

Classis East

Meeting of May 12, 2021
Trinity Protestant Reformed Church

WEDNESDAY MORNING MAY 12, 2021

ARTICLE 1

Rev. C. Griess, chairman pro-tem, leads **in opening devotions**. Classis sings Psalter 159. Rev. Griess reads 2Timothy 2:1-5, gives a brief meditation, and opens with prayer.

ARTICLE 2

The **credentials are read** (Supplements 1-19). The churches are represented by the following delegates:

Byron Center	Elder Ed Hekstra	Elder Harlow Kuiper
Cornerstone	Rev. Spriensma	Elder Tom VenHuizen
Faith	Elder Alvin Bylsma	Elder Jeff Scholten
First	Rev. C. Griess	Elder Pete Adams
Georgetown	Rev. C. Haak	Elder Rick Wierenga
Grace	Rev. R. VanOverloop	Elder Bob VandenTop
Grandville	Rev. N. Decker	Elder Dave Kregel
Holland	Elder Chris Dykstra	Elder Wes Koops
Hope	Rev. J. Mahtani	Elder Steve Langerak
Hudsonville	Elder Will Haveman	Elder Brian VanderKolk
Kalamazoo	Elder Larry Moerman	Elder Tom Verbeek
Pittsburgh	Rev. W. Bruinsma	Elder August Hollema
Providence	Elder Tom Bergman	Elder John Pipe
Southeast	Rev. J. Maatman	Elder Jim Holstege
Southwest	Elder Mark DeKraker	Elder Gary Boverhof
Trinity	Rev. W. Langerak	Elder Doug Pastoor
Unity	Rev. G. Eriks	Elder Lee Oosterbaan
Wingham	Elder Allan Kikkert	Elder Rod Crich
Zion	Rev. J. Holstege	Elder Mike Potjer

It is moved to accept the credentials as read.

Carried

As requested on their credentials, the delegates from Wingham are seated virtually “due to government restrictions which do not allow them to travel to the meeting in person.”

It is noted that our Stated Clerk is not present due to contracting COVID. Rev. Langerak, as assistant Stated Clerk assumes his duties. Two other ministers are also not present, Rev. D. Noorman whose wife just had a baby, and Rev. Smidstra who is in Singapore. Due to these reasons, and vacancies, elders comprise 27 of 38 delegates.

Rev. Griess declares classis constituted.

ARTICLE 3

Rev. C. Haak, by rotation, now **presides as chairman**. He welcomes the delegates, gives a short meditation on the Ascension of Christ from Ephesians 1:19-22, and asks for their cooperation in conducting the business of this session.

ARTICLE 4

Those present at classis for the first time are given opportunity to sign the Formula of Subscription. Elders Brian Vander Kolk, Lee Oosterbaan, Chris Dykstra, Alvin Bylsma, and Jeff Scholten sign the Formula of Subscription.

ARTICLE 5

The Classical Committee **reads its report** (Supplement 20).

The CC informs classis that it has had insufficient time to complete its mandate from the January classis (Art. 43.B) regarding the matter of Rules for the Stated Clerk. The CC asks to be granted until the next classis to complete this mandate.

The CC informs classis that they received a letter from the consistory of Trinity PRC (Supplement 21). This letter cites current rules of the state from MCL 333.2253, that “indoor gatherings... Are prohibited at non-residential venues, except where no more than 25 persons are gathered.” However, current rules allow for board of directors meetings for organizations if the by-laws require such a meeting. And classis has previously invoked this exception to meet. Trinity PRC informs “classis east that as host church, we are restricting in-person attendance at the May 12 meeting of Classis East to delegates, protestants, Trinity’s staff and Professors/ Seminary students (who wish to attend). They present three grounds for this decision. The CC approved this decision of Trinity and notified the clerks of the class with the understanding that classis has the final authority to approve. The CC recommends Classis East concur with the decision of Trinity Consistory so that it may continue using Trinity’s facility.

The CC also reports that they received questions about discrepancies between attendance rules for the January classis, which allowed 100 people to assemble, and Trinity’s restriction to essential personnel for this classis. So they studied the matter, and in their opinion, the January classis did not comply with state rules (MCL 333.2253—Dec. 18, 2020) in force at that time. This order allowed gatherings at non-residential venues of 100 people *outdoors*, but did not allow *indoor* gatherings of any size. They note that Classis January could have invoked the exception clause for Board Meetings required by-laws, but that restricts indoor attendance to necessary personnel.

ARTICLE 6

It is moved to concur with the decision of Trinity Consistory “to restrict attendance to delegates, protestants, staff, and Professors / Seminary students (who wish to attend).”

Grounds:

1. The current government regulations (Emergency Order MCL 333.2253 of May 6, 2021) limits indoor gatherings at most non-residential venues to 25 persons, but does allow for Board of Directors meetings for organizations if the by-laws require them.
2. Restriction of attendance to those required by our by-laws, although it would be above the 25 person limit, would be in compliance with the law.

Carried

It is noted that the above decision reflects the fact that the March 19, 2021 rule cited by Trinity has expired and was replaced on May 6, 2021 with an identical rule.

