



NEXT STEPS DISCERNMENT

Dear Congregation,

As a Council, we believe God is inviting our church to enter into a season of discernment. The [decisions of Synod 2022](#) related to human sexuality have prompted us to ask what these decisions mean for us, for our ministry moving forward, and for our ability to hold together despite differences of views.

Though the Council is responsible for making most decisions about next steps for our church, we nevertheless highly value the prayers, discernment, and insights of our entire congregation. So before we make decisions, we want to discern together.

First, we want to invite you to join us in practising **examen**, a spiritual discipline that has long been used by Christians trying to orient their hearts and ears to the voice of God. Spiritual disciplines like examen are part of the foundation of how we want to make decisions as leaders. (A description of examen is attached in an appendix at the end of this letter.)

Second, we want to listen to each of you, and we want you to listen to each other. In the next week, we will invite you to sign up for a small group listening circle. In this circle meeting, you will pray, listen, and share with each other in response to the following questions. Circles are expected to last no more than 90 minutes. Please reflect on these questions before the meeting, but we encourage you not to take comprehensive notes with you. Instead, speak to one another as God leads.

1. What did you first think when you heard about synod's decisions?
2. What have you thought about these decisions since?
3. What's been the hardest thing for you about these decisions?

4. What do you need to move forward in this next season?
5. What do you think our church needs in order to move forward in this next season?
6. Briefly, what do you wish to share with the Council to help their discernment in this season?
7. Is there anything else that came up in our circle today that you'd like to communicate to Council?

The first three questions will be asked and answered confidentially so that you can share your thoughts freely with just each other. But for the last four questions, someone will take notes of your responses so that we have a record of what was shared.

As a Council, we will then take what we've heard from you and what you've heard from each other and write a report or summary to give back to you. After that, the Council will meet to reflect on what you've shared and to add our own discernment to help us either make a

decision or, more likely, to engage the congregation a little more deeply in the challenges and opportunities before us.

We expect that these listening circles are only the first stage of a longer discernment and that you will have future opportunities to listen, share, and pray as we go deeper into the issues for our church. Whatever we do, we commit to communicate what we're doing and why we're doing it as clearly, completely, and promptly as possible.

We have been using a resource from our denomination called Next Steps Discernment as a guide for how we approach this season. We invite you to read more about this process or watch the introductory video at crcna.org/pcr/nextsteps.

We thank you in advance for your prayers, patience, and participation in this process. May God continue to build, bless, and lead God's church!

Together in Christ's service,

HSR Sub-committee of Living Hope Christian Reformed Church, Peterborough



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Appendix: The Spiritual Practice of Examen (Remembering)

Description

The Bible is full of invitations and commands to remember: Remember what God has done (Joshua 4). Remember that God is good (Psalm 103). Remember Jesus' sacrifice (Luke 22:14–20). God's people are constantly called to remember because we otherwise so easily forget.

One way to strengthen our remembering muscles is to practice a daily examen. An examen is a routine in which people take time to ask and answer several questions about how they did (or did not) experience God in the past day. By regularly reflecting on our day, we become more aware of God and more aware of what circumstances seem to lead us closer to God or pull us further from God.

In the context of discernment, examen, like fasting, can raise our level of awareness of who God is and where God is active in our lives. It also can expose where we are resisting or distant from God.

Practice

We invite you to practice a daily examen before and during the discernment period by spending five minutes each day to reflect on these questions:

- What am I grateful for?
- When did I notice God's presence? When did I ignore God?
- What emotions did I experience today? What might God be saying through them?
- What sins do I need to confess?

Then pray for the grace you need to be more available to God.