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Appendix I—Directory and Financial Reports

Beginning on page iv of this volume is an index to both the ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS and to the DIRECTORY AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (Appendix I).

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ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CONVENED IN ITS ONE HUNDRED NINETY-SECOND REGULAR SESSION ON THE CAMPUSES OF HOPE COLLEGE AND WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN HOLLAND, MICHIGAN ON FRIDAY, THE FIFTH DAY OF JUNE, A.D. ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY-EIGHT, AT 1:30 P.M., EASTERN DAYLIGHT TIME, AND ADJOURNED ON WEDNESDAY, THE TENTH DAY OF JUNE, A.D. ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY EIGHT AT 12:15 P.M., EASTERN DAYLIGHT TIME.

THE THEME OF THE SESSION OF THE GENERAL SYNOD WAS *GOD'S SPIRIT UPON US: PROCLAIMING*, TAKEN FROM ISAIAH 61: 1-4.

I. FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The Synod opened on Friday afternoon, June 5, 1998 with a worship service in the Dimnent Chapel on the campus of Hope College. Participant in the service were: The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, president of General Synod; the Rev. Frederick Kruithof, vice-president of the General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America; the Rev. Stephen Struikmans, pastor of the Rancho Community Reformed Church, Temecula, CA, preaching; the Rev. Gloria McCanna, associate pastor of the New Hackensack Reformed Church, Wappingers Falls, NY; the Rev. John Bell, Iona Community, Scotland. Also participating in the service were the following ecumenical representatives: the Rev. Michael DeVries, Pillar Christian Reformed Church, Holland, MI; the Rev. Stephen Dudek, St. Frances de Sales Parish, Holland, MI; the Rev. Don Lester, Presbyterian Church, USA; the Rev. Dennis Remenschneider, Peace Lutheran Church, Holland, MI; the Rev. Dr. Kent Ulery, conference minister, Michigan Conference, United Church of Christ.

The Revs. Gloria McCanna and Stephen Struikmans presided as worship leaders and preachers for the daily worship services during the meetings of the General Synod (Saturday-Wednesday, June 6-10, 1998). Music leadership for the worship services at synod was provided by: the Rev. John Bell, Iona Community, Scotland; Ms. Linda Strouf, organist and choir director, Third Reformed Church, Holland, MI, and professor of music at Hope College; and Barbara Veurink, organist, Hope Church, Holland, MI.

WORSHIP

Friday Afternoon

Opening Worship Service—The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen
The Rev. Frederick Kruithof
The Rev. Gloria McCanna
The Rev. Stephen Struikmans
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
The Rev. John Bell

Closing Prayer—The Rev. Richard Ter Maat

Friday Evening

Opening Prayer—Ms. Lorna Garry
Closing Prayer—Mr. Phillip Baham

Saturday Morning

Worship Service—The Rev. Gloria McCanna
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Anthony Vis

Sunday Morning

General Synod participants worshiped in the following RCA churches within the bounds of the Classis of Holland and Zeeland:

Beechwood Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Bentheim Reformed Church	Hamilton, Michigan
Calvary Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Central Park Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Christ Memorial Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Community Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Crossroad Chapel Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Ebenezer Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Faith Reformed Church	Zeeland, Michigan
Fellowship Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
First Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
First Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Fourth Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Grace Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Hamilton Reformed Church	Hamilton, Michigan
Harlem Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Haven Reformed Church	Hamilton, Michigan
Hope Church	Holland, Michigan
Maplewood Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
North Holland Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Ottawa Reformed Church	West Olive, Michigan
Overisel Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Rose Park Reformed church	Holland, Michigan
Second Reformed Church	Zeeland, Michigan
Third Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Trinity Reformed Church	Holland, Michigan
Vriesland Reformed Church	Zeeland, Michigan

Monday Morning

Worship Service—The Rev. Stephen Struikmans
Closing Prayer—Ms. Ann Sharpe

Monday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Dr. Thomas Boogaart
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Madeline Fuentez

Monday Evening
Opening Prayer—Mr. Michael Tsai
Closing Prayer—Mr. Ronald Nauta

Tuesday Morning
Worship Service—The Rev. Gloria McCanna
Closing Prayer—Ms. Patty Ford

Tuesday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Heino Blaauw
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Livingston Chen

Tuesday Evening
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Renee House
Closing Prayer—Mr. John Koster

Wednesday Morning
Worship Service—The Rev. Gloria McCanna and the Rev. Stephen Struikmans

An installation service for the new officers of General Synod and a communion service were held in the gymnasium of the Dow Physical Education Center on the campus of Hope College in Holland, Michigan. Participants in the service included: the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, president of General Synod; the Rev. Frederick Kruithof, vice-president of General Synod; the Rev. Vernon Hoffs, vice-president-elect of General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary, and the Rev. Dennis TeBeest, moderator of the Commission on Christian Worship.

ROLL CALL OF SYNOD

Regional Synod of Albany

Samuel Vander Schaaf, 187 Canal St, Fort Plain, NY 13339

Classis of Albany

MINISTERS

Allan Janssen, 30 Church Rd, Selkirk, NY 12158
Stephen Mathonnet-VanderWell, 415 Main Ave, Wynantskill, NY 12198

ELDERS

Harry Bissett, PO Box 152, Wynantskill, NY 12198
Irving Mosher, 126 Normanskill Rd, Slingerlands, NY 12159

Classis of Columbia-Greene

MINISTERS

Stephen Allison, 51 Eichybush Rd, Kinderhook, NY 12106
Allan Conover, 285 Mansion St, Coxsackie, NY 12051

ELDERS

Susanne Peckham, 578 Muitzeskill Rd, Schodack Landing, NY 12156
Richard Van Alstyne, PO Box 442, Kinderhook, NY 12106

Classis of Montgomery

MINISTERS

Jeffrey Neevel, 22 Bethune St, Alexandria Bay, NY 13607
Nolan Palsma, 198 Orchard Dr W, North Syracuse, NY 13212

ELDERS

Francis Alger, 4282 State Highway 29, PO Box 756, Johnstown, NY 12095
Kenneth Palmer, 19 Walnut St, Mohawk, NY 13407

Classis of Rochester

MINISTERS

Gordon Damsteegt, 8441 Ravlin Hill Rd, Clymer, NY 14724
Peter Ford, 10715 Fernridge Ct, Richmond, VA 23236
William Hoffman, PO Box 83, Marion, NY 14505

ELDERS

Kenneth Dykhuizen, 1779 Ross Rd Lot 43, Lyons, NY 14489
Lee Peters, 101 Marbletown Rd, Newark, NY 14513

Classis of Schenectady

MINISTERS

Robert Luidens, 129 Lincoln Ave, Altamont, NY 12009
Donald Pangburn, 2000 Broadway, Schenectady, NY 12306

ELDERS

Joseph Bennett, 414 Sacandaga Rd, Scotia, NY 12302
Helen Decker, 17 Maple Ave, Cambridge, NY 12816

Classis of Schoharie

MINISTERS

Robert Hoffman, 1664 Helderberg Tr, Berne, NY 12023
Stephen Yon, PO Box 447, Prattsville, NY 12468

ELDERS

Carol Hendrix, PO Box 673, Schoharie, NY 12157
Richard Kuhlow, Meeker Hollow Road, Roxbury, NY 12474

Regional Synod of Canada

John Kapteyn, 245 Faubert Dr, Chatham, ON N7M 2Y6

Classis of British Columbia

MINISTERS

Livingstone Chen, 9211 Grandville Ave, Richmond, BC V6Y 1P9
Marc Konynenberg, 7214 Jordan St, Powell River, BC V8A 1N1

ELDERS

Albert Spaa, 8504 204th St, Langley, BC V2Y 2C2
Dick Van Dyk, 4845 Colbrook Ct, Burnaby, BC V5G 3Y3

Classis of Canadian Prairies

MINISTERS

Albertus DeLange, Box 220, Ft McLeod, AB T0L 0Z0
Randy Opmeer, 5300 Rundlehorn Dr NE Apt 1905, Calgary, AB T1Y 3Z5

ELDERS

Darrell Brooker, Box 8, Monarch, AB T0L 1M0
Doreen Leicht, 205 Loyam Dr, Simset Beach, AB T95 1R6

Classis of Ontario

MINISTERS

Abram Blaak, 621 Highway 8, Stoney Creek, ON L8G 5G2
Heino Blaauw, 18 Mountain St, Grimsby, ON L3M 3J8

ELDERS

Peter Devries, 514 Speedvale Ave E, Guelph, ON N1E 1M3
Gerrit Koobs, 27 Queen St, Drayton, ONT N0G 1P0

Regional Synod of the Far West

Ned Beadel, 2121 E Palmdale Blvd, Palmdale, CA 93550

Classis of California

MINISTERS

Roger Beukelman, 11610 I Ave, Hesperia, CA 92345
Linda Bos, 2088 London Way, Corona, CA 91720
Thomas De Vries, 25550 Ironwood Ave, Moreno Valley, CA 92557
Donald Den Dulk, 207 Orange Ave, Coronado, CA 92118
Leon Fikse, 42 W Hilton Ave, Redlands, CA 92373
Vernon Hoffs, 659 Golden West Dr, Redlands, CA 92373
Kenneth Kolenbrander, PO Box 307 UP6, Yuma, AZ 85365
Peter Van Dyke, 30515 Railroad Canyon Rd, Canyon Lake, CA 92587

ELDERS

Eugene Bartels, 13330 De Monte Dr #10J, Seal Beach, CA 90740
John Bos, 545 Via Codo, Fullerton, CA 92635
Timothy Holsten, 29251 Camino Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675
Gene Kooiman, 15403 Benfield, Norwalk, CA 90650
John Lloyd, 927 Stanley Ave, Escondido, CA 92026
Gregory Soloman, 13131 Witchita Way, Moreno Valley, CA 92555

Classis of Cascades

MINISTERS

Terry Maassen, 2609 Larch Way, Lynnwood, WA 98036
Ross Rettig, 250 SW 3rd Ave, Oak Harbor, WA 98277

ELDERS

Mary Mills, 53 117th Ave E, Edgewood, WA 98372
David Scholten, PO Box 50, Ulm, MT 59485

Classis of Central California

MINISTERS

Warren Bovenkerk, 2233 Den Helder Dr, Modesto, CA 95356
Peter Mondeel, 4223 Sky Hawk Ln, Vacaville, CA 95688

ELDERS

Jeffrey Lee, 1 Noah Ct, Sacramento, CA 95831
Ann Sharp, 9715 Plymouth St, Oakland, CA 94603

Classis of Rocky Mountains

MINISTERS

Ronald Gray, 7290 Lexington Dr, Colorado Springs, CO 80918
Eric Ishimaru, 7031 Samuel Dr., Denver, CO 80221

ELDERS

Philip Baham, 4418 E Caley Ln, Litteton, CO 80121
Cecilia Ruiz, PO Box 96, Dulce, NM 87528

Classis of Southwest

MINISTERS

Floyd Goulooze, 11834 E Del Timbre Dr, Scottsdale, AZ 85259
Kenneth Petty, 1301 E Whitton Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85014

ELDERS

Judith Glasser, 3044 W Mescal St, Phoenix, AZ 85029
Marilyn Hoffs, 9621 N 16th Pl, Phoenix, AZ 85020

Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

Donald VanderJagt, 8252 Birchwood, Jenison, MI 49428

Classis of Holland

MINISTERS

Kenneth Eriks, 300 N 168th Ave, Holland, MI 49424
Steven Hoogerwerf, 17139 2nd St, Holland, MI 49424
Wesley Kiel, 978 Laketown Dr, Holland, MI 49423
Larry Terlouw, 895 Ottawa Beach Rd, Holland, MI 49424
Greg Vander Meer, 595 Graafschap Rd, Holland, MI 49423

ELDERS

Ruth Dirkse, 852 Creekridge Dr, Holland, MI 49423
Arne Jannenga, 1383 Natchez, Holland, MI 49424
Donald Lam, 882 W 26th St, Holland, MI 49423
Alyce Prins, 811 W 32nd St, Holland, MI 49423
Richard Wolters, 753 Mary Ave, Holland, MI 49424

Classis of Lake Erie

MINISTERS

Carroll de Forest, PO Box 16, Gray Hawk, KY 40434
John Hubers, 2683 Dexter Ave, Ann Arbor, MI 48103

ELDERS

Charles Rowell, 2426 Berwick, Canton, MI 48188
David Ver Meer, 5299 Plumwood St, Columbus, OH 43229

Classis of Muskegon

MINISTERS

Sherwin Brantsen, 1568 W Giles Rd, Muskegon, MI 49445
Richard Christy, 3769 Sehler, Conklin, MI 49403
Steven Hyma, 1878 Evanston Ave, Muskegon, MI 49442

ELDERS

Avis Boelkins, 4716 Henry St, Muskegon, MI 49441
Richard Jorgensen, 2619 E Bard Rd, Muskegon, MI 49445
Edward Tennison, 6084 O'Neil Rd, Twin Lake, MI 49457

Classis of Northern Michigan

MINISTERS

Robert Hitchcock, 7638 N Tall Timber Dr, Walkerville, MI 49459
Vernon Van Der Werff, 348 E Main St, Fremont, MI 49412

ELDERS

Eugene Drenth, 11586 Marion Center Rd, Charlevoix, MI 49720
Conrad Klooster, 522 Meadowlane Dr, Charlevoix, MI 49720

Classis of North Grand Rapids

MINISTERS

Roger Eernisse, 1000 Aberdeen NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505
Henry Kroondyk, 1005 Lockridge Dr NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505-4541
Richard Ter Maat, 2042 Wendover NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504

ELDERS

John Damon, 1320 Union NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505
Harold Melpolder, 3425 Olderidge Dr NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525
Henry Vroegindewey, 6464 Sunfish Lake Ave, Rockford, MI 49341

Classis of South Grand Rapids

MINISTERS

David Adams, 728 72nd St, Grand Rapids, MI 49548
Harvey Hertz, 973 28th St SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508
Thomas Stark, 231 Oakhill, East Lansing, MI 48823
Douglas Van Bronkhorst, 3060 Wilson Ave SW, Grandville, MI 49418
Jayne Yonkman, 3988 Yorkland Dr NW #12, Comstock Park, MI 49321
James Zinger, 3675 8th Ave, Hudsonville, MI 49426

ELDERS

Jo Buit, 5319 Arrowhead Pass, Fort Wayne, IN 46804
Dennis Bush, 2902 Boone Ave SW, Wyoming, MI 49509
Harvey Dykema, 2051 84th St SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Marvin Goorhouse, 3530 Wentworth Dr SW, Wyoming, MI 49509
Klaus Knoll, 4600 76th St SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Jay Patmos, 1041 16th Ave, Byron Center, MI 49315

Classis of Southwest Michigan

MINISTERS

Thomas Bier, 119 Race St, Allegan, MI 49010
Daniel Kroeze, 200 Pine St, Decatur, MI 49045
Mark Poppen, 1365 Monroe Blvd, South Haven, MI 49090
Robert VandeVord, 8707 Windwood St, Portage, MI 49002

ELDERS

Edward Hilton, 1180 Cadet Ln, Kalamazoo, MI 49009
Carol Stamm, 3455 West B Ave, Plainwell, MI 49080
Ellen Vellenga, 1229 Meadowbrook Ln, Portage, MI 49024

Classis of Zeeland

MINISTERS

Timothy Custer, 882 Sand Lake Dr, Zeeland, MI 49464
Carl Folkert, 4276 Baldwin, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Dewey Thompson, 12050 New Holland St, Holland, MI 49423
Michael Van Buren, 6610 36th Ave, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Scott Van Oostendorp, 148 E Central, Zeeland, MI 49464

ELDERS

Marvin Allen, 8579 76th Ave, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Howard Avink, 7450 Boulder Bluff #68, Jenison, MI 49428
Bud Anama, 6518 Barry St, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Paul Driesenga, 4685 Martin St, Hamilton, MI 49419
Robert Vande Bunte, 2094 32nd Ave, Hudsonville, MI 49426

Regional Synod of the Heartland

Henry Jungling, 1112 Glenn, Aplington, IA 50604

Classis of Central Iowa

MINISTERS

James Dykstra, 710 NE 52nd Ave, Des Moines, IA 50313
DuWayne Hanke, 2300 S 3rd Ave E, Newton, IA 50208
Donald Plantinga, 304 Washington St, Pella, IA 50219
Carl Vanfarowe, 6712 NW 53rd St, Johnston, IA 50131

ELDERS

Lloyd Sandbulte, 407 6th St NW, Altoona, IA 50009
Darwin Ten Haken, 4204 Walnut St, West Des Moines, IA 50265
Kenneth Van Maanen, 2176 Eaton Ave, Leighton, IA 50143
Norman Verros, 1925 Highway 163, Pella, IA 50219

Classis of Central Plains

MINISTERS

David Henion, 10807 W Kent, Wichita, KS 67209
Earl Smith, Box 369, Macy, NE 68039

ELDERS

Roger Dys, 6620 Crooked Creek Dr, Lincoln, NE 68516
Dennis Scheimeir, 2138 N Keith, Wichita, KS 67212

Classis of Dakota

MINISTERS

Robert Scholten, PO Box 418, Platte, SD 57369
Michael Van Hamersveld, 210 8th Ave, Litchville, ND 58461
Arthur Zewert, 830 96th St SE, Hague, SD 58542

ELDERS

Kenneth Heeren, 2712 Wood Dr, Sioux Falls, SD 57105
Clarence Mast, 209 Hansina Ave, Volga, SD 57071
Jacob Wolbrink, 2677 381 Ave PO Box 128, Stickney, SD 57375

Classis of East Sioux

MINISTERS

Gary Vande Kamp, 1605 Elm Ct, Sheldon, IA 51201
Gary Van Heukelom, 1010 6th St, Sibley, IA 51249
Mark Volkers, 280 1st St NE PO Box 486, Primghar, IA 51245

ELDERS

Edgar De Vries, 1210 Kahler Ct, Sheldon, IA 51201
Howard Langstraat, 905 5th St NE, Sibley, IA 51249

Classis of Minnesota

MINISTERS

Donald Baker, 1906 Sixth Ave, Alexandria, MN 56308
Randy Blumer, 5995 Timber Tr, Prior Lake, MN 55372
Mark Ellens, 101 E Park Ave, Box 129, Hollandale, MN 56045

ELDERS

Marvin Anker, RR #2 PO Box 93, Edgerton, MN 56128
Henry Schmidt, 140 St. Hwy 30, Slayton, MN 56172

Classis of Pleasant Prairie

MINISTERS

Carl Gearhart, 912 Third St, PO Box 247, Dumont, IA 50625
Melvin Voss, 712 3rd Ave NE, Belmond, IA 50421

ELDERS

Gene Brass, 1900 440 St, Buffalo Center, IA 50424
Jake De Boer, 2301 Brookland Dr NE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402

Classis of Red River

MINISTERS

William Bischoff, 2618 Arlene Park, San Antonio, TX 78251
Richard Chavarria, 206 Blessing St, Fort Benning, GA 31905
George Montanari, Box 362, Apache, OK 73006
Robert Woodyard, 11400 N Portland Ave, Oklahoma City, OK 73120

ELDERS

Ronald Nauta, 3200 Melanie Ln, Plano, TX 75023
Stephen Thomas, 1901 Diamond Cluster, Carrollton, TX 75010

Classis of West Sioux

MINISTERS

Matthew Draffen, 901 Pleasant St, Boyden, IA 51234
Bradley Langstraat, 2801 360th St, Rock Valey, IA 51247
Michael Molenaar, 1305 Seventh St, Rock Valley, IA 51247
David Tellinghuisen, 700 17th St, Hawarden, IA 51023

ELDERS

Mary Bechler, 3817 Chippewa Ct, Sioux City, IA 51104
John De Koster, 1218 Division St, PO Box 498, Hull, IA 51239
Marion Mouw, 124 4th Ave NE, Sioux Center, IA 51250

Regional Synod of Mid-America

Roger De Graff, 1615 Volbrecht Ct, South Holland, IL 60473

Classis of Chicago

MINISTERS

Ruth Hawley-Lowry, 14242 S Wabash Ave, Riverdale, IL 60627
Daniel Plasman, 4813 Oakwood Ave, Downers Grove, IL 60515

ELDERS

Michael Richter, 2039 N Albany #2, Chicago, IL 60647
Andrew Ridderhoff, 6721 W Edgewood, Palos Heights, IL 60463

Classis of Florida

MINISTERS

Gerald Hekhuis, 8533 Viva Via, Hudson, FL 34667
James Lankheet, 17950 Griffin Rd, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33331

ELDERS

Larry Thomas, 2344 Tahitian Dr, Holiday, FL 34691
Roger Van Liere, 2351 St Charles Dr, Clearwater, FL 34624

Classis of Illiana

MINISTERS

Jeffrey Moes, 10921 Pembrook Ct, Frankfort, IL 60423
Joseph Muyskens, 18945 Jonathan Ln, Homewood, IL 60430
Thurman Rynbrant, 132 Silver Springs Ct, Caledonia, MI 49316
Albert VanderMeer, 2560 Bernice Ave, Lansing, IL 60438

ELDERS

Jacob Salm, 9332 E 4500 S Rd, Saint Anne, IL 60964
John Sluis, 18233 Oregon Ln, Orland Park, IL 60467
Clarence Toren, 122 Village Woods Dr, Crete, IL 60417
Merle Wahlstrom, 1681 School St, South Holland, IL 60473

Classis of Illinois

MINISTERS

Larry Klaaren, 140 S Church Rd, Kings, IL 61068
Randall Knoll, 325 S Bunker Hill Rd, German Valley, IL 61039
Calvin Rynbrandt, 400 S Madison, Morrison, IL 61270

ELDERS

Glenn Bechtel, 9643 Spring Valley Rd, Fulton, IL 61252
Donald Mueller, 790 1st Ave, Clinton, IA 52732
Charles Schleich, 245 W Main St, PO Box 236, Fariview, IL 61432

Classis of Wisconsin

MINISTERS

Madeline Fuentez, 8078 N 45th St, Brown Deer, WI 53223
Vernon Hettinga, 4895 S Calhoun Rd, New Berlin, WI 53151
Vernon Smith, 1726 E Washington St, West Bend, WI 53095
Cary Winn, 7110 Old Spring St, Racine, WI 53406

ELDERS

Lowell Bruins, W12697 Cty AS, Brandon, WI 53919
Lee De Master, 1255 Vista View Dr, Brookfield, WI 53005
James De Young, 514 Cochrane St, Waupun, WI 53963
Robert Van Tatenhove, W2687 Cty Hwy 00, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085
Mark Voss, 2040 White Pine Ln, Sheboygan, WI 53083

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

Donald Adams, 3 Skyline Dr, Warren, NJ 07059

Classis of Delaware-Raritan

MINISTERS

David Ruisard, Box 98, Whitehouse Station, NJ 08889
Lester Sharp, 1039 Coronet Rd, Warminster, PA 18974
Gordon Wiersma, 1300 Bristol Rd, Churchville, PA 18966

ELDERS

Marshall Elzinga, 1309 Millstone River Rd, Somerville, NJ 08876
Judith Ramp, 775 Redwod Dr, Southampton, PA 18966
David Vaflor, 211 W Bristol Rd, Feasterville, PA 19053

Classis of Greater Palisades

MINISTERS

Thomas Hendricks, 245 Larch Ave, Bogota, NJ 07603
Calvin Tysen, Englewood Hospital Chap. Office, 350 Engle St, Englewood, NJ 07631
Gerald Wondra, 408 12th St, Cresskill, NJ 07626

ELDERS

Gertrude Carroll, 157 Demarest Ave, Closter, NJ 07624
Theodore Kallinikos, 245 Lawton Ave, Cliffside Park, NJ 07010
Edward Van Duzer, 318 Newtown Rd, Wyckoff, NJ 07481

Classis of New Brunswick

MINISTERS

Clement Birkelbach, 11-B Verbena Ct, Whiting, NJ 08759
David deForest, 62 Hance Ave, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724
Norman Hamm, 215 Middle Rd, Hazlet, NJ 07730

ELDERS

Daniel Grab, 5803A Oleander Ct, Frederick, MD 21703
Donald Nash, 19 Crest Dr, Colts Neck, NJ 07722
Lawrence Waddell, 9 Markus Dr, Kendall Park, NJ 08824

Classis of Passaic Valley

MINISTERS

Robert Gram, 580 Wyckoff Ave, Wyckoff, NJ 07481
Donald Peet, 299 Harding Ave, Clifton, NJ 07011
Everett Zabriskie, III, 32 Franklin Ave, Oakland, NJ 07436

ELDERS

Matthew Perkins, 4 Morgan Ct, Wayne, NJ 07470
Margaret Stevens, 29 Morris Ave, Lincoln Park, NJ 07035

Regional Synod of New York

Arthur Hessinger, 16 Frieda Ln, Wantagh, NY 11793

Classis of Brooklyn

MINISTERS

Christine Dyke, 138 Milton St, Brooklyn, NY 11222
Carlos Rivera, 26 St Paul's Dr N, Hempstead, NY 11550
Martin Weitz, PO Box 1982, Ruwi 112, Sultanate of Oman

ELDERS

William Rhem, 1322 Jefferson Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11221
Cristina Tobias, PO Box 3025, Kings Hill, VI 00851

Classis of Mid-Hudson

MINISTERS

Nickolas Miles, 11 Church St, PO Box 206, Bloomington, NY 12411
James Neevel, 1860 Route 376, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590
Robert Vanderlaan, 25 Mill St, Rhinebeck, NY 12572

ELDERS

John Ferris, 105 Charter Ct, Cary, NC 27511
Phillip Maschino, PO Box 213, 616 De Witt Mills Rd, Bloomington, NY 12411
Phyllis Muyskens, 55 Main St, PO Box 541, Glenham, NY 12527

Classis of Nassau-Suffolk

MINISTERS

Sherwin Broersma, 380 Lakeland Ave, Sayville, NY 11782
Beverly Bell Winslow, 3 Salem Way, Glen Head, NY 11545

ELDERS

Kenneth Hartje, 130 Seaward Ave, Glen Cove, NY 11542
Helen Hessinger, 16 Frieda Ln, Wantagh, NY 11793

Classis of New York

MINISTERS

Renee House, 31 Seminary Pl, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

ELDERS

Marion Stone, 45 Fairview Ave, New York, NY 10040
Michael Tsai, 50 W 34th St #908, New York, NY 10001

Classis of Orange

MINISTERS

James Brumm, 22 Rifton Pl, Walden, NY 12526
Harlan Nyhof, PO Box 627, Woodbourne, NY 12788

ELDERS

Wayne Elberth, Box 18 Route 55, Neversink, NY 12740
Jean Van Hassel, 75 Ridge Rd, Westtown, NY 10998

Classis of Queens

MINISTER

Costas Kounadis, 51-12 111th St, Corona, NY 11368
Philip Rauwerdink, 77-11 64th Pl, Glendale, NY 11385

ELDERS

Lorna Gabby, 39-69A 47th St, Sunnyside, NY 11104
Poshu Huang, 220 Sinclair Ave, Staten Island, NY 10312

Classis of Rockland-Westchester

MINISTERS

John Elliott, 270 Ardsley Rd, Scarsdale, NY 10583
P. Okke Postma, 24 Farragut Ave, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706

ELDERS

Jan Dyckman, 1 James St, Montrose, NY 10548
Patricia Jean Mouquin, 2 Rockland Rd, Sparkill, NY 10976

New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Paul Fries, 17 Seminary Pl, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
David Waanders, 17 Seminary Pl, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Western Theological Seminary

Thomas Boogaart, 101 E 13th St, Holland, MI 49423
Donald Bruggink, 101 E 13th St, Holland, MI 49423

CORRESPONDING DELEGATES

GENERAL SECRETARIES EMERITUS
Marion de Velder
Edwin Mulder

COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE
Richard Bates
Donald De Vries
Frederick Kruithof
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
Carolyn Jones-Assini
Helen Monsees
Allen Pruis
Sara Smith
Charles Van Engen
Anthony Vis

PERSONNEL AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE
Harry De Bruyn

BOARD OF PENSIONS
Gregg Mast

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Norman Kansfield

(students)
Scott Harris
Nancy Weis

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Beverly Bell Winslow

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dennis Voskuil

(students)
Kyle DeYoung
Ryan Rader

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Ronald Hartgerink

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AGENCY
Cornelis Kors

(students)
Lawrence Dougherty
Joel Plantinga

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AGENCY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
David Schutt

CENTRAL COLLEGE
David Roe

HOPE COLLEGE
John Jacobson, Jr.

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE
James Bultman

THE CHURCH HERALD
Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell
Christina Van Eyl

REFORMED CHURCH WOMEN'S MINISTRIES
Sherry Vander Eyk
Diane Van Zetten

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUNCIL
Oliver Patterson

AMERICAN INDIAN COUNCIL
Bernice Mast

COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES
Brigido Cabrera

COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES
Samuel Kwon

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION
Donald Cronkite

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
Timothy Boeve

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
Dennis TeBeest

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER
Carol Myers

COMMISSION ON HISTORY
Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS
James Ramsay

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
Louise Smith

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY
James Brownson

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
Frances Baron

REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY

REGIONAL SYNOD OF CANADA
Thelma Devries
Grace Vos

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST
Wendy Beadel
Barbara Frierson

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES
Louise Smith
Esther Vande Bunte

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND
Shirley Boertje
Marietta Vandersall

REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA
Ruth De Young
Ruth Ann Ebbers

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS
Janet Johnston
Carol Mutch

REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK
Doris Bettis
Valerie Griggs

ECUMENICAL DELEGATES

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Michael Devries

EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH
Steven Armfield

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Gary Hanson

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
Donald Lester

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN KOREA
Sang Hak Kim
Byung Ik Min

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Kent Ulery

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PEOPLE

PARLIAMENTARIAN
Russell Paarlberg

WORSHIP LEADERS
Gloria McCanna
Stephen Struikmans

TASK FORCE CALLING LEADERS TO SERVE AS MISSIONARY PASTORS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
Amanda Walvoord

TASK FORCE ON PURPOSES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF REGIONAL SYNODS AND CLASSES
Anthony Vis

TASK FORCE TO IMPLEMENT THE STANDARDS FOR THE PREPARATION OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT
Vernon Hoffs

OFFICIAL OBSERVERS

CENTRAL COLLEGE

HOPE COLLEGE
Rebecca LaRoy
Adam Paarlberg

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE
Betsy DeBoom
Thomas Scholtens

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL MISSIONARIES
Peter and Patricia Ford
Paul Hoekstra
George Montanari
Lewis Scudder
Earl Smith
Martin and Emilie Weitz

SEMINARIAN SEMINAR
James Craig (TEA)
Kyle DeYoung (WTS)
Lawrence Doughterty (TEA)
Scott Harris (NBTS)
Robert Harrison (TEA)
Daniel Herrick (WTS)
Douglas Kiel (WTS)
Kyu Hun Lee (NBTS)
Lynne McGarrigan (NBTS)
Adolf Pagliarulo (NBTS)
Joel Plantinga (TEA)
Ryan Rader (WTS)

Ann Rost (NBTS)
Brian Smilde (WTS)
Hung-Yong Song (NBTS)
Timothy TenClay (WTS)
Derek VandeSlunt (WTS)
James Vellenga (TEA)
Nancy Weis (NBTS)

MINUTES AND JOURNAL

The Acts and Proceedings of the 191st regular session of the General Synod were read by title.