ARTICLE 7

It is moved to approve the **transcription of the January 13, 2021, minutes of Classis East.** **Carried**

ARTICLE 8

It is moved to grant advisory vote to Rev. D. Holstege. **Carried**

ARTICLE 9

The **questions of Article 41** are asked and satisfactorily answered. **Carried**

ARTICLE 10

The report of the Stated Clerk is read (Supplement 21).

It is moved to approve the work of the Stated Clerk and to authorize reimbursement of \$233 for expenses incurred in preparing for this meeting. **Carried**

ARTICLE 11

The chairman declares closed session.

Classis enters closed session.

Classis enters open session.

ARTICLE 12

A letter is read from Providence PRC thanking classis for providing pulpit supply during its time of vacancy (Supplement 23).

ARTICLE 13

The chairman appoints the following committees of pre-advice:

1. Protests of A. Lanning's Deposition (Agenda 1-38)
Ministers: Revs. Van Overloop and Griess,
Elders: P. Adams, T. Bergman, and T. Verbeek.
The president notes that in correspondence with our clerk, M. Vermeer indicated that he is no longer a member of the PRC.
2. Brian Hilt Protests of Agenda Distribution (Agenda 39-43) and Election of Synodical Delegate (Agenda 1-3)
Ministers: Revs. W. Bruinsma and W. Langerak
Elders: G. Boverhof, S. Langerak, and C. Dykstra
3. Stephanie Medema Protest of Art. 41, D of CE 1/13/2021 (Agenda 4-18)
Ministers: Revs. G. Eriks and J. Mahtani
Elders: J. Holstege and A. Hollema
The president notes that in correspondence with our clerk, Mrs. Medema indicates that although her husband and children have left the PRC, she remains a member so that she may continue her protest.
4. Rev. Maatman Letter Re. Church Visitor's Work (Agenda 19-21):

Ministers: Revs. A. Spriensma and J. Holstege

Elders: D. Kregel and D. Pastoor

5. Finance and Classical Appointments

Ministers: Revs. J. Maatman and N. Decker

Elders: E. Hekstra and B. Vander Kolk

6. Thank the Caterers: Rev. Haak

Two letters are received from Byron Center on their credentials, one thanking classis for its assistance and reporting of the state of the congregation, and another addressing statements made about the consistory in two protests brought to Classis regarding deposition. The president refers the first letter to committee 5 and the second letter to committee 1 for advice.

Classis recesses for the committees to work until noon. Elder Rick Wierenga closes the morning session with prayer.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON MAY 12, 2021

ARTICLE 14

Classis reconvenes. Classis sings Psalter 381 and Rev. Mahtani opens with prayer.

ARTICLE 15

It is moved to declare closed session.

Carried

Classis enters closed session.

Classis enters open session.

ARTICLE 16

Classis treats the letter of Rev. J. Maatman. Committee 4 presents its advice (See Articles 24, 28, and 32; Supplement 25).

I. Information

A. Rev. Jacob Maatman submitted a letter to Classis East dated April 14, 2021. Since the letter was submitted after the deadline, the letter is accompanied by an email to the stated clerk asking that Classis East pardon his mistake and grant an exception to the rule that materials must be submitted to the stated clerk before the published deadline.

B. Rev. Maatman's cover letter explains the purpose of his letter:

1. "As far as legality, this letter does not constitute a protest against the approval in general of the work of the church visitors that is recorded in Article 16 of the minutes of Classis East January 13, provided that minute does not express approval of the work of the church visitors in all particulars. But, if the only way for this letter to be considered is if it is a protest against that decision, then so let it be considered, although the letter only concerns this one aspect of the work." (Supplemental Agenda, p. 20).

2. The "one aspect of the work" with which the letter is concerned is actually two distinct charges of misconduct on the part of the church visitors.

- a. First, Rev. Maatman asks Classis East to rule “that the church visitors overreached and exceeded their mandate when they drafted, for the consistory, articles of suspension of the former minister of Byron Center.” (Supplemental agenda, p. 21).
- b. Second, Rev. Maatman asks Classis East to rule “that the church visitors erred when they conducted their labors with Byron Center as a committee of five, two of whom were already involved in the matter.” (Supplemental agenda, p. 21).

II. Recommendation:

A. That Classis East declare the letter of Rev. Jacob Maatman not legally before it. Ground: The requirements of the Rules for Protest, Appeals, and Overtures have not been met. Classis cannot treat this letter as a protest against the decision of Article 16 because, as Rev. Maatman acknowledges, the decision of Article 16 does not “express approval of the work of the church visitors in all particulars.”

1. Specifically, classis did not deliberate, nor come to a decision on the points of order to which Rev. Maatman objects.
2. It would be unwise for classis to treat this letter as a protest against a particular part of the church visitors work because classis has not previously spoken to those particulars. Additionally, Classis does not have the necessary information to make a judgment on the propriety of the church visitors (or lack thereof) in these aspects of their work.

Note: The letter was submitted to the stated clerk after the deadline, which in itself is grounds for the letter to be declared illegal. However, if the lateness of the submission were the only issue, the committee judges that an exception could be granted for the letter to be treated. VanDellen and Monsma speak in favor of such exceptions, “Moreover, there was always the danger that proper appeals would be ruled out of order for the simple reason that they come a day or more late” (VDM, p. 142).

It is moved to recommit.

