live a life of chastity in obedience to God's will the homosexual needs the loving support and encouragement of the church. The church should therefore so include him in its fellowship that he is not tempted by rejection and loneliness...*

*...It is not surprising that many young homosexuals leave their homes, their churches, their communities and flee to the cities where they can live with others of their own kind and openly be what they are.*

The '73 Report understood that rejection and loneliness can have such a negative impact on one's faith and life. Now I am doing what so many gay people are forced to do. I may not be going to the city to be with my own kind, but I am going to a denomination where I no longer have to worry about acceptance. I am sad about leaving the CRC and I have been in a state of grief for a couple of years now, but I am also hopeful.

I am hopeful for the CRC, I think the pain I experienced is not because the CRC is following its confessions, but because it is not following its confessions close enough. How I was treated went against the HC's explanation of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, which means there is potential to correct course. Even though I will no longer be in the CRC, I pray that it corrects course.

I do not know what will happen next. The only thing I can do is trust in God's leading. I hope that God will bring me healing and conviction so that I am no longer wandering. I hope that God leads my church, New Life Fellowship, in its next steps. I also hope that the CRC can thrive. I am not leaving in bitterness, I hope that the CRC will repent and serve God. That is what I pray for.