During the Wednesday morning (June 10) meeting, the General Synod approved the journal of actions for the meetings held on Friday, Saturday, and Monday and authorized its officers to approve the journal of actions for the meetings held on Tuesday and Wednesday.

RULES OF ORDER

The Rules of Order were read by title, and copies were placed on the secretary's table.

TELLERS

The following tellers were appointed:

Lawrence Dougherty	Adolf Pagliarulo
Robert Harrison	Ann Rost
Daniel Herrick	Brian Smilde
Douglas Kiel	Timothy Ten Clay
Lynne McGarrigan	Derek Vande Slunt

AGENDA AND SCHEDULE

The General Synod approved a schedule based on the agenda of General Synod prescribed in the Special Rules of Order, Article 1 (BCO 1997, Part II, 109-10).

In addition to the prescribed agenda, the schedule provided for the following presentations, forums, programs, and activities:

Pre-General Synod Workshop—Friday morning

Pre-synod workshops were introduced in 1997 in response to requests from delegates to previous synods. The workshops provide an opportunity to learn about the life, mission, and organization of the Reformed Church in America apart from the business contained in the General Synod Workbook. At the 1998 General Synod, one workshop was offered. It was titled, "Why Holland? The Influence of Western Michigan on the RCA." Leadership for the workshop was provided by Elton J. Bruins, director of the A.C. Van Raalte Institute and emeritus professor, Hope College; Larry J. Wagenaar, director of the Joint Archives of Holland and associate professor, Hope College; John K.V. Tammi, director, College Theatre and professor, Hope College; Beth E. Marcus, former president of the General Synod, RCA.

General Synod Theme—Friday afternoon through Wednesday morning

The General Synod theme was "God's Spirit Upon Us: Proclaiming (Isaiah 61:1-4). The Rev. Gloria McCanna, associate pastor of New Hackensack Reformed Church, Wappingers Falls, New York and the Rev. Stephen Struikmans, pastor of Rancho Community Reformed Church, Temecula, California addressed the theme in their sermons throughout the week. The Rev. John Bell from the Iona Community in Scotland assisted in the design of the liturgies and provided music leadership in worship and throughout the meetings of the synod.

On Friday afternoon, General Synod participants met in plenary session. This session began with an opening worship and communion service in the Dimnent Chapel on the campus of Hope College, followed by a procession of officers, delegates and guests to the gymnasium in the Dow Physical Education Center for the plenary session. The Rev. Stephen Struikmans preached the sermon.

The theme for synod was expressed through the liturgy and messages preached in daily worship by the Rev. Gloria McCanna and the Rev. Stephen Struikmans on Saturday, June 6, Monday and Tuesday, June 8 and 9 and in the opening liturgy and prayers on Wednesday, June 10.

On Sunday evening, General Synod participants met in the sanctuary of the St. Frances de Sales Roman Catholic Church. The Rev. John Bell was the featured leader and speaker for the evening, introducing the General Synod and guests to a broad range of new liturgical music. Following the program at St. Frances de Sales, delegates were hosted at a reception on the lawn of Third Reformed Church.

Saturday evening

President's Reception and Picnic

Sunday morning

Synod delegates worshiped at area RCA churches (see p.2).

Mission Program and Reception—Monday evening

Mission Services Staff and Missionaries on Home Assignment

The Rev. Robert Terwilliger, supervisor of RCA Mission Programs in Eastern Europe and Russia, led the General Synod in prayer for Rev. Kenneth Zorgdrager, who suffered a stroke in May, 1998.

The Rev. Bruce Menning, director of Mission Services, introduced the missionaries on home assignment:

Martin and Emilee Weitz, Oman
Peter and Patty Ford, Sudan
Lewis Scudder, Cyprus
Paul Rader, Coalition for Appalachian Ministries
George Montanari, Apache, Oklahoma
Joe Dudley, Cook College and Theological School
Earl Smith, Macy, Nebraska

Mission Work in Sudan

In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Reformed Church in America's work in Sudan, Gene Meerdink, supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa, introduced the retired missionaries from Africa:

Harvey and Lavina Hoekstra
LaVerne and Lorraine Sikkema
Morrie Swart
Arlene Schuiteman
Paul and Dorothy Hostetter

A video on Sudan was shown.

The Rev. Roger Schrock, supervisor of RCA mission programs in the Middle East, introduced the Rev. Antanasio Oaphaoldo, pastor of Sudan Unity Calvary Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who addressed the General Synod.

The youth choir from Sudan Unity Calvary Church sang for the General Synod.

Historical Series Books on RCA Missions

The Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink, Professor of Historical Theology at Western Theological Seminary, introduced four new books published in the RCA Historical Series.

The Arabian Mission Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son, by the Rev. Lewis Scudder III.

The Call of Africa: The Reformed Church in America Mission in the Sub-Sahara, 1948-1998, by Morell Swart.

Deacons' Accounts 1652-1674, First Dutch Reformed Church of Beverwijk/Albany, New York, by Jenny Venema, translator and editor.

In Remembrance and Hope: The Ministry and Vision of Howard G. Hageman, by the Rev. Gregg Mast.

Volunteer Program

Amy De Kruyter, associate for RCA Volunteer Services, spoke about the RCA's Volunteer Program and introduced the following volunteers who will be leaving on volunteer assignments:

Kristi Bakker—Annville, Kentucky
Melody Chen—Yokohama, Japan
Laura Myers—Project Hospitality, Staten Island, New York
Arjenna Strong—Kosice, Slovakia
Rachel Turkstra—Kosice, Slovakia
Rachel Maris—Hong Kong
Heidi Jones—The Way Out Ministries, Hawaiian Gardens, California
Jeff and Kristen Gowman—Taiwan
Bart Hisgen and Cindy Miller—Dembi Dolo, Ethiopia

The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen led the General Synod in a prayer commissioning these volunteers.

RCA Urban Program

The Rev. Bruce Menning, director of Mission Services, introduced the Rev. Stanley Perea, new coordinator of RCA Urban Ministries. Perea addressed the General Synod, introducing the planned expansion of the RCA's involvement in supporting urban ministries.

Reception

Following the Monday evening program, a reception was held for all participants in the mission program.

Ecumenical Breakfast - Monday morning

On Monday morning delegates were hosted at the Ecumenical Breakfast sponsored by the Commission on Christian Unity. It was a historic event as a representative of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the Rev. David Melvin, and of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCCUSA), the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, engaged in a panel presentation and dialogue. Each focused on the role of the NAE and the NCCCUSA in the larger ecumenical arena. The event was historic because it was the first time that representatives of these two ecumenical bodies shared a platform.

Ecumenical Presentation - Monday afternoon

The General Synod was host to a historic event as representatives of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and the National Association of Evangelicals each addressed the synod. For the first time in their histories, the NCCCUSA and the NAE had representatives together on the same platform. Both the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell and the Rev. David Melvin acknowledged the historic importance of the moment and addressed the ecumenical vision of the future.

Ecumenical Luncheon - Monday noon

On Monday noon, there was an ecumenical luncheon in honor of the ecumenical delegates from other communions to the General Synod. Each brought greetings from their church. Those ecumenical delegates were: the Rev. Michael DeVries of the Christian Reformed Church; the Rev. Steven Armfield of the Evangelical Covenant Church; the Rev. Dr. Byung Ik Min and the Rev. Dr. Sang Hak Kim of the Presbyterian Church in Korea; Bishop Gray Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Rev. Dr. Dan Lester of the Presbyterian Church (USA); and the Rev. Dr. Kent Ulery of the United Church of Christ. The Rev. David Melvin of the NAE and the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell of the NCCCUSA were also in attendance.

CELEBRATING WOMEN IN MINISTRY

The 1997 General Synod voted:

To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with Reformed Church Women's Ministries and the Commission on Women, to plan and implement for the 1998 General Synod a special celebration of the ordination of women to the offices of deacon, elder and minister of word and sacrament (MGS 1997, R-7, p. 144).

A program celebrating women in ministry was presented on Tuesday morning during the report from the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. Participants in the program were:

Witnesses:

Erin Beckerink	Senior, Western Theological Seminary
Lynne Hubers	Receptionist, Arbor Hospice, Ann Arbor, Michigan; former missionary to Oman and Bahrain
Amanda Walvoord	Minister of Adult Discipleship, Fellowship Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan
Jean Van Engen	Business manager, City of Hope Medical Center, Duarte, California; former missionary to Chiapas
Jan Brondyke	Deacon, Calvary Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan
Sara Smith	Moderator, Congregational Services Committee of the General Synod Council, elder, Flushing, New York

Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell	Pastor, First Reformed Church, Wynantskill, New York
Linda Strouf	Minister of Music, Third Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan

In addition to these listed participants, the program included a video montage of women engaged in the ministries and mission carried out throughout North America and worldwide by the Reformed Church in America. The program concluded with synod delegates and guests singing the hymn, "For Such a Time as This." Women delegates and guests encircled the gymnasium for the singing of the hymn.

The planning team for the celebration included:

Arlene Arends Waldorf
Scott Brown
Joyce De Velder
Karin Granberg-Michaelson
Lynne Hubers
Kama Jongerius-Zuidema
Gloria McCanna
Mary Linge
Phil Schuiling
Bert Van Soest
Betty Voskuil, chair

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Moderator: Thomas Boogaart (Western Seminary)
Vice Moderator: James Neevel (Mid-Hudson)

Ministers:

Sherwin Brantsen (Muskegon)
Donald Bruggink (Western Seminary)
Gordon Damsteegt (Rochester)
Kenneth Kolenbrander (California)
Jeffrey Neevel (Montgomery)
Donald Peet (Passaic Valley)
Carlos Rivera (Brooklyn)
Robert Vanderlaan (Mid-Hudson)

Elders:

Marvin Anker (Minnesota)
Gene Brass (Pleasant Prairie)
Jo Buit (South Grand Rapids)
Ruth Dirkse (Holland)
John Ferris (Mid-Hudson)
Helen Hessinger (Nassau-Suffolk)
Doreen Leicht (Canadian Prairies)
Phillip Maschino (Mid-Hudson)
Clarence Mast (Dakota)
Matthew Perkins (Passaic Valley)
Ann Sharp (Central California)
Margaret Stevens (Passaic Valley)
Clarence Toren (Illiana)
Lawrence Waddell (New Brunswick)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Moderator: Livingstone Chen (British Columbia)
Vice Moderator: Ellen Vellenga (Southwest Michigan)

Ministers:

Clement Birkelbach (New Brunswick)
Carl Folkert (Zeeland)
Madeline Fuentez (Wisconsin)
Carl Gearhart (Pleasant Prairie)
Robert Gram (Passaic Valley)
Henry Kroondyk (North Grand Rapids)
Calvin Rynbrandt (Illinois)
Robert Scholten (Dakota)
Earl Smith (Central Plains)
David Tellinghuisen (West Sioux)
Dewey Thompson (Zeeland)
Martin Weitz (Brooklyn)

Elders:

Donald Adams (R S of the Mid-Atlantics)
Howard Avink (Zeeland)
Gertrude Carroll (Greater Palisades)
Marshall Elzinga (Delaware-Raritan)
Daniel Grab (New Brunswick)
Donald Lam (Holland)
Conrad Klooster (Northern Michigan)
Lloyd Sandbulte (Central Iowa)
Albert Spaa (British Columbia)
Michael Tsai (New York)
Norman Verros (Central Iowa)
Merle Wahlstrom (Illiana)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Moderator: Phyllis Muyskens (Mid-Hudson)
Vice Moderator: Richard Ter Maat (North Grand Rapids)

Ministers:

Floyd Goulooze (Southwest)
Norman Hamm (New Brunswick)
David Henion (Central Plains)
Marc Konynenberg (British Columbia)
Harlan Nyhof (Orange)
Philip Rauwerdink (Queens)
Vernon Smith (Wisconsin)
Mark Volkers (East Sioux)
Stephen Yon (Schoharie)

Elders:

Jan Dyckman (Rockland-Westchester)
Kenneth Dykhuizen (Rochester)
Edward Hilton (Southwest Michigan)
Poshu Huang (Queens)
Richard Jorgensen (Muskegon)
Richard Kuhlow (Schoharie)
Jeffrey Lee (Central California)
Alyce Prins (Holland)
Michael Richter (Chicago)
Edward Tennison (Muskegon)
Donald VanderJagt (R S of the Great Lakes)
Robert Van Tatenhove (Wisconsin)
Henry Vroegindewey (North Grand Rapids)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Moderator: Renee House (New York)
Vice Moderator: Ronald Nauta (Red River)

Ministers:

Donald Baker (Minnesota)
Ned Beadel (R S of the Far West)
James Brumm (Orange)
Albertus DeLange (Canadian Prairies)
Matthew Draffen (West Sioux)
DuWayne Hanke (Central Iowa)
Ruth Hawley-Lowry (Chicago)
Thomas Hendricks (Greater Palisades)
Bradley Langstraat (West Sioux)
Kenneth Petty (Southwest)

Elders:

Philip Baham (Rocky Mountains)
Klaus Knoll (South Grand Rapids)
Gene Kooiman (California)
John Lloyd (California)
Patricia Jean Mouquin (Rockland-Westchester)
Charles Schleich (Illinois)
John Sluis (Illiana)
David Vaflor (Delaware-Raritan)
Edward Van Duzer (Greater Palisades)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Moderator: Ronald Gray (Rocky Mountains)
Vice Moderator: Nolan Palsma (Montgomery)

Ministers:

Abram Blaak (Ontario)
Allan Conover (Columbia-Greene)
Timothy Custer (Zeeland)
Roger Eernisse (North Grand Rapids)
Daniel Kroeze (Southwest Michigan)
Donald Pangburn (Schenectady)
Donald Plantinga (Central Iowa)
Michael Van Buren (Zeeland)
Scott Van Oostendorp (Zeeland)
Jayne Yonkman (South Grand Rapids)
Arthur Zewert (Dakota)
James Zinger (South Grand Rapids)

Elders:

Eugene Bartels (California)
Glenn Bechtel (Illinois)
Avis Boelkins (Muskegon)
Eugene Drenth (Northern Michigan)
Harvey Dykema (South Grand Rapids)
Donald Mueller (Illinois)
Susanne Peckham (Columbia-Greene)
Charles Rowell (Lake Erie)
Jacob Salm (Illiana)
Marion Stone (New York)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER

Moderator: Gordon Wiersma (Delaware-Raritan)
Vice Moderator: Heino Blaauw (Ontario)

Ministers:

James Dykstra (Central Iowa)
Mark Ellens (Minnesota)
Gerald Hekhuis (Florida)
Harvey Hertz (South Grand Rapids)
Wesley Kiel (Holland)
Larry Klaaren (Illinois)
Peter Mondeel (Central California)
Daniel Plasman (Chicago)
Robert VandeVord (Southwest Michigan)
Everett Zabriskie, III (Passaic Valley)

Elders:

Marvin Allen (Zeeland)
Bud Anama (Zeeland)
Harry Bissett (Albany)
John Damon (North Grand Rapids)
John De Koster (West Sioux)
Kenneth Hartje (Nassau-Suffolk)
Arthur Hessinger (R S of New York)
Lee Peters (Rochester)
Andrew Ridderhoff (Chicago)
Cecilia Ruiz (Rocky Mountains)
Jean Van Hassel (Orange)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Moderator: George Montanari (Red River)
Vice Moderator: Linda Bos (California)

Ministers:

William Bischoff (Red River)
David deForest (New Brunswick)
Leon Fikse (California)
Peter Ford (Rochester)
Robert Hitchcock (Northern Michigan)
Vernon Hoffs (California)
Eric Ishimaru (Rocky Mountains)
Douglas Van Bronkhorst (South Grand Rapids)
Albert VanderMeer (Illiana)
Gary Van Heukelom (East Sioux)
David Waanders (New Brunswick Seminary)
Beverly Bell Winslow (Nassau-Suffolk)
Gerald Wondra (Greater Palisades)
Robert Woodyard (Red River)

Elders:

Darrell Brooker (Canadian Prairies)
Marvin Goorhouse (South Grand Rapids)
Carol Hendrix (Schoharie)
David Scholten (Cascades)
Carol Stamm (Southwest Michigan)
Darwin Ten Haken (Central Iowa)
Larry Thomas (Florida)
Richard Van Alstyne (Columbia-Greene)
Robert Vande Bunte (Zeeland)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH GROWTH

Moderator: Terry Maassen (Cascades)
Vice Moderator: Robert Luidens (Schenectady)

Ministers:

Roger Beukelman (California)
Thomas Bier (Southwest Michigan)
Randy Blumer (Minnesota)
Warren Bovenkerk (Central California)
Steven Hyma (Muskegon)
James Lankheet (Florida)
Jeffrey Moes (Illiana)
Vernon Van Der Werff (Northern Michigan)
Peter Van Dyke (California)
Gary Vande Kamp (East Sioux)
Samuel Vander Schaaf (R S of Albany)
Carl Vanfarowe (Central Iowa)
Melvin Voss (Pleasant Prairie)

Elders:

Dennis Bush (South Grand Rapids)
Helen Decker (Schenectady)
Edgar De Vries (East Sioux)
Marilyn Hoffs (Southwest)
Timothy Holsten (California)
Theodore Kallinikos (Greater Palisades)
Gerrit Koobs (Ontario)
Howard Langstraat (East Sioux)
Jay Patmos (South Grand Rapids)
Kenneth Van Maanen (Central Iowa)
David Ver Meer (Lake Erie)
Richard Wolters (Holland)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Moderator: Roger De Graff (R S of Mid-America)
Vice Moderator: John Elliott (Rockland-Westchester)

Ministers:

Richard Christy (Muskegon)
Vernon Hettinga (Wisconsin)
Robert Hoffman (Schoharie)
Randall Knoll (Illinois)
Costas Kounadis (Queens)
Ross Rettig (Cascades)
Lester Sharp (Delaware-Raritan)
Greg Vander Meer (Holland)

Elders:

John Bos (California)
Jake De Boer (Pleasant Prairie)
Peter Devries (Ontario)
James De Young (Wisconsin)
Lorna Gabby (Queens)
Judith Glasser (Southwest)
Irving Mosher (Albany)
Marion Mouw (West Sioux)
Donald Nash (New Brunswick)
Kenneth Palmer (Montgomery)
William Rhem (Brooklyn)
Dick Van Dyk (British Columbia)
Mark Voss (Wisconsin)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY

Moderator: Kenneth Eriks (Holland)
Vice Moderator: P. Okke Postma (Rockland-Westchester)

Ministers:

David Adams (South Grand Rapids)
Stephen Allison (Columbia-Greene)
Sherwin Broersma (Nassau-Suffolk)
Richard Chavarria (Red River)
Donald Den Dulk (California)
Christine Dyke (Brooklyn)
Paul Fries (New Brunswick Seminary)
Steven Hoogerwerf (Holland)
Allan Janssen (Albany)
Stephen Mathonnet-VanderWell (Albany)
Nickolas Miles (Mid-Hudson)
Michael Molenaar (West Sioux)
Joseph Muyskens (Illiana)
Randy Opmeer (Canadian Prairies)
Thomas Stark (South Grand Rapids)
Larry Terlouw (Holland)
Cary Winn (Wisconsin)

Elders:

Lowell Bruins (Wisconsin)
Paul Driesenga (Zeeland)
Kenneth Heeren (Dakota)
Henry Jungling (R S of the Heartland)
Mary Mills (Cascades)
Dennis Scheimeir (Central Plains)
Gregory Soloman (California)
Stephen Thomas (Red River)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WORLD MISSION

Moderator: John Hubers (Lake Erie)
Vice Moderator: Mary Bechler (West Sioux)

Ministers:

Carroll de Forest (Lake Erie)
Thomas De Vries (California)
William Hoffman (Rochester)
John Kapteyn (R S of Canada)
Mark Poppen (Southwest Michigan)
David Ruisard (Delaware-Raritan)
Thurman Rynbrant (Illiana)
Calvin Tysen (Greater Palisades)
Michael Van Hamersveld (Dakota)

Elders:

Joseph Bennett (Schenectady)
Lee De Master (Wisconsin)
Roger Dys (Central Plains)
Wayne Elberth (Orange)
Arne Jannenga (Holland)
Harold Melpolder (North Grand Rapids)
Judith Ramp (Delaware-Raritan)
Henry Schmidt (Minnesota)
Cristina Tobias (Brooklyn)
Roger Van Liere (Florida)
Jacob Wolbrink (Dakota)

II. AGENDA OF GENERAL SYNOD

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS

The general secretary noted that all communications received by the General Synod were referred to appropriate committees.

PRESENTATION AND REFERRAL OF NEW BUSINESS

The following new business was presented by delegates, registered for consideration by General Synod, and referred to the Committee of Reference:

1. That General Synod instruct New Brunswick Theological Seminary and its president (a General Synod professor of theology) to neither hire nor continue to employ any person in its faculty or administration whose theological and moral commitments concerning homosexual practice are not in agreement with the teachings of Scripture, RCA doctrinal standards, and past General Synod actions, all of which clearly say that homosexual practice is sin.

   The following reasons were offered:

   a. As expressed in the *Book of Church Order*, the General Synod has original authority over all matters pertaining to doctrine and denominational polity as they relate both to the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church and to General Synod professors of theology (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Art. 2, Sec. 7; Art. 8, Sec. 5).

   b. As noted in the minutes of May 19 of the Classis of Passaic Valley (NJ), New Brunswick Theological Seminary, through the office of its president, recently offered the position of interim professor of New Testament to a person openly living in a homosexual relationship.

   c. This action by New Brunswick Theological Seminary and its president was too recent to be reasonably considered by any of the church's assemblies, agencies, or commission prior to this meeting of the General Synod (*BCO*, Chap. 3, Part II, Art. 2, Sec. 8).

d. This action by New Brunswick Theological Seminary and its president are an immediate threat to the unity, purity, and peace of the church (*BCO*, Formularies, Declaration for General Synod Professors of Theology).

2. To Instruct the general secretary to write to the president of the United States and appropriate members of the Congress, and to instruct the executive of the Synod of Canada to write to the prime minister of Canada and appropriate members of Parliament, urging them to secure refugee status for Indonesian Chinese with the United Nations commissioner on refugees; and further, advocate for the practice of human rights in Indonesia.

3. To call upon the congregations of the Reformed Church in America to pray for Indonesia, that human rights and freedom of religious expression be restored to all people in that country.

   The following reasons were offered:

   a. For the past few weeks, we have news reports about the grim situation in Indonesia. Christian churches and ethnic Chinese are victims of any socio-economic upheaval in Indonesia. Churches have been destroyed and/or burned; shops and homes of Chinese Indonesians have been looted, destroyed, and/or burned to the ground. Some Indonesian Chinese have been killed, and women raped. It has been a pattern.

   b. As Christians, we should condemn all forms of violence, racism against minority groups, and disregard of human life and rights of religious expression. Looting of someone's property cannot be condoned. Hence, we extend our deepest sympathy to Indonesian Christians and ethnic Chinese.

   c. Due to the recent financial crisis, many of the Indonesian Chinese are unable to meet the requirements for immigration programs from countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia. The United Nations high commissioner for refugees (UNHCR) has thus far overlooked the struggle of Indonesian Chinese. The UNHCR should be called upon to grant Indonesian Chinese refugee status.

4. Stated clerks request permission to make a special presentation of T.U.L.I.P. at an appropriate time during this synod.

Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, these items were accepted as new business and were referred as follows:

1. New Brunswick Theological Seminary hiring and employment practices.

   This item was referred to by the Committee of Reference for further deliberation and advice to the General Synod.

2. Human rights in Indonesia.

   This item was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action (see p. 145).

3. Human rights in Indonesia.

   This item was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action (see p. 145).

4. Request from stated clerks.

   This item was referred back to the Committee of Reference for incorporation into the scheduled of General Synod at an appropriate time as determined by the Committee of Reference in consultation with the officers.

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

The Rev. Charles Van Engen, Ph.D.
President of General Synod, 1997-1998

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Vice President, Mr. General Secretary, delegates to the 192nd General Synod, my wife, Jean, sisters and brothers in Christ:

It has been a humbling and awesome experience to serve as your president during this past year. The members of the Reformed Church in America have been very gracious in their invitations, in hosting my visits, and in their patience with my tight schedule. And our loving Lord Jesus has given me grace, strength, and joy. I especially want to thank our General Secretary, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, who sensitively and generously drew me into so many of the inner circles of denominational life and gave me the freedom to be involved in numerous issues facing our church. I also want to acknowledge and thank the members of the General Synod staff for their loving support and personal encouragement to me during this year.

I was able to talk with pastors and church leaders from every regional synod and representatives of thirty classes. I had the honor of talking with two rather large groups of retired ministers and missionaries in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and Holland, Michigan. I had the joy of meeting with all four racial/ethnic councils and being involved in retreats with three of them. I was privileged to be able to spend a significant time of conversation with the faculties of both New Brunswick and Western Seminaries. I observed the meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Geneva last September. And I had the opportunity to visit two of the economically, politically, and socially unstable places where RCA missionaries are serving: Chiapas, Mexico, and Kenya, Africa.

Our theme for this General Synod is "God's Spirit upon Us: Proclaiming," based on Luke 4 and Isaiah 61:1-4. Gloria McCanna and Steve Struikmans will lead us in Bible study and worship around this timely theme. I believe "The Spirit of the Lord is upon [us]...to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives...and to proclaim [Jubilee] the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

Just as the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for ministry in his day, so we who are disciples of Jesus Christ participate in Jesus' mission. His mission is now our mission. The Holy Spirit has anointed us for mission and ministry in our day, "in a lost and broken world so loved by God." We are being called to discover together during the next three years the million ways in which our thousand churches can be "empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world," as the Statement of Mission and Vision says. In this report I will focus on the Statement of Mission and Vision and make several recommendations for its implementation so that together we may discover "what the Spirit is saying to the churches [of our day]" (See Rev. 1:11; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22).

OBSERVATIONS

As I traveled around the RCA this year, I have been impressed that so many of our congregations and classes are alive and healthy—vigorous and on a roll! Based on what I have seen this year I have more hope for the RCA today than I have ever had. I want to make three general observations.

First, the RCA is full of wonderful, sensitive, visionary, gifted, and really fine people. We need to find more ways to encourage and unleash them for ministry.

Secondly, the RCA is good at partnering with others. We have some of the most creative partnerships in mission I have ever seen. Drawing from our 140 years of experience, some of today's partnerships include working with Methodist Christians from North India in Hoboken, New Jersey; Project Hospitality in Staten Island, New York; The Other Way ministry in Grand Rapids, Michigan; The Way Out ministry in Hawaiian Gardens, California; the African Inland Church in Kenya; and a Brazilian Presbyterian pastor who helps us plant Portuguese-speaking congregations in Toronto, Ontario. Our partnerships comprise a global network of local relationships.

My third impression involves the exciting opportunities that face us as a church. I am excited about the Statement of Mission and Vision. It gives us a unique opportunity to find ways to mobilize all our members for ministry and mission in the world. Last year Tony Vis recommended, and General Synod approved, that we (in part) "declare the Reformed Church in America a 'missionary denomination' for the twenty-first century...and encourage every congregation to...think of its members as missionaries called to bear witness to the good news of God in Jesus Christ in the midst of a disbelieving culture" (*MSG 1997*, P-1, p. 33). This call is especially significant for mission in the cities of our world.

The Statement of Mission and Vision asks us to "imagine" these challenges becoming realities. I want to report we don't need to imagine. It is already happening in our congregations throughout the whole of the RCA! We have caught the vision. Throughout my travels in every region of the RCA this has been very clear: at all levels of the church we are committed to being a "missionary denomination," with our congregations being "mission stations." We now see ourselves as **God's Missionary People**.[1] Now the question is, how do we implement the vision globally and locally?

Given its profound significance for our future together, it seemed wise and natural that I should focus my attention during my presidential year on how we can take one more step forward and begin to implement together the Statement of Mission and Vision, building on the work of those who have gone before us. I have spent this year listening, talking, reflecting, and brainstorming with pastors, leaders, and church members on what steps we can take. So today I want to offer some observations and five proposals.

The Statement of Mission and Vision was the result of a three-year process involving the General Synod Council (GSC) that culminated in January of 1997 when the GSC asked Wes to "go to the mountain" to sift through all that had been generated during those three years and to bring it together in a concise statement. Wes invited Tony Vis and me, along with five others, to spend three days in Snowmass, Colorado, for a time of worship, reflection, sharing, prayer, and writing. The result was the Statement of Mission and Vision which, with some revisions, was approved by the GSC in April of 1997 and by the General Synod of 1997.[2] The first two sentences of the statement are crucial, since all else flows from them:

> ***The RCA is a fellowship of congregations***
> ***called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit***
> ***to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.***
>
> ***Our task is to equip congregations for ministry—***
> ***a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—***
> ***following Christ in mission,***
> ***in a lost and broken world so loved by God.***

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

OUR MISSION

The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry (a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing) following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

THE VISION

Imagine...

Laity and pastors unleashed, hungry for ministry; congregations mission-minded and inviting, authentic and healing, growing and multiplying, alert to the opportunities around them.

Imagine...

Classes and synods as communities of nurture and vision—accountable, responsible, sustained by prayer, alive to the Spirit.

Imagine...

A denomination, locally oriented, globally connected, that prays in many languages and beholds the face of Christ in every face; a denomination renewed and renewing, raising up leaders, always directing its resources toward the front lines of ministry.

Imagine...

Hurts being healed, the lost being found, the hungry being fed, peace healing brokenness, hope replacing despair, lives transformed by the love of Jesus Christ.

Imagine...

The Reformed Church in America engaging the world.

LIVING OUT THE VISION

This vision will be lived out...

By congregations focused for ministry creative, confident, healing, and radically attentive to the world outside its doors.

By consistories selected more for ministry than for management, attuned to the Spirit, eager and equipped to serve.

By pastors open to dream, prepared to lead, willing to risk.

By classes that are empowering and proactive, living in communion, each accountable to all, and all to Christ.

By synods and staff that funnel resources to the local church and keep us connected to the larger church.

By all the people of the RCA, a network of relationships, a fellowship that celebrates its gifts and confesses its failures, and where the ministries of all are valued and cherished.

To live out this vision by consistories, classes, synods, and staff, our decision-making will be transformed by a pervasive climate of worship, discernment, and biblical reflection. We will no longer do business as usual, nor our usual business.

OUR MISSION

It seems important at this point to help each other discover just how we can be a "missionary denomination." When I met with pastors and spouses from New York and New Jersey at the Warwick Center, they helped me see that one of the most urgent theological and missiological issues we face is for us to examine our own understanding of the gospel and how we may effectively communicate it in our post-Christian, rapidly changing culture where the church is increasingly sidelined from the mainstream of society. And in conversations with leaders and church members in Toronto, Ontario; South Holland, Illinois; and Holland, Michigan, I heard these kinds of questions: "What does it mean for RCA churches to become mission stations?" "What barriers need to be removed?" "How can we see ourselves as missionaries? We financially support other people to do that." "I love the vision statement, but how do we actually become missionary churches?"

Vision statements can make a difference when they are translated into goals, into organization and action in specific and concrete places and times, by particular people, in unique ways. Every RCA congregation is unique. Every RCA congregation, every classis, every regional synod has its own personality and style of working. We need to move forward as a missionary denomination by encouraging new discovery and creativity to bubble up from below, unleashing the local potential of ***"a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God."*** As a denomination we need to learn from, respond to, and offer support for, the missional vision of consistories, classes, and regional synods.