Carried

Classis recesses to give the committees of pre-advice time to work.

ARTICLE 17

Classis reconvenes at 4 PM. Elder Alvin Bylsma opens the session with prayer.

ARTICLE 18

Classis treats the recommitted advice from committee 3 (See Article 15; Supplement 26).

The chairman declares closed session.

Classis enters closed session.

Classis enters open session.

ARTICLE 19

Classis treats the letter from Byron Center to Classis addressing statements made in two protests against the judgment of classis regarding the deposition of A. Lanning (See Article 13). Committee 1 presents its advice (I) (Supplement 27):

A. Information

1. Byron Center PRC consistory sent a letter to the May 12 meeting of Classis East, which letter came to Classis along with their credentials. The letter addresses a number of the protests of Classis' January 2021 decision regarding Byron Center's request for the judgment of Classis East for the deposition of her minister.
2. The letter points out four matters found in two of the protests that Byron Center considers egregious misrepresentations.
3. The president of the May 2021 Classis meeting placed this letter into the hands of committee 1 which committee is charged to bring advice regarding the protests.

B. Recommendations:

1. That the letter be distributed to the delegates of Classis East and then read on the floor of Classis. Ground: The delegates have read the protests before the protests were adjudicated by Classis. It is just and fair that Byron Center be given a voice with regard to the same matters regardless of how Classis decides to adjudicate the protests.
2. That Classis instruct the Stated Clerk to distribute the letter to the councils and anyone else to whom he distributed the full agenda of the May 2021 meeting of Classis. Ground: Whoever received the agenda has read the protests before they were adjudicated by Classis. It is just and fair that Byron Center be given a voice with regard to the same matters regardless of how Classis decides to adjudicate the protests.

It is moved to adopt recommendation B.1.

Carried

The letter from Byron Center is distributed to the delegates and read (Supplement 28). The letter notes several inaccuracies in two protests regarding the deposition of A. Lanning.

From the protest of B. Hilt, the consistory notes the following:

1. The timeline the protestant presents is wrong. Mr. Hilt claims "*Byron Center then called in the church visitors whose advice was to depose Rev. Lanning. Knowing that advice and the high probability it would be adopted, Rev. Lanning knew he had one or two more opportunities to bring the Word of God to the flock...* (Agenda, pp. 3-4). Against this, the consistory testifies that this "*timeline proposed...is incorrect...[and] is simply wrong. The Church Visitors initial advice was for Byron Center to relieve Rev. Lanning from the pulpit to allow time to further study the sermon on Jeremiah 23 and our decision to require Rev. Lanning to step down from the editorship of the Sword & Shield publication for a time. The consistory did not approve this advice, and Rev. Lanning remained in the pulpit. There was at the time no mention of deposition, and that was not the Church Visitors advice.*"
2. The protestant is wrong when he claims Classis inaccurately quoted Rev. Lanning. Classis quoted Rev. Lanning as saying he "*informs the elders of BCPRC that they 'have gone to the prophets of Egypt for understanding by going to the Church Visitors...the Church Visitors will not counsel you to your profit, but to your shame'* (Agenda, p. 138). Mr. Hilt says, "*Classis East quotes as though these are verbatim quotes from Rev. Lanning, but they are not*" (Agenda, p. 14). Over against this, the consistory testifies: "*This IS what was said...the protestant was not in the room...However, the consistory was in the room and can attest that these quotes [of Rev. Lanning] are accurate.*"
3. The protestant is wrong when he states that the consistory "*did not deliberate, study, and formulate a recommendation and grounds and then seek advice of the church visitors. They turned to the church visitors to do their work for them, and the church visitors readily*

complied” (Agenda, p. 20). Over against this, the consistory testifies this assessment is “judgmental and simply incorrect. Agenda materials clearly show that for months, the editorship issue was being discussed and even include reports from a committee to investigate. As for the sermon itself, there were hours and hours of discussion...Some with and some without the attendance of the Church Visitors. The assertion that the Byron Center consistory abdicated the responsibility of their offices and simply left it up to the Church Visitors is wrong.

From the protest of Rev. Vander Wal:

1. The protestant makes the following claim: *“First...the decision recorded in the above was not truly the decision of Byron Center’s consistory. The decision was made by Byron Center’s consistory under duress, duress imposed by Classis East through its so-called ‘Church Visitors.’ The ‘Church Visitors’ formed themselves into a committee of five ministers, instead of two church visitors” (Agenda, p. 23).*
2. Over against this, the consistory testifies that this is *“perhaps the most egregious incorrect statement that comes...The assertion here is that the Church Visitors came in and with a heavy hand pushed the Byron Center consistory into making a decision that the Church Visitors wanted done. This statement is wrong and there is no truth in it. Never was the consistory under duress from the Church Visitors. Never was the consistory bullied by the Church Visitors, and never did the consistory simply acquiesce to the will of the Church Visitors. The statement above only casts doubt on the character of the men involved and seeks to wrongly define their motive and desired outcome of the work. It was Byron Center’s consistory that called the Church Visitors for advice. The Church Visitors never sought to impose their will upon the consistory.*

In conclusion the consistory writes: *“It is disappointing that these statements were made and have been included in the Classis Agenda. Interestingly these assertions are made without any proof. We pray for Classis and the delegates as you deliberate on the important matters before you. May God be gracious and merciful to us all.*

It is moved to adopt recommendation B.2. of the advice, to instruct the Stated Clerk to distribute the letter of Byron Center to the councils and anyone else to whom he distributed the material of these four protests from the Agenda of the May 2021 meeting of Classis. Ground: Whoever received the agenda has read the protests before they were adjudicated by Classis. It is just and fair that Byron Center be given a voice with regard to the same matters regardless of how Classis decides to adjudicate the protests. **Carried**

ARTICLE 20

Classis treats the four protests of the judgment of Classis East to concur with the decision of Byron Center to depose Rev. A. Lanning. Committee 1 presents its advice (see Supplement 27).

