

To: the churches of Classis Grand Rapid East

From: Jack Kooreman on behalf of the Council of Grace Christian Reformed Church

Re: Belhar Confession and Synod 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The council of Grace Christian Reformed Church discussed the Belhar Confession at its March 11 and April 1, 2009 council meetings. We met on April 1 with Kate Kooyman of the Social Justice Office of the CRCNA, who presented the history of the Belhar to us. After meeting with Kate, we decided unanimously to voice our support for the Belhar to the Synod of 2009. We are aware of the fact that other Christian Reformed Churches have taken up this issue and are sending communications to the Synod of 2009 in which they urge that Synod not approve the Belhar as our Fourth Confession on par with the historic three forms of unity. We are asking that Classis Grand Rapids East send an Overture or Communication to Synod in support of the adoption of the Belhar Confession as the Fourth Confession of our denomination.

We believe that the Belhar Confession provides a biblically based doctrinal standard of justice, reconciliation, and unity. It is intended to guide the personal lives of Christians but also the entire body of Christ as it lives out God's will "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God."

Some of those who oppose this action by Synod claim that the status of the Confession is limited by the fact that it emerged specifically from the conflict over Apartheid in South Africa. We see the Belhar as a gift from brothers and sisters who have experienced oppression and racism. We know that South Africa is not alone in its journey with conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and the subjugation of the disenfranchised. The history in our own country of oppression, racism and injustice mandate that we clearly speak out the "message of reconciliation" that has been entrusted to us.

Within the Overture, we have referenced our history as a Church to speak to issues of race and our challenge to become a more "Diverse and Unified Family" in Jesus Christ. We see the adoption of the Belhar as consistent with that commitment. That issue was not developed or discussed in the Overture of Classis Pacific Northwest. I am also attaching that Overture.

We therefore ask for Classis Grand Rapids East to voice its support with us for the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of our denomination by passing the attached Overture to Synod 2009.

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Jack Kooreman