



April 19, 2022

Dear Members of the Calvin University Board of Trustees,

As you gather this week, we, the undersigned faculty, urge you to take action on the reappointment of Dr. Joe Kuilema. Specifically, we ask you to follow the unanimous recommendation of his department and overturn the vote of the Professional Status Committee—an action marred by questionable decision-making and contestable Reformed interpretations.

In his years on the faculty, Dr. Kuilema has demonstrated an unparalleled commitment to Calvin's students and Calvin's mission. There are few on the faculty more passionately devoted to equipping students to think deeply, act justly, and live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. On this there is no dispute, as the Dean's memo confirms.

The Dean's revised dossier makes clear that, despite Dr. Kuilema's outstanding record, and despite PSC's affirmation of his reappointment in December 2021, the Provost requested reconsideration in light of Dr. Kuilema's role as officiant in a civil same-sex wedding involving a Calvin University employee working for the Center for Social Research.

In light of this event, we already know the Provost made questionable, irregular decisions that evaded due process. He admitted to Faculty Senate that the decision to excise the Center of Social Research from the university was "abrupt" and "nonconsultative." (In fact, neither the CSR Advisory Council nor any of the social science departments on campus were consulted about the decision. And none of them supported the decision. Moreover, given that the Provost cannot unilaterally *establish* a center or institute, it seems clear that the Provost should not be *closing* one by administrative fiat.)

In a similar way, once informed of Dr. Kuilema's role, the Provost initiated a process to reconsider, and ultimately rescind, PSC's affirmation of Kuilema's reappointment. The rationale articulated by the Dean appeals, of course, to our Faculty Handbook. But we contest both this interpretation of policy as well as the policy itself. We will address matters of interpretation; but more significantly, we are urging the Board of Trustees to reconsider the *spirit* of the university on matters of LGBTQ inclusion and discipleship.

On the "letter of the law," so to speak, two considerations: (1) In February 2022, PSC offered a document to provide clarity for the Calvin community as the denomination considers the CRC's Human Sexuality Report. Footnote 2 of that document notes

ambiguity in the church's position on civil same-sex marriage. PSC's judgment of Dr. Kuilema for participation in a same-sex civil ceremony seems to contradict its own statement.

(2) More egregiously, the decision not to reappoint Dr. Kuilema amounts to the university acting in the place of the church—a clear violation of the principle of sphere sovereignty at the heart of the Reformed tradition. By judging Dr. Kuilema as disqualified for reappointment, the Provost and PSC are effectively exercising discipline of a faculty member when Dr. Kuilema's own congregation not only did not exercise discipline but *affirmed* his participation in the wedding ceremony. Per faculty requirements outlined in the Faculty Handbook, Dr. Kuilema is a member in good standing in his CRC congregation who has the complete support of both his pastors and council. He has shown himself to be a devoted churchman (indeed, at the time of the ceremony, he was serving as an elder in his congregation). The Dean, Provost, and some members of the PSC are effectively acting as arbiters of Reformed pastoral guidance more than Dr. Kuilema's home CRC congregation.

Thus we arrive at the *spirit* of the matter. There's no denying that, technically speaking (per the "letter of the law"), Dr. Kuilema's actions run afoul of the Faculty Handbook. But we refuse to believe they run counter to the spirit of Calvin's Reformed Christian mission. Dr. Kuilema's action was not willful and obstinate; it was a considered, intentional act of love and care nourished by his Reformed commitments. If it is a violation of the Faculty Handbook, it is, in the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," an act of civil disobedience meant to protest an unjust law. Or perhaps better: an act of "ecclesiastical disobedience" in the best spirit of being Reformed and always reforming. You should know that, in this respect, Dr. Kuilema's actions only mirror similar actions by local congregations—of which many faculty are members—that have also discerned and concluded that the CRC's policy and practice is unacceptably narrow.