We are learning to "think globally/act locally." The church does not exist to serve its members. Rather, the members *are the church,* and together we exist to be Christ's body in ministry in God's world. We are centered in Jesus Christ. The local is global, the global is local—simultaneously.

A VISION OF THE RCA

One way I have been able to think of how the RCA can see itself as a "missionary denomination" is to suggest a vision that comes from the way Jesus described the church in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[3]

I believe Luke intended Acts 1:8 to be a shorthand description of how the church of Jesus Christ is to be God's missionary people in their contexts. For us today this means that every RCA congregation, and the RCA as a denomination, is called by the Holy Spirit to participate in Christ's mission in Jerusalem, AND Judea, AND Samaria AND around the globe—all at the same time. One way I have found to talk about this dream during this past year has been to suggest the following vision for the RCA.

Every RCA congregation can be in mission in:

JERUSALEM:

That each RCA congregation would start at least two new ministries in the church's closest contexts during the next year.

JUDEA:

That each RCA congregation would participate in parenting at least one new offspring church to nurture during the next three years, in partnership and cooperation with other congregations and with its classis and regional synod, assisted by RCA staff.

SAMARIA:

That each RCA congregation would partner with another church/churches in at least one new transformational ministry someplace in Canada, the USA, or Mexico, preferably in the city with older-churches-in-transitional-neighborhoods during the next three years.[4]

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH:

That each RCA congregation would develop one new global partnership with another congregation or ministry where members and leaders can be personally involved each year during the next three years, assisted and facilitated by RCA regional and denominational staff.

Each RCA congregation can and should THINK GLOBALLY/ ACT LOCALLY.

I have organized the second part of my report around the Acts 1:8 framework, and I want to offer five proposals that I believe may lead us one more step forward in the process of living out this vision.

JERUSALEM

THE LEADERSHIP OF CONSISTORIES IN MISSION

During my travels this past year, in virtually every part of the RCA the conversation has invariably led to discussion of the radical changes the Statement of Mission and Vision entails in the way our consistories—each in its own way—will seek to live out the vision.

The Statement of Mission and Vision is signaling a dramatic change when it says, "Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry." What we seek is to be a fellowship of congregations that relate to each other in terms of:

- Relational networking locally and globally for outreach to a lost and broken world, loved by God.
- Local initiative that leads in shaping our vision of our churches engaging the world.
- Horizontal and mutual partnership for shared tasks locally oriented and globally connected.
- Visionary leadership that is "hungry for ministry, alert to the opportunities" for mission in a changing world.

We are all learners at this stage. In the RCA we need to learn together how this perspective is being lived out in our churches and classes—and to share what we have learned with others in the church. Together we can move forward in mission, empowering one another throughout the whole church for mission into the next century in a rapidly changing world so loved by God. What does it mean when we say in the Statement of Mission and Vision that we want to see "consistories selected more for ministry than for management, attuned to the Spirit, eager and equipped to serve?" And how can we help consistories work through the process of institutional change and be able to move forward in mission in their contexts?

Missionary churches are churches where the ministry of the members is a dominant feature. As children of the Protestant Reformation we hold to the "priesthood of all believers." By this we mean that all members of the church have the right, privilege, and duty to interpret the Bible for themselves. But this is not enough. All around the world we are now in the midst of a second kind of reformation: *the ministry of all the members.* It is imperative that we continue to encourage, develop, organize, and mobilize the members of the church in ministry and mission. Missionary churches emerge to new life and renewal in direct proportion to the exercise of the gifts in ministry of all the members of the church.[5]

As Loren Mead said in *Five Challenges for the Once and Future Church,* "Our first challenge is to change the ownership of the church and free pastors and laypersons from power struggles in order to focus on creative ways to dialogue for the health and growth of the church."[6]

Given our wide diversity of contexts and styles around the RCA, how can we help one another come to a new understanding from a missional standpoint of the ministry of our consistories? We need a group of knowledgeable, visionary, and pastoral people to think about this for a couple of years and to pray, listen, think, strategize, and write about it to help us all.

These questions are related to the work of the Task Force on Revitalization, the work of the regional evangelism trainers, and a number of other ongoing programs in several classes that are trying to discover their mission in their contexts, globally and locally.

In his report to the 1997 General Synod, our general secretary called for the creation of an ad hoc committee to review the *Book of Church Order* and suggest possible revisions "that will allow greater flexibility in the method of consistory selection and will emphasize the consistory's calling to give spiritual leadership in the ministry and mission of congregations" (*MGS 1997*, P-3, p. 50).

This recommendation was approved by the 1997 General Synod, but for several reasons the ad hoc committee was not formed and did not meet. Yet I believe Wes was on the right track in calling for such a study. However, during this past year we have begun to see that the tensions mentioned above do not necessarily mean changes in the *Book of Church Order.* Rather, they seem to call for a new way of looking at the makeup and role of leadership in our consistories so they can lead missionary congregations. So in keeping with the spirit of last year's General Synod, I want to reaffirm, focus, and broaden last year's initiative with the following proposal.

P-1.
To instruct the General Synod Council to appoint a task force consisting of one long-term cross-cultural missionary, two ministers of Word and sacrament, three elders, and three deacons, with the group to include at least four women; and further,

To instruct the task force to study how the Reformed Church in America can develop a new understanding of the purpose, makeup, and work of its consistories so that consistories may begin to see themselves and to function as agents of mission and ministry in their contexts, for an initial report to the 1999 General Synod and a final report to the General Synod of 2000.**

THE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN IN MISSION

When we speak of the ministry of the members of the church, we are speaking more about women than men because approximately two-thirds of the members of the Reformed Church

in America are women.[7] Led by its president, Tony Vis, the 1997 General Synod voted "To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with Reformed Church Women's Ministries and the Commission for Women, to plan and implement for the 1998 General Synod a special celebration of the ordination of women to the offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and sacrament" (*MGS 1997*, P-4, p. 36). Later during this General Synod we will be led in this celebration.

But a celebration is not enough if we do not covenant together to intentionally encourage the leadership of women. Matthew makes a point of highlighting the role of women to lead the church in mission after Christ's resurrection. In Matthew 28 the women are the first go to the tomb that Jesus has already left. The women are the first to hear the announcement of Christ's resurrection; the women are the first to see the resurrected Jesus; the women are the first to report Christ's resurrection to the rest of the disciples (including the men); and the women are told by Jesus to get the rest of the disciples (women and men) to Galilee, where Jesus will tell them all, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

The missionary Apostle Paul also emphasized the need for women in leadership in mission. I believe my seminary colleague David Scholer, a New Testament scholar, is right when he says that Galatians 3:28 is Paul's "theological basis for the inclusion of women and men as equal and mutual partners in all the ministries of the church."[8] Against all the social hostility of his day that divided humanity between Jews and Greeks, between slaves and free persons, and between men and women—against such divisions, Paul states that in the church, in its life and ministry and in its mission, there is a new reality. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Twenty percent of Paul's coworkers whom he mentions by name in his letters were women.[9]

Our own mission history demonstrates the essential role that the leadership of women has had in the formation and ministry of the RCA.[10] As in Matthew, the women of the RCA have led the whole church into mission. The women of the Reformed Church in America provided the vision, initiative, and initial support for the start of almost every major mission field where the RCA has been involved—in India, China, Japan, Arabia,[11] Native American churches, Chiapas, and Appalachia.[12] And women comprise over two-thirds of all missionaries ever sent by the RCA to all parts of the world.

The women of the RCA also led the church in supporting and encouraging the westward expansion of the RCA—building parsonages, sending Christmas boxes, and supporting the clergy families that began many of the churches west of the Mississippi. Women led the way in ministering to Japanese, Italian, and Hungarian immigrants in New York and New Jersey.

The Reformed Church in America would not exist today, nor would much of its mission history have happened globally, if it had not been for the gifted, visionary, dedicated, and strong leadership of women in the church. Is it possible that now we would violate our own history? When the leadership of women balances the leadership of men in an atmosphere of complementarity and mutuality, the church moves forward in mission.

My wife, Jean, says it this way, "Why have the RCA churches been so eager to support women as missionaries and so reticent to allow them to have leadership roles in congregations?"

Thus I would offer my second recommendation as a prayerful concern and a corporate goal that I consider essential in order for us to give concrete reality to our Statement of Mission and Vision.

P-2.
To covenant together as the Reformed Church in America that all of us together as a body will do everything in our power to foster, develop, and encourage the ministry and leadership of women at all levels of church life—including as elders and deacons, as ministers of Word and sacrament, and as leaders in classes, regional synods, and General Synod Council staff; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council to examine the historical, cultural, and structural barriers to the leadership of women in the mission of the church, and to develop an intentional and long-range plan that includes concrete ways in which women's and men's gifts in ministry and leadership may be equally represented during the next decade at all levels of church life, for report to the General Synod of 2000.**

JUDEA

CONGREGATIONS PARENT NEW CHURCHES IN MISSION

Healthy churches plant churches. This is a characteristic of vibrant, alive, growing, congregations all over the world. Once we knew this. Before the world wars congregations were the primary agents of planting new churches. For good reasons and for a period of time this role was transferred to classes and regional synods. Classes and regional synods will continue to be essential to this process. But it is imperative—and it is built into the Statement of Mission and Vision—that congregations be directly involved once again in planting new churches all over North America.

After more than thirty years of research, a number of church consultants and experts have concluded that one of the most effective ways to evangelize North America is to plant new churches. We also know that, given our multicultural reality in North America, these new churches need to be appropriate in their style, life, and ministry to the different contexts and cultures that surround us. And we now know also that one of the most effective ways to revitalize existing churches is to mobilize them so that they can parent new congregations. It would seem that congregations do not reach full maturity until they are actively involved in parenting other congregations.

So in 1996 General Synod passed the following proposal from the general secretary's report:

> To instruct the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee and Mission Services Committee, in cooperation with the racial/ethnic councils, to develop a vision and implementation plan for new congregations from 1998 to 2005, with special attention to urban areas; and to develop a variety of models for these new congregations in different economic, cultural, and ethnic settings, for report to the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, P-1, p. 45).
>
> This report is coming to this General Synod and is in your workbook.

I challenge us as delegates to add our committed support of this vision by calling our churches to be involved in parenting new churches during the next seven years. Therefore, in consultation with Evangelism and Church Development Services, with the leaders of our regional synods, and in cooperation with the Revitalization Task Force, I offer the following proposal:

P-3.
To declare that a goal of the Reformed Church in America is to see that by the year 2005 a majority of the congregations of the RCA will have participated actively, personally, and directly in parenting another congregation in partnership with their classes, regional synods, and appropriate General Synod Council units.**

SAMARIA

A CONVOCATION FOR A DENOMINATION IN MISSION

Because of substantial changes in the society that surrounds us in North America, we now find ourselves involved in mission in a post-Christian, post-modern North America that is global/local, multi-ethnic, and religiously plural, and where the church has been reduced to the private tastes of certain individuals and marginalized from the large public spheres of national and social influence.[13] We live in an environment that is "increasingly hostile toward Christianity"[14] and is particularly negative about the church. But isn't it strangely ironic that our present social environment is also full of people who are increasingly curious about and hungry for spirituality and ultimate meaning, as evidenced by the popularity of television series like *Touched by an Angel*?

These issues are particularly important for our ministry in the cities of the world. What tools can help us carry out more effective ministries in a multi-ethnic reality? How do we witness as Christians when we are increasingly surrounded by people of other faiths? Today's cities represent the most challenging contexts of mission ever to face the church of Jesus Christ. We need people to help us understand what this reality means theologically, missiologically, and pastorally.

For several years a number of us have begun to think that we need a convocation like the one the early church held in Acts 15. Such a gathering would be a time for reporting and visioning, a training event that would set the stage for the RCA in mission into the next century. It would seem that such a convocation would flow naturally from the sentence in the Statement of Mission and Vision that says that "Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry." Such a convocation is being called for in Bruce Menning's report coming from Mission Services. That report is in your workbooks.

The convocation we are envisioning would begin with the preparation of a set of questions that might stimulate local churches and classes to continue conversations as to what are the implications of being "mission stations" in their contexts. After a time, from all over the RCA and from our partners in mission around the world, selected persons would come together and report on what they have been trying and discovering. A number of experts in related fields could be invited as resource persons. Those attending the convocation would then be asked, in an environment of worship and prayer, to begin to discern together the will of God, developing a more accurate picture of the reality facing us, and brainstorming ways in which together and separately congregations may be in global/local mission in their contexts. Thus mission initiatives and action will bubble up from what is being tried and what is being envisioned by the members and leaders of RCA congregations: "*a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing.*"

Therefore, in consultation with Mission Services, Evangelism and Church Development Services, and Congregational Services of the General Synod Council, I offer the following proposal:

P-4.

To instruct the General Synod Council and its Mission Services unit to convene a global/local mission convocation of the Reformed Church in America, to be held in the spring of 2000; and further,

to plan the convocation to be self-funded, paid for by the churches and persons who participate; and further,

to anticipate that 1,000 to 1,200 persons will attend, including both clergy and laity selected and invited from the whole church; and further,

to design the convocation to reflect the global/local nature of mission in today's world; to reflect the multi-ethnic reality in which we live; and to highlight the global opportunities for evangelism and church planting among unreached peoples, especially in the cities of Europe and North America and around the world; and further,

to include a number of different mission initiatives that together present a realistic picture of the numerous ways in which the RCA is becoming a missionary denomination for the twenty-first century;" and further,

in preparation for the convocation, to involve local discovery groups from all around the church, who will gather to examine mission opportunities in their own contexts; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council, in cooperation with its Mission Services unit, to fund a design team for the mission convocation on an if-raised basis.**

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR LOCAL INITIATIVES IN MISSION

We are a global/local church. Our history is intimately connected with the histories of some of the oldest churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America. Our mission is at once global and local. So it would be strangely ironic if in the name of mission the RCA reduced its commitment to, and participation with, the world church. Over 60 percent of world Christianity is now in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Christianity is no longer a "Western" religion. It wasn't originally and is not now.

The shape of mission around the globe is in profound change. Our global missions have challenged our local congregations to prayer, church growth, and commitment in the face of persecution. Our local congregations have sent sons and daughters and have financially supported them and many projects to help the global church. More full-time cross-cultural missionaries are now being sent and supported by churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America than the total number of missionaries from Europe and North America combined. We are partners in the church worldwide.

We need to reaffirm our older partnerships and develop new ones with churches and mission agencies around the world. But it is time we focus our mission and ecumenical partnerships on mutual cooperation for mission in a third setting—especially in the cities of the world,

including the cities of Europe and North America. The "Ecumenical Mandate" adopted by the 1996 General Synod provides us with a very helpful framework for creating such new partnerships for global/local mission.

When we think about mission in other contexts, we are faced with two very troubling realities impacting the world church. People around the globe are suffering from religious persecution and from displacement from their homes. Religious persecution is on the rise around the world. More Christians have died because of their faith in the twentieth century than in all the previous nineteen centuries combined.[15] Around the globe more people have become refugees and displaced persons than at any other time in the history of humanity. The United Nations counts somewhere between forty-five and fifty million people displaced right now, either in their own countries or into other countries. Never in the history of the earth have we had such a movement of humanity as we are presently facing.

Yet governments and multinational corporations are not equipped to respond to the need. This represents a loud shout, a blaring Macedonian call to the church, "Come help us." Clearly the need is far greater than the RCA alone could respond to, both in terms of religious persecution and in relation to displaced peoples. But we are really good at partnering—and our small resources are multiplied a hundred times over as we partner with other churches around the world for local/global relief of such suffering, proclaiming in word and deed the love of Jesus, who himself was a political refugee.

These issues are close to my heart because of my own pilgrimage of living under conditions of religious persecution and ministering to refugees in Chiapas. At this General Synod we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the RCA's mission in Sudan. Paul Hostetter provided us with an excellent telling of this story in the April 1998 issue of the *Church Herald*. The present reality of Sudan involves both matters of religious freedom and the needs of displaced people. Peter and Patty Ford and Barbara Kapenga serve as RCA missionaries in Sudan, working with and alongside the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. So I have asked that the offerings at this year's General Synod be designated for ministries in Sudan, the details of which will be handed out to you at your tables.

Because I believe that healthy congregations are involved personally and directly with the world church, I offer this final proposal.

P-5.
To instruct Mission Services of the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the Commission on Christian Unity, to seek ways to develop three new mission partnerships (one each year for the next three years) with churches or mission agencies in Africa, Asia, or Latin America for mission in a third location; and further,

that special attention be given to experimental mission endeavors in the cities of the world, seeking active participation on the part of RCA congregations in the ongoing ministry of these new partnerships; and further,

that these partnerships focus on long-term initiatives that emphasize religious freedom, calling for a reduction of religious persecution worldwide, especially of Christians; and further,

that these partnerships foster compassionate witness in word and deed among unreached peoples found in cities, especially in situations of religious persecution and among displaced peoples and refugees.**

CONCLUSION

Lesslie Newbigin suggested that the primary way post-Christian and anti-church people will understand the gospel is for them to see it lived out in the local congregation. Jesus said it in John: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

In Newbigin's words,

> The primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation...The only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it...This community will have, I think, the following six characteristics:
> It will be a community of praise...
> It will be a community of truth....
> It will be a community that does not live for itself...
> It will be a community...sustained in the exercise of the priesthood in the world...
> It will be a community of mutual responsibility...
> It will be a community of hope.[16]

The world today to which we are called to witness of the love of Jesus Christ needs for us to be just like that.

The Holy Spirit has anointed us for mission and ministry in our day. Will we commit ourselves to being Christ's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20) in mission? Our General Synod theme states that the Holy Spirit is upon us to proclaim the good news in Jesus Christ. Jesus' apostolic mission has been transferred to us, his disciples (Acts 13). As we participate in the mission of Jesus, we will be able to say, like Jesus did in Nazareth, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). We are a missionary people, "called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world." The Spirit is anointing us.

Our calling is to be God's missionary people in God's world:

A thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—
following Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen

[1] See Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

[2] See Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, "Why a Mission Statement?" presentation made at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, February 2, 1998, pp. 3-5.

[3] See Charles Van Engen, *Your Are My Witnesses: Drawing from Your Spiritual Journey to Evangelize Your Neighbors* (Reformed Church Press, 1992).

[4] See Charles Van Engen, "No Fit Place for a Church," the *Church Herald*, May 1997, pp. 18-23.

[5] This section is taken from Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, pp. 150-151.

[6] Summary by Ray Ellis in his review in *Strategies for Today's Leader*, XXXIV:4, p. 29 of Loren Mead, *Five Challenges for the Once and Future Church* (Bethseda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1996).

[7] See Don Luidens and Roger Nemeth, "In Search of the RCA," *The Church Herald,* September, 1992, pp. 8-11.

[8] David Scholer, "Galatians 3:28 and the Ministry of Women in the Church: Inaugural Lecture as Professor of New Testament" (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), p. 15.

[9] *Ibid*, 35, note 46.

[10] Arie Brouwer, *Reformed Church Roots* (Reformed Church Press, 1977), pp. 147-152; 158-161.

[11] See Eugene Heideman, *A People in Mission: The Surprising Harvest* (Reformed Church Press, 1980), pp. 3-4; and Arie Brouwer, *Reformed Church Roots*, pp. 148-150.

[12] Eugene Heideman, *A People in Mission: Their Expanding Dream* (Reformed Church Press, 1984), pp. 31-38.

[13] See C. Van Engen, *Evangelism in a Changing World: Proclaiming the Gospel in a Modern/Postmodern World in Crisis*, self-published for the 1995 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. This was reprinted in Charles Van Engen, "Mission Theology in the Light of Postmodern Critique," in *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology*. (Grand Rapids 1996), pp. 207-229.

[14] Willaim Easum, *Dancing With Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile and Hurting World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), p. 13.

[15] *The Persecuted Church Homepage*, Oct. 14, 1997.

[16] Lesslie Newbegin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 227-232.

**Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 was held by the Committee of Reference for further referral or disposition as appropriate; P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations; P-3 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth; P-4 and P-5 were referred to the Advisory Committee on World Mission.

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

INTRODUCTION

God's Spirit transforms. Always.

One year ago the General Synod adopted the Statement of Mission and Vision to shape the future of the Reformed Church in America.

We gather at this General Synod with a clear mission. We are "called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world."

And our direction is set: "Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God."

But we can do this only by making space for the transforming and renewing work of God's Spirit. This Spirit asks us to freshly open our lives, our committees, our consistories, our classes—indeed, all those structures and institutions of the Reformed Church in America—to the work of transformation.

This is not rhetoric. This is real. So is this question. Are we ready and willing as a denomination to be transformed by God's Spirit?

One year, when Albert Einstein gave out the final exam in his graduate physics course, a student complained, "Professor, these are the same questions as the ones you gave us on last year's exam!"

Einstein replied, "Yes, I know. But the answers have changed."

Forty years ago we asked, "What is the purpose of a denomination?" The answer: A denomination is a structure that carries out our mission, builds up institutions, enforces procedures, and publishes materials. It sometimes seemed that the purpose of congregations was to serve the denomination.

Today we ask the same question. But our Mission and Vision Statement provides a different answer: "Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry." The denomination serves congregations.

Please hear me. This requires change.

It calls us to clarify our priorities. To focus our resources around our primary points of mission. To alter our institutional structures. To modify our style of doing business. And to transform our organizational culture.

Last year's General Synod, in adopting the Mission and Vision Statement, painted a persuasive picture of our "new land" and inspired us to step out in this journey. Over six hundred congregations have begun using this statement in their study and reflection. Classes have been requested to prepare their particular statements of mission and vision as part of this journey.

We have embarked on this process. In consistories, classes, regional synods, and the General Synod Council, such changes are underway.

Our Statement of Mission and Vision should do two things. First, it should provide a framework for evaluating our present programs and establishing focused goals and priorities. The General Synod Council, acting as your Board of Directors, has begun this task. Second, it should enable us all to ask the "big questions" about our basic purposes as a denomination, our underlying values, our institutional structures, and our organizational culture. This is where prophetic imagination is needed.

Your challenge, as delegates to the 1998 General Synod, is to provide prayerful guidance and direction for this journey and help discern the paths that we shall take. You are the gathered body representing the full life of the Reformed Church in America. The theme of this General Synod is "God's Spirit upon Us." If this truly is our prayer, then we should expect transformation and renewal.

My report to you is in two parts to suggest how we live out our Statement of Mission and Vision. First, the priorities that should guide us, as found in our work before this General Synod. Second, the big questions that we need to be exploring about our life together.

PART I

Seven priorities should direct us.

REVITALIZE CONGREGATIONS

Of the 350,000 Protestant congregations in the United States, 80,000 can be described by the following characteristics (consider whether this describes your own congregation): 1) established prior to 1965; 2) serves largely an Anglo constituency; 3) reached its largest size prior to 1985; 4) for the past ten years its membership has been steady or is declining; 5) a majority of its members were born before 1956; 6) it belongs to a denomination; and 7) new members received each year are less than 7 percent of its total membership.

Congregations like these face the challenge of revitalizing their ministry and sense of mission. If they do not, they may stagnate and drift slowly toward death. If they do revitalize, fresh outreach and ministry can bring exciting new life.

Many congregations of the Reformed Church in America fit this description and face this challenge. In January 1997 Tony Vis, then president of General Synod, called together a "summit" of pastors who had successfully led experiences of revitalization in their congregational ministries. They shared stories, lessons, and experiences, and worked together over the next year.

The rich fruit of their effort is in your workbook, titled "A Revitalized Church for a Renewed Future" (p. 383). Its wisdom is deep and engaging, and it gives us clear directions. Now we must follow.

A key element is the development of networks of pastors committed to revitalization, who find a safe place for nurture and accountability to share their journeys. This is beginning to happen in the RCA. Evangelism and Church Development Services will make this a high priority in the year ahead. To accomplish this end, a Church Revitalization Team will be formed to guide this process. It will hold the Reformed Church in America accountable to the goal of having two hundred RCA congregations participate in revitalization networks by the year 2003.

ESTABLISH NEW CHURCHES

Three months ago I was privileged to participate in the service marking the organization of Valley Life Community Church in Boise, Idaho. Four years prior a pastor and family had moved into a new housing development on Boise's outskirts, with only a call and a vision. Strong support came from another RCA congregation in Idaho and through Classis Cascades.

Now another congregation has been nurtured into new life. The entire classis met in Boise for its service of organization. It was an inspiring celebration of mission. And that classis plans on starting four more churches by the year 2004.

But the story is not the same in every classis and for each attempted new church start. I also remember meeting with a classis in the sanctuary of a congregation that was failing as a new church. The pastor was removed from service, and the church will be closed.

Further, the mood of that classis felt different. Their questions seemed inward-looking, with mistrust of the denomination. They seemed to be looking "down and in" rather than "up and out." I kept wondering, where is the real passion for mission?

That contrast is instructive. As a denomination—and as a General Synod— we have to ask, "Where is our real passion?" "What consumes our energy?" "What do we study the most?" Is it our internal life, with our structures, conflicts, and disputes? Or is it our external context—the world, the society, to which we are sent, following Christ in mission?

If our focus is outward, we will find passion, excitement, unity, and the power of God's Spirit leading the way. One result will be fresh vision for new church development, extending into the twenty-first century.

You find such a plan in your workbook, in the section on Evangelism and Church Development (pp. 379-383). The plan seeks to show where the Statement of Mission and Vision will lead us. And it calls for starting eighty new churches by the year 2005.

More importantly, we will commit ourselves to a diversity of models and places for our new churches, including new multicultural churches and churches started among Hispanic, Asian-American, African-American, and Native American populations. Our new churches will reach out to the new and growing populations of North America as well as building on our locations of historic strength in ministry.

But this is not done by a denominational office. It's implemented by congregations and classes. Certainly support comes from regional synods, from racial/ethnic councils, from the General Synod Council, and others. But if our goal is to "equip congregations for ministry," this includes enabling and inspiring each congregation to participate in some way in the birthing and support of a new congregation.

NURTURE THE GIFTS OF THE LAITY

We cannot stress this often enough. Implementing the future mission and vision of the Reformed Church in America requires calling forth the gifts of all. We believe in the "parity" of our "offices"—minister of Word and sacrament, elder, deacon, and professor of theology. That means none are more important than another. All of these together fulfill the ministry of Jesus Christ. Because we take this so seriously, we ordain those called to the office of elder and deacon—which, among denominations, is striking and unique.

But we have not practiced well what our polity preaches. Recently we have begun recovering what it means to be called and equipped to the service of deacon and elder. This must intensify. Further, president Chuck Van Engen's recommendation concerning the purpose and function of our consistories will move us in the right direction.

Yet the task is far more extensive. Every person called into membership of the body of Christ has a gift for the ministry and mission of the congregation. Every member. It is the task of the pastor and congregation to see that each gift is evoked, nurtured, and called forth.

Years ago I was a member of Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C. This small church community and its pastor, Gordon Cosby, believe deeply that every member is called to discover and exercise his or her particular gift in the life of the church. Over the years, the ministries created through radically living out this simple, biblical principle have touched and transformed the lives of thousands of people throughout Washington.

RCA congregations are learning similar lessons. Initiatives undertaken at last year's General Synod to engage congregations in a fresh encounter with the Bible are bearing fruit in many areas. New models for guiding young people and new believers into the serious commitments of membership are being developed by Congregational Services. Remember, the best indicator of future congregational vitality is the level of education going on with its young people and adults.

If our 952 RCA congregations learned how to evoke the gifts of each of their members, our congregations and the communities that surround them would experience dramatic, sustained, transformation.

ENGAGE THE CITY

Many in RCA churches today, including my daughter, are wearing bracelets with the letters WWJD, standing for "What Would Jesus Do?" This initiative began in an RCA congregation. It is a creative way to ask again, daily, the questions of faithful discipleship in following our Lord. I have reflected on that question when considering the challenges of urban ministry before the Reformed Church in America.

We are in the midst of a major social change. The welfare reform act passed by Congress and signed into law is dramatically altering the relationship between government, social service agencies, charitable organizations, the churches, and those who are the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society.

Not all the news is good news for the poor. In New York City only 29 percent of those leaving welfare have found full-time or part-time work. In many states, while some who leave welfare find jobs and become self-supporting, many others simply sink deeper into poverty. Demand for shelter by the homeless has gone up by 12 percent. The U.S. Conference of Mayors reports that requests for emergency food assistance throughout the country have risen by 16 percent, and one person in five is turned away because of inadequate supplies. Second Harvest, the nation's largest network of food banks supporting feeding programs in 11,240 agencies, reports an increase in food assistance between 10 percent and 35 percent.

At the same time we can celebrate success stories. One of the most noted is right here in Holland and Ottawa County, where the active partnership of churches with government and social service agencies has virtually eliminated welfare rolls. The personal involvement of those in churches and business, and the strong local economy, have made a transition from welfare to work a reality.

Ottawa County is an exception. But it does underscore a truth. Moving millions of families off welfare and out of poverty into sustainable work will require a new civic partnership between government agencies, businesses, social welfare groups, and, especially, the churches. Congregations in inner-city areas will be the key to providing this leadership. The gospel expects nothing less.

The poverty we face is not only material. It also is spiritual. Churches know that transformation must touch the whole person with the love of Jesus Christ. Models of effective social transformation in inner cities today often are rooted in faith-based groups, addressing material and spiritual needs.

This challenge is now before our churches as never before. The passage providing our biblical theme for this General Synod, "God's Spirit upon Us," from Isaiah 61, continues with this verse: "They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations" (vs. 4). That is a result of having God's Spirit upon us.

Our God calls us to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners. How will the Reformed Church in America respond?

Robert Linthicum, a Presbyterian pastor and author, has worked with World Vision studying urban congregations around the world that are conducting socially and spiritually transforming ministries in their communities. These congregations, says Linthicum, have three common characteristics: 1) a focus on mission; 2) a commitment to outreach; and 3) the empowerment of their members for ministry.

Further, look at those denominations that are growing in numbers, such as the Church of the Nazarene, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Assemblies of God, and the Church of God. Linthicum underscores this: "Intriguingly, the most significant growth of these denominations has, by and large, occurred not just in suburbia but in the cities. It is a demonstrable myth that city churches are in decline."

Responding to the new opportunities of ministry in our cities today will take new resources. You will hear at this General Synod about our pledge to build a $5 million fund for urban ministry. This is required if we are to go where our Statement of Mission leads us: "following Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God." Our former general secretary, Ed Mulder, has agreed to lead this effort.

This General Synod can affirm a new commitment of the Reformed Church in America to urban ministry. And in doing so, we can look to our Lord. For there is no doubt in my mind about what Jesus would do. He would enter the city.

WELCOME ALL PEOPLE

The Brooklyn Classis invited me to its meeting this spring. At the New Brooklyn Reformed Church, pastored by the Rev. Barbara Alexander, we discussed together the mission and vision of the Reformed Church in America. We split into small groups. The classis has many African-American and Hispanic members. I was one of the few Anglos in my group.

In the discussion, someone said their need was for the *Book of Church Order* to be translated into Dutch. I thought, obviously, this is a joke. But they persisted. Then two black men spoke up. They were active elders in their church and were immigrants from Surinam, the former Dutch colony in South America. And their Dutch was much better than their English. And so they asked, "Why can't we get the *BCO* in Dutch?"

We are, in fact, working on a translation of the *BCO* into Chinese, and also into Korean. A Spanish translation is nearly completed, with plans for *BCO* revisions to be translated annually into Spanish. Our guidebooks for deacons and elders are in four languages. But if we are truly committed, in the words of our vision statement, to be a denomination that "prays in many languages and beholds the face of Christ in every face," then we should expect these challenges to increase in our future. We must be ready to welcome them.