- I. Information re: Legality
 - A. Byron Center PRC came to the January 2021 meeting of Classis East requesting “the judgment of Classis East, with the advice of the Synodical Deputies from Classis West, for the deposition of Rev A. Lanning for the sin of public schism according to Art. 79, 80 of the Church Order. Grounds: a. We believe that Rev. Lanning’s sermon on 11/15/20 constitutes public schism as evidenced by the material provided. b. We

believe that Rev Lanning's sermons following on 11/22/20 and 11/26/20 constitute further schism as evidenced in the enclosed materials. c. Rev. Lanning has shown no evidence of repentance regarding the consistory's instructions."

1. The decision of Classis East January 2021 was to "concur with Byron Center's decision to depose Rev. A. Lanning and advise Byron Center's Consistory to proceed with the deposition of Rev. A. Lanning from the office of the word and sacraments," with three main grounds.
 2. The Synodical Deputies also decided to "concur with Byron Center's decision to depose Rev. A. Lanning and advise Byron Center's consistory to proceed with the deposition of Rev. A. Lanning from the office of the word and sacraments." They "report with heartfelt sorrow, that they concur with the decision of Classis East."
- B. To the May 12, 2021 meeting of Classis East come four protests of the classis' January decision. Information from the protestants concerning legality of their protests:
1. Mr. Brian Hilt
 - a. Mr. Hilt expresses that he is aware that "at the September 2020 meeting of Classis there were protests of a decision of Classis East which had been made with the approval of the Synodical Deputies. In finding that illegal, Classis East stated that the protest must be made to Synod because of the concurrence of the Synodical Deputies from Classis West." Mr. Hilt does "not believe that correct."
 - b. Mr. Hilt believes the protest he submits to this Classis must be received by Classis East rather than Synod 2021 because "the protest must go to the body where the minutes of the decision are recorded."
 - c. He appeals to Articles 11 and 79 of the Church Order to support this contention, arguing especially that the Church Order in Article 79 uses the word "judgment" to describe the decision of classis, and the word "advice" to describe the decision of the Synodical Deputies. Mr. Hilt sees the difference in wording to imply a difference in the significance of the respective decisions of a classis and the Synodical Deputies.
 - d. Applying his perceived distinction to this case, namely, that the Classis' concurrence with Byron Center is a stronger decision since it is termed a "judgment" and the decision of the synodical deputies is weaker since it is termed "advice," Mr. Hilt concludes, "the protest of the judgment needs to come to Classis East as the body that made the judgment."
 2. Rev. M. VanderWal--Rev. VanderWal makes no case concerning legality.
 3. Mr. Michael Vermeer
 - a. Mr. Vermeer believes his protest ought to come to this meeting of Classis East. He believes the decisions of Classis September 2020, which decision declared certain matters addressed by the Synodical Deputies not to be legally before it, "do not apply in this case." The reason he gives is that there is a difference between the matter faced at Classis September 2020 and this case before Classis May 2021. At the September meeting of Classis it was decided that "Synod 2020 approved this work of the Synodical Deputies" already (his quotation of Articles 21 and 22 of the minutes of Classis Sept 2020 showing this to be classis' argument). In the case before classis now, "synod has not yet approved the work of the Synodical Deputies."
 - b. He argues, "While synod also has responsibility for their actions through their deputies, this concurrence does not take away the responsibility that Classis has

to address error in the decision they made. In correcting this error Classis ought to bring to Synod 2021 a recommendation to reject the concurrence of the Synodical Deputies.”

4. Wingham PRC Consistory

a. Wingham PRC Consistory also interacts with the decision of Classis East September 2020 in arguing for the legality of their protest.

b. The consistory “believes that because our protest is of the judgment of Classis East in this matter—and not the approval provided by the synodical deputies of Classis West—our protest ought to come before Classis East for deliberation. The decision was deliberated upon by the delegates of Classis East, the grounds were provided by those same delegates, and both the decision and its grounds are included in the minutes of Classis East.”

c. They also notify the Classis that they have submitted this same material as an appeal to Synod 2021.

II. Recommendations:

A. That this matter be treated in open session. Ground: The recommendation following deals only with issues of church polity, not the content of the discipline case.

B. That classis declare the protests against the decisions to concur with Byron Center’s deposition of Rev. Andy Lanning to be not legally before it. Ground: This matter has been concluded at the level of classis because the action of the Synodical Deputies has made this matter a judgment of Synod.

