3/24/2023

Dear CRC congregations,

We—members of the CRC, students and alumni of Calvin University, and their loved ones—we were deeply disappointed with the discourse from Synod 2022. In particular, we took issue with one of the arguments that was used to support the traditional position on marriage (and implicitly gender) in the church; which was that the CRC will better achieve its goals of racial and ethnic diversity if it were to take/uphold a more traditional stance on these matters. Hence, as concerned Christians, we strongly urge the following:

- That you support us in our efforts to get Synod to issue a formal apology for condoning the treatment of all marginalized ethnic and racial groups as a monolith, and the harm that has been caused to LGBTQ+ people of color in the church—*in particular*, by the church’s failure to refute this argument;
- That you support us in our efforts to get the CRC to formally acknowledge the existence of intersectional identities in the CRC by word and deed;
- And that moving forward, you each designate more focus on providing pastoral care for LGBTQ+ people of color specifically.

**An Apology to People of Color**

In the deliberations of Synod 2022, churches tried to justify:

1) Adopting the 2021 CRC’s HSR report which contained some condescending remarks about gay and trans and gender-expansive people as a “useful summary of biblical teaching” on sexuality and gender; and

2) Having the CRC uphold a firmly traditional perspective on marriage

By suggesting that these actions would benefit the CRC’s goals of increasing ethnic and racial diversity. A delegate from Classis Zeeland, for example, argued: “If we deviate from [the Human Sexuality R]eport, we will in fact be far less diverse than we would otherwise be” (Van Farowe, 2022).
However, this claim totally disregards the reality that Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, multiracial, and other non-White people are NOT monolithic. There is considerable diversity in opinion within each and every ethnic and racial group about gender/gender identity and sexuality—as well as other matters.

Several research studies show that no group of people of the same race or ethnicity is homogeneous in what they think about homosexuality, same-sex marriage, gender/gender identity, and transgender healthcare.

For example, the results of a 2017 national survey administered by the Pew Research Center showed that:

- 41% of Black people were against same-sex marriage, and 51% supported same-sex marriage.
- 36% of Hispanic people were against same-sex marriage, and 60% supported same-sex marriage.
- 31% of White people were against same-sex marriage, and 64% supported same-sex marriage.

Moreover, a survey conducted in 2019 revealed that public opinion on the acceptance of homosexuality in society differs also by country and region - and within each country and region (Poushter & Kent). For instance, the survey revealed that:

- Among Filipinos, 24% reported that society should not be accepting of homosexuality, and 73% reported that it should be accepting.
- Among Greek people, 47% reported that society should not be accepting of homosexuality, and 48% reported that it should be accepting.
- Among South Koreans, 53% reported that society should not be accepting of homosexuality, and 44% reported that it should be accepting.
- Among Indians, 37% reported that society should not be accepting of homosexuality, and 37% reported that it should be accepting.
- Among Kenyans, 83% reported that society should not be accepting of homosexuality, and 14% reported that it should be accepting.
- Among South Africans, 38% reported that society should not be accepting of homosexuality, and 54% reported that it should be accepting.
- Among Mexicans, 24% reported that society should not be accepting of homosexuality, and 69% reported that it should be accepting.
- Among Argentians, 19% reported that society should not be accepting of homosexuality, and 76% reported that it should be accepting.
Similarly, Black people, Latino people, Asians, and people of all other races and ethnicities are split on their views about gender identity, and transgender healthcare (Parker, Horowitz, Brown 2022).

Thus, continuing to overlook the diversity of thought in the church among people of all races and ethnicities, will only result in making any additional ethnic and racial diversity it might obtain in the future, inauthentic.

Furthermore, this claim dismisses the growing number of individuals from all racial and ethnic groups who are identifying as LGBTQ+, and the existence of LGBTQ+ Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, multiracial, and other non-White people altogether.

According to the latest Gallup survey on LGBTQ+ identification, the percentage of adults who identify as LGBTQ+ has increased, largely because more and more adults-aged 18 and over—from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are identifying as LGBTQ+. Specifically, “Non-Hispanic Black, Non-Hispanic White, and Hispanic adults in the U.S. are all more likely today to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or something other than heterosexual than they were in 2012” (Jones, 2022), when Gallup first began measuring LGBTQ+ identification. According to the UCLA School of Law, nearly 48% of all people in the U.S. who identify as LGBTQ+ also identify as some race other than White (2022). Not only are there more and more LGBTQ+ people of color in the abstract, but there are LGBTQ+ people of color in the CRC as well. There are LGBTQ+ people of color who are members of the CRC, who attend Calvin University, or who attend CRC churches regularly. The argument that racial and ethnic diversity is achieved through restricting acceptance of LGBTQ+ folks is inherently harmful to LGBTQ+ people of color in our very communities. In fact, this argument has already been incredibly harmful within our communities—to LGBTQ+ people and non-LGBTQ+ people alike.