Further, to prepare us for such a future, the work of our four racial/ethnic councils must become a full part of the General Synod Council. This is an historic shift, which rests on our shared commitment to a multi-ethnic future. Four years of dialogue, with this past year focused on hard, detailed work, have produced the proposals found in your workbook (pp. 282-287).

For the RCA to be proactive in its work against racism within our life, and in society, we cannot consign this responsibility simply to the racial/ethnic councils. Rather, it must be the commitment of the denomination as a whole—of all who confess the name of Jesus Christ as Lord. That's why this proposal also calls for a new General Synod commission. I urge your study and then your support of these proposals. They will prepare us institutionally for being a church in the twenty-first century that demonstrates in its life as well as its words the reconciling love of God in Christ.

ANNOUNCE THE GOOD NEWS

Last year's president, Tony Vis, declared, and General Synod agreed, that each of our congregations needs to see itself as a "mission station" in a radically changing culture. You have heard president Chuck Van Engen's stirring call to mission—local and global. We are challenged to turn our hearts and eyes outside ourselves and ask, "What is God's mission in the world?"

God's love is overflowing. God's Spirit is always sending.

One evening this past winter I shared worship, dinner, and a rich discussion with the Ontario Classis. I learned that Toronto is the fastest-growing urban area in all of North America. Reformed Church congregations there, many with rural roots, now are asking how they give witness to the gospel in a highly secularized, urbanized, multi-ethnic culture.

Our changing context in North America underscores what we declared at General Synod three years ago: mission is one. Studies have shown that not a single county in the United States has a higher percentage of people regularly attending churches today than it did ten years ago. The church faces a new call to evangelism, recognizing that the re-evangelism of North America is now a challenge for the global church.

Yet, even as we respond to the challenges of mission within North America, we must not retreat into a new form of provincialism. Mission knows no limits of national boundaries. At last year's General Synod, when the Statement of Mission and Vision was being debated, three important words were added at the end of the section on vision—"engaging the world." They were proposed by an RCA missionary who was a delegate. And those three words must never be forgotten. Our vision statement ends, "Imagine...The Reformed Church in America engaging the world."

LEARN TO CALL FORTH LEADERS

God's Spirit always calls some to give pastoral leadership in the ministry of our congregations. Many of you here experienced such a call and can remember well when you first heard it.

But when one responds, he or she must then be prepared and trained. We used to call this theological education. Today, more appropriately, we call it ministerial formation, for we recognize that one must be shaped in the heart as well as educated in the mind for such service.

For three years a task force requested by General Synod in 1994 has been working hard and listening well. It proposed a new structure and process to guide those called to the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America. After wide discussion in the church, last year's General Synod accepted this proposal and asked for an implementation plan to be presented to this General Synod.

That plan is found in your section on Church Vocations (pp. 227-240). It presents the constitution and *BCO* changes necessary to establish the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA), which would serve as the agency of the General Synod for the care of all those called and being prepared for the pastoral ministry of the RCA. The present functions of TEA (Theological Education Agency) would be integrated into the MFCA.

This is an important step that ensures clear standards for those being prepared for ministry and also provides flexibility and care for each person, through his or her classis, in the course of their ministerial formation.

Let me add one pastoral word concerning the call of women to all offices and places of service and leadership in the life of the Reformed Church in America. You have already heard our president address this matter. At this General Synod we will celebrate the gifts that women have brought to our life and mission.

Your workbook also contains thoughtful recommendations from the Theology Commission (p. 161) to study the role of conscience and dissent within our denominational life. This comes after that commission examined the "conscience clauses" in the *Book of Church Order* relating to the ordination of women to office.

As a denomination let us be clear. The Reformed Church in America opened the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament to women in 1980. We did so because it is the denomination's biblical conviction that God's Spirit and call comes upon women and men alike to serve the body of Christ in all capacities. The wisdom of this conviction is seen in the fruitfulness of ministry.

In 1980 we also stated that the denomination would respect the conscience of those whose convictions differed with this decision. Thus, room has been given for such persons to refrain from participating in acts of ordination, for example, which would be against their beliefs.

At the same time, we in the denomination should not misunderstand the meaning of this provision. The Reformed Church in America, as a covenantal body of believers, is not neutral on the question of God's call to women for service in all the offices of the church. We do not simply say that this is for a classis or consistory to decide. No. We as a denomination have an unambiguous understanding of the Bible's wisdom on this issue, and we affirmed this almost two decades ago.

Those whose conviction and practice differ are allowed respectful room to dissent. This has been done out of concern for the unity of the body. Yet, such actions are contrary to the conviction of the RCA. Remember that the early church actively supported women as those with authority and leadership in ministry. These were women whose names are recorded, and whose ministry is explicitly affirmed in the New Testament, such as Chloe, Apphia, Nympha, Peris, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Phoebe, Priscilla, Euodia, Syntyche, and Junia. To live

out the Statement of Mission and Vision today, the RCA's commitment to supporting the gifts of women in ministry can be no less.

These seven areas, then, are crucial to our crucial transformation. They take us where our Statement of Mission and Vision leads. They depend upon God's Spirit being upon us, and they point the path to renewal.

That is how to remember them:

Revitalize congregations
Establish new churches
Nurture the gifts of the laity
Engage the city
Welcome all people
Announce the good news
Learn to call forth leaders

PART II

All of this—to revitalize, and establish, and nurture, and engage, and welcome, and announce, and learn to call forth—all of this, I believe, is essential to our future as the church of Jesus Christ in this world at this time. I would not have brought them to you if I did not believe that with all my heart.

These seven items are indeed what we need to do as a church in mission. But this alone is not enough. We also need to examine how we live our life together. We are a chosen people, not a chosen person; how we live lives of Christian discipleship depends not so much on your particular ability or mine, but on God's gifts and grace to the whole community. That makes how we live and love and learn together essential to our Christian witness in the world.

What do I mean? We can begin by affirming two central values. The Reformed Church in America is ecumenical and evangelical.

The heritage of the Reformed Church in America has been shaped by a generous, ecumenical, and evangelical Calvinism. Our participation in the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches goes back to the historic roots of these bodies. We have never been swayed from these expressions of our ecumenical commitment. At the same time, our witness has been shaped by clear and uncompromised theological convictions, rooted in Reformed faith, and infused with strong evangelical commitment.

One of our gifts is to hold together our evangelical and ecumenical commitments as the faithful expression of our fidelity to our Lord. Our Ecumenical Mandate, approved by the General Synod in 1996, charts the path and provides the guiding biblical principles for us. Last year's General Synod took one important step on this path in approving the Formula of Agreement for full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

At this General Synod we can take another step. For decades the most damaging division in the Protestant church has not been between its denominations, but between those "evangelical" Christians and those described as "ecumenical, mainline" Christians. A cold war between them has been waged. Separate organizations and institutions have been formed. Stereotypes have been created. Suspicions and hostility have been fostered. And the body of Jesus Christ, and his witness in the world, has suffered.

As the twenty-first century dawns, it is time that all this be brought to an end. It is unbiblical. It is inaccurate. It is shameful. As the Christian calendar turns to a new millennium, Christian groups are preparing to write new chapters in our fellowship and ecumenical relationships with one another. The Reformed Church in America can be a bridge-builder in that process and can help prepare the way for where the Spirit will lead.

Therefore, this General Synod has invited the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ, and the Rev. David Melvin, interim president of the National Association of Evangelicals, to meet with us, speak to us, and be in dialogue together. This comes at the initiative of our Commission on Christian Unity. Let us hope that this may lead to future actions that may be initiated by the General Synod.

If we pray for God's Spirit to be upon us, then we must expect the Spirit to draw us into unity with the whole body of Christ. God's Holy Spirit creates, shapes, and renews the church. And, my brothers and sisters, the Spirit calls us into one church, never into many divided and competing churches and denominations.

How else are we challenged in our life together? Two years ago, with General Synod's support, I began an intensive time of meetings with our various classes. The goal was to share together in worship, reflection, and discussion concerning our common mission and the vision for future ministry for each classis and its congregations. Further, I sought to discover how our classes are functioning—what they are doing well, and what seems difficult to accomplish.

I have visited with forty of our forty-six classes since I have been general secretary. The remaining six will be visited in the months ahead. Also, I have asked each classis, in person or in writing, to identify what it needs from the rest of the denomination in order to better fulfill its calling.

Here's what I heard. In the joys and struggles of classes and churches, pastors and laypeople, in different ways and in different places, but with a clarity of voice, I heard expressions of three crucial "big picture" issues for our life together: How do we work together as a Christian community? How do we live out individual lives of faithful discipleship within the covenanted community? How do we discern God's wisdom and will both for our own lives and the life of the church? I want to address each of those issues, with specifics, and suggest something we can do to help.

How do we work together as a Christian community? The *Harvard Business Review* recently featured an article titled "Changing the Way We Change" (Nov.-Dec. 1997, pp. 126-139). Its author, R. T. Pascale, contends that while many organizations are undergoing widespread changes in their structures and programs, a deeper level of change is needed and sought. Such "revitalization or transformation," he says, "is what more and more companies seek but all too rarely achieve." Those able to reach that goal have learned how to reshape the "culture" of the organization. By this we mean the formal and informal ways in which people relate and the ways in which decisions are made.

In our polity, classes are given crucial responsibilities for the life and ministry of our congregations. Ordaining pastors, nurturing those in preparation for ministry, supervising and caring for those in pastoral service and their families, overseeing congregations, providing for congregational care in times of ministerial transition, mediating and resolving conflicts, nurturing pastors in their continuing education and growth, starting new churches, and exercising responsibility for all forms of ministry carried out by its members—these are all proscribed as duties of the classis.

Yet, who does this? How is it carried out? Normally, by pastors or elders already overburdened by their normal responsibilities. As I heard in the Classis of British Columbia, "We all work sixty hours a week, and then we volunteer to do something for classis. How can we ever be creative?" One president reported that "Volunteerism is at an all-time low in the classis." In another setting I was told, "Classis is nobody's first priority." And how can it be in our present system?

Committee chairs of classes typically change from year to year. I was told in one classis how a plan for starting a new church, on land already owned, was being put together and almost complete, lacking only a few thousand dollars. Then the chair of the Church Planning and Development Committee changed, momentum was halted, and the new church was never begun. When visiting Montgomery Classis, one member put it this way: "The problem with classis is that the buck never stops."

Classes are struggling to find ways for better carrying out their crucial tasks. I listened to the Zeeland Classis debate a proposal to hire a full-time classis minister. Its president shared how in the past half year, five churches were in serious situations of conflict. The need for outside mediation was critical. But how could he, or anyone, take the enormous time required, and still do their regular ministry? Another pleaded that a pastor for our pastors was the deepest need of the classis.

"Someone has to assume responsibility for making the classis what it should be," said one member. But the price tag—more than a $4 per-member increase in assessment—seemed too burdensome to others. When they finally voted, the proposal was narrowly approved, thirty-eight to thirty-three.

Other classes here in the Synod of the Great Lakes are moving in a similar direction. A full-time stated clerk in the California Classis has dramatically improved its ability to handle necessary business efficiently and nurture long-range vision.

But for most of our classes, hiring staff places additional financial burdens on congregations with budgets stretched too thin. We find ourselves at a time when our classes are recovering a broader understanding of their mission, but when few have the capacity to effectively carry out all their commitments.

Yet, a new style—indeed, a new "culture"—is beginning to emerge in the life of several classes. The single most important step I consistently observe is setting aside intentional times for the members of classis to deepen their personal sharing and fellowship with one another away from the constraints of normal classis business meetings.

In Albany pastors meet weekly to discuss lectionary passages. And in that regional synod some pastors go on periodic canoe trips or hikes together. Some classes, such as Pleasant Prairie, have established an endowment fund to support a yearly continuing education event for its clergy. The Minnesota Classis has scheduled an overnight retreat before its next meeting to "build a sense of community." Several classes already have held similar events.

In March the Queens Classis passed its president's recommendations for "a series of open meetings to dream, share, confess, and prayerfully seek after God's mission for our classis." This came in response to the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by General Synod.

The president of Delaware-Raritan Classis proposed that a new design for its meetings each year be adopted, with one meeting for administrative matters, a second for theological discussion, and a third focused on a shared mission activity.

The New York Classis, after asking each of its congregations to respond to a probing questionnaire, recently held a special meeting to begin discussing the development of its own mission statement by 1999.

Right here in Holland, a strategic planning committee of the classis worked for a year and a half on the new challenges of urban ministry and the long-range directions of the classis. At a two-day retreat of the whole classis, these proposals became part of a classis-wide dialogue.

We are beginning to learn what it means to "no longer do business as usual, nor our usual business." The point is this. A classis needs to break out of its normal routine of business meetings and create space for deepening the fellowship among its members. Then it can begin to clarify its mission, seek long-range vision, and focus itself for the future.

Last year's General Synod asked each classis to begin work on a statement of its own mission and vision, for sharing with the 1999 General Synod. But this will require changes in the "culture" of our classes. Ways must be found to become free from the tyranny of the routine and to build a climate that nurtures trust rather than competition.

When I have visited with classes that are learning how to do this, the change is immediately apparent. Members come to the meetings with anticipation rather than obligation. Informal sharing is open and intense. Worship together is powerful and unifying. Fruitfulness as well as failure, joy as well as pain, are freely shared. And a common focus on mission builds the community of the classis.

Yet, in my observation, this picture is the exception rather than the rule. Such changes do not always come easily.

When I meet with the leaders of other denominations and compare notes about our structures, I have been surprised to find that the RCA is fairly unique in one curious way. We are one of the only denominations that places key denominational responsibilities with a local judicatory like the classis, but then allocates all its staff resources at the regional and national level. In my judgment, we have a fundamental mismatch of responsibility between our polity and our staff capacity. This needs to be addressed.

In addition, I have listened to what those at classis meetings say they need from the denomination. Often it seems that a gulf exists between programs and resources of the General Synod, and the needs and awareness of those in a classis. Frequently I've heard comments similar to this one from Ontario: "Don't send us cookbooks, send us cooks!"

Classes are asking for more personal contact from those working on behalf of the General Synod; and often they may ask the same from their regional synod. Further, I hear them requesting "generalists," not specialists. Classes are looking for the kind of assistance that will respond to their particular needs and be able to connect them to useful resources and networks. They need people more than they need paper.

All these concerns have become focused in the Task Force on the Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes, appointed two years ago. Its interim report is in your workbook (pp. 363-369). This is a far-reaching proposal designed to refocus the gifts and capacity of your staff more closely to the needs that arise in our classes and the aspirations of their congregations.

The goal can be put simply: the RCA should have one seamless system of staff that assists its classes and helps equip its congregations. A transformed denomination should build up its congregations for local mission and weave them together for global mission. This proposal presents a model of how this might be done.

There are still many questions. Some of these are identified in the report. Others will take sustained dialogue in the year ahead among staff, stated clerks, regional synods, and governing bodies from all our assemblies. This discussion will explore how to transform our institutional culture so the Reformed Church in America can respond flexibly and effectively to the needs of our classes and congregations in the twenty-first century. I raise it for you, and at length, to underscore the importance of this dialogue in the coming year. How we live our life together as a church will depend on it.

That's the first big picture issue. Here's the second. In a day and age of constant change and motion; in a society where the Christian faith is but one option among many; in a world of great diversity, how do we recognize and live out God's unique call to discipleship and Christian living?

It is a broad question lived out in specific and often difficult scenarios. Assisted suicide. Guns. Hunger. Pornography. Environmental degradation. Abortion. All of them are deeply difficult issues; all of them, in their own ways, are intimately connected to a God of grace and mercy. I wish to speak directly, and from my heart as a pastor, about one issue of personal and corporate discipleship: the tensions over the church's response to homosexuality.

No issue today has as much potential to spawn divisiveness, mistrust, gossip, suspicion, and conflict in the church as this one. No issue has more capacity to confuse our focus, drain our energy, injure our fellowship, and divert our mission than this one. No current issue can so easily demoralize our meetings, paralyze our process, fuel our anxiety, and cripple our confidence as this one.

But I don't believe it must be so. We can do this differently. The Reformed Church has shown in the past a desire to handle this issue by calling for study, dialogue, and biblical reflection. Our ability to withstand its terrible potential for diviseness in the future will depend on continuing that commitment.

Some of you are aware that a few weeks ago, the president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield, faced with a vacancy on the faculty in New Testament, appointed for one year a professor, a woman, trained, qualified, an excellent teacher, who is also living openly in a committed relationship with another woman. In my judgment, this action was a mistake. It threatened to create a breach of trust between the denomination and New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Last week, New Brunswick's Board of Trustees thoughtfully and prayerfully reviewed this matter and made a decision to rescind the appointment; they did so, in their words, "for the peace and unity of the church."

This action prevents a potentially divisive conflict from erupting right now in the denomination. But it still leaves us as a church with a crucial and important question: how will we, the Reformed Church in America, choose to address this issue, not only in this situation, but in the future?

Or perhaps I should say, how shall we *continue* to address this issue? Let me remind you how thoroughly we have addressed the question of homosexuality in the work of General Synod. The matter was first raised in 1974. A major paper, "Homosexuality: A Theological and Biblical Appraisal," was received by General Synod in 1978. This was followed by "Christian Pastoral Care for the Homosexual," received in 1979. In 1990 the General Synod approved a proposal for a denominational position on the issue: "To adopt as the position

of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture, while at the same time encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings" (*MGS 1990*, R-11, p. 461).

In 1994 General Synod deliberately refrained from taking a divisive vote on this issue. Instead, General Synod repented for its insensitivity to this entire matter, expressing its "desire to reflect the love of Christ to homosexual persons." It further called for "a process of repentance, prayer, learning, and growth in ministry" guided by the statements of 1978, 1979, and 1990 (*MGS 1994*, substitute motion for R-5, pp. 375-376). On this basis, it requested a study guide for use in RCA congregations, as well as ongoing reflection concerning how "persons of homosexual orientation have suffered wrongly in our churches and in our society," and a collection of "models of ministry" in the church which are in harmony with the RCA's theological statements (*MGS 1994*, R-6, p. 377).

The Theology Commission worked further on the outline for a study guide, and General Synod gave its approval. The guide itself went through extensive writing and review, all of it based on what the Reformed Church in America, through its General Synod, has carefully studied, deliberated, and clearly spoken on in the past twenty-five years. It's ready for use.

But are we ready to use it, or other means, in dialogue, discernment, and prayer? For the General Synod has called the church to a process of "repentance, prayer, learning, and growth in ministry." This we have not done. The issue facing our life is how we respond pastorally to the real-life challenges encountered in our churches and institutions through the lives of those persons with a homosexual orientation. Here is where we need to repent, pray, learn, and grow.

These matters will not be resolved by more overtures, debates, and votes at General Synod. They now require pastoral discernment rather than ongoing political debate. The context for these discussions is the boards of elders of our congregations, and in the pastors' studies. In many congregations, faithful pastoral care is provided in quiet but effective ways. We can expect a diversity of pastoral approaches in our congregations. But we can also expect well-informed, shared, prayerful responses that grow out of our covenant with one another and our mutual commitment to the one head of the church, Jesus Christ. It's time to recommit ourselves to this dialogue.

I encourage you to look at a number of important resources. The first is the study guide for congregations I've already mentioned. The second will be the result of our intentional dialogue with the United Church of Christ over our differences with them on the question of homosexuality. This report will come to next year's General Synod and will merit careful and wide study. Third is the study paper presented to the 1994 General Synod on "The Use of Scripture in Making Moral Decisions." It's an excellent document that has been by-and-large neglected.

You have given me pastoral as well as administrative responsibilities in the wider life of our denomination. It is in my pastoral service and from my pastoral experience that I offer this advice and direction. We have these options before us. We could debate this whole matter now at this General Synod. The result, in my judgment, would be to tear ourselves apart and lose the focus we need so deeply to maintain. Alternatively, we could ignore the whole matter and pretend this issue doesn't exist. In the long run, that also would be untrue and damaging to our life.

I believe, in its faithfulness to Scripture and to each other, the Reformed Church can choose a third course. I believe we can forge a new way, not of open warfare, not of feigned peace, but of committed dialogue. This way I recommend to you as a pastor is as follows:

First, let us stay on course in our commitment to implement our Statement of Mission and Vision. Our focus, our convictions, our passion, our commitments must be persistently centered on our mission—on God's mission in this world. That must remain in the forefront of all our deliberation, energy, and effort. This, I know, is what the vast majority of our denomination earnestly desires.

Second, let us honor over the next two years a commitment we have already made, that we engage in intentional reflection and shared discernment in our various assemblies to the pastoral challenges raised by the issue of homosexuality.

Third, let us covenant in this period to refrain from deliberative debate in General Synod over policy issues related to homosexuality. We've already addressed these matters thoroughly in the course of the last twenty-five years. This sabbatical from political debate will give space for the discernment on pastoral issues we need.

Finally, let us direct all commissions, agencies, and institutions related to the General Synod to refrain from taking any action during this period that would be in obvious contradiction of our stated position, as expressed especially in 1978, 1979, 1990, and 1994.

In order to follow where God is calling us together in mission, we need to make these commitments. Therefore, I offer to you this proposal:

> **P-1**
> **To instruct this General Synod to refrain from deliberative debate and policy decisions relating to homosexuality, as these matters have already been thoroughly addressed by previous synods, and to urge this same action upon the 1999 and 2000 General Synods; and further,**
>
> **to instruct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee, to help enable congregations and classes to enter a process of intentional discernment concerning the pastoral challenges raised by the issue of homosexuality over the next two years, utilizing the study guide and other resources, in order to fulfill the actions called for on this matter by the 1994 General Synod.****

Those are two big issues. Here's the third one: how we can best understand God's wisdom and will for our own lives and for the life of the church?

Most North American denominations are governed by models that parallel those of parliamentary institutions. Representative bodies are established, drawn from geographical regions. Delegated members meet in a deliberative process usually governed by *Robert's Rules of Order*. Matters are debated and votes are taken. Decisions are made by majority rule. It is assumed that God's will can best be discerned through the opinions of 51 percent of those present.

We tend to take this all for granted. But the church, of course, has not always governed its life by majority votes in representative legislative bodies governed by *Robert's Rules of Order*. A rich history of other various forms of governance and decision-making has been largely forgotten. In the "counciliar" tradition, special councils meet for extended times of discussion, prayer, and resolution of crucial issues.

Many traditions have been guided by a process of consensus, or more appropriately, seeking for the "common mind" of the group. Such approaches assume that a highly conflicted

situation, regardless of the relative balance of power or votes, is not one likely to produce a sustainable course of action that is truly led by the Spirit.

Some examples in the church place more emphasis on discernment than on deliberation in guiding its life. More attention is given to listening to each other, as well as listening for God's leading, than on argumentation and debate. And techniques for discernment have been well developed, just as rules for debate.

Some classes and congregations in the RCA are already doing just that. Guided by various resources, such as Charles Olsen's *Transforming Church Boards* and *Discerning God's Will Together*, they are thinking freshly about conducting meetings in a different framework rather than saying a quick opening prayer and then plunging into the agenda. The president of Montgomery Classis recommended this spring that such a different style of meetings, called "worshipful work," be implemented at all the regular business sessions and committees of the classis.

One other denomination, the Disciples of Christ, has decided to take two issues, namely their understanding of biblical interpretation and the challenge of racism, and agreed not to "vote" on these matters. Rather, each issue is submitted to a six-year "discernment process" of discussion, reflection, prayer, and sharing throughout the church. At the end of that period, the denomination will see what perspectives and directions have emerged.

As we approach a new century, the Reformed Church in America should reflect carefully on the style of meetings at our assemblies—General Synod, regional synods, classes, and consistories. If, in fact, we are open to God's transforming Spirit upon us, why should we assume that the culture's political style of running meetings and making decisions is automatically the best way for the church to function in every setting?

Therefore I offer this second proposal:

P-2
To instruct the 1998 General Synod president and vice-president, the moderator of the General Synod Council, and the general secretary to initiate a process to study alternative ways to conduct business meetings and make decisions in the assemblies of the Reformed Church in America; and further,

to include an evaluation of various methods used by other church bodies as a part of this process; and further,

to submit a report, with recommendations, to the General Synod no later than 2000.**

The Reformed Church in America is 370 years old. As we face a new century, let us examine how best we remain connected together in fellowship for mission. The General Synod is the primary occasion that gathers representatives of the church each year as our chief governing body. But let us ask, is this the best way to use our resources for sustaining our fellowship, directing our policies, and supporting our common mission?

General Synod is driven by its business agenda. In recent years we have introduced a theme, changed the schedule, and made worship more central. Yet, we meet as a legislative body, with a 414-page workbook, to deliberate and vote on numerous recommendations. And, as in other such legislative bodies, the system is designed to handle conflict, so controversial issues get the most attention. What generates heat gets the most light. Those may not, however, be the most important issues shaping our ministry and mission.

Three weeks ago your General Synod president, vice-president, staff directors of the General Synod Council units, and I met on retreat in preparation for this General Synod. We went through the *General Synod Workbook*, reflecting and praying on each section. And we discussed the basic purposes of General Synod, as well as the success of the last two Spring Sabbath events. Our thoughts and prayers turned toward General Synod in the year 2000, as well as the mission convocation already proposed by our president.

An idea emerged. When we start the new century, could we convene a special General Synod focused solely on one task—discerning and clarifying our future directions for mission? Could we set aside other business and make this the single purpose of that gathering? Could we use as resources for that time the expressions of mission and vision prepared by each of our classes? Could this be a General Synod unlike any other, meeting in New York, at the site of our denominational birth, and asking where God would lead us as we enter a new millennium? We felt a sense of excitement, and even of inspiration, as we explored this possibility. So we bring it before you, for your reflection and decision during these days.

In the future, denominations will serve as vehicles to equip the mission of the local church and weave them together into the global church. This is where our Statement of Mission and Vision will lead us. "Equipping congregations for ministry" each in their place, and following Christ, with the whole church, "engaging the world." Let us, in the decisions before us in these next five days, prepare the way.

God's Spirit transforms. Always. May it be so, even with us.

**Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 and P-2 were held by the Committee of Reference for further referral, disposition and report back to this meeting of General Synod.

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

The General Synod Council (GSC) has served the Reformed Church in America since July 1, 1993. The *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) states:

The General Synod Council is established by and responsible to the General Synod. Its responsibility is to implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies; to support, strengthen, and correlate the work of the several boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1).

Specific responsibilities for GSC are defined in the *Bylaws of the General Synod* (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6). To carry out these responsibilities, GSC held stated meetings on October 7-9, 1997, January 20-22, 1998, and April 14-16, 1998, thus fulfilling the requirement of three stated meetings prescribed in the *Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 5.

The *Bylaws of the General Synod* also authorize the General Synod Council Coordinating Committee to serve as the Committee of Reference during the sessions of the General Synod (the *Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6j). As such, this committee receives referrals from the General Synod and formulates and presents appropriate resolutions to the General Synod. It also receives and acts upon applications for leaves of absence from the sessions of General Synod.

The GSC report is presented in two ways. First, matters of a general nature to be heard and acted upon directly by the General Synod are reported here. They are identified by "#" in the outline below. Second, other matters of the seven General Synod Council committees are reported through appropriate advisory committees as indicated by the parenthetical note following the title of the item in the outline below. Referrals from the General Synod of 1997 are dealt with throughout the report.

Ad Interim Administration

Regional Synod Minutes

Ad Interim Appointments

Debt Reporting

Revisions of Consistorial Report Form

General Synod Meeting

Referral of Business

Communion Offering

Seating of Delegates

Dates and Sites

Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

Amendments to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* and *Special Rules of Order of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*

Budget

Classis of Muskegon 1993-98 General Synod Assessments

1999 General Synod Operational Budget

Other 1999 General Synod Assessments

Total 1999 General Synod Assessments

Supervision

Personnel and Evaluation Committee

Other

1998 General Synod Theme

Classes and Regional Synod Stated Clerks Consultation

Staff Consulting Group

Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (COURSE)

1997 Statistical Report of the RCA

Appointment of General Synod Treasurer and Assistant Secretary

Report of the Board of Directors

Annual Report (Church Order)

From the General Synod Council Committees

1. GSC Congregational Services Committee

Office of Social Witness (Christian Action)

Office of Hunger Education (Christian Action)

Office of Congregational Services (Christian Education and Discipleship)

Office of Diaconal Ministries (Christian Education and Discipleship)

Office of Christian Worship (Christian Worship)

Task Force for Calling Forth Leaders to Serve as Missionary Pastors in the Twenty-First Century (Christian Education and Discipleship)

2. GSC Evangelism and Church Development Services

Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund (Church Order/ Evangelization and Church Growth)

Office of Evangeli 'hurch Growth)

Vision and Im 2000 (Evangelizatio

A Revitalized C owth)

Office of Congreg

Office of New Ch

3. GSC Finance Ser

Office of Finance

4. GSC Ministry an

Office of Ministry

Spring Sabbath (Church Vocations)

Task Force on Standards to Implement the Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament (Church Vocations)

5. GSC Mission Services Committee

Office of Mission Services (World Mission)

Changes in Missionary Personnel (World Mission)

6. GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

RCA Archives and Office of Historical Services (Christian Heritage and Communications)

Necrology (Christian Heritage and Communications)

Task Force on Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes (Christian Education and Discipleship/Church Order)

Relationship of the Racial/Ethnic Councils with General Synod and the General Synod Council (Christian Education and Discipleship/Church Order)

Review of Commissions (Church Order)

7. GSC Stewardship and Communication Services Committee

Office of Stewardship and Communication (Christian Heritage and Communications/Financial Support)

RCA Foundation (Financial Support)

Committee of Reference

Referrals

1999 General Synod Assessments

Leaves of Absence

Resolutions

AD INTERIM ADMINISTRATION

Regional Synod Minutes

The GSC received and found to be in good order the 1997 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York.

Ad Interim Appointments

To the General Synod Council:

The Rev. Philip Bakelaar, representing the Classis of New Brunswick, to fill the unexpired term of the Rev. Nancy Ryan, Class of 1999.

The Rev. Stanley Perea, at-large representative, to fill the unexpired term of Doris De Young, Class of 2000.

To the Commission on Theology:

The Rev. Carolyn Holloway to fill the unexpired term of the Rev. Petronella Verwijs, Class of 2000.

R-1.
To approve the ad interim appointments. (ADOPTED)

Debt Reporting

A special Committee on Church Funding recommended to the 1976 General Synod that procedures be developed for an annual review of the debt situation in each local church and classis. The General Synod adopted a procedure that called for review of church debt by the classis, the regional synod, and the General Synod.

Each classis was then mailed a report form to be completed and returned by March 15 to the regional synod and to GSC.

At its April 1991 meeting, the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) expressed concern about the present format of the form and by consensus requested the treasurer to present revisions of the form to the October 1991 GSEC meeting.

At its October 1991 meeting, GSEC approved the following revised questions:

1. Does the classis itself have any debts? If so, please complete the following: type of loan indebtedness, purpose, current principal balance of borrowed funds, and delinquency balance.

2. Has the classis cosigned or guaranteed any loans for which it has contingent liability? If so, describe each.

3. Is there a committee in the classis that watches the debt obligations of local churches within the classis? If so, what is the name of the committee?

4. Utilizing the information provided in Section IV, Addendum B, of the annual consistorial report form, please provide a listing of the current indebtedness of each church within your classis, following the suggested format on the reverse side of the form (name of the church, total borrowings [mortgages, notes, etc.], and delinquency amounts [if any]).