1. The Synodical Deputies perform the activity of synod in the interim of the meetings of synod.

a. Even though in this case synod has not yet passed judgment on its deputies’ work, the decisions of the deputies are decisive. This is evidenced in the fact that upon their decisions, the decision is immediately implemented. The Church Order (and the decisions pertaining to the articles) speak of these men in Articles 4, 11, 13, and 79. In general, the Synodical Deputies make possible the immediate implementation of the ordination of a candidate into the ministry of the Word and sacraments, of a minister released from a congregation, of a minister being emeritated, of a minister being deposed, and of a congregation being organized or disbanded. [The same is true of the Synodical Finance Committee formed (Synod 1943, Art. 94) and empowered to make subsidy adjustments (Synod 1959, Art. 167; and Synod 1960, Art. 137), and given legal right to act in cases of emergency (Synod 1966, Arts. 147-149).]

b. That the Church Order uses the word “advice” with regard to the Synodical Deputies in Article 79 of the Church Order, therefore, does not indicate that the deputies’ decision carries less weight than the decision of Classis. Our seminary professors have consistently described the decisions of the broader assemblies as “advice with teeth” for the consistory. They are called “advice” in the Church Order sometimes because the decisions are not forced or imposed on the consistory. The consistory may refuse to take the advice, but must also realize that in not taking the advice of a broader assembly it is going in the direction of leaving the denomination. A synod may overturn the decisions of its deputies to be sure, but the fact that the decisions of the deputies enable implementation of action means the decisions of the deputies themselves “have teeth.”

c. Classis East made a decision along with the Synodical Deputies in January 2021 (which decision was immediately implemented by Byron Center Protestant

Reformed Church as authorized by the Church Order) resulting in Rev. Andy Lanning being deposed from the ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

d. It would not be legal for Classis East to consider undoing its decision to concur with Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church without synod speaking to the matter either through its deputies or its constituted voice.

e. Since the Synodical Deputies are not here, the matter must go to synod as the broadest assembly.

2. In this particular case, there are additional matters that relate: Three of these four protests are in the Agenda for Synod 2021. In addition to the three protests, Synod 2021 will have before it, therefore, the history of the case, the decision of Classis East, and the work of the Synodical Deputies. The issue of the correctness of the deposition of Rev. Andy Lanning would not be ignored, but will be treated at Synod 2021. Additionally, any decision made in the meeting of Classis East May 2021 may not legally go to Synod 2021, as the deadline for material to enter Synod 2021's Agenda is April 15. It would have to go to Synod 2022, complicating the matter.

It is moved to adopt recommendation B.1., to treat this material in open session. Ground: The recommendation following deals only with issues of church polity, not the content of the discipline case.

Carried

It is moved to adopt recommendation B.2., to declare the protests against the decisions to concur with Byron Center's deposition of Rev. Andy Lanning to be not legally before it. Ground: This matter has been concluded at the level of classis because the action of the Synodical Deputies has made this matter a judgment of Synod.

It is moved to elide points of explanation 1.d. and 1.e.

Carried

Motion as once amended.

Carried

ARTICLE 21

Classis treats the protest of Mr. B. Hilt against Article 43 of the January 2021 Classis which approved the work of the Stated Clerk

Committee 2 presents its advice (Supplement 29).

I. Information: Mr. B. Hilt protests Article 43 of the January 2021 Classis to approve the work of the Stated Clerk.

A. Article 43 read as follows: Classis treats the request of the stated clerk for judgement of his actions regarding the publication of the agenda for this meeting of classis (supplement 32).

I. Information

A. The stated clerk reported the following (Minutes, Art. 12): "I decided not to provide any of the material of this agenda to non-office bearers who requested a copy of the agenda. I also prepared a 'public agenda' with only a generic list of items that will be treated at classis to distribute to non-office bearers at their request. I wrote a letter explaining my decisions regarding the

agenda to send along with the 'public agenda' that I distributed to non-office bearers. I have attached that letter and the 'public agenda' to this report.

B. The stated clerk then made the following request: "I ask that Classis judge my actions concerning the distribution of the agenda to non-officebearers and hope that these actions will be approved."

II. Recommendations:

A. That Classis approve the actions of the stated clerk as reported with regard to the publication of the agenda. Grounds: Given the fact that almost every item on the agenda was subsequently treated in closed session, the actions of the stated clerk were reasonable, wise, and in general accord with our current rules (Art. V.1.e, "protests and appeals which deal with discipline cases excluding those dealing with public deviation in doctrine, shall not be included in the agenda...")

B. That Classis refer this matter to the Classical Committee to study and bring recommendation to the next meeting of Classis. Grounds:

1. Classis has made previous related decisions, including recently approving an overture (January 2018), overturning that decision and adding points to the Rules of Classis (May 2018).

2. These decisions, the practices of Classis West, and the rules of Synod should be studied carefully before making any further decisions (Art. 46), and there is insufficient time given the lengthy agenda to study them carefully.

B. Specifically, Mr. Hilt believes that the Stated Clerk "erred in his treatment of the distribution of the agenda to non-office-bearers and that Classis East erred in approving his work in the above listed decision. Those who are not office-bearers were sent a letter by the Stated Clerk and a 'public agenda' which merely listed some items. These were included as supplements to the minutes of Classis East. In the letter the Stated Clerk provided his reasons for not distributing a more comprehensive agenda."