This is why we are asking for an apology from the CRCNA to LGBTQ+ people of color within the church, after it gives one to all people of color within the church, for failing to confront those who—though perhaps unintentionally, nevertheless-used them as props during the Synod 2022 deliberations about the HSR.

**The Existence of Intersecting Racial and Sexual Identities**

In addition, there is a need for the CRCNA to take steps to learn more about and promote greater awareness and appreciation of the existence of the ethnic and racial diversity that exists within the LGBTQ+ community. An apology is not enough, in and of itself, to amend the harm that has been inflicted upon the BIPOC within the LGBTQ+ community, especially, because of the arguments that were used to support the decisions that were made related to the HSR. Indeed, when it comes to addressing any type of harm, it is not good to only focus on alleviating or
reducing the harm that has already been done. It is equally important that actions are enacted to prevent it from happening again. Otherwise, the positive results or changes that occur from any efforts to support and uplift those that have been harmed will only be minimal and temporary at best, rather than deep and long-lasting. This is because preventing harm requires us to identify, analyze, and directly confront the root causes of the problem(s) that provoke and perpetuate the harm in question.

In this case, two of the things that most significantly contributed to the harm of LGBTQ+ people of color in the CRCNA following Synod 2022 were misinformation about the LGBTQ+ community’s demographics, as well as an apparent lack of knowledge and understanding among church members and leaders of intersecting racial/ethnic and sexual and/or gender identities, in general. Consequently, that is why we are requesting that the CRNCA combat the spread of this misinformation, and discourage the use of this misinformation to guide services, practices, and policies from now on. Similarly, that is why we are urging the CRNCA to create or provide opportunities for people to hear the stories of and learn about and from LGBTQ+ people of all different types of backgrounds (i.e., racial, ethnic, socio-economic, etc.).

**Pastoral Care for LGBTQ+ People of Color**

The Christian Reformed Church needs to care for its LGBTQ+ members of color more adequately. According to the Journal of Counseling Psychology, LGBTQ+ people of color tend to have more difficulty accessing community resilience resources than their white counterparts (Parmenter, 2021). This means that even when there are resources for LGBTQ+ people who are struggling, people who have both minority sexual and racial/ethnic identities continue to be marginalized. Therefore, we must be intentional about caring for LGBTQ+ people of color in our communities. We must provide specific care and resources that attend to their unique needs.

LGBTQ+ people of color tend to be disadvantaged in comparison to their white counterparts. According to a national survey done by CAP (the Center for American Progress) in 2020, LGBTQ+ people of color – which includes Black, Latino, Asian, multiracial individuals, as well as those who identify with another race or ethnicity other than White–often experience higher rates of mistreatment in employment, the criminal justice system, and their personal lives than white LGBTQ+ individuals (Mahowald, 2022).

Specifically, in terms of medical care:
• 24% of LGBTQ people of color surveyed reported some form of negative or discriminatory treatment from a doctor or health care provider in the year prior compared to 17% of white LGBTQ respondents.
• 18% of LGBTQ people of color surveyed said they had to teach their doctor about their sexual orientation to get appropriate care compared to 8% of white LGBTQ respondents.
• 10% of LGBTQ people of color surveyed had a doctor refuse to see them because of their sexual orientation, and 19% had a doctor who was visibly uncomfortable due to their sexual orientation; compared to 4% and 11% of white LGBTQ respondents, respectively.
• Among transgender people of color, 68% reported negative or discriminatory treatment from a doctor or health care provider; compared to 27% of white transgender respondents.
• 28% of transgender people of color had a doctor refuse to see them because of their gender identity; compared to 8% of white transgender respondents.
• 29% of transgender people of color reported that a doctor used harsh or abusive language while treating them, and 38% reported that a doctor was rough or physically abusive; whereas 8% and 5% of white transgender respondents, respectively, reported the same.