We urge you, Board of Trustees, to realize that many in the Calvin University community—faculty, staff, and students, as well as alumni and prospective students—have discerned and concluded that there are ways for same-sex Christians to be faithful followers of Jesus that do not conform to the parameters of the CRC's stated position. The non-reappointment of Dr. Kuilema, a champion for students on such matters, will send a chilling signal to our community that the university is retrenching to a narrow stance that will make many feel unwelcome—including current students, prospective students, and many of us on the faculty. This chill will actively work against the pastoral focus of the HSR. None of us wants to be part of a Calvin University that excludes the voice and spirit of someone like Dr. Kuilema. None of us want to be part of a university that doesn't have room to welcome all students, including LGBTQ followers of Jesus who are answering the call of discipleship in ways that are affirmed by their CRC councils and congregations.

So we urge you, Board of Trustees, to be prudent and courageous, discerning and hopeful. We urge you to reappoint Dr. Joe Kuilema and thus demonstrate that Calvin

University is a place where people will find courageous conversation and capacious welcome.

Sincerely,

James K.A. Smith, Philosophy
Tracy Kuperus, Politics & Economics/African & African Diaspora Studies
Emily Helder, Psychology
Kevin Timpe, Philosophy
Jonathan Hill, Sociology & Social Work
Todd Vanden Berg, Sociology & Social Work
David P. Warners, Biology
Carolyn Anderson, Chemistry & Biochemistry
David S. Koetje, Biology
Adel Abadeer, Politics & Economics
Laura Luchies, Center for Social Research / DataWise Consulting, LLC
Scott H. Vander Linde, Economics (Emeritus)
Jesse Holcomb, English and Communication
Stacia Hoeksema, Sociology & Social Work
Rachel Venema, Sociology & Social Work
Ryan M. Bebej, Biology
Becky R. Haney, Politics & Economics
James Rooks, Education
Otto Selles, World Languages
Jane Bruin, Center for Intercultural Student Development
Karin Maag, Meeter Center for Calvin Studies
John Wertz, Biology
Matthew Kuperus Heun, Engineering
Amy Wilstermann, Biology
Frans van Liere, Historical Studies
Elisha Marr, Sociology & Social Work
Heather Koole, Speech Pathology & Audiology
John Walcott, Education
Clarence Joldersma, Education
Kate Strater, Education
Peggy Goetz, Speech Pathology & Audiology
Craig Hanson, Historical Studies
Albert Boerema, Education
Mark Mulder, Sociology & Social Work
Kathy De Mey, Hekman Library
Linda Naranjo-Huebl, English
Jennifer Steensma Hoag, Visual & Performing Arts
Matthew C. Halteman, Philosophy
Anna Greidanus, Visual & Performing Arts
Marj Terpstra, Education
Thomas B. Hoeksema Sr., Education (Emeritus)
Chad Engbers, English

Erica Boldenow, Biology
Randall Pruim, Mathematics and Statistics
Eric M. Washington, Historical Studies/African and African Diaspora Studies
Sarah Kolk, Hekman Library
Paula Manni-Pohler, Visual & Performing Arts
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Katherine Swart, Hekman Library
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Stacy L. DeRuiter, Mathematics and Statistics
William L. Miller, Biology
Katherine van Liere, Historical Studies
Anding Shen, Biology
Elizabeth Oommen, Speech Pathology & Audiology
Thea Brophy, Student Success
Carl Plantinga, Communication
Jolene Vos-Camy, World Languages/ Vice-chair of Faculty Senate
Kyle Heys, Student Success
Herman De Vries, World Languages
Loren Haarsma, Physics and Astronomy
Abraham Ceballos-Zapata, World Languages, Education
Darrell Rohl, Historical Studies
Neil Carlson, Center for Social Research / DataWise Consulting, LLC
Gail Gunst Heffner, Emeritus
T. R. Thompson, Religion
James R. Skillen, Geology, Geography, and Environment
Melinda C. Higley, Geology, Geography, and Environment
Deanna van Dijk, Geology, Geography, and Environment
Rachael Baker, Chemistry & Biochemistry
Ken Bergwerff, (Emeritus) Geology and Science Education
Roland Hoksbergen, Economics (Emeritus)
Tom Steenwyk, Registrar
Claudia Beversluis, Psychology/Provost (Emeritus)
Kenneth Heffner, SAO (retired)
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