C. Mr. Hilt makes the following arguments in support of his protest:

1. The Stated Clerk erred in his reasoning that "...I am not allowed to distribute publicly any of the material that classis will be treating." Mr. Hilt argues that such material are allowed because the Rules of the Stated Clerk only give the Stated Clerk discretion with regard to "matters clearly not ecclesiastical." All other items must be included in the "public agenda." Mr. Hilt cites a number of matters that he claims should have been included in the "public agenda" because Classis treated them as ecclesiastical. Among them were cases treated in closed session, which he argues were not matters of discipline, and cases that concerned public deviation from doctrine, which by rule were also to be included in the agenda.

2. Classis said "that because 'almost every item' was later treated in closed session the actions of the Stated Clerk were reasonable." This does not mean the decision was correct.

3. The Stated Clerk did not know what matters would be treated in closed session, and therefore "assume[d] Classis' prerogative...A subsequent decision of classis to deal with a matter in closed session does not excuse it not being included on the public agenda."

4. The actions of the Stated Clerk were not "reasonable, wise, and in general accord with our current rules..." as Classis declared. Of the six protests and/or

appeals, and one request for judgement on the agenda, “at least three should have been included...per the Rules...”

5. The Stated Clerk does not have discretion over all of the items on the Agenda. According to the Rules, the default is, “The Stated Clerk shall ordinarily publish all material intended for the agenda.” The Stated Clerk only has discretion for things clearly not ecclesiastical.

6. In 1972 Synod adopted the rule to allow the Stated Clerk discretion on “things clearly not ecclesiastical.” This decision is relevant for Classis since it adopted the Rules of Synod.

a. Of relevance is that one ground refers to things “quite obviously not ecclesiastical.” And, in the pre-advice, the committee wrote: “[We are] strongly of the opinion that, as much as possible, all the material which comes to our Synod and which is treated there should be made available to the people of the Church and especially to the office-bearers...The saints in Christ’s Church should know, as much as possible, what is happening at Synod, for only then can they fulfill their responsibilities in the office of believers.”

b. Mr. Hilt argues that the Stated Clerk, “in not providing the material for the agenda as much as possible placed a barricade in front of those in the office of believer and prohibited them from fulfilling their responsibilities. That is tragic and contradictory to principles of the reformation and Reformed church government.”

II. Recommendations:

A. That Classis declare the protest of Mr. B. Hilt against Article 43 of the January 2021 Classis to be legally before it. Ground: The requirements of C.O., articles 30 and 31, and the Rules for Protest have been met.

B. That Classis not sustain the protest of Mr. B. Hilt against Article 43 of the January 2021 Classis. Ground: The protest of Mr. B. Hilt does not reckon with part B of Article 43, which further explains the decision of Classis to approve of the work of the Stated Clerk. Explanation:

1. Part B was the decision to “refer this matter to the Classical Committee to study and bring recommendation to the next meeting of Classis. Grounds:

a. “Classis has made previous related decisions, including recently approving an overture (January 2018), overturning that decision and adding points to the Rules of Classis (May 2018).

b. “These decisions, the practices of Classis West, and the rules of Synod should be studied carefully before making any further decisions (Art. 46), and there is insufficient time given the lengthy agenda to study them carefully.

2. With this decision, Classis determined that, although the Clerk did not strictly follow the letter of its Rules regarding distribution of the Agenda, the main problem was not the actions of the Stated Clerk but that the Rules need to be re-examined in light of past decisions and practices at Classis East and West, and differences between how material arrives at Classis versus Synod. Therefore, Classis appointed a committee to study this matter and bring a recommendation to Classis.

3. Mr. B. Hilt does not prove that it is unlawful for Classis to judge that its own officers are reasonably in accord with its own rules, or that it is unlawful for Classis to re-examine or change those rules.

It is moved to adopt recommendation II.A, to declare the protest of Mr. B. Hilt against Article 43 of the January 2021 Classis to be legally before it. Ground: The requirements of the C.O., articles 30 and 31, and the Rules of Protest have been met. **Carried**

It is moved to adopt recommendation II.B., to not sustain the protest of Mr. B. Hilt against Article 43 of the January 2021 Classis.

It is moved to amend by eliding point of explanation II.B.3. **Failed**

Motion as originally presented. **Carried**

Classis recesses for dinner.

WEDNESDAY EVENING May 12, 2021

ARTICLE 22

Classis reconvenes and Rev. A. Spriensma opens with prayer.

ARTICLE 23

Classis enters closed session.

Classis enters open session.

ARTICLE 24

Classis returns to the letter of Rev. J. Maatman (See also Articles 16, 28, and 32). Committee 4 presents its reformulated advice (Supplement 30)

II. Recommendations:

- A. That Classis East declare the letter of Rev. Maatman legally before it. Grounds:
 - 1. Although the letter came late, the committee judges that an exception should be granted for the letter to be treated. VanDellen & Monsma speak in favor of such exceptions, "Moreover, there was always the danger that proper appeals would be ruled out of order for the simple reason that they come a day or more late" (VDM, p. 142).
 - 2. Rev. Maatman expresses his desire that his letter be viewed as a protest against Article 16 of the minutes of the January 2021 meeting of Classis East.
 - 3. The protest satisfies the requirements of articles 30 & 31 of the church order.
- B. That Classis East not sustain the charge of Rev. Maatman that "the church visitors overreached and exceeded their mandate when they drafted, for the consistory, articles of suspension of the former minister of Byron Center."
 - 1. In this protest Rev. Maatman does not provide us with any documentation of the mandate he says was exceeded by the church visitors. As far as we know, no such written mandate that would restrict the work of the church visitors exists.
 - 2. Rev. Maatman errs in his assertion that the consistory must "come to a mind as a consistory" before "the mind of the church visitors was expressed." The mind of the consistory was expressed by its own decision to seek the help of the Church Visitors.