5. What arrangements have been made for the classis or the churches with delinquencies to become current in their financial obligations?

At the June 1997 stated clerks meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, it was reported that a number of classes do not return the above indebtedness report form. The clerks noted that the Consistorial Report Form, Addendum B, requests the following similar information on indebtedness:

1. Does your church have any indebtedness?

2. Is yes, what is the total indebtedness?

3. Is your church delinquent in any of its debt payments?

4. If yes, what is the amount of the delinquency?

By consensus the stated clerks agreed that the indebtedness information requested on Addendum B of the Consistorial Report Form is sufficient. It is not necessary to also request indebtedness information on another form.

At its January 1998 meeting, the GSC Finance Services Committee received this report from the stated clerks. By consensus the GSC Finance Services Committee instructed the secretary for General Synod operations to no longer send the church indebtedness form to stated clerks of classes.

Revisions of Consistorial Report Form

No revisions of the 1997 Consistorial Report Form were made.

GENERAL SYNOD MEETING

Referral of Business

The business of General Synod has been assigned to the appropriate committees as presented in the Workbook. The Committee of Reference recommended:

R-2.
To approve the assignment of General Synod's business as presented in the General Synod Workbook.

➢ Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-2, synod

VOTED: **To approve the assignment of General Synod's business as presented in the General Synod Workbook and note that the Minutes of the 192nd regular session of the General Synod shall include the actual and full text of the overture from South Grand Rapids Classis, two paragraphs of which are found on pp. 164-165 of the General Synod Workbook. (ADOPTED)**

Communion Offering

Upon recommendation of the president of General Synod, GSC designated the 1998 General Synod communion offering for the Presbyterian Church of Sudan.

The Seating of Delegates

The *Bylaws of the General Synod* require that a classis be current in the payment of its General Synod assessments before its delegates may be seated as members of the General Synod (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1a).

The general secretary will report on classes payments of 1997 and 1998 General Synod assessments at the General Synod meeting.

Dates and Sites

1998 General Synod

Upon recommendation of GSC, the General Synod in 1995 accepted the invitation of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, to host the 1998 meeting of the General Synod on their campuses. The 1995 General Synod also set the dates of June 6-12, 1998, for the 1998 meeting of the General Synod (*MGS 1995*, R-4, p. 49).

At its October 1996 meeting, GSC reviewed evaluations of the 1996 General Synod meeting. A number of General Synod delegates expressed concern about the length of General Synod meetings. GSC then approved the schedule for the 1997 General Synod meeting and reduced the length by one-half day on Friday, June 20, 1997, to an adjournment time of 12:30 p.m. rather than later Friday afternoon or evening.

At its April 1997 meeting, GSC again discussed the length of General Synod meetings. It was determined to reduce the length from the current six and one-half days to five days. It is anticipated that this reduction in the length of the General Synod meeting will result in savings in operating costs for the 1998 General Synod meeting and similar savings in subsequent years.

The 1997 General Synod then voted to revise the dates from June 6-12 (Saturday through Friday) to June 5-10 (Friday through Wednesday) for the 1998 General Synod meeting (*MGS 1997*, R-3, p. 61).

1999 General Synod

At its March 1996 meeting, GSC reviewed an invitation from the Classis of Dakota to host the 1999 meeting of the General Synod within the bounds of the classis. Upon recommendation of GSC, the 1996 General Synod accepted the invitation of the Classis of Dakota to host the 1999 meeting of the General Synod on the campus of Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The 1996 General Synod also set the dates of June 12-18 for the 1999 General Synod meeting (*MGS 1996*, R-3, p. 62).

As noted above, the 1996 General Synod set the dates of June 12-18 for the 1999 General Synod. Reducing the number of days for the 1999 General Synod meeting requires a revision of dates for this meeting.

R-3.
To revise the dates for the 1999 General Synod meeting from June 12-18 (Saturday through Friday) to June 11-16 (Friday through Wednesday).

Note: R-3 was adopted on Wednesday, June 10, 1998, following a review and evaluation of the revised five-day schedule used at this 1998 meeting of the General Synod.

2000 General Synod

At its October 1997 meeting, GSC received an invitation from the Regional Synod of New York to host the 2000 General Synod meeting within the bounds of the regional synod.

R-4.
To accept the invitation of the Regional Synod of New York to host the 2000 General Synod; and further,

to hold the meeting of the 2000 General Synod in the facilities of Marble Collegiate Church; and further,

to set the dates of June 9-14 for the 2000 General Synod meeting. (ADOPTED)

POLICY AND PLANNING

Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

The Government

The General Synod in 1997 adopted and referred to the classes for approval six amendments to the *Book of Church Order*. The amendments are recorded in the *1997 Minutes of General Synod*, pp. 64, 238-39, 239-40, 241-42, 245-61, and 275-85.

Proposed Amendments	Approved*	Disapproved*
1. **Addition to "Constitutional Inquiry" Questions** (*MGS 1996*, pp. 399-402 and *MGS 1997*, pp. 63-64) (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1a, p. 30)	29	16**
2. **Calling of Pastors in New Church Starts** (*MGS 1997*, pp. 238-39) (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2, p. 11)	44	1
3. **Membership on Committees of Regional Synods** (*MGS 1997*, pp. 239-40) (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 3, Section 2, p. 60) (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 5, p. 61) (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6, Section 4, p. 30)	43	2

4. **Installation of Ministers into Specialized Ministries** 38 7
(*MGS 1997,* pp. 241-42)
(*BCO,* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 4a, pp. 47-48)

5. **Preaching Elders** 35 10
(*MGS 1997,* pp. 275-85)
(*BCO,* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7e, p. 13)
(*BCO,* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Sections 1-5, p. 51)

6. **Revisions of Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures** 40 5
(*MGS 1997,* pp.242-61)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2, p. 77)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2, Sections 1-3, p. 77)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Sections 1-5, pp. 78-79)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Sections 1-7, p. 79)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Sections 1-14, pp. 80-81)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 6, Sections 1-2, p. 81)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Sections 1-4, p. 83)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Sections 1-11, pp. 84-86)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 1, Sections 1-4, pp. 83-84)
(*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Sections 1-12, new pages)
(*BCO,* The *Formularies of the Reformed Church in America,* p. 122)

R-5.
To declare amendments 2-6 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 1998 edition of the *Book of Church Order.*

*A report was not received from the Classis of Central Plains.

VOTED: To amend R-5 by dividing R-5 to take out #5, and to refer it to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations.

VOTED: To declare amendments 2-3, 6 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 1998 edition of the *Book of Church Order.*

**The proposed amendment for an additional "constitutional inquiry" question (#6) failed to receive the required two-thirds approval of the classes and will therefore not be incorporated into the 1998 edition of the *BCO.*

Amendments to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* and *Special Rules of Order of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*

The 1997 General Synod did not approve in first reading for recommendation to the 1998 General Synod any amendments to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* and *Special Rules of Order of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order.*

BUDGET

Classis of Muskegon 1993-98 General Synod Assessments

At its April 1994 meeting, GSC was informed that the Classis of Muskegon and the Classis of North Grand Rapids would not be paying in full the 1993 General Synod assessment because a church in each respective classis was refusing to pay its share of the General Synod assessment. (Note: The General Synod assesses classes and not congregations. Each classis determines how to collect and pay its General Synod assessment.)

Delegates from the Classis of Muskegon and the Classis of North Grand Rapids were not seated at the 1994 General Synod since these classes had not paid in full the 1993 General Synod assessment (*MGS 1994*, pp. 6-7, 48-49; see also *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1a).

At the October 1997 GSC meeting, the executive committee of the Classis of Muskegon requested the General Synod Council to recommend to the 1998 General Synod that the General Synod forgive the portion of past unpaid General Synod assessments not paid by the classis for the years 1993-98. The portion not paid during these years was the amount charged by the classis to Christ Community Church in Spring Lake, Michigan, for its number of confessing members.

On December 17, 1997, the Classis of Muskegon voted to approve a separation agreement between the Classis of Muskegon and Christ Community Church. At its January 1998 meeting, GSC was informed of the painful, long, and extremely complicated process of attempting to resolve this situation.

Since the classis did take, with regret, decisive steps to address the situation, GSC, at its January 1998 meeting, voted to recommend that the 1998 General Synod forgive the Classis of Muskegon the unpaid portion of its 1993-98 General Synod assessment charged by the classis to Christ Community Church.

R-6.
To forgive the Classis of Muskegon the unpaid portion (the amount charged by the classis to Christ Community Church in Spring Lake, Michigan) of General Synod assessments due by the classis for the years 1993-98. (ADOPTED)

1999 General Synod Operational Budget

The General Synod Operational Budget provides funds for the expenses of the General Synod meeting, General Synod officers, denominational staff, commissions, the *Church Herald* and other publications, racial/ethnic councils, maintaining ecumenical relationships, and such other work as the Synod directs.

The General Synod Operational Budget is funded almost entirely by a per-confessing-member assessment on the classes.

At its April 1998 meeting GSC reviewed requests for the 1999 General Synod Operational Budget totaling $$4,350,706. Aware of the concern expressed by congregations and classes about assessment increases, and the instruction of the 1997 General Synod to the general secretary to prepare the 1999 budget with a cap at the 1998 General Synod per-confessing-member assessment, plus an adjustment for inflation/cost of living (*MGS 1997*, R-4, p. 395), GSC limited the total increase in the 1999 General Synod Operational Budget to 2.39 percent.

The GSC noted at its April 1998 meeting that several recommendations calling for additions to the operational budget will be presented during the week of General Synod. Since the General Synod will consider these additional matters that affect the assessment, a recommendation on the total for the 1999 General Synod Operational Budget will be presented by the Committee of Reference at the 1998 General Synod meeting for adoption. Also, the 1997 confessing members total will then be available for use in computing the final assessment amount.

1999 GENERAL SYNOD OPERATIONAL BUDGET

	Actual 1997	Budget 1998	Proposed 1999
I. General Synod Meeting			
Meeting Expenses	$172,093	$171,500	$190,000
Initiatives	0	0	18,000
General Synod Theme	5,972	0	0
Printing & Postage	104,948	110,000	90,000
Insurance	4,099	4,000	4,200
General Synod Video	25,550	16,000	15,000
	$312,662	$301,500	$317,200
II. Staffing Costs (General Synod Council Units)			
Wages & Salaries	$1,064,514	$1,110,525	$1,210,892
Contract Staff	47,136	42,400	0
Fringe Benefits	233,189	266,075	283,177
Professional Development	2,866	13,900	14,600
Staff Travel	221,322	189,750	190,000
Rent	94,210	117,650	109,450
Office Maintenance	3,676	8,450	3,100
Office Supplies	9,993	14,000	12,400
Telephone	55,322	58,500	60,100
Printing	22,713	33,150	26,150
Postage	21,351	29,400	26,650
Depreciation	25,806	29,500	28,200
Office Equipment & Repair	7,405	6,900	8,500
Contingency	4,259	7,900	6,400
	$1,813,759	$1,928,100	$1,979,619
III. Committees/Commissions/Task Forces			
General Synod Council Meetings	$171,860	$129,000	$123,500
Commissions:			
Christian Action	7,357	6,000	7,500
Christian Unity	14,699	7,000	8,000
Christian Worship	8,520	6,000	8,000
Church Order	215	2,500	4,000
History	3,670	4,000	4,000
Judicial Business	8,122	4,000	4,000
Nominations	3,074	4,000	500
Theology	7,329	6,500	7,000
Women	9,216	7,000	8,000
Task Forces:			
Discipline/Judicial Procedures	1,515	0	0
Standards for Ministry	12,396	0	0
Church *Herald* Study	54	0	0
RCWM Structure	2,479	12,500	0
Regional Synod/Classes Responsib.	9,178	5,000	0
Gifted Youth for Ministry	0	8,000	0
Consistories	0	0	8,000

	Actual 1997	Budget 1998	Proposed 1999
Councils:			
African-American	32,128	28,000	28,000
S Africa/RCA Partner Coord Team	108	0	1,500
Hispanic	22,577	23,300	23,300
Asian-American	21,818	22,300	22,300
American Indian	19,740	14,000	14,000
Staff Consulting Group/COURSE	7,320	15,000	20,000
Classes Stated Clerks Meeting	9,609	8,000	9,500
	$372,984	$312,100	$301,100
IV. Publications			
Church Herald	$858,341	$1,000,900	$971,000
Book of Church Order	14,797	4,000	8,000
Perspectives	6,000	6,000	6,000
Loose-leaf *Liturgy* (Reprint)	2,305	3,000	2,500
Reprints (Miscellaneous)	9,412	8,000	8,000
	$890,855	$1,021,900	$995,500
V. Ecumenical Delegations & Agencies			
NCC Delegation	$6,665	$5,000	$6,000
Lutheran/Reformed Studies	1,582	500	2,000
URCSA Partnership	0	0	2,000
Christian Reformed Church	66	200	500
Travel of Ecumenical Appointees	15,589	16,000	16,000
Interpretive Speaking	86	3,500	3,500
23rd General Council Meeting	2,021	0	0
WCC Assemby	5,223	8,000	0
Ecumenical Contingency	1,367	2,000	3,000
World Alliance of Reformed Churches	22,075	14,000	16,000
Canada Council of Churches	1,500	1,000	1,000
	$56,174	$50,200	$50,000
VI. Other			
Presidential Expenses	$19,617	$8,000	$10,000
Pastoral Coverage	0	500	800
Theological Education	10,395	0	0
Seminarian Seminar	13,181	15,000	15,000
Assessment Relief	0	10,000	10,000
RCA Survey	0	0	18,000
Pastoral Services	21,078	24,000	24,000
Chaplains Conference	24,763	20,000	20,000
Women in Ministry Events	2,359	5,000	5,000
Immigration Assistance	0	10,000	10,000
Standards TF Follow-up	0	10,000	9,000
General Contingency	9,305	5,000	5,000
Basic Service Costs*	454,504	522,950	580,487
	$555,202	$630,450	$707,287
TOTAL	$4,001,636	$4,244,250	$4,350,706

(The $4,350,706 amount divided by the 1997 confessing member total of 185,074 equals an amount of $23.51 for the 1999 assessment for the General Synod operational budget. As noted previously, the final 1997 confessing member total will be available at the beginning of the 1998 General Synod meeting, and other additional matters or recommendations presented during the week of Synod will cause this preliminary amount of $4,350,706 to change.)

* The 1999 Basic Service Costs of $580,487 represent contributions towards the operations of the following offices:

Office of Finance	$168,667
Office of Information Systems	128,060
Archival Office	38,750
Personnel Office	34,660
Stewardship and Communications	210,350

NOTE: ASKINGS

It is important to note that the assessment amount requested does not meet all funding requirements for the denomination. The assessment amount primarily covers administrative and operational costs. The assessment does not cover the General Synod mission programs or the program elements of GSC unit budgets.

Also, it is important to note that the RCA contribution for membership in the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) is not paid from General Synod assessment income. Instead, each church has been asked to make contributions to pay for ecumenical membership in these two agencies in the following amounts:

	Actual 1997	Budget 1998	Proposed 1999
NCC	$31,500	$32,500	$32,000
WCC	$31,500	$31,500	$32,000

R-7.
To approve the 1999 General Synod Operational Budget of 4,350,706, and further,

to set the 1999 per-confessing-member assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget at $23.51. (ADOPTED)

(The 1998 General Synod Operational Budget assessment is $22.77 per confessing member.)

Other 1999 General Synod Assessments

In addition to the General Synod Operational Budget, the General Synod has authorized other assessments to ensure adequate funding for denominational concerns.

$1.50	to provide sufficient retirement income for clergy who retired prior to 1973 (no increase)
*$3.35	to provide unified funding for the administration of theological education ($3.25 in 1998)
$4.85	TOTAL

*At its October 1995 meeting, GSC voted to designate the 1997 General Synod assessment for the administration of theological education at 13.4 percent of the 1997 General Synod operational budget assessment and the Board of Pensions General Fund budget assessment. At its October 1996 meeting, GSC again voted to designate the 1998 General Synod assessment for the administration of theological education at 13.4 percent of the 1998 General Synod operational budget assessment and the Board of Pensions General Fund budget assessment. GSC also voted to maintain this same percentage of 13.4 percent annually until a review is requested. (Using the 13.4 percentage, $23.35 is the preliminary total amount of the assessment for the General Synod operational budget and $1.50 is the assessment amount for the Board of Pensions General Fund. $23.35 plus $1.50 equals $24.85. $24.85 multiplied by 13.4 percent equals $3.33.) As noted previously, the final 1997 confessing member total will be available at the beginning of the 1998 General Synod meeting, and additional matters or recommendations presented during the week of Synod that will affect the total amount of the General Synod operational budget will cause this preliminary amount of $4,350,706 to change.

R-8.
To fix the 1999 budget for other General Synod assessments (sufficient retirement income and theological education administration) at $4.85 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

(The 1998 General Synod assessment amount for the above two items per confessing member is $4.75.)

Total 1999 General Synod Assessments

The preliminary total assessment for General Synod concerns in 1999 is $28.18 ($23.35 plus $4.83) per confessing member. This is an approximate increase of 2.39 percent over the 1998 total of $27.52 ($22.77 plus 4.75) per confessing member.

R-9.
To fix the total 1999 General Synod assessment budget at $28.36 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

SUPERVISION

Personnel and Evaluation Committee

The Personnel and Evaluation Committee is comprised of four members from the General Synod Council. The members are Harry De Bruyn, chair; the Rev. Gregg Mast; Nancy Miller, and the Rev. John Elliott, Jr.

The committee has four principal accountabilities:

1. Oversight and evaluation of the general secretary.

2. Review and recommendation to GSC of personnel policies, including salary ranges and benefits for denominational staff.

3. Review and recommendation to GSC of salary ranges and benefits for missionaries.

4. Review and approval of salaries as provided in V-4.c of the GSC *Handbook*.

The Personnel and Evaluation Committee functions within the policies approved by GSC. Among these policies are salary classifications that reflect the degree of responsibility

carried by staff members filling the respective positions. Information concerning the classification of specific positions is available from the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services. A broad sketch of the classifications with salary ranges (including housing allowances) in effect in April of the current year appears below:

SALARY RANGES

CLASSIFICATION		low (80%)	mid-point (100%)	high (120%)
Executive Staff	I	$70,210	$87,760	$105,310
	II	63,180	78,980	94,780
	IIIA	52,660	65,820	78,980
	IIIB	43,880	54,850	65,820
		(85%)	(100%)	(115%)
Professional Associates	IV	$29,730	$34,980	$40,230
Administrative Staff	V	23,890	28,110	32,330
Secretarial and Office Staff	VIA	20,590	24,220	27,850
	VIB	17,660	20,780	23,900

NOTE: Special circumstances may warrant hiring below the sixth range.

OTHER

1998 General Synod Theme

The theme for the 1998 General Synod is "God's Spirit Upon Us: Proclaiming," taken from Isa. 61:1-4.

Classis and Regional Synod Stated Clerks Consultation

GSEC, at its January 1992 and October 1992 meetings, authorized the secretary for General Synod operations to annually bring together the stated clerks of classes and regional synods. Funding for this annual stated clerks' meeting is provided by the General Synod assessment budget, with the understanding that transportation expenses for this meeting are provided by the classes and regional synods.

The annual gathering of stated clerks will be June 3-4, 1998, at Pillar Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. To be discussed at this gathering will be trends in the Reformed Church in America and RCA classes, use of mediation to resolve conflicts, the authority of the classis, insurance coverage needed in a classis, church revitalization, and records management (dealing with "paperwork"). There will also be a panel discussion on purposes and responsibilities of regional synods and classes. The stated clerks will also be alerted to particular issues coming before the 1998 General Synod, be provided additional background information and details on proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order*, be updated on the newly revised *Book of Church Order* disciplinary and judicial procedures, and be updated by the secretary for General Synod operations on ways to further facilitate cooperation, communication, and information among the General Synod, classes, and regional synods.

Staff Consulting Group

The Staff Consulting Group was organized at the Consultation on Funding in 1973 and approved by the General Synod in that same year. The membership consists of the general secretary, the Administrative Council (the directors of the seven GSC committees/units, the

secretary for General Synod operations, and the secretary for the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries), the regional synod executives, the RCA seminary and RCA college presidents, the director of the Theological Education Agency, the executive director of Reformed Church Women's Ministries, and the editor of the *Church Herald.* The president of General Synod is invited to participate as an observer.

The Staff Consulting Group met on November 18, 1997, in Chicago, Illinois. The focus of this meeting was on the implications for the RCA of the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997,* pp. 78-80). Another focus of this meeting's discussion was the declaration adopted by the 1997 General Synod to declare the Reformed Church in America a "missionary denomination" for the twenty-first century and to declare North America a primary mission field for the RCA, with RCA congregations thinking of themselves as "mission stations" (*MGS 1997,* P-1, p. 33 and *MGS 1997,* R-4, p. 422). The Staff Consulting Group then discussed the leadership needed in the RCA to serve as missionary pastors in the twenty-first century (*MGS 1997,* P-6, p. 39 and *MGS 1997,* R-8, p. 144).

Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (COURSE)

The Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (COURSE) was organized in 1993. The membership consists of the general secretary, the Administrative Council (the directors of the seven GSC committees/units, the secretary for General Synod operations, and the secretary for the Council for Pacific and Asian America Ministries), and the regional synod executives.

COURSE, at the invitation of the Task Force on Purposes and Responsibilities, met September 4-5, 1997, with the task force at First Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York, to give input on purposes and responsibilities of regional synods and classes. COURSE then met November 17, 1997, and February 24, 1998, in Chicago, Illinois. Discussed at these two meetings was the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997,* pp. 78-80), attendance of regional synod executives at General Synod Council meetings, the Report of the Task Force on Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes, the Report of the Task Force on Implementation of Standards for Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament, and the relationship of the racial/ethnic councils with General Synod and the General Synod Council.

1997 Statistical Report of the RCA

(This report will be distributed at General Synod registration.)

Appointment of General Synod Treasurer and Assistant Secretary

In accordance with its corporate bylaws, the General Synod must annually appoint a treasurer of the General Synod corporation (*Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America,* Article V, Section 5.01).

R-10.
To appoint Susan Converse treasurer of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

In accordance with its corporate bylaws, the General Synod may elect or appoint such other officers as the needs of the corporation may from time to time require (*Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America,* Article V, Section 5.01). In order for the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, to have authority to sign legal documents for the corporation of the General Synod, it is necessary to approve the following recommendation:

R-11.
To appoint the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell assistant secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

EXTENSION OF MORTGAGE AGREEMENT

In order for the Reformed Church in America to finalize terms for extending the mortgage agreement with Old Kent Bank of Holland, Michigan, for repayment of the outstanding balance of $785,449.40 on the loan originally taken to construct the denominational offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1992, the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America is requested to take the following action:

R-12
The undersigned, general secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, a corporation organized and existing under the provisions of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York, do hereby certify that the following constitutes a true, correct and accurate abstract from a meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, held June 5-10, 1998, on the campus of Hope College, in Holland, Michigan.

WHEREAS, by vote of the governing body of the General Synod, Reformed Church in America, dated April 1, 1992, the treasurer and/or the general secretary of the General Synod were authorized to enter into negotiations with Old Kent Bank of Holland, Michigan ("Bank") for a one-year construction loan in an amount not to exceed one million and 00/100 ($1,000,000) dollars at the referenced bank's prime interest rate and thereafter to arrange for the conversion of the referenced construction loan into a standard end financing loan on the best terms then available; and,

WHEREAS, the sum of nine-hundred thousand and 00/100 ($900,000) dollars was advanced by the bank to this end; and,

WHEREAS, the referenced construction loan was converted into an end financing format to control repayment of the sum of nine-hundred thousand and 00/100 ($900,000) dollars for a term ending April 1, 1998; and,

WHEREAS, it has been agreed with Old Kent Bank of Holland to further extend the term of said loan and the conditions of repayment thereof,

NOW THEREFORE, it is resolved that the outstanding balance of $785,449.40 shall be repaid over a period commencing April 1, 1998, and continuing thereafter until April 1, 2003, at a rate of 8 percent with a constant monthly payment of $7,525 until maturity and at a rate of 10 percent post maturity on any unpaid balance.

NOW THEREFORE, it is further resolved that the treasurer and the assistant secretary shall have the authority to execute any and all appropriate documentation to accomplish the foregoing transaction.

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary
(ADOPTED)

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors hereby submits its annual report. This is the 178th year since the incorporation of the General Synod by a Special Act of the Legislature of the State of New York in 1819. The General Synod of 1993 and the General Synod of 1994 authorized the members of the General Synod Council to serve as the Board of Directors.

In previous years this report was comprised primarily of the financial summary of the previous fiscal year and reports on the various investment programs of the Reformed Church in America. These reports are now in the Financial Support section (see Report of the Office of Finance in the Financial Support section).

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATEMENT OF MISSION AND VISION

The 1997 General Synod adopted a Statement of Mission and Vision (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80). The 1997 General Synod also voted:

> To instruct the General Synod Council to audit all of its present programs and commitments in light of the statement of mission and vision; and further,
>
> to instruct the General Synod Council to identify, manage, and prioritize the resources necessary to implement this vision; and further,
>
> to instruct the General Synod Council to evaluate how the Reformed Church in America is implementing the statement of mission and vision, for report to the 1999 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-3, p. 428).

Beginning in the fall of 1997 and continuing in January 1998, GSC engaged in a complex process of evaluating its present ministries as well as the ways in which it carries out its work within the structure of its seven standing committees, and as a full council. Part of this task was an ongoing effort to develop strategic goal statements related to the RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision that would enable GSC to set objectives for continuing and beginning new work, and to evaluate its present programs and commitments within the context of the Statement of Mission and Vision.

At its January 1998 meeting GSC considered seven provisional goal statements that were developed from the work of GSC at its October 1997 meeting. GSC requested its Steering Committee for Long-Range Planning to revise the provisional goal statements for report at its April 1998 meeting. At its April 1998 meeting the General Synod Council adopted the following goal statements and referred them to its seven standing committees and unit staff for the development of program initiatives and objectives that will direct the resources of GSC into the future. GSC also instructed its standing committees to assess, evaluate, and prioritize all current programs and commitments in light of these goal areas.

In response to the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod, the General Synod Council established the following outcomes to guide its assessment of present and future programs and commitments, and to assist it in identifying, prioritizing, and allocating the resources of the Reformed Church in America:

1. **RCA congregations will be the center of local and global mission.**

    a. Church members will be actively engaged in local missions. Church members and congregations will be challenged to become partners connected in missions globally.

b. The General Synod Council will allocate the resources within its responsibility to clearly reflect an understanding that RCA congregations are the centers of local and global mission.

c. RCA congregations, as well as classes, regional synods, and other denominational agencies and structures, will minister to all people by crossing cultural boundaries with integrity, sensitivity, and grace, by promoting racial justice, and by developing an open spiritual fellowship with all who minister with us.

2. RCA ministers and laity will be equipped to meet the challenges of ministry and mission in the midst of a disbelieving culture.

a. A diverse network of teaching churches will be established to enhance and shape the training of new ministers.

b. RCA members will be equipped to recognize their gifts and their particular call to ministry, and they will clearly understand how to connect their faith with their daily lives.

c. Tools and resources that support the formation and reformation of effective pastoral and lay leadership will be available in all RCA congregations.

3. RCA congregations, classes, and ministers will experience a renewed sense of hope and a clear sense of mission, and they will share the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

a. A range of strategies that have the flexibility to promote revitalization in existing RCA congregations and ministries and that promote evangelism through a diversity of congregations into local communities will be implemented.

b. GSC and RCA regional synods will work cooperatively, and in partnership with RCA classes and congregations, to develop plans and strategies for starting new RCA congregations in a variety of geographic, economic, racial/ethnic, and social settings.

In addition to the process of developing goal areas and objectives related to the Statement of Mission and Vision, the General Synod Council's seven standing committees began in October 1997 to assess current programs and commitments in light of the statement and to move ahead with fresh initiatives in several areas of mission, program, and organizational life to begin the process of implementation. Delegates to the 1998 General Synod will want to review particularly the GSC reports referred to the Advisory Committees on World Mission, Christian Education and Discipleship, Evangelization and Church Growth, Church Order, and Christian Heritage and Communications.

Two additional reports from the General Synod Council to the 1998 General Synod reflect work carried out with focused attention on the Statement of Mission and Vision. The first is the Report of the Task Force on the Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes (see the report of the task force in the Christian Education and Discipleship section and the Church Order section). The second report is the Relationship of Racial/Ethnic Councils with General Synod and GSC (see the Report of the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, Racial Ethnic/Councils with General Synod and GSC in the Christian Education and Discipleship section and Church Order section).

GENERAL SYNOD ASSESSMENT BUDGET

The 1996 General Synod and the 1997 General Synod received for information the report, "A Review Process for the General Synod Operational Budget (Assessments)" (*MGS 1996*, pp. 387-90 and *MGS 1997*, pp. 80-83). This review process is fully implemented and is in its first full year of use.

The proposed 1999 General Synod assessment budget was developed following a careful review of each budget item (see 1999 General Synod Assessments in the General Synod Council report section). The result of this review process is a proposed 1999 General Synod assessment budget that includes no overall increase in the administrative operations of the RCA and significant decreases in the overall costs for operations within the corporations of the General Synod and the General Synod Council in 1999. The proposed 1999 budget includes costs for an expanded information technology budget. This will enable improved use of electronic technology for communication purposes (video conferencing) and thus reduces the cost and time required for in-person meetings. An increase in the overall General Synod assessment of 2.2 percent results primarily from an expansion of the RCA's work in new church development, in cooperation with RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, and racial/ethnic councils. GSC and RCA staff continue to work at means to reduce the cost of the RCA's administrative operations.

RCA OFFICES

In 1997 the General Synod Council resumed earnest efforts begun in the 1970s to deploy RCA staff to various regions of North America where the RCA has concentrations of RCA congregations. RCA staff serving in denomination-wide capacities are currently located in denominational centers in New York City; Albany, New York; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Lansing, Illinois; Orange City, Iowa; and Corona, California. In addition, the RCA has one-person or home offices for RCA staff in Warwick, New York; New Brunswick, New Jersey; Holland, Michigan; Cache, Oklahoma; Marysville, California; Apple Valley, Minnesota; and Littleton, Colorado.

The RCA received in 1997 a special designated gift from Ruth Stafford Peale to be used for long-overdue renovation work in the combined chapel and conference rooms in the denomination's New York City offices located on the eighteenth floor in the Interchurch Center. Additional renovation of the office space at the Interchurch Center was also accomplished at the same time to reduce the RCA's overall square footage and reduce the annual cost of operations at the Interchurch Center. The remodeling construction work at the Interchurch Center was completed in late winter 1998, and the refurbished chapel and conference room were dedicated in honor of Ruth Stafford Peale at a worship service on March 5, 1998.

In September 1997 the General Synod Council continued its lease agreement with the Regional Synod of the Far West for shared office space in Corona, California. Earlier in 1997 this regional synod and GSC, in cooperation with the Classis of California and the Theological Education Agency, were in negotiations to purchase an office building that would have served all four entities. The arrangement proved not viable at this time. The Classis of California and TEA relocated from Cerritos, California, to new offices in Bellflower, California, in December 1997.