In regards to housing and economic status:

• 44% of LGBTQ people of color reported that discrimination has affected their ability to rent or purchase a home to some degree; compared to 32% of white LGBTQ respondents.
• 26% of LGBTQ people of color reported experiencing discrimination in an apartment community whereas 14% of white LGBTQ respondents reported the same.
• 48% of LGBTQ respondents of color indicated having an income below $40,000 a year compared to 41% of white LGBTQ respondents that were surveyed.

Additionally, one psychological study found that LGBTQ+ people of color may require more support navigating their intersectional identities through mental health care (Moore et al., 2021). On several fronts in our society, LGBTQ+ people of color face compounded marginalization. It is the responsibility of the church to respond with pastoral care. This advice is actually in line with Synod 2022, which emphasized the HSR’s recommendation for increased pastoral care (Van Farowe, 2022). It is also strongly supported by research done on spirituality among LGBTQ+ people of color. For example, in a study that explored concepts such as identity intersections, mental health challenges, and positive experiences with religion and spirituality; one of the implications highlighted was “the need to provide resources for LGBTQ affirming churches and spiritual communities” (Lockett et al., 2022).

In conclusion, if the church wants to truly: 1) promote diversity, and 2) love its brothers, sisters, and siblings of all different races and ethnicities; it has to prevent its members and leaders from treating all people who share the same race or ethnicity as a monolith. And it must reconcile
with, acknowledge and care for LGBTQ+ people of color. That is why we humbly ask that you heed our requests.

Disclaimer:

We, the writers of this letter, duly recognize that some people who identify as part of a marginalized racial or ethnic group, dislike when others use the terms “ethnic and racial minorities”, “BIPOC”, or “people of color” to refer to all marginalized ethnic and racial communities collectively for various reasons. In other words, we are fully aware that there is no “one size fits all” language when it comes to talking about race and ethnicity that appeals to everyone.

Thus, we want to be clear that the only reason these terms are the ones that predominantly show up in this letter is because we are often directly quoting from, or referencing the peer-reviewed sources we obtained our information from. The authors tended to use these specific terms in their works. By no means is the inclusion of these terms to be taken as indicative of what we personally believe those who identify with any racial or ethnic group that is not Caucasian/White should be called.

Sincerely,

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Elisabeth Stevens (she/her)
Naomi Dykstra (she/her)
Annie Walstra (they/them/theirs)
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Dear CRC congregations,

It breaks my heart to have to write this additional communication related to the letter you received from me and many others, but it appears that it is necessary.

This week, several people have personally told me that they didn't see any problem with the argument that church leaders made during Synod 2022 about how "adopting the HSR and its recommendations will increase ethnic and racial diversity in the CRC" because the HSR was "supported by a CRC group predominantly made up of Latinos and one predominately made up of Koreans". However, this line of thinking these people use to justify the validity of the argument delegates used in Synod 2022 about how adopting the HSR would increase racial and ethnic diversity in the church (i.e., the notion that the delegates made and/or were right in making this claim mostly/solely because of the support the HSR received from these two groups) is problematic. More than problematic, even. It is dangerous.

Similar lines of thinking have led and/or allowed many people to commit horrendous and violent crimes against [Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, Multi-racial, and other] people with a race/ethnicity different than White-European, and [people part of] the LGBTQ+ community, throughout history.

It is dangerous because it is rooted in the erroneous assumption that ALL Latinos have the same perspectives on sexuality, same-sex marriage, and gender as Latinos that are part of Consejo Latino... and that ALL Koreans have the same perspectives on sexuality, same-sex marriage, and gender as Koreans that are part of the Korean CRC Council.

It is also dangerous because it completely dismisses the fact that [what is commonly referred to as] the BIPOC community does NOT only consist of Latino people of various nationalities, and Koreans.

I also found it alarming that the people who told me these things, conveniently "forgot" that the Latino person they were talking to:

1. Does not agree with the CRC's strictly traditional position on homosexuality, marriage, and gender and

2. Identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community, themselves.

Because, I have already come out to these people, and they know I'm Latino, and I have told them several times how and why I have my doubts about the CRC's traditional position on these
very matters. Consequently, is it any wonder then, why I sometimes can't help but think that maybe all I am to other people is simply an apparition - or an aberration? Really, is it any wonder?

So please, if you hear anyone try to use this reasoning to justify the “it will increase the CRC’s ethnic and racial diversity” argument that was used at Synod 2022, don’t let it slide. And please, please, don’t endorse it.

Sincerely,

Elaine Martinez Vasquez (she/her, they/them, he/him)