- a. The decision of Byron Center PRC consistory was “to request advice from the Church Visitors, regarding the sermon preached on the morning of 11-15-20, “Shepherds to Feed You” Jeremiah 23:4,14, with regards to direction going forward” (BC consistory minutes, Art. 3, Nov. 19, 2020).
 - b. A request for advice from the church visitors may include recommendations drafted for the consideration and action of the consistory.
 - c. The fact that the consistory had not drafted their own proposal was rendered irrelevant when Byron Center’s consistory decided to request the advice of the church visitors.
 - d. The church visitors and their advice were invited by the consistory.
3. Rev. Maatman errs in his assertion that the church visitors should have followed the pattern of a previous case, in which the church visitors assisted a consistory only in “proper legal formalities.”
- a. Although treated differently than the former case, the advice of the Church Visitors to BC consistory falls within the scope of Article 44, “To take heed whether the ministers and the consistory... observe in all things the adopted order, and properly promote as much as lies in them, through word and deed, the upbuilding of the congregation...to the end that they may... by their advice and assistance help and direct all things unto the peace, upbuilding, and greatest profit of the churches.”
 - b. The church visitors must exercise wisdom as they judge how to help the consistory, but it is the prerogative of the church visitors to make that judgment when they are called to help a consistory. At times the church visitors may provide assistance in legal formalities, and at other times this may provide more substantial help.
- C. That Classis East not sustain the charge of Rev. Maatman that “the church visitors erred when they conducted their labors with Byron Center as a committee of five, two of whom were already involved in the matter.”
1. Regarding the lack of recusal on the part of two of the church visitors:
 - a. The fact that two of the church visitors were already “involved in the matter” was well-known to Byron Center’s consistory when they requested help from the church visitors and while the meetings were conducted with the church visitors. Byron Center’s consistory made no requests for these men to recuse themselves.
 - b. The fact that a church visitor is working with a consistory regarding charges of sin against a minister does not automatically demand his exclusion from assisting in the matter. Although it may have been wise for the two church visitors who were “already involved in the matter” to recuse themselves, the consistory did not request it, and still sought their assistance. As a case in point, a delegate to an assembly who brings a protest may deliberate and vote on that protest without compromising his objectivity.
 2. Regarding the number of church visitors involved in the work:
 - a. Through the work of the classical committee, classis did in fact appoint a 5th church visitor for this case. Having been duly appointed, it is the prerogative of the church visitors themselves to determine whether the church visitors should do their work as a full committee.
 - b. Since the way of wisdom is that there is safety in a multitude of counselors, Classis does not find fault in the number of church visitors involved in this case.

c. The church visitors' request to the classical committee was for "additional assistance," and later in their report to Classis East they report that they were given this "additional assistance." The classical committee uses the language of a "substitute." We are unable to determine the nature of the fifth church visitor.

It is moved to adopt recommendation II.A, that Classis declare the letter of Rev. Maatman legally before it, on 3 grounds.

It is moved to amend by eliding the phrase, "the committee judges that" from ground 1. **Carried**

Motion as once amended. **Carried**

It is moved to adopt recommendation II.B., not to sustain the charge of Rev. Maatman that "the church visitors overreached and exceeded their mandate when they drafted, for the consistory, articles of suspension of the former minister of Byron Center."

It is moved to amend by replacing the word "charge" with "allegation." **Carried**

Motion as once amended **Carried**

It is moved to adopt recommendation II.C., to not sustain the charge of Rev. Maatman that "the church visitors erred when they conducted their labors with Byron Center as a committee of five, two of whom were already involved in the matter."

It is moved to amend by replacing the word "charge" with "allegation." **Carried**

It is moved to amend by eliding C. 2.c. **Carried**

It is moved to recommit. **Carried**

ARTICLE 25

Committee 5 presents the following schedule for pulpit supply (Supplement 31). It grants the requests of Faith, First (Holland), and Pittsburgh that their ministers be left off the schedule, and it does not provide supply for vacant congregations every fourth week.