Conversations began in early 1997 with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for leased space in the Lutheran Center located near Chicago's O'Hare airport. The conversations moved to active negotiation in late 1997 and early 1998. GSC anticipates that its staff

currently located in Lansing, Illinois, as well as some staff currently located in other RCA offices, will be relocated to an office suite in the Lutheran Center by July 1, 1998. The staff of the Regional Synod of Mid-America may join GSC at this Lutheran Center location. The Lansing, Illinois, property is currently listed for sale.

Report of the Commission on Judicial Business

The Office of the General Synod received three appeals during the past year: 1) from the Rev. Paul De Vries, 2) from the Rev. Donald Van Hoeven, and 3) from the Classis of New York.

The Commission on Judicial Business met via telephone conference call on July 8, 1997, and, by consensus, agreed to conduct a hearing for the Rev. Paul De Vries appeal and the Rev. Donald Van Hoeven appeal. The commission also met via telephone conference call on August 1, 1997, and agreed to conduct a hearing on the Classis of New York appeal.

The Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) held hearings on the above three appeals September 22-23, 1997, in Newark, New Jersey.

The commission then met December 6, 1997, in Chicago, Illinois, and via telephone conference call on January 8, 1998, to prepare its reports and recommendations on these three appeals. The reports and recommendations of the commission, along with responses (attached as appendices to the CJB reports and recommendations) from some of the parties (pursuant to *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5), follow:

THE REV. PAUL DE VRIES APPEAL

Introduction

During the dates and times at issue here, the Rev. Paul De Vries, a member of the Classis of Chicago, served as Protestant chaplain of an outreach ministry at O'Hare Airport near Chicago, Illinois. A dispute arose between the Catholic and Protestant segments of the ministry, who had been operating side by side, including allegations that various individuals made efforts to thwart an investigation of fund-raising practices within the ministry. This precipitated a request by De Vries for assistance from the Classis of Chicago in settling the dispute.

In the meantime, in 1995 the City of Chicago established a new corporation, the O'Hare Interfaith Chapel Corporation, to conduct the ministry of the chapel at O'Hare Airport. The legal and procedural changes were communicated to the Classis of Chicago. One new procedure was "no one may conduct ministry at the chapel unless they have been appointed to do so by a sponsoring judicatory." This change required the Classis of Chicago to act as a sponsoring judicatory of De Vries's ministry at O'Hare Airport. The classis declined to be a sponsoring judicatory.

It appears to the Commission on Judicial Business that De Vries assumed his ministry was an outreach ministry of the Classis of Chicago. The classis, on the other hand, considered the ministry to be an independent specialized ministry.

The Action of the Classis of Chicago

After De Vries requested assistance from the Classis of Chicago in settling this dispute, the classis notified him of its position that the classis was not a sponsoring judicatory of the O'Hare Airport ministry. A September 18, 1996, memo from the Classis of Chicago executive committee confirmed this position of classis. De Vries objected to this position.

In October 1996 De Vries found another sponsoring judicatory but pursued his dispute with the Classis of Chicago. De Vries filed a complaint with the Regional Synod of Mid-America.

The Complaint to the Regional Synod of Mid-America

The Regional Synod of Mid-America voted on April 23, 1997, to dismiss the complaint of De Vries against the Classis of Chicago and to thank him for his fourteen years of ministry at O'Hare Airport. The regional synod stated there was no legitimate complaint against the Classis of Chicago. At this same meeting, the Regional Synod of Mid-America had in its possession a response from De Vries to the various arguments and allegations before the regional synod. By vote of the regional synod, the response of De Vries was not read or distributed and considered by the Regional Synod of Mid-America.

The Nature of the Appeal

De Vries appealed the action of the Regional Synod of Mid-America on the following grounds: 1) an irregularity occurred in the procedure because the regional synod did not distribute to its delegates the response of De Vries with the regional synod's Overtures and Judicial Business Committee report and recommendation as required by the *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5; and 2) the Regional Synod of Mid-America's decision was manifestly unjust.

The Timeliness of the Appeal

De Vries appealed the action of the Regional Synod of Mid-America to the General Synod on May 26, 1997 (*MGS 1997*, p. 86). All papers and materials which form the record of this appeal were received in timely fashion and were in order.

The Hearing

A September 22, 1997, hearing date was set for 1:00 p.m. eastern time in Newark, New Jersey, and a notice of hearing was duly sent by the Commission on Judicial Business to both De Vries and the Regional Synod of Mid-America. De Vries and the regional synod acknowledged timely receipt of the notice of hearing.

The hearing was called to order by the moderator of the Commission on Judicial Business at 1:00 p.m. eastern time in Newark, New Jersey. However, there was no appearance at the hearing by either De Vries or representatives from the Regional Synod of Mid-America. Although the commission could have declared the case to be defaulted since the parties failed to appear (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 4), the commission voted to proceed to consider the merits of the appeal on the basis of the record submitted without the parties present.

The Issues Presented

The Commission on Judicial Business first considered the allegation of the violation of *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5 (not distributing the response of De Vries with the report of the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the the Regional Synod of Mid-America).

It is undisputed that De Vries submitted a response to the Regional Synod of Mid-America for consideration at its April 23, 1997, meeting and that the regional synod voted not to distribute or otherwise consider the response of De Vries.

The Commission on Judicial Business was also asked to determine if the decision of the regional synod not to hear the complaint of De Vries justified an appeal for "manifest injustice" as per the *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 2.

Conclusion

The Commission on Judicial Business determined that the failure to distribute and to consider the response of De Vries is a clear violation of the *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5. Section 5 states:

The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory by a date determined by the parent judicatory prior to the next stated meeting or a special meeting and shall simultaneously therewith furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. Within twenty days thereafter, any party may submit to the clerk of the judicatory a written response to the committee's report. The clerk shall distribute copies of the committee's report and any responses received to the members of the judicatory [underlining added for emphasis]. After receiving the report of the committee and the responses thereto, the judicatory may request to hear the original parties in the case with their counsel. The report of the committee may be adopted, rejected, amended, or referred back to the committee. The judicatory may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the judgment of the lower judicatory or assembly, or remand the case to it with instructions.

In order to afford De Vries the procedural rights he is guaranteed under the *Book of Church Order*, the Regional Synod of Mid-America was obliged to distribute the response prepared by De Vries to the RSM-AM delegates prior to discussion and vote.

The Commission on Judicial Business then determined that in view of the procedural violation of the *Book of Church Order*, it was not necessary to consider the substance of the decision appealed.

R-1.
To remand the case to the Regional Synod of Mid-America with instructions to comply with the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5, and distribute to the regional synod delegates the response of the Rev. Paul De Vries with the report of the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the Regional Synod of Mid-America before proceeding to a decision on the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee's report. (ADOPTED)

(The Rev. Sam Hamstra, member of the Commission on Judicial Business from the Regional Synod of Mid-America, recused himself and did not participate in this appeal.)

APPENDIX

The *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5 states:

> The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory . . . prior to the next stated meeting and shall simultaneously therewith furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. Within twenty days thereafter, any party may submit to the clerk of the judicatory a written response to the committee's report. The clerk shall distribute copies of the committee's report and any responses received to the members of the judicatory.

A written response to the above Commission on Judicial Business report was received from the Rev. Paul DeVries, and his response follows:

RESPONSE FROM THE REV. PAUL DE VRIES

Dear Friends:

The appellant thanks the Commission on Judicial Business for dealing with our appeal.

We acknowledge that the commission's recommendation (R-1 above) addresses only the matter of the Regional Synod of Mid-America's procedure in handling our complaint, and not the substance of our dispute.

It was inevitable that matters of substance would be mentioned in the commission's report. We wish to comment on one such matter.

In the "introduction" section of the Commission on Judicial Business report, second paragraph, last sentence, the report states, in part, "The classis declined to be a sponsoring judicatory."

In our view, the Classis of Chicago did not decline to become our sponsor. The classis was our sponsor, and it walked out on an existing sponsorship. In a manner of speaking, it was not that classis declined to offer its hand to us in marriage. Classis divorced us. What classis declined was the continuation of the marriage; classis also declined our urgent plea for "marriage counseling." In the course of our complaint and appeal, evidence was submitted which was, in effect, a marriage license. The president of the O'Hare Interfaith Chapel Corporation disclosed in a letter that classis had agreed to the sponsorship. Based on that agreement (a simple, compelling, historical fact) the chapel corporation president could and did put in writing that classis was the sponsor. He mailed a copy of his letter to the appropriate Classis of Chicago minister, who happened also to hold office in the O'Hare Interfaith Chapel Corporation.

As things stand today, classis is indeed not our sponsoring judicatory. And it is the way this circumstance came about, among other things, that constitutes some of the substance of our complaint.

Sincerely,

Paul F. DeVries

James Molenaar
Counsel to the Rev. Paul F. DeVries

THE REV. DONALD VAN HOEVEN APPEAL

(A motion was made and supported to grant privilege of the floor to the Rev. Donald Van Hoeven and his counsel. The motion LOST).

Introduction

The Rev. Donald Van Hoeven is a member of the Classis of Southwest Michigan. On September 24, 1996, the classis adopted a motion to admonish and rebuke him "for the public statements he has made on his views of salvation apart from Christ" which were published in four newspapers in Michigan between March 10 and July 28, 1996. Van Hoeven made a complaint to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes found the complaint not to be in order and accordingly declined to afford the parties the hearing provided by *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 4. The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee recommended to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes that it declare the complaint of Van Hoeven not to be in order. The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes adopted this recommendation on May 5, 1997.

The Timeliness of the Appeal

Van Hoeven appealed the action of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes to the General Synod on June 6, 1997 (*MGS 1997*, p. 86). All papers and materials which form the record of this appeal were received in timely fashion and were in order.

The Action of the Classis of Southwest Michigan

Van Hoeven wrote an article which was published in the *Kalamazoo Gazette,* Kalamazoo, Michigan, on March 10, 1996. In this article, Van Hoeven said, among other things:

> I do not believe exclusivity to be the message of scripture nor the essence of the life of Jesus. I believe God's grace is greater than our creeds. I do not believe that non-Christians are "condemned to hell," second class. We all fall short of the glory of God; we are all judged, we are all dependent on God's gracious love.
>
> Exclusivity (salvation only through Jesus) in the church has become not only a scandal, but a stumbling block, set before us to protect the claimed uniqueness of the identity of the institutional church.

This same article was published in the *Muskegon Chronicle*, Muskegon, Michigan, on March 24, 1996.

On March 29, 1996, the executive committee of the Classis of Southwest Michigan wrote to its member pastors and advised them that the executive committee had decided to send Van Hoeven a letter to seek correction and to rebuke him for the views he expressed, particularly that salvation can be received apart from Christ. The executive committee also wrote that it had asked its pastoral relations task force to meet with Van Hoeven to discuss these issues, and the executive committee sought the pastors' prayers.

The task force and the executive committee met with Van Hoeven. On August 27, 1996, there was a special session of classis for the purpose of meeting with Van Hoeven for dialogue. (In the meantime, Van Hoeven's article was published twice more—on April 13, 1996, in the *Holland Sentinel*, Holland, Michigan, and on July 28, 1996, in the *Grand Rapids Press*, Grand Rapids, Michigan.)

Since the August 27, 1996, dialogue did not resolve the controversy, the classis met again on September 24, 1996. At this September 24 meeting the classis adopted the following motion:

> To admonish and rebuke Rev. Don Van Hoeven for the public statements he has made on his views of salvation apart from Christ which were published March 10, 1996, in the *Kalamazoo Gazette*; April 13, 1996, in the *Holland Sentinel*; March 24, 1996, in the *Muskegon Chronicle*; and July 28, 1996, in the *Grand Rapids Press*.

The Complaint to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

On November 1, 1996, Van Hoeven filed a complaint with the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes concerning the action of the Classis of Southwest Michigan. The grounds of his complaint were:

1. The classis failed to apprise him of the nature of any offense as related to the newspaper articles.

2. The statements in the newspaper articles do not constitute an offense as that term is defined in *BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2, Section 3.

3. The action of classis was the result of manifest bias and prejudice and resulted in manifest injustice to him.

4. The classis violated or failed to comply with the *Book of Church Order* or other laws and regulations of the church.

The Nature of a Complaint

The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes noted that the complaint confused the grounds for a complaint with the grounds for an appeal. A complaint is a written statement alleging that an action or a decision of an assembly or officer of the church has violated or failed to comply with the *Book of Church Order* or other laws and regulations of the church (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 1). Manifestation of bias and manifest injustice in the judgment are grounds of appeal, not grounds for complaint (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 2).

The distinction is important. The *BCO* provides for an appeal from a decision of a judicatory. The decision of a judicatory is a decision on a judicial question, such as a charge, a complaint, or an appeal. An appeal is a broader review than a complaint. In an appeal, the higher judicatory considers whether the lower judicatory refused a party reasonable indulgence, whether it received improper evidence or declined to receive proper evidence, whether it rendered a decision before all the testimony was taken, whether it manifested bias or prejudice, and whether the judgement resulted in manifest injustice (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2).

A complaint, on the other hand, lies from the action of an assembly or officer. Assemblies and officers take actions that are discretionary in nature. Typically these actions are decisions on administrative or pastoral questions. Assemblies and officers are not held to the procedural standards of bodies that exercise judicial powers. The judicatory that hears a complaint is not entitled to substitute for the impugned action the exercise of its own discretion. Much less does it review the correctness of the decision. The judicatory that hears a complaint is limited to deciding whether the assembly or officer acted lawfully, that is to say in accordance with the prescribed procedures. As long as the assembly or officer does not violate the *Book of Church Order* or other laws or regulations of the church, the action cannot be challenged. If it were otherwise, the authority that the *Book of Church Order* intends for officers and assemblies is not really theirs to exercise.

Assembly and Judicatory Distinction

A body is an "assembly" for nonjudicial proceedings. An "assembly" becomes a "judicatory" when it enters judicial proceedings.

The decision of the classis to admonish and rebuke Van Hoeven was the action of an assembly in its exercise of pastoral discipline (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2). The action of admonition and rebuke is not judicial discipline.

Judicial discipline is exercised by a judicatory. This type of discipline can result in suspension, deposition, or excommunication. Judicial discipline requires the presentation of a charge, and it gives rise to specific procedural rights, including the right to appeal (see *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2 on discipline; *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Articles 4 to 6 on charge; *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2 on appeals).

The Complaint on Procedural Grounds

The only means of review available to Van Hoeven in the present case is therefore a complaint on procedural grounds. If the complaint is to be in order, valid grounds of complaint must be stated. The following grounds that were presented to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes must therefore be considered:

The First Ground of Complaint: Notice of Nature of Offense

The first ground of complaint is procedural in nature, but it is not a valid ground of complaint. First, when a classis exercises pastoral discipline as an assembly, it is not required to present a charge or take comparable action to notify a person who could be affected. But even assuming that a classis is required to give notice of the nature of the offense, it cannot be maintained that the Classis of Southwest Michigan did not provide this notice. The offense specified in the motion adopted by classis and in the letter of admonition and rebuke was the publication of a view by Van Hoeven of salvation apart from Christ.

This theological matter was brought to the attention of Van Hoeven in several ways before the motion was adopted by the classis. The Church/Pastor Relations Task Force of the classis met with Van Hoeven on April 17 and May 1, 1996. The executive committee of the classis met with Van Hoeven on May 29, 1996. The classis as a whole met with Van Hoeven on August 27, 1996. The offense was stated in the motion before it was voted upon by the classis at its September 24, 1996, meeting. There was more than adequate notice of the nature of the offense.

The Second Ground of Complaint: Statements Not an Offense

This is not a procedural question. Whether the statements constitute an offense is the very question that was decided by the classis. A complaint does not lie from the action of an assembly on the basis that the complainant disagrees with the action.

The Third Ground of Complaint: Bias, Prejudice, and Injustice

Bias, prejudice, and injustice are grounds of appeal, not complaint. Again, an assembly making a pastoral decision is not held to the procedural requirements of a judicatory that is trying a charge. Members of an assembly may well express an opinion one way or the other before the final vote. This does not invalidate the decision of the assembly.

The Fourth Ground of Complaint: Violation of the *Book of Church Order*

Violation of the *Book of Church Order* or other laws of the church could in some circumstances be a valid ground of complaint. For instance, if an assembly purported to exercise pastoral discipline at a meeting that was not properly constituted in accordance with the requirements of the *Book of Church Order*, a complaint could be made.

But in the present case, no such violation was alleged. This fourth ground appears to be a compendious way of expressing the specific grounds of complaint. In any event, it does not add anything to them. The specific grounds are invalid because they proceed on the presumption that the action of the classis is subject to the broader review that is available in an appeal from the decision of a judicatory. This fourth, general ground is therefore similarly invalid.

Conclusion

As the complaint of Van Hoeven did not state valid grounds, it was not in order and it could not be put into order. It was not a question of providing further documentation or giving appropriate notices. The complaint was fundamentally flawed. The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes was correct not to hear it.

R-2.
To uphold the decision of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes to declare out of order the complaint brought by the Rev. Donald Van Hoeven against the motion of the Classis of Southwest Michigan to admonish and rebuke him. (NOT ADOPTED)

➢Following the defeat of R-2, upon a motion from the floor, synod

VOTED: To remand R-2 (p. 83) to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes with instructions to find the complaint in order and to proceed in accordance with the provisions of the *Book of Church Order* applicable thereto.

(The Rev. Larry Schuyler, member of the Commission on Judicial Business from the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes, recused himself and did not participate in this appeal.)➢

APPENDIX

The *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5 states:

> The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory . . . prior to the next stated meeting and shall simultaneously therewith furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. Within twenty days thereafter, any party may submit to the clerk of the judicatory a written response to the committee's report. The clerk shall distribute copies of the committee's report and any responses received to the members of the judicatory.

A written response to the above Commission on Judicial Business Report was received from Van Hoeven, and his response follows:

RESPONSE FROM THE REV. DONALD VAN HOEVEN

Introduction and Statement of Faith

> Take from the world all religious intolerance. Help all to remember that there are more ways than one to You, that You have your own secret stairway into every heart. Grant that we may not brand as heretics all who do not think as we do. (A prayer prepared by the Reformed Church in America's Commission on Christian Worship in 1988 and published in *Pray to the Lord, Prayers for Corporate Worship*, Reformed Church Press, 1988.)

Throughout the life of the Rev. Donald Van Hoeven, and especially during the past thirty-two years of service as a minister of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America, he has sought to witness to God's reconciling revelation in Jesus Christ. It is this saving presence of God in the world that has been for him the source of wholeness, healing, and atonement for all of life and all of creation. He has proclaimed this presence in his pastoral and prophetic ministry and has spoken of this experience of God within our community of faith.

It is this spirit, grounded in a Christocentric revelation of God in which his salvation is in Jesus Christ, which led Van Hoeven to submit an article to the *Kalamazoo Gazette*. This article was published in a feature entitled "Viewpoints" in the March 10, 1996, edition. In this article Van Hoeven reaffirmed that "I am a Christian" and that "I trust in, worship, and serve God as God has been revealed to me by God's Spirit in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6)." He further noted, however, that "we all fall short of the glory of God; we are all judged, we are all dependent on God's gracious love." With this in mind, he spoke out against the conceit and arrogance typified by those Christians advocating an "exclusivic understanding of God's grace and love." He questioned how "we as Christians hold on to this exclusiveness and still say 'these are my brothers and my sisters.'" He asked "who does belong to God?" He wondered, "is God equally grieved at the suffering of a child in the Bedouin tent of Iraq as with our children's or grandchildren's suffering?" And he prophetically asked, "will the denomination silence me if I preach that together, Muslin, Buddhist, Jew, or Hindu, we are all one before God whose Spirit leads us all into truth?"

The March 10, 1996, "Viewpoint" article was not a finished theological statement, nor was it an expression of theological doubting, but a public witness of a follower of Jesus who is in the Way. Thus, Van Hoeven calls upon the church to "openly debate these issues, and that the church allow for a variety of views and colors as it develops its tapestry of faith and life." (The complete text of the "Viewpoints" article follows this response, and General Synod is urged to read the article in its entirety rather than the excerpts taken out of context which appear in the above Report of the Commission on Judicial Business.)

It was this inclusive presence of God which moved the psalmist to declare that love of God in Psalm 87, saying that the "Egypts"[1] and "Babylons" of life were also God's children. This experience of God moved the prophet Micah to envision the future reign of God in Zion: For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god; but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever (Micah 4:5).

The Bible refers constantly to people outside Israel who believed in God and loved justice. The list of such people (Gen. 14:19; Exod. 18; Num. 22:6, 35; 23:19; c.f. 24:1-9; 1 Kings 10:9; 17:24; 2 Kings 5; Acts 10:2; etc.) is long. It includes persons of "foreign religions" such Enoch, Melchizedek, Jethro, the seer Balaam (used by God to speak the truth about peoples who would be blessed and who would perish), the Queen of Sheba, the widow of Zarephath, Naaman, etc. These are but a few examples of people throughout the centuries who are the "religious others"; those who are outside the Christian religious family, but who have a real relationship to God and have therefore lived righteously and believingly before the face of God. While it seems some Christians within the RCA, in their arrogance and exclusivity, would, in an effort to seek purity in the church, condemn them to eternal separation from God, the Bible cites them as evidence of God's mysterious plan of salvation. This presence of God is what the Reformed theologian J. H. Bavink calls "the silent work of God" (J. H. Bavink, *The Church Between the Temple and the Mosque,* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966).

It is this willing, this determining of God that all are to be saved, that all are to reach full knowledge of the truth, as Paul testifies in 1 Timothy 2:3-4. This has caused Van Hoeven to search his heart for how he is to respond to those who have come to know God in ways which he has not experienced. Is it his task to say that such persons must be like us in their knowing of God? Or is it necessary to claim that everyone is right? In his call to denounce evil and announce "good news," he again takes his lead from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 4:4, where Paul indicates that even though he believes he was in a right relationship with God, "it is the Lord who judges." Paul knew in his humility before God that insights expressed by the human mind and grasped by the human will cannot claim ultimacy. For Van Hoeven this is an essential understanding that protects against the massive history of religious intolerance that characterizes many faith communities.

Procedural History

Before the ink was dry on the March 10, 1996, "Viewpoint" article, before calling a meeting of the Classis of Southwest Michigan, before specifying an offense, before any discussions with Van Hoeven, without any opportunity for a hearing and without even the common decency of including Van Hoeven on the mailing list, the executive committee of the Classis of Southwest Michigan sent a letter to the pastors in the classis, dated March 13, 1996, expressing its "serious concern" over the theological views expressed by Van Hoeven and assuring "that we are dealing with this matter." Again, absent any meetings or discussions with Van Hoeven, classis sent a second letter on March 29, 1996, to the pastors of the classis announcing "we have decided to send the Rev. Van Hoeven a letter to seek correction and rebuke him for the views he had expressed."

Thus, without being given any opportunity to be heard, and without being advised of any "offense," Van Hoeven was found "guilty" before the eyes of classis and was rebuked. Only in response to the repeated objections by Van Hoeven was any opportunity afforded to him to "dialogue." Notwithstanding the failure to specify any "offense" to which he could respond, classis voted "to admonish and rebuke Rev. Dr. Don Van Hoeven for the public statements he has made on his view of salvation apart from Christ which were published March 10 in the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, April 13 in the *Holland Sentinel*, March 24 in the *Muskegon Chronicle*, and July 28 in the *Grand Rapids Press*."

Van Hoeven filed a complaint from the action of the Classis of Southwest Michigan to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. Without ever affording the complainant an opportunity for a hearing, without providing the complainant with a copy of the record of the case and without even permitting the complainant to witness the proceeding, the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes voted to declare the complaint not to be in order. Van Hoeven appealed this decision to the General Synod.

Right of Redress

The gravamen of the within appeal is the refusal to afford Van Hoeven, or for that matter any member of the Reformed Church in America, redress by way of complaint from a decision to admonish and rebuke him. The decision of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes and the recommendation of the Commission on Judicial Business (R-2 above) would, if adopted, virtually emasculate the complaint provisions and would deny any redress from any decision of an assembly no matter how baseless, no matter how biased and no matter how unjust.

The right of redress by complaint from an action of classis is specifically protected. The *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6, Section 2, states:

> A member of classis shall not have the right to protest against any act or decision of that body but shall have the right to redress by appeal or complaint (emphasis added).

Similarly, the right to file a complaint from an action or decision of an assembly is given under *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 1:

> A complaint is a written statement alleging that an action or a decision of an assembly or officer of the church has violated or failed to comply with the *Book of Church Order* or other laws or regulations of the church.

Nowhere in either of the above two *BCO* provisions is any exception, limitation, or circumscription that would preclude the complaint upon the action of an assembly to admonish or rebuke. Nor is there any such limitation, exclusion, or circumscription that would limit a complaint solely to procedural errors.

Nature of Discipline

Admonition and rebuke are forms of discipline administered by an assembly (*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2). Although all further steps of discipline (suspension, deposition, and excommunication) are judicial in nature and require the formal presentation and trial of charges in a judicatory, all forms of disciplines, including admonition and rebuke, must be based on the commission of an "offense." The *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2, states:

> The exercise of discipline may take the form of admonition, rebuke, suspension from the privileges of membership in the church or from office, deposition from office or excommunication, as the gravity of the offense in the opinion of the judicatory may warrant (emphasis added).

An offense is not merely the expression of an unpopular or controversial view. Rather, offenses are narrowly defined in the *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2, Section 3:.

> Those matters only shall be considered as offenses, or subject to accusation, which can be shown to be such from the Bible, or from the *Constitution of the Reformed Church in America*, or which are sins or offenses which cause their perpetrators to become dishonorable in reputation before the world.

Absence of Notice as Violation of the *BCO*

The Classis of Southwest Michigan had, from the outset, decided to discipline Van Hoeven for the March 10, 1996, "Viewpoint" article. When Van Hoeven inquired as to the "offense," he was advised that no "offense" need be provided since the admonition and rebuke were nonjudicial. Even as to those forms of discipline which are ostensibly "pastoral" in nature, the exercise of any form of discipline must still be based upon an offense. Thus even though the formal presentation of a charge brought by individual accusation or on the initiative of the responsible judicatory is not required (*BCO,* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4), fundamental fairness requires that the party against whom a disciplinary action is to be taken be advised of the conduct for which he is to be disciplined and the basis for determining that such conduct constitutes an offense. How can any reasonable person expect anyone to be given a fair opportunity to respond without being advised of the basis for the alleged offensive behavior? The above report of the Commission on Judicial Business discounts such notice by claiming that the alleged offensive behavior was stated in the motion voted upon by the classis at its September 24, 1996, meeting. Such motion was made only after the "dialogue" with Van Hoeven. It is analogous to holding a trial but notifying the accused of the charges only after the verdict is in.

Absence of an "Offense" as a Violation of the *BCO*

Apart from the issue of notice, there is the issue as to whether the behavior for which discipline is to be imposed constitutes an "offense." In the "Viewpoint" article, Van Hoeven reaffirms his faith in Jesus Christ. He questions, however, how exclusivity within the church affects a Christian's relationship with peoples of other faiths. He asks whether God's loving grace is capable of encompassing all peoples. He calls upon Christians to discuss and debate these issues. Many within the RCA share these questions and would welcome a dialogue. Others within the RCA are content not to be concerned with these matters and feel uneasy about debating these issues. Should such uneasiness, however, form the basis of discipline against those who seek such debate?

It is interesting to note that while the motion of classis cited the "Viewpoint" article as the basis for the admonition and rebuke, the classis, in its letter of admonition and rebuke, did not reference any specific statements in the article that ostensibly constitute an offense. It

relies upon characterizations expressing the fears, biases and prejudices of others, rather than on the words of Van Hoeven. Thus, for example, William Dornbos, the president of classis and author of the letter, opined that "the implication is that there is room for other religious traditions to find salvation apart from Christ." He further opined that "In your articles, the questions and statements lead to the conclusion that other religions may obtain salvation apart from Jesus Christ" (emphasis added). Similarly, again relying on his own subjective interpretation, Dornbos went on to rebuke Van Hoeven "since the position which you support and imply are contrary to the clear statement of God's Word" (emphasis added). Again, as a result of his own subjective reading, he states that Van Hoeven "suggests" (emphasis added) that persons should look to anyone or anything other than Jesus Christ for salvation, even though no such suggestion is set forth in the article. The foregoing are the expressions of the author of the letter of admonition and rebuke, but are not the statements found in the article written by Van Hoeven.

Violations of the *BCO* Not Limited to Procedural Matters

Van Hoeven has stood ready, willing, and able to demonstrate the biblical support for the statements made in the "Viewpoint" article. Rather than providing him with an opportunity to be heard on the merits, the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes denied Van Hoeven any opportunity for a hearing by declaring the complaint "out of order." Without any citation in the *Book of Church Order*, and without any basis in fact or reason, the regional syond adopted the position that complaints are limited to deciding whether an assembly or officer acted in accordance with prescribed procedures. This "procedural" restriction upon the filing of complaints has no citation in the *BCO* because no such restriction exists. To the contrary, the *BCO* provides that a complaint exists where it is alleged "that an action or decision of an assembly or officer of the church has violated or failed to comply with the *Book of Church Order* or other laws and regulations of the church" (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 1). Apart from the issue of notice (discussed above) and bias (which is discussed below), the *BCO* predicates discipline upon the commission of an "offense." Where no offense has occurred (i.e., conduct which can be shown to be such from the Bible, or from the *Constitution of the Reformed Church in America*, or which are sins or offenses which cause their perpetrators to become dishonorable in reputation before the world (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2, Section 3), the imposition of discipline, of whatever form, is not in compliance with the *Book of Church Order*.

The position espoused by the regional synod and the Commission on Judicial Business precludes a right of review or redress for any action of an assembly as long as the assembly was properly constituted, regardless how fanciful, unsubstantiated, baseless, unjust or biased it may be. Such a ruling would arguably not only apply to admonition and rebuke but would extend to all other actions of an assembly, including superseding a consistory, disbanding a church, revocation of licensure, approvals and disapprovals of calls, and the termination of ministerial relationships, to name a few. (The distinction between a "substantive" issue and a "procedural" issue is itself murky. In the within case, is the necessity for an "offense" a "procedural" prerequisite or a "substantive" determination? Is the decision as to what is called "procedural" and "substantive," itself, a procedural or substantive issue? To attempt to make these distinctions in the absence of any clearly expressed distinction in the *BCO* is pure sophistry.)

Bias, Prejudice, and Injustice as a Violation of the *BCO*

The record is replete with instances of bias and prejudice by both the Classis of Southwest Michigan and the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes (e.g., determinations to impose discipline before attempting to even contact Van Hoeven; failing to copy him on correspondence; refusal to provide the complainant with a record of the case; refusing to grant the complainant an opportunity to be heard; and refusing to allow the complainant an

opportunity to even observe the proceedings of the Regional Synod while permitting classis such an opportunity.) The above Report of the Commission on Judicial Business asserts that "bias, prejudice, and injustice are grounds of appeal, not complaint." Although Van Hoeven recognizes that bias, prejudice, and injustice, as well as other causes, are grounds for an appeal (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 2), he believes that there is nothing in the *BCO* that would expressly preclude taking such factors into account in connection with a complaint. Van Hoeven submits that the *Book of Church Order* must be read *in para materia.* All of its parts must be read together to add meaning to the whole. Thus, the question must be asked whether the framers of the *Book of Church Order* intended to exclude the manifestation of bias and prejudice or manifest injustice as a basis to file a complaint. Put another way, is the exercise of bias and prejudice and manifest injustice in compliance with the *Book of Church Order*? Van Hoeven submits that the answer is no. If, for example, a classis was to deny a call solely on the basis of race or gender, would General Synod conclude that such a decision is in compliance with the *Book of Church Order* and thus is unreviewable?

Conclusion

Van Hoeven asks the delegates of General Synod to keep in mind the biblical teachings "Do to others as you would have them to do you" (Luke 6:31) and "what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Donald Van Hoeven has been unjustly rebuked and admonished by the Classis of Southwest Michigan contrary to the *Book of Church Order*. He has filed a complaint therefrom and the within appeal to this General Synod in the belief that he would be afforded a fair and impartial hearing, be given an opportunity to be heard on the merits, and receive a just determination.

Not all members of the Reformed Church in America agree on all issues. There is a divergence of views on the ordination of women, methods of ministering to homosexuals, positions on abortion, etc. Despite divergence on these views, what everyone should agree upon is the willingness to listen to each other, to respect the sincerity of each other's viewpoint, and to treat each other fairly and justly.

Van Hoeven hopes that the actions of the Classis of Southwest Michigan and the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes do not serve as a model for "justice, RCA style." For to do justice requires fairness; and it is not fair, Van Hoeven submits, to admonish and rebuke a minister without informing him of an offense or for conduct that does not constitute an offense under the *BCO*. Nor is it fair to deny him an opportunity for redress or deny him an opportunity to be heard. Nor is it fair to deny a person the right to question how we as Christians treat non-Christians or to ask whether God's salvific grace may encompass those with different faiths. Nor is it fair to stifle dialogue on these issues with threats of discipline.

If we, as a denomination, are willing to sacrifice fairness and justice, abandon mutual respect, and refuse to listen to each other in the name of doctrinal purity, are we not betraying the very truths which hold us together?

The Rev. Dr. Donald Van Hoeven asks for an opportunity to have his complaint considered on the merits. Given such an opportunity, he believes he has demonstrated that he has committed no offense and that the admonition and rebuke are improper. Van Hoeven requests that General Synod reverse the decision of the Classis of Southwest Michigan and remove the stigma that the admonition and rebuke has wrongly placed upon him. At the very least, Van Hoeven seeks an opportunity to be heard and would, in the alternative, seek a remand to the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes with a direction that he receive a hearing on the merits. In other words, Van Hoeven requests the same respect that all have the right to expect from each other, and he seeks the same justice and fairness that the Lord requires of all.

Respectfully submitted,

William F. Rupp
Counsel to the Rev. Dr. Donald Van Hoeven

Complete Text of "Viewpoints" Article

The complete text of the "Viewpoints" article published in the March 10, 1996, edition of the *Kalamazoo Gazette* follows:

> Recently the Reformed Church in America's Muskegon Classis has acted to censor and separate the Rev. Dr. Richard Rhem, the pastor of Christ Community Reformed Church in Spring Lake, Michigan, from the Reformed Church in America. The controversy is focused on two basic issues. The first is Rev. Rhem's belief that sexual orientation is a consequence of one's birth, and that there is no reason to call either heterosexual or homosexual persons to repentance for their sexual orientation. While the scriptures do not address the issue of orientation, they do call for covenant faithfulness. As Rev. Rhem stated in a recent pastoral letter, "Since our sexuality is so intrinsic to our humanness, to require the person of homosexual orientation to deny his/her sexuality would seem oppressive. Celibacy is a calling; it ought not to be made a demand."
>
> Rev. Rhem's position is biblically correct, and I agree with him. The oppressiveness of the church's stand regarding homosexuality is a clear violation of God's graceful and inclusive love. But this area of the controversy leads to the second and may be even more challenging issue: must all Christians believe that God's saving grace is available only through Jesus Christ, consciously embraced by the believer? Or may I, as a Christian, believe that God is truly known in a saving way by others in their own respective religious traditions?
>
> The current controversy in the Reformed Church in America has arisen because one of its ordained ministers has had the courage to say publicly what many clergy and laity believe in their hearts and speak of privately. For ministers in most denominations to preach or write such inclusive beliefs about the nature of God's grace is to invite a similar censor or removal. The result is that the clergy are tragically silent about this issue, and this communicates the message that the laity are incapable of participating in the continuing struggle to integrate faith and experience.
>
> The issues in the Spring Lake Church controversy are of great significance. That is why a pastor must be silenced. There are massive divisions between peoples all over the world. Some of the worst, most horrible crimes against humanity are committed because some persons still believe that the majority of the world's non-Christian population is of lesser value in the eyes of God. While being human, they must be "saved" to be made acceptable before God.
>
> It is a small step to regard such persons as second class, not quite as important or cherished by God as were we Christians. Throughout my life in the institutional church I have seen how this exclusivistic understanding of God's grace and love has resulted in the church's accommodation to such inhumanity.
>
> Can we as Christians hold on to this exclusiveness and still say "these are my brothers and my sisters"? Who does belong to God? Is God equally grieved at the suffering of a child in the Bedouin tent of Iraq as with our children's or grandchildren's suffering? How can we support a nationalism that is grounded in the idolatry of "God and Country"? Will the denomination silence me if I preach that together, Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, or Hindu, we are one before God whose Spirit leads us all into truth?

I am a Christian. I, with Rev. Rhem can say, "I trust in, worship and serve God as God has been revealed to me by God's Spirit in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6)." However, I do not believe exclusivity to be the message of scripture nor the essence of the life of Jesus. I believe God's grace is greater than our creeds. I do not believe that non-Christians are "condemned to hell," second class. We all fall short of the glory of God; we are all judged, we are all dependent on God's gracious love.

Nurturing exclusivity and superiority is not just a religious practice. It has always been in the interest of the principalities and powers, the leaders of the nation state to seek to co-opt exclusive, arrogant religious beliefs. It was as true at the time of Jesus as it is for us. We need only to remember our history and how the funding for the U.S.-sponsored terrorism of the Contras in Nicaragua was much easier when their mission was to destroy the "godless communists."

It is essential that we openly debate these issues, and that the church allow for a variety of hues and colors as it develops its tapestry of faith and life. Exclusivity (salvation only through Jesus) in the church has become not only a scandal, but a stumbling block, set before us to protect the claimed uniqueness of the identity of the institutional church. Ministers and laity who see Jesus's authority as being a life of removing barriers to God's love must refuse to be silenced. I thank God for Rev. Rhem and for this large congregation of witnesses to the inclusive love of God.

The Rev. Dr. Don Van Hoeven
Minister, Reformed Church in America

THE CLASSIS OF NEW YORK APPEAL

Introduction

On November 12, 1996, the Classis of New York at a special session voted "no" on a motion "to determine whether the Collegiate Church needs permission of Classis of New York to sell church property." (The *BCO,* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9, defines church property as "real property of the church on which there stands a building designed for worship or religious instruction, or as a residence for the minister.")

The Rev. William Hanousek and elder Sylvia Simpfendorfer-Ishmael made a complaint to the Regional Synod of New York under *BCO,* Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1. On May 10, 1997, the RSNY adopted the following:

> Your Committee recommends that the Synod of New York remand the matter of approving or disapproving the sale of any particular real property of a church which is a member of the Classis of New York on which stands a building designed for worship or as a residence for the minister to the Classis of New York with the instruction that it so approve or disapprove any particular such sales proposed to it, in accordance with Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9 of the *Book of Church Order.*

The Timeliness of the Appeal

The Classis of New York appealed the action of the Regional Synod of New York to the General Synod on July 3, 1997. All papers and materials which form the record of this appeal were received in timely fashion and were in order.

The Issues Presented

The Classis of New York cited four grounds of appeal, summarized as follows:

1. There was irregularity in the proceedings because at the May 10, 1997, Regional Synod of New York meeting, voting privileges were denied to certain delegates from the Classis of New York.

2. The Regional Synod of New York received improper evidence—its permanent committee's report referred to a summary of oral remarks of counsel for the Classis of New York which was not part of the record.

3. The Regional Synod of New York declined to receive proper evidence in that it failed to take into account precedents and provisions of the civil law.

4. There was apparent injustice in the ruling.

1. Irregularity in the Proceedings

At the May 10, 1997, meeting of the Regional Synod of New York, which adopted the recommendation of its Permanent Committee on Judicial Business, voting privileges were denied to certain delegates from the Classis of New York on the ground that these delegates had previously voted on, prepared, or conducted the case in the lower judicatory, under *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 6 which states:

> Persons who have voted on a case in a lower judicatory or who have prepared or conducted that case shall not vote upon the case in a higher judicatory.

The Classis of New York argues that Section 6 had no application, as the proceedings at the classis were not a "case in a lower judicatory." This point is well taken. Classis was acting as an assembly. The Commission on Judicial Business does not, however, recommend reversal on this ground as the parties acknowledge that the number of disenfranchised delegates was not enough to change the result of the May 10, 1997, RSNY vote.

2. Receiving Improper Evidence

In its report to the Regional Synod of New York, its Permanent Committee on Judicial Business quoted from a written summary of argument provided to the permanent committee by counsel for the classis at the permanent committee's hearing. It was not part of the record of the case.

The Commission on Judicial Business does not think this prejudiced the classis. The summary of written argument was used as an aid to the permanent committee in stating and understanding the position of the classis, which is the use for which it was intended. If counsel for the classis had not wanted it to be used, he did not need to provide it.

3. Declining to Receive Proper Evidence

In its report the Permanent Committee on Judicial Business of the Regional Synod of New York stated:

> Your committee also found that interpretation of the provisions of civil contracts or agreements or of the laws of the State of New York are outside the committee's mandate, which is to find whether "an action or a decision of an assembly or officer

of the church has violated or failed to comply with the *Book of Church Order* or other laws and regulations of the church," and recommend that the Synod of New York "confirm or reverse, in whole or in part," the action or decision of the Classis of New York, "or remand the case to it with instructions."

The Commission on Judicial Business sees no error in the above. The permanent committee stated its mandate correctly. The permanent committee did receive and consider the extensive material and arguments with respect to the Royal Charter of the Collegiate Church, its adoption by the colonial legislature and by the legislature of the State of New York, and pertinent decisions of the civil courts. RSNY's mandate, however, was not to interpret the provisions of contracts or the laws of New York, but to interpret the *Book of Church Order* or other laws of the church.

4. Manifest Injustice

The Permanent Committee on Judicial Business of the Regional Synod of New York found two procedural deficiencies. The two procedural deficiencies were: 1) the notice of the special session of the classis failed to state the purpose of the meeting, and 2) there was imprecision in the wording of the motion. However, the permanent committee did not find it necessary to act on these deficiencies in view of its conclusion that the classis had acted in contravention of *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9, by failing to accept responsibility to consider and either approve or disapprove a specific intended action of the Collegiate consistory.

a. Insufficient Notice of Meeting and Imprecision in Wording of Motion

The Rev. William Hanousek and elder Simpfendorfer-Ishmael (the complainants) alleged to the Regional Synod of New York several procedural deficiencies. The permanent committee of the regional synod rejected all but one. The permanent committee found that the notice of meeting sent to classis delegates was insufficient. It appears that the clerk *pro tem* of the classis sent the notice of meeting on October 20, 1996, and referred in the notice to "the attached motion," but no motion was attached. Thus the notice of meeting complied with the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 4, Section 2 in so far as it was sent more than ten days before the special session of classis, but the notice did not comply with the requirement in the same Section 2 that the notice state the purpose of the special session. A review of the events leading to the calling of the special session is pertinent.

The classis met in a stated session on September 24, 1996. The minutes of that meeting state the following with respect to the motion in question:

X. Old Business: Bethany/Collegiate dispute, Rev. Carolyn Holloway was asked to be clerk *pro tem*. Please refer to the enclosures for this portion of the minutes.

The enclosure states:

PROPOSAL BY REV. RENEE HOUSE:

She proposed that this Body (New York Classis) meet in a Special Committee Meeting on November 12, 1996. The issue is to decide if Collegiate Church must have permission from Classis to sell Church Property. Assuming they vote yes, the proposal is that the regular scheduled meeting for November 19, 1996 will be dedicated to the question, "Can they sell the Property."

M.S.C. with 5 abstentions.

Certainly the purpose of the November 12, 1996, special session was clear to all who attended the stated session of September 24, 1996. The location and specific agenda, including order of presentations on the motion, for the November 12, 1996, special session were determined at an October 17, 1996, meeting of the President's Council of the classis on October 17, 1996. Attending this October 17 meeting were persons associated with Bethany Memorial Reformed Church and Collegiate Church.

During this time in the fall of 1996, there was a dispute between Collegiate Church and Bethany Memorial Reformed Church over the proposed sale of the property upon which Bethany is situated. (The property is owned by Collegiate Church.) Sadly, this dispute had reached civil litigation. This dispute must have been well known throughout the classis. It is evident from the September 24, 1996, minutes of the stated session of classis that the motion to be debated at the special session of classis was connected to the Bethany property issue. The motion calling the November 12 special session of classis contemplated that if the classis determined Collegiate Church needed permission to sell church property, the classis would then at its November 19 stated session determine whether Collegiate could sell "the Property." The drafter (Renee House) of the motion to call the November 12 session did not consider it necessary to say more than "the Property," no doubt because everyone knew which property she was talking about in her motion.

In all the circumstances, the Commission on Judicial Business finds that there was no prejudice occasioned by the omission of the attachment to the notice of meeting sent October 20, 1996, to classis delegates. The commission also notes that on November 8, 1996, a second notice of meeting was sent to classis delegates. This was apparently an attempt to cure the deficiency in the notice of October 20. The second notice of meeting stated the purpose of the November 12 special session by describing the motion to be considered. However, obviously, the second notice sent on November 8 was not sent out in the time (ten days' notice of any special session) prescribed by the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 4, Section 2. Hanousek and Simpfendorfer-Ishmael mentioned in their complaint to the Regional Synod of New York that they knew of four members of classis, whom they named specifically, who did not receive the November 8 second notice of meeting. All four, however, attended the November 12 meeting in question.

The permanent committee of the Regional Synod of New York also found imprecision in the wording of the motion drafted by Renee House. This imprecision, however, did not prevent the permanent committee from interpreting the motion.

There does not appear ever to have been any controversy with respect to Collegiate Church selling property which is not "church property" as defined by *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9 that states: "real property of the church on which there stands a building designed for worship or religious instruction, or as a residence for the minister." As the permanent committee of the regional synod noted, the ambiguity in the wording of the motion ("the Property") appears to have been resolved at the November 12 special session of classis.

b. Failure of Classis to Accept its Responsibility

In its report the permanent committee of the Regional Synod of New York undertook a thorough review of the history of Collegiate Church and the relationship of the Collegiate Church to the denomination, as well as precedents of civil law that deal with Royal charters and New York State legislation. The permanent committee concluded that Collegiate's Royal Charter does not exempt it from the provisions of the *Book of Church Order*.

The Commission on Judicial Business agrees. If a church's charter prevailed over the *Book of Church Order*, there would have been no need to amend the *BCO* in 1963 (*MGS 1963*, pp. 124-25 and *MGS 1964*, p. 205) to provide that a church could elect elders in the manner prescribed by its charter. The commission does not agree, however, that the Classis of New York in its action of November 12, 1996, contravened or violated the *Book of Church Order* or failed to accept its responsibility.

First, Section 9 of Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2 of the *BCO* is located within Article 2 that deals with responsibilities of the consistory. The Collegiate Church has consistently taken the position that Section 9 does not apply to Collegiate Church because of its Royal Charter. The Collegiate Church has not asked for the approval of classis to sell church property. So on November 12, 1996, there was no request from the Collegiate Church for approval by the classis, and classis was not considering any such request. However, classis was aware that there was a dispute between two of its member churches (Bethany and Collegiate) over the sale of certain property, and classis decided to take a proactive course of action by exercising its authority of general superintendence over the interests of the churches within its bounds pursuant to *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1. In effect, the Classis of New York decided to leave the matter of the sale of church property owned by one of its churches to the consistory of that church.

The Classis of New York acted as an assembly and therefore did not have to give reasons for its action. However, the record discloses several considerations which might have motivated the decision. The classis may well have accepted Collegiate Church's position that *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9 does not apply to Collegiate. But the Commission on Judicial Business, at the September 23, 1997, hearing on this matter, was told by the classis representative that the classis was also motivated by a concern not to become involved in pending civil litigation between two of its churches. Also, the classis did not think that it had the expertise or resources required to deal with approving the sale of Collegiate Church property. Collegiate Church's property is exceptional in that it is situated on the island of Manhattan and is accordingly very valuable.

Conclusion

Whatever the reasons, the action in question by the classis was the valid exercise of a discretion that is vested in classis—the general superintendence by classis of churches (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1). The Commission on Judicial Business notes that at the November 12 special session of classis, representatives of Collegiate Church assured classis that Collegiate Church "intends always to follow the requirements of the RCA *Book of Church Order*, as and when applicable" and "to expand Christ's ministry in Manhattan and fulfill the continuing mission responsibility from Madison Avenue church by the opening of a vibrant new church on the upper East Side prior to the year 2000 using the resources unlocked from specific real estate asset holdings."

A question of pastoral judgment was before classis at the November 12, 1996, special session. Classis resolved the question.

R-3
To reverse the May 10, 1997, decision of the Regional Synod of New York and to uphold the November 12, 1996, decision of the Classis of New York. (NOT ADOPTED)

➢Following the defeat of R-3, upon a motion from the floor, synod

VOTED: To reconsider R-3

Upon a motion from the floor, synod

VOTED: To grant privilege of the floor to Thomas Liddle

Upon a motion from the floor, synod

VOTED: To adopt R-3

(Adrienne Flipse Hausch, member of the Commission on Judicial Business from the Regional Synod of New York, recused herself and did not participate in this appeal.)➢

APPENDIX

The *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5 states:

> The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory . . . prior to the next stated meeting and shall simultaneously therewith furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. Within twenty days thereafter, any party may submit to the clerk of the judicatory a written response to the committee's report. The clerk shall distribute copies of the committee's report and any responses received to the members of the judicatory.

A written response to the above Commisison on Judicial Business report was received from the Regional Synod of New York and this response follows:

RESPONSE FROM THE REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK

The Commission on Judicial Business in its report did not agree with the Regional Synod of New York's finding "that the Classis of New York in its action on November 12, 1996, contravened or violated the *Book of Church Order* or failed to accept its responsibility." The commission based its recommendation (R-3 above) "to reverse the May 10, 1997, decision of the Regional Synod of New York and to uphold the November 12, 1996, decision of the Classis of New York" on Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1 of the *Book of Church Order* which states:

> The classis shall exercise a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers and over the interests and concerns of the churches within its bounds, and shall enforce the requirements of the *Government of the Reformed Church in America.*

The Commission on Judicial Business found that "the action in question by the classis was the valid exercise of a discretion which is vested in classis—the general superintendence by classis of churches (citing the above *BCO* section).

The Regional Synod of New York responds and states that it can find in that sentence no "discretion," explicit or implied, in the mandate to "enforce the requirements of the *Government of the Reformed Church in America.*" That is a mandated responsibility which is explicit and without qualification.

The Regional Synod of New York responds and reaffirms its finding that in voting, on November 12, 1996, that the Collegiate Church does not need permission of the Classis of New York to sell church property the Classis of New York failed to enforce the requirements of Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9, of the *BCO* which reads, in part:

> The consistory shall not sell, transfer, lease, mortgage or otherwise alienate or encumber any real property of the church on which there stands a building designated for worship or religious instruction, or as a residence for a minister, unless the approval of the classis of which the church is a member has been secured.

The Classis of New York failed to enforce that requirement of the *Government of the Reformed Church in America.* The classis also apparently gave advance license to the Collegiate Church to ignore this explicit requirement of the *Government of the Reformed Church in America.*

The Commission on Judicial Business agrees with the Regional Synod of New York that Collegiate's Royal Charter does not exempt it from the provisions of the *Book of Church Order.* If a church's charter prevailed over the *Book of Church Order*, there would have been no need to amend the *BCO* in 1963 to provide that a church could elect elders in the manner prescribed by its charter (*MGS 1963*, pp. 124-25 and *MGS 1964*, p. 205). However, as the commission notes, "the Collegiate Church has consistently taken the position that Section 9 of *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2 does not apply to Collegiate Church because of its Royal Charter. The Collegiate Church has not asked for approval to sell church property."

The Regional Synod of New York holds that, were Collegiate willing to accept that this *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9, provision applies to Collegiate along with all other churches in the denomination and put a proposal before the classis for approval, this dispute could have been resolved long ago. Articles of incorporation and charters spell out corporate rights and responsibilities *vis-a-vis* the government, while a church's rights and responsibilities *vis-a-vis* the larger church are spelled out in the *Book of Church Order.* It would seem to be possible for the Classis of New York and the Collegiate Church to consider the Charter and the *Book of Church Order* as being complementary, except in instances of clear contradiction, as in the method of choosing elders and deacons. Should they feel that there are other points of contradiction, under New York State's *Religious Corporation Law,* Article 2, Section 24, the consistory can, simply by resolution recorded with the county clerk, "determine that the provisions of this chapter applying to churches of the same denomination and to the trustees thereof shall apply to such church."

Instead, the November 12, 1996, vote at the Classis of New York meeting supported the Collegiate Church's position and purported to declare that the requirement is not applicable to the Collegiate Church should it wish to sell any property covered by *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9 at any time, present or future. That section, on the contrary, exempts no particular churches, and the Regional Synod of New York contends that no classis has the power to exempt any of its churches from any explicit requirement of any section of the *Book of Church Order* simply by its own majority vote. The Regional Synod of New York found that the vote "To determine whether the Collegiate Church needs permission of Classis of New York to sell church property" exceeded the authority of a classis since it proposed conferring an exception from a clear and specific requirement of a section of the *Book of Church Order* where such an exception has, after careful consideration, not been established by vote of the General Synod and ratified by vote of the classes (which is the Reformed

Church in America's established procedure for making such decisions (*BCO, Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures*, p. 73).

The *Book of Church Order* gives great flexibility to consistories to manage most of the affairs of the local church but contains other explicit requirements of classis permission for actions of a consistory in a few instances which are considered to be of exceptional importance in the life of a church, for example (in addition to the requirement *in re* certain real property): 1) the change of the method of election of elders and deacons, 2) the issuance of calls to ministers, and 3) the dissolution of pastoral relationships.

In none of these instances, or in the instance at hand, are classes empowered to waive the requirement for certain churches. The Commission on Judicial Business seems to suggest that a classis has the discretion to grant permission to one or more of its churches not to follow such requirements. To suggest that classes have such a power, for "pastoral" or any other reasons, is to propound a novel theory; akin to an ecclesiastical version of the discredited doctrine of nullification in early nineteenth century United States history, which held that a state legislature could nullify the effect of a federal law within that state.

The Regional Synod of New York respectfully submits that, unless exemptions are specifically written into the *Book of Church Order*, procedures required of churches are required of all churches in all classes, and no classis can selectively declare a requirement to be nullified for selected churches. A classis can, of course, overture that the *Book of Church Order* be amended to include an exemption it feels desirable.

The Commission on Judicial Business notes that "the classis did not think that it had the expertise or resources required to deal with approving the sale of Collegiate Church property." Classes normally approve such requests quite routinely; in most cases approving the request, classis members voting on the bases they consider relevant and giving great respect to the judgment of the consistory which has made the request and the reasons it gives for the proposed action, without considering the burden of such a vote intolerable. The Classis of New York states that "Collegiate Church's property is exceptional in that it is situated on the island of Manhattan and is accordingly very valuable." Several of its other churches are located on the same island, and many covered church properties in many classes are also very valuable, but the *Book of Church Order* makes no exceptions on the basis of relative value. Indeed, the fact that value of covered real property is often a major part of the assets of a church is, no doubt, one reason for the *BCO*'s requirement of classis review.

The Commission on Judicial Business also notes that "at the November 12 special session of classis, representatives of the Collegiate Church assured classis that Collegiate Church intends always to follow requirements of the RCA *Book of Church Order*, as and when applicable." This goes to the heart of the issue. The Regional Synod of New York holds that *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9 is applicable to the Collegiate Church. In its report, the Commission on Judicial Business stated its agreement with this position. The Classis of New York determined the opposite, and the commission, with perplexing logic, nonetheless recommends that this determination of the classis be upheld.

The Regional Synod of New York took no position on any particular property sale within the Classis of New York and noted that a specific instance in regard to a particular property was not at issue on November 12, 1996. The decision at the Classis of New York meeting was in no way limited or specific as to what real property of the church "on which stands a building designed for worship or religious instruction or as a residence for the minister" might be effected, but, rather, made a general determination that a particular consistory is not bound by a specific requirement of the *Book of Church Order*.

The Commission on Church Order opines that, in declaring the Collegiate Church does not need permission of the Classis of New York to sell church property, the Classis of New York "resolved a question of pastoral judgment." The Regional Synod of New York submits that the Reformed Church in America, in approving *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9 four decades ago, required that consistories submit to the prayerful consideration and pastoral judgment of their fellow Christians convened as the classis, of which the church is a member, the use and possible reallocation of resources represented by the real property that congregations build or acquire for worship and/or religious instruction. Therefore the Regional Synod of New York respectfully insists that it is necessary for the Classis of New York to accept its responsibility to exercise its pastoral judgement in a constitutional way: by considering and either approving or disapproving any specific actions of the Collegiate Consistory which might be proposed, rather than declaring that the Collegiate Consistory does not need to request the approval of the classis.

The Regional Synod of New York, in response to the above Report of the Commission on Judicial Business, respectfully protests that its adoption by the General Synod would contravene the following important Reformed Church in America constitutional principles:

1. **Classes are responsible to "enforce the requirements of the *Government of the Reformed Church in America*"** (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1). The *Book of Church Order* becomes a dead letter to Reformed Church in America churches unless its requirements are enforced, even when felt to be inconvenient. In RCA polity no other assembly is in a position to call a local church's attention to its responsibilities as Reformed churches. The options of "pastoral judgment" are limited by this responsibility which is mandated upon all classes by the *Book of Church Order*.

2. **Every Reformed Church in America consistory "shall be guided in its transaction of business by such rules of order as it shall adopt from time to time, and which are in accord with the *Government of the Reformed Church in America*"** (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 4, Section 1). The consistories of all churches are equally bound, and they cannot be declared otherwise by classis action. Any exception to this principle requires a specific amendment to the *BCO*.

3. **Classes look to General Synod's interpretive actions for guidance.** It would be extremely unwise for General Synod to set a precedent of condoning the failure of a classis to enforce the requirements of the *Government of the Reformed Church in America*.

The Regional Synod of New York, in response to the above Report of the Commission on Judicial Business, respectfully requests General Synod to defeat R-3 above, and, instead, to confirm the May 10, 1997, decision of the Regional Synod of New York to "remand the matter of approving or disapproving the sale of any particular real property of a church which is a member of the Classis of New York on which stands a building designed for worship or religious instruction or as a residence for the minister to the Classis of New York with the instruction that it so approve or disapprove any particular such sale proposed to it, in accordance with Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 8 of the *Book of Church Order*."

[1] The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) uses the term "Rahab" in Ps. 87:4 as a poetic reference to Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIAN ACTION: WITNESSING IN THE SOCIAL ORDER

> *"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"* (Isa. 58:6-7).

Jesus Christ is the Lord of all creation. As Christ's followers, we are called to witness to his lordship in every area of life. CHRISTIAN ACTION deals with the church's witness in society. The Reformed Church in America addresses social issues in witness to God's just and loving intention for all creation. It is concerned with such questions as:

- How can we best witness to God's special love for the poor, the stranger, and the outcast?
- How can the church work for peace and reconciliation among peoples, races, and nations?
- How does our discipleship to Jesus Christ shape the way we treat those who are needy, different, angry, or broken?
- How do we bring the message of God's justice and love to institutions, governments, and places of power?
- What guidance can the church offer for complex ethical issues facing Christians in modern society?
- How is God calling us to care for creation?

The General Synod of 1990 adopted "Building the Church for the 21st Century" as the directional statement for the RCA for the 1990s (*MGS 1990*, R-15, pp. 350-53). A portion of that statement reads:

> We will serve the gracious reign of Christ for the sake of justice, peace, freedom, and the care of God's creation.
>
> In obedience to our Lord's command, we seek Christ's kingdom and its righteousness. In fellowship with Christ we choose to

identify ourselves more and more with the needy, the suffering, and the oppressed; seeking justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God. By God's grace we will be peacemakers, and trust-keepers, faithful stewards of God's good earth.

Major responsibility for CHRISTIAN ACTION is assigned to the General Synod Commission on Christian Action, the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee, the Office of Social Witness, and the four racial/ethnic councils.

Report of the Commission on Christian Action

The Commission on Christian Action met November 7-8, 1997, at the United Methodist Building in Washington, D.C., and February 13-14, 1998, at the Interchurch Center in New York City.

A CALL TO RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

At an October 1997 news conference before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Justice Fellowship released its *1997 Criminal Justice Index*. This comprehensive index evaluates and ranks the crisis level of crime and the problems of correction systems in every state in the United States, revealing that most states spend too much money on revolving-door prisons and too little on healing victims and communities injured by crime.

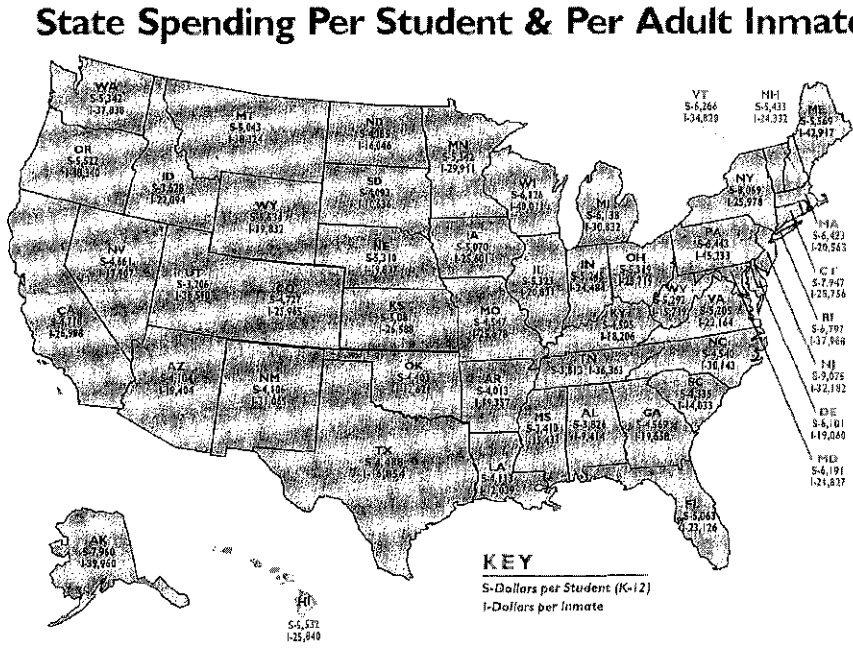
Justice Fellowship president Pat Nolan said:

> The bottom line is that we have a crisis in our criminal justice system nationwide. We challenge the attorney general of each state to spend the same energies and resources on reforming their criminal justice system as they have dedicated to negotiating a tobacco settlement. Our citizens, families, and communities deserve no less.

Charles Colson, the founder of Justice Fellowship, comments:

> The signs of the crisis are that we spend about five times more on incarceration than on schools, and incarceration costs have increased 700 percent since 1985, yet these staggering costs have not bought us lower recidivism, better victim compensation, or safer communities.