Date	Kalamazoo (PM)	Hudsonville (PM)	Providence (PM)	Byron Center (PM)
6/6	Noorman	Langerak	Griess	VanOverloop
6/13	Spriensma	Maatman	Haak	Decker
6/20	VanOverloop	Mahtani	Holstege	Eriks
6/27				
7/4	Decker	Noorman	Langerak	Griess
7/11	Eriks	Spriensma	Maatman	Haak

Date	Kalamazoo (PM)	Hudsonville (PM)	Providence (PM)	Byron Center (PM)
7/18	Griess	VanOverloop	Mahtani	Holstege
7/25				
8/1	Haak	Decker	Noorman	Langerak
8/8	Holstege	Eriks	Spriensma	Maatman
8/15	Langerak	Griess	VanOverloop	Mahtani
8/22				
8/29	Maatman	Haak	Decker	Noorman
9/5	Mahtani	Holstege	Eriks	Spriensma
9/12	Noorman	Langerak	Griess	VanOverloop
9/19				
9/26	Spriensma	Maatman	Haak	Decker

It is moved to adopt the proposed schedule

Carried

ARTICLE 26

The letter from Byron Center consistory that is addressed to Classis is read (See also Article 13; Supplement 32). The letter expresses gratitude to Classis East for honoring their request to assign a committee to assist them when requested, which committee cheerfully assisted them with advice and encouragement on three separate occasions. The consistory reports that the congregation continues to enjoy sound, Reformed preaching from Prof. Doug Kuiper every Sunday AM and classical supply in the PM, which edifies and comforts them. The consistory also reports that Byron Center now numbers approximately 42 families, about half of what they were previously. They ask that Classis East remember the consistory and congregations in its prayers.

ARTICLE 27

Classis enters closed session

Classis enters open session.

ARTICLE 28

Classis returns to the letter of Rev. J. Maatman. Committee 4 presents its reformulated advice (See also Articles 16, 24, and 32; Supplement 34).

C. That Classis East not sustain the allegation of Rev. Maatman that “the church visitors erred when they conducted their labors with Byron Center as a committee of five, two of whom were already involved in the matter.”

1. Regarding the lack of recusal on the part of two of the church visitors:

- a. As a matter of accuracy, there were not two, but one man on the committee of five who may have been involved to the point of considering recusal, and this was well known to Byron Center's Consistory.
 - b. Although it may have been wise for the church visitor who was involved to recuse himself, the consistory did not request it, and still sought their assistance. As a case in point, a delegate to an assembly who brings a protest may deliberate and vote on that protest without compromising his objectivity.
2. Regarding the number of church visitors involved in the work:
- a. Through the work of the classical committee, classis did in fact appoint a 5th church visitor for this case. Having been duly appointed, it is the prerogative of the church visitors themselves to determine whether the church visitors should do their work as a full committee.
 - b. Since the way of wisdom is that there is safety in a multitude of counselors, Classis does not find fault in the number of church visitors involved in this case.

It is moved to adopt recommendation C.

It is moved to amend by eliding the last sentence in 1.b., "As a case in point..." **Carried**

It is moved to recommit. **Carried**

ARTICLE 29

Classis treats the **expenses for this meeting** (Supplements 35-37)

Rev. W. Bruinsma	\$344.20
Rev. A. Spruiensma	\$196.00
Trinity PRC - janitorial and catering	\$606.50
Total	\$1146.70

It is moved to authorize payment for these expenses. **Carried**

ARTICLE 30

Rev. Haak reports that he has thanked the caterers.

ARTICLE 31

Classis treats the **Place and Time of the next meeting of Classis East.**

It is moved to convene at 8:00 AM on September 8, 2021 at Grandville PRC. **Carried**

ARTICLE 32

Classis returns to the letter of Rev. J. Maatman (See also Articles 16, 24, and 28).
Committee 4 presents their reformulated advice (Supplement 38).

C. That Classis East not sustain the allegation of Rev. Maatman that "the church visitors erred when they conducted their labors with Byron Center as a committee of five."
Grounds:

1. Through the work of the classical committee, classis did in fact appoint a 5th church visitor for this case. Having been duly appointed, it is the prerogative of the church visitors themselves to determine whether the church visitors should do their work as a full committee.

2. Since the way of wisdom is that there is safety in a multitude of counselors, Classis does not find fault in the number of church visitors involved in this case.

D. That Classis East sustain the allegation of Rev. Maatman regarding the recusal of any on the committee of five church visitors who were already “involved in the matter.”

Grounds:

1. As a matter of accuracy, there were not two, but one man on the committee of five who was involved to the point that he should have recused himself.

2. The church visitors erred when they did not require the one man who was involved to recuse himself.

3. Nevertheless, the involvement of the one man did not adversely affect the decisions of Byron Center’s consistory, as referenced in their letter to Classis East dated May 12, 2021. “Never was the consistory under duress from the Church Visitors. Never was the consistory bullied by the Church Visitors, and never did the consistory simply acquiesce to the will of the Church Visitors.”

It is moved to adopt recommendation C with its grounds. **Carried**

It is moved to adopt recommendation D with its grounds.

It is moved to amend by adding “for the sake of appearance” at the end of ground 2. **Failed**

Motion as originally presented. **Carried**

It is moved that those men who served as church visitors in January produce a report to the next Classis clarifying or correcting any confusing or incorrect information (cf. Minutes of January 13, supplement 26, p. 72). **Carried**

ARTICLE 33

The script minutes are read. It is moved to adopt. **Carried**

It is moved to adjourn. **Carried**

Rev. Haak expresses gratitude to the delegates for helping him in leading the deliberations of classis and for the work done by the committees. He asks that we pray for God’s blessings upon our work, prayers for our vacant churches, and fervent prayer for young men for the gospel ministry and peace in the churches.

Rev. Haak closes with prayer.

_____, President

_____, Secretary