The cost to the taxpayer rises astronomically. And while the economic cost should capture our attention, it is the waste of human resources that should capture our collective conscience. The average cost per prisoner per year of $20,000 to $30,000 is comparable to tuition costs at Ivy League colleges and a generous package for Hope, Central, or Northwestern! "It is a startling fact," reports Justice Fellowship president Pat Nolan, "that most states spend more than five times the amount per prisoner than they spend educating their children." In spite of these high expenditures there is a disappointing 74 percent recidivism. Although the crime rate is declining in most cases, the voting public has by-and-large continued to support policies that have proven ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst.



Figures are for 1996. Source: Education figures from National Center for Education Statistics, 1996 Inmate figures from the 1996 Corrections Yearbook.

Alternatives to imprisonment would certainly save money. In 1980, with 330,000 people incarcerated in state and federal prisons, the cost was $1.5 billion. Today, with 1.5 million persons in prison, the cost is a staggering $20 billion for operating expenses and another $20 billion for construction expenses.

According to the Bureau of Justice the average annual custodial vs. noncustodial costs for 1996 are:

Custodial Costs		Noncustodial Costs (Probation)	
Halfway house	$12,494	Interactive supervision	$2,292
Jail	$14,363	Community service	$2,759
Prison	$17,794	Day reporting	$2,781
Boot camp	$23,707	House arrest	$402
		Electronic monitoring	$2,011

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS OF CRIME?

All of us are the victims of crime in varying degrees. Obviously, the individuals hurt—physically, emotionally, and materially—by the criminal act are victims in the first instance. In addition, the prosecution of a crime too often dehumanizes the victims into "evidence" and fails to recognize their needs for knowledge, support, involvement, or recovery from loss, resulting in what is correctly called "the re-victimizing of the victim."

The adversarial nature of our justice system often reduces the criminal to a person described totally by his or her crime. The process not only dehumanizes the victim but demonizes the perpetrator. The criminal becomes a larger-than-life enemy rather than a member of the human community, who, while in need of correction, also needs support, guidance, love and forgiveness. A prison for youthful offenders was referred to by one government official as a "punk prison," the kind of name-calling that encourages us to deny any human potential and any redemptive possibilities in young offenders. Dealing with them as "outsiders" to the human community, we condemn them to become the products of our rejection, fear, and neglect.

"NIMBY" (not in my back yard) is too often the response to any proposed halfway house where decompression and restoration to the community can take place. So the offender is often subjected to the burden of a crime that is never paid. The institutionalized rejection and separation at the time of sentence gets reinforced during incarceration and is then perpetuated by the challenge to overcome inhospitable attitudes about community correction centers and discrimination in the workplace. Such rejection and separation nurture many stereotypes, and as a result in our relationship with offenders and ex-offenders, fear often supplants compassion and faith.

Also to be noted is that in 1996 the ratio of African-Americans in the criminal justice system surpassed 50 percent while African-Americans represent only 12 percent of the general population. Thirty-three percent of African-American males aged 20-29 are caught up in the criminal justice system (*Church and Society*, March/April 1997). Unemployment among Hispanics is 50 percent higher than the national average. One-third of the Native American population is living in poverty. Apparently recognizing a correlation between poverty and incarceration, Diana McClure, a promoter of private, for-profit prisons, assured investors that the current political trends are good for the prison industry. Privatized prisons, in her opinion, represent an excellent investment, because "reduced [welfare] entitlements will result in increased referrals (to prison)" (*Washington Memo,* January-February 1998).

When human misery is seen as a sign of hope for capital gain, one can understand the oppressiveness experienced by offenders. They too, see themselves as the victims of many overwhelming forces.

WHERE DID WE GO WRONG?

We became lost when we turned away from the idea of crime as an offense against the Sovereign King of the Universe and against the sister or brother next to us, to crime as an offense again the "sovereign state." Daniel Van Ness of Justice Fellowship, in his book, *Crime and Its Victims,* describes clearly how King Henry of England replaced God and neighbor as the victims of crime, with the king as the offended party. In 1611 William the Conqueror's son, Henry I, issued *Leges Henrici,* naming certain offenses as "against the king's peace." We have democratized this process to a depersonalized "The State vs. n__."

We need to rediscover our biblical roots and seek the peace (or shalom) not merely of the king or of the state, but with the Sovereign God and the people wounded by crime. A crucial reality was lost when the shift was made to offenses against the rules of the state from offenses against a relationship with God and neighbor. Healing and restoration cannot take place when we seek only to satisfy the justice of the state while isolating and insulating the parties whose relationship to each other has been broken.

WHERE CAN WE GO RIGHT?

When God's majesty and love are offended by crimes that break relationships, consequences may certainly include punishment, but not without efforts for restoration and shalom. We are

called to seek God's shalom through restitution (owed to the victim and not the state), community service, and treatment and training for the offender. Restitution, rather than unrelenting retribution, is the goal. (The Hebrew word, *shillum*, the root word for *shalom*, is the very word for restitution.)

Restorative justice is rooted deeply in the Bible. Retributive justice in the Bible finds its boundaries in "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19) and "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged" (Matt. 7:1). God gets the last word in punishment and those deserving it. More often than not, the word *justice* in the Bible refers not to retribution, but to distribution; not to the meting out of punishment, but to the proper sharing of all that is necessary for life. The Bible speaks much more of justice for the poor, the widow, and the orphan, than it does of "bringing the criminal to justice."

The reconciliation and restoration of the offender is at the heart of the gospel message. God, who in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor. 5:19). The mission in which the church joins with Christ in the world is that of a call to a cleansing confession of sin and a healing proclamation of salvation in the God who wills that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). This forgiveness and wholeness are graciously offered to all whose lives are broken by criminal deeds and those left embittered by the effects of those deeds. Our concern to see that "justice is done" in biblical terms is not to seek to punish the offender but to make right what is wrong, to heal those who have been hurt, to reconcile those who are estranged, and to restore the offender to the community.

The rediscovery of restoration is rooted in obeying the first commandment to love God totally, and the second, to love our neighbor as ourself. Offense, or crime, occurs when relationships are violated or broken. When the person committing a crime is made the central focus, God and neighbor are made peripheral. In a restorative justice system, a loving relationship, mended and healed, is uppermost. Retribution asks: What laws have been broken? Who did it? What punishment (pain) does he or she deserve? Restorative justice, by contrast, asks: Who has been hurt? What are their needs? Whose obligation are they? Reforming our systems based on this restorative approach will lead to procedures that are less polarized and politicized by fear, and more driven by faith that yields the fruits of shalom.

In summary, restorative justice:

1. Understands that crime is primarily an offense against divine/human relationships and secondarily is a violation of a law.

2. Recognizes that crime is wrong (a violation of persons and relationships) and that there are potential dangers as well as opportunities after crimes are committed.

3. Encourages a process to "make things as right as possible," to attend to victim and community needs resulting from the crime, and to offender needs related to the cause of the crime.

4) Recognizes the important and vital role of the community, and especially the community of faith.

Retribution	Restoration
Blame-fixing is central	Problem-solving is central
Focus on the past	Focus on the future
Needs are secondary	Needs are primary

Retribution	Restoration
Battle model: adversarial	Dialogue is normative
Emphasizes differences	Searches for commonalities
Imposition of pain considered normative	Restoration and reparation considered normative
One social injury added to another	Emphasis on repair and healing of social injuries
Harm done by offender balanced by harm done to the offender	Harm by offender balanced by making it right
Focus on offender: victim ignored	Victim's needs central
State and offender are key elements	Victim and offender are key elements
Victims lack information	Information provided to victims
Restitution is rare	Restitution is normal
Victim's "truth" secondary	Victims given a chance to tell their truth
Victim's suffering ignored	Victim's suffering lamented and validated
Offender is passive	Offender is given a role in the solution
State monopoly on response to wrongdoing	Victim, offender, and community roles recognized
Offender has no responsibility for resolution	Offender has responsibility for resolution
Outcomes encourage offender irresponsibility	Responsible behavior encouraged
Rituals of personal denunciation and exclusion perpetuated	Rituals of lament and reordering are introduced.
Offender is denounced	Harmful act is denounced.
Offender's ties to community weakened	Offender's integration into community increases
Offender seen in fragments, offense seen as definitional	Offender viewed holistically
Sense of balance through retribution	Sense of balance through restitution
Balance righted by lowering offender	Balance righted by raising both victim and offender
Justice tested by intent and process	Justice tested by its "fruits"
Victim-offender relationships ignored	Victim-offender relationships central
Process alienates	Process aims at reconciliation
Response based on offender's past behavior	Response based on consequences of offender's behavior
Proxy professions are the key actors	Victim and offender are central with professional help available
Ignores social, economic, and moral context of behavior	Total context is relevant
Assumes a win-lose outcome	Makes possible win-win outcomes

The morning after the break-in at our church—a break-in that resulted in almost $100,000 worth of damage—20 people stood in a circle, holding hands and praying. We stood in the middle of a scene that resembled the aftermath of a tornado. A News 8 camera crew waited for us in the entry, along with reporters from two area newspapers. We prayed for God's peace. We prayed for the person(s) who were responsible for the damage. We prayed that God would bring good out of this senseless act of vandalism. And we thanked God for the reminder that we are not exempt from the violence and chaos that engulfed our world. It was a defining moment for our congregation. We consciously decided that we were going to seize this opportunity to show to our community the grace of God.

In all of the interviews that followed we stressed our concern for the person(s) responsible for the break-in. We never talked about restitution or revenge. I think that is mostly because we were not thinking in those terms. All of the reporters picked up on this, and every account stressed the concern Beechwood had for the individual(s) who had turned their church upside-down. At every service and meeting we consciously prayed for God's grace to show through our actions. And, of course, it did!

A few months later two seventeen-year-olds were arrested and charged. Both were high school dropouts. They had been drinking that night, and once they got into the building, they lost control and went wild. They stole a silver-plated shovel and a hand-made butterfly quilt. The quilt had been made by the children of our church. They smashed computers and printers, but passed up $50 in cash that was sitting in plain sight.

Shortly after their arrest, both sets of parents called me. I invited them to come to see me. They did. They were very sorry and deeply ashamed. One of the young men came to see me as well. He was contrite. I prayed with each of them.

The chair of our deacons and I wrote letters to the judge on behalf of the young men. The judge later said that these letters were the primary reason he did not send the two young men to jail. One young man began to attend our church. He has since stopped but has remained in contact with me. Once a month he'll show up to talk. He did some of his community service here but ran into a conflict with our custodian and had to finish somewhere else. Even that conflict was handled with grace as we worked with the probation officer to bring healthy closure to his work here.

I have conducted weddings for a brother and a sister of the other young man, the one who has never directly apologized for his actions. He was in the wedding party for both weddings. He and I had several conversations, but never in any depth. On occasion the two couples that I married show up at church.

God has brought much good out of the violence done to this congregation. Our people feel good about the way our church handled this situation. They like hearing others in the community speak well of us for having taken the "high road."

Both young men have graduated from high school and are working in the community. Since their trouble here they seem to be on a better road themselves. Perhaps this road will eventually lead them to God. It did so for us!

The Rev. Marlin Vis, pastor
Beechwood Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan

Resources:

Restorative Justice: Making Things Right (video produced by the Mennonite Central Committee).

Restoring Justice (a five-part video produced by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and aired on NBC. Available from TRAVARCA.

RCA Office of Social Witness, 475 Riverside Drive, 18th Floor, New York, NY 10115; (212) 870-3020.

Restore, 1010 North Westnedge, Kalamazoo, MI 49007.

Justice Fellowship, P.O. Box 97103, Washington, D.C. 20077-7340.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Criminal Justice Program, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202; (502) 569-5810.

"The Church and the Criminal Justice System," *Church & Society,* Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), March/April 1997.

R-1.
To call on RCA congregations to embrace the biblical mandates reflecting a call to restorative justice: to proclaim freedom to the prisoners (Luke 4:18); to lift up the surprised sheep, of whom Jesus said, "I was in prison and you visited me" (Matt. 25:36); to affirm the solidarity with the saints exhorted to "remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them" (Heb. 13:3); to affirm the humanity of those who are imprisoned by obeying the law to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39); and to follow Jesus into a lost and broken world he loves so much." (ADOPTED)

R-2.
To pause for a time of prayer for those in prison and for those who have been the victims of crime.

A Daily Prayer for Justice and Mercy

Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit:
Give us your compassion for those in prison.
Mend in mercy the broken in mind and memory.
Soften the hard heart, the captives of anger.
Free the innocent; parole the trustworthy.
Awaken the repentance that restores people.
May prisoners' families persevere in their love.

Jesus,
Heal the victims of crime. They live with the scars.
Lift to eternal peace those who die.
Grant victims' families the forgiveness that heals.
Give wisdom to lawmakers and to those who judge.
Instill prudence and patience in those who guard.
Make those in prison ministry bearers of your light
for we are all in need of your mercy! Amen.
(The National Prison Prayer Crusade of the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association/Prison Ministries) (ADOPTED)

R-3.
To direct the RCA Distribution Center to make available copies of this paper, "A Call to Restorative Justice;" and further,

to encourage RCA congregations to study this paper and the criminal justice practices in their communities, giving special attention to dispositional options (e.g. deferred prosecution, probation, community service, etc.) within the criminal justice system, emphasizing the benefits of the restorative justice alternatives. (ADOPTED)

R-4.
To direct the minister for social witness and the RCA Distribution Center/TRAVARCA to make available additional study resources to assist congregations in implementing restorative justice ministries in their communities. (ADOPTED)

R-5.
To request each RCA board of deacons to lead congregations in:

1. **Discovering and understanding the criminal justice system in their communities by organizing workshops, panels, symposia, and/or visits to correctional facilities.**

2. **Reaching out to those who are in any way involved in or affected by the criminal justice system, such as correctional staff, offenders, victims, families, and friends.**

3. **Providing forums where those involved in the criminal justice system can tell their stories, express their needs, and offer their gifts in formulating helpful and healing responses. (ADOPTED)**

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-6.
To instruct the Commission on Christian Action to address the root causes that lead people into the criminal justice system, identify ministries that address these causes, and report to the General Synod of 2000. (NOT ADOPTED)≺

WELFARE REFORM

The 1997 General Synod adopted a series of recommendations regarding welfare reform *(MGS 1997,* p. 96-98). Several of the recommendations were addressed to RCA diaconal ministries and to the Office of Social Witness. (See also the Report of the Office of Social Witness in this Christian Action section.) The General Synod instructed the commission "to prepare a paper on the effects of welfare reform, addressing how the church can respond most effectively to new welfare reform laws" *(MGS 1997,* R-10, p. 97). A further recommendation urging RCA members to write state legislators and governors advocating for certain provisions in state welfare policies (*MGS 1997,* R-11, p. 97) was referred back to the Commission on Christian Action for research and development of an additional list of concerns and actions to guide RCA members and congregations in living up to their responsibilities to the poor and the vulnerable *(MGS 1997,* p. 98). The Commission on Christian Action was instructed to incorporate both lists of concerns into its paper on the effects of welfare reform, for report to the 1998 General Synod *(MGS 1997,* p. 98).

In response to the above General Synod directives, the Office of Social Witness sent letters to the classes stated clerks asking them to identify at least one ministry (and the name and address of a contact person) that serves the poor. Those ministries identified were in turn contacted by the Office of Social Witness and asked to share information about their work and about the effects of welfare reform. All responses received to date are available in the Office of Social Witness. The commission encourages those classes that have not yet responded, or those ministries or congregations that have not been contacted and have information to share, to contact the Office of Social Witness. Information about such ministries can serve as helpful models to other congregations. Some of the types of ministries in which RCA congregations and members are engaged are:

Community/church-based program for ex-offenders.

A housing finance model that allows low income individuals to build equity while paying no interest.

A computer center staffed by one full-time staff person, volunteer teens, and retired folks.

Supportive, spiritually based programs for persons released from prison or foster care.

Donation of meat from local livestock producers to soup kitchens.

Community clothing shop, used furniture shop, and food pantry for the poor.

Time Out program for poor mothers.

School supplies for the poor.

Income tax assistance for the working poor.

Funds from a clothing outlet to support local endeavors like playgrounds, day care, boys clubs, and girls clubs; as well as to assist individuals on a one-time basis with emergency needs such as rent and transportation.

Church, community, and government pilot programs.

Summer vacation Bible camp for homeless single mothers, funded in part by city and church.

Preparing nutritious lunches for migrant workers and advocating for promised pay and benefits for them.

Many of the ministries contacted also reported that needs at food kitchens and pantry programs have increased; cash assistance for large numbers of poor people has been painfully inadequate; many welfare recipients are overwhelmed with the challenges of finding jobs; and the number of evictions and utility shut-offs has drastically increased.

Many of the programs, agencies, and congregations that responded have a wealth of wisdom and information to share about creative and effective ministry. For the purposes of this report the commission cites two examples:

1. **"Project Zero" in Ottawa County, Michigan,** is a program that assists welfare recipients making the transition from dependency to self-sufficiency. State government and community agencies work together to forge partnerships to reach this goal. A faith-based organization called Good Samaritan Ministries is an umbrella group of local church volunteers committed to empowering struggling families who are motivated to become self-sufficient. Provided services include practical help, mentoring/skill development, and social and emotional support. Spiritual support is available, as requested and appropriate.

2. A research project that can serve as a model for monitoring the effects of welfare reform is the **Siouxland Association for Public Justice Welfare Reform Project** in northwest Iowa. Its goals are:

a. To investigate the current situation in Iowa regarding charitable choice, in light of the research and advocacy work done by the Center for Public Justice.

b. To investigate the impact of welfare reform in northwest Iowa.

c. To call upon citizens and organizations (churches) to pursue justice by promoting charitable choice and by addressing the problems of those who are negatively affected by welfare reform.

d. To focus attention on issues of poverty and welfare reform in the 1998 elections.

In sum, the church's ministry with the poor in light of the new welfare policies can (and should) take a variety of forms. Some ministries focus on meeting immediate, emergency needs. Many RCA congregations are involved in or support food pantries, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters. Also important are those ministries that provide more long-term support for those individuals and families who are struggling to become less dependent on welfare programs. Often this involves Christians who are willing to make significant commitments as teachers, counselors, and mentors, and congregations who can provide a network of supportive relationships for people in need.

Finally, the state continues to have an important responsibility and role in protecting the most vulnerable in society. Part of the church's witness, then, is to advocate for government policies that are just, compassionate, and effective. Reformed theologian John deGruchy, writing about Calvin's understanding of the roles of the church and of the state with regard to the poor, notes:

> The church's diaconal responsibility was not intended, then, to let the state off the hook; on the contrary, the proclamation of the gospel and the commandment of God within the public sphere was intended to remind those in authority about their responsibility under God to those in their political care. Central to this responsibility, and thus the substance of many of Calvin's sermons, was the conviction that a just and well-regulated government will be distinguished for maintaining the rights of the poor and afflicted *(Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1991, pp. 250-251).

R-7.
To encourage local Reformed Church in America diaconates to continue to cooperate with local agencies and congregations in meeting the needs of those most severely affected by welfare reform. (ADOPTED)

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-8:

R-8.
To urge Reformed Church in America members to write state legislators, governors, and other appropriate public officials, advocating for welfare policies that:

1. **Ensure that all eligible people, particularly children, receive assistance. State Plans should assure that families qualifying for assistance receive it and are not turned away or placed on waiting lists. When necessary, a state should provide state funds to protect those people denied federally funded benefits.**

2. **Provide adequate benefits. States should define minimum benefit levels below which low-income people are not allowed to fall. These benefits should be adequate to provide a decent standard of living.**

3. **Create family-sustaining jobs. Requiring people to work means that states should create jobs that pay a livable wage and do not displace present workers. Programs should eliminate barriers to employment and provide child care, transportation, education, training, and other services that make participation feasible.**

4. **Exclude no child. State plans should acknowledge the responsibility of both government and parents in seeking the well-being of children. No child should be excluded from receiving benefits available to other siblings because of being born while the mother was on welfare or unmarried or under age eighteen. No child should be completely removed from the safety net because of a parent's failure to fulfill agreements with the government. No child should be excluded because his or her parent is not a U.S. citizen.**

5. **Provide adequate funding to help people move out of poverty. Programs designed to help people move out of poverty cost more in the short term. Therefore, states should increase their own welfare funding.**

Reason:

To further clarify the welfare policies we are urging states to adopt.≺

➢Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-8, synod:

VOTED: To add a new point #1 which reads:

1. **Enable as many welfare recipients as possible to achieve self-sufficiency and to delete the word ~~eligible~~ and inserting the words people in need in the original paragraph #1≺**

➢Synod then:

VOTED: To adopt R-8 as amended. The amended motion to read as follows:

To urge Reformed Church in America members to write state legislators, governors, and other apropriate public officials, advocating for welfare policies that:

1. **Enable as many welfare recipients as possible to achieve self-sufficiency Ensure that all ~~eligible~~ people in need, particularly children, receive assistance. State Plans should assure that families qualifying for assistance receive it and are not turned away or placed on waiting lists. When necessary, a state should provide state funds to protect those people denied federally funded benefits.**

2. **Provide adequate benefits.** States should define minimum benefit levels below which low-income people are not allowed to fall. These benefits should be adequate to provide a decent standard of living.

3. **Create family-sustaining jobs.** Requiring people to work means that states should create jobs that pay a livable wage and do not displace present workers. Programs should eliminate barriers to employment and provide child care, transportation, education, training, and other services that make participation feasible.

4. **Exclude no child.** State plans should acknowledge the responsibility of both government and parents in seeking the well-being of children. No child should be excluded from receiving benefits available to other siblings because of being born while the mother was on welfare or unmarried or under age eighteen. No child should be completely removed from the safety net because of a parent's failure to fulfill agreements with the government. No child should be excluded because his or her parent is not a U.S. citizen.

5. **Provide adequate funding to help people move out of poverty.** Programs designed to help people move out of poverty cost more in the short term. Therefore, states should increase their own welfare funding.

BRINGING RACISM TO LIGHT FOR A DECADE FREED FROM RACISM

> A movement toward the long-term goal of a "colorblind" society, the deconstruction of racism, does not mean that we become "neutral" about the continuing significance of race in American life (Marable, 1995, p. 89).

The African-American Council of the Reformed Church in America asked the Commission on Christian Action to prepare a paper on affirmative action and equality of opportunity for presentation to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, R-11, p. 105). Our society is in the midst of such rapid change in both attitudes toward and practice of affirmative action that it is difficult to prepare a paper on the subject that will still be current when General Synod meets in June 1998. Nevertheless, the commission has tried to summarize some of the history of affirmative action, its strengths, and the reasons for its current rejection by some.

In the process, and as a result of further conversation with representatives of the African-American Council, the Council for Hispanic Ministries, and the Council for Pacific and Asian-American Ministries, the commission found deeper issues regarding race in America, issues of which both the need for affirmative action and the debate about it may be regarded as symptoms. Those issues are included with this paper because that seems to be the spirit of the original request. The Commission on Christian Action would like to thank the African-American Council for stimulating us to study this issue. We hope that what we have produced will be useful to the African-American Council and to the Reformed Church in America.

LISTENING AND SPEAKING ABOUT RACE

An intense discussion about race is happening in North America. Is it a fact that *Race Matters*[1] as a central reality in North American life or is there now a *Declining Significance of Race*[2]? Think about the theory and practice of affirmative action, for example. Is affirmative action

an unjust and corrupting "naked racial preference,"[3] or is it the case that "completely scrapping affirmative action would halt decades of progress in opening up opportunity to all Americans?"[4] Even to decide what role race actually plays for Americans, we have to talk about race with one another in an open and honest way. In his recent book *Racial Healing,* Harlon L. Dalton says that "tangled emotions and inexplicable behavior are the inevitable by-products to our nation's unresolved racial past" (Dalton, 1995, p. 3). He urges Americans to "confront one another, take risks, make ourselves vulnerable, put pride aside, say all the things we are not supposed to say in mixed company—in short, put on the table all of our fears, trepidations, wishes and hopes" because we will never achieve racial healing unless we do (Dalton, p. 4).

This paper is not meant as the final word on the issues it discusses but the beginning of a long-term conversation. The paper is written from the limited perspective of the members of the Commission on Christian Action with the hope that it will be a beginning word that brings the wide range of views in the denomination to bear on the question of racism, a challenging word that stimulates the process of eliminating racial division both inside the Reformed Church in America and outside its walls, and a useful word as the denomination thinks through the challenges of its new mission statement, especially the stirring phrase, "Imagine hurts being healed, the lost being found, the hungry being fed, peace healing brokenness, hope replacing despair, lives transformed by the love of Jesus Christ" (*MGS 1997*, p. 79).

Biblical Anchor #1: Identifying with Joseph's Brothers

> Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died. 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today" (Gen. 50:15-20).

The end of the story of Joseph is a happy one. Although the brothers sold Joseph into slavery, and although he suffered much, as slaves do, Joseph and his brothers are reunited in love at the end. The brothers aren't completely transformed yet—they still think they have to lie their way into Joseph's good graces with a little story about their father's wishes. Joseph sees through the lie to the remarkable truth, a truth that comes to all of us again and again if we only look. At some point, we are all the oppressive brothers in need of forgiveness. But what we intend for harm, God intends for good. At times we are all also Joseph, but can we forgive even being sold into slavery? Identification with both the brothers and with Joseph is necessary as we think about the ways race has functioned to divide our society.

The Commission on Christian Action asks the people of the Reformed Church in America to consider the possibility that God is calling this denomination to help bring God's good out of the harm of racism. Across the spectrum of American political life, people are beginning to talk more freely about the problems of race in our society. A series of publicly visible events have marked this renewed thought about the place of race in our society, beginning perhaps in the fall of 1995 with the "Million Man March." In late summer 1997, President Clinton announced "One America in the 21st Century: The President's Initiative on Race" and formed an advisory board for the initiative to inquire what might be done to improve race relations in the United States. At about the same time, Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney announced his hope that, through the faithful actions of members of Promise Keepers, it will be possible by the year 2000 to declare that "the giant of racism is dead in the church of Jesus Christ" (Maxwell, 1997, p. 62).

A considerable Dutch heritage continues to help shape the Reformed Church in America; yet it is a vitally diverse denomination, enriched by congregations of many racial and ethnic backgrounds. The RCA has strong racial/ethnic councils that contribute to our understanding of one another and could do even more. Most importantly, we have thousands of people in the Reformed Church in America who fall down before God every week, asking for and receiving God's forgiveness. What a special opportunity the RCA has to listen, to speak, and to act together to bring God's healing to racial relations in North America!

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN THE WORKPLACE

A predominant focus of the discussion of race in America in the late 1990s is affirmative action. Newscasters, politicians, employers, and college deans, as well as ordinary job-seekers and applicants to education programs are asking questions like:

> What exactly is affirmative action anyway?
>
> Are there compelling reasons why race or gender should continue to be a consideration in hiring or admission to a school or college?
>
> Is opposition to affirmative action actually a demonstration of a commitment to equality for all the races?
>
> Don't people become stigmatized by being hired or admitted as part of an affirmative action program?
>
> Isn't it best simply to be colorblind in our policies?
>
> Can we be colorblind, given the history and continued prevalence of racism in America?

These are deep and important questions that cannot be given the full treatment they deserve in so short a paper as this one. The Commission on Christian Action has had to be content with a summary of the issues in hopes that the summary will stimulate further reading and thinking on the part of those who read it.

"Affirmative action" is not a specific law or even a set of laws passed at a certain time to address the problem of unequal opportunity. Instead, presidential orders; voluntary and mandated administrative practices at many businesses, municipalities, and schools; and court decisions over many different years have shaped the body of practice called affirmative action. A definition by the United States Commission on Civil Rights identifies affirmative action as:

> a contemporary term that encompasses any measure, beyond simple termination of a discriminatory practice, that permits the consideration of race, national origin, sex, or disability, along with other criteria, and which is adopted to provide opportunities to a class of qualified individuals who have either historically or actually been denied those opportunities and/or to prevent the recurrence of discrimination in the future (Shelton, 1996, p. 8).

Put simply, affirmative action is the collection of actions growing from the belief that overcoming the effects of racism requires effort.[5]

Although the flurry of activity and discussion surrounding affirmative action in 1997 might suggest that it is a relatively recent set of policies, affirmative action is not new. All U.S. presidents, beginning with Franklin Roosevelt in 1941, have issued executive orders

mandating policies to ensure equal employment opportunity for Americans regardless of race. Roosevelt's executive order regarding hiring by defense contractors established the precedent of positive government action in the matter of employment opportunity. Employers were monitored to assure that they were not discriminating (Taylor, 1989, pp. 21-23; Marable, 1995, p. 82). Similar executive orders came from other presidents, most notably Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, who greatly expanded the scope of affirmative action programs; and President Ronald Reagan, who attempted to find ways of making affirmative action voluntary.

In all these programs the basic idea was and is that centuries of discrimination against women, African-Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans cannot be easily overcome. Effort and good faith are necessary because even at our best we are in a web of social interactions that make it easy to discriminate. As a director at a college affirmative action office explains:

> [Affirmative action] is an employer doing something to remedy the effects of past discrimination against women, minority group members, persons with disabilities, the veteran. This action is more than hiring a few more Blacks or women to meet a goal. Affirmative action is a mandate to employers to first discover the barriers to employment of those under represented in the workforce and then to remove those barriers (Holloway, 1989, p. 18).

"Classical affirmative action" (American Psychological Association, 1995, p. 2) requires that employers study the people they are hiring or admitting to see if they match the availability of qualified people. There need be no question of mandating how many people of various groups must be hired ("quotas") nor of setting aside a certain proportion of jobs for one group or another. The requirement is to act in such a way that discrimination can be detected and avoided. This requires record-keeping over a period of time for the detection of patterns of bias and a commitment to change in order to avoid bias.

Often the commitment takes the form of a plan of action. For example, if a company found that they were hiring far fewer qualified African-Americans or Latinos than were in the labor pool, they would have reason to ask why. A study of employment practices might show that most of the people being hired learned about the job through informal contacts with people already in the company. In such a case, an affirmative action would be to advertise where African-Americans or Latinos would be more likely to see the advertisement and use other forms of recruitment to counter the tendency of the informal network to be biased. Often the plan includes numerical guidelines—just as business plans, investment plans, and other kinds of plans contain guidelines so there is something to measure against.

The courts have been active in considering affirmative action programs and measuring them against constitutional and legal requirements, but they have not always appeared consistent in their rulings. Still, certain broad principles of affirmative action have emerged from court decisions (Newman, 1989, pp. 42-46).[6] Plans are more likely to withstand court scrutiny if they are remedial in nature, limited in duration, and consider the rights of those not benefited. Because of these decisions by the courts, certain kinds of affirmative action plans are not lawful—those that include set quotas or set-asides for a particular group, and those that allow an unqualified applicant to receive benefits over a qualified one.

Affirmative action is an imperfect attempt to recognize that some people suffer bias because of their gender, race, or disability when seeking employment or admission to a school. It is imperfect as all institutions are imperfect, subject to misuse or clumsy administration by some, exploitation perhaps by others; and yet it has also been of great benefit in increasing access for women and racial/ethnic people. Companies such as AT&T, IBM, Levi Strauss, and Sears Roebuck, who adopted affirmative action plans, saw a decided increase in African-

American employment and promotion. Racial/ethnic representation improved also in occupations that had poor records of employing African-Americans, such as steel workers, fire fighters, and police officers (Ezorsky, 1991, p. 48; Shelton, 1996, pp. 10-11).

Critics of affirmative action frequently argue that our society should be "colorblind" in matters of employment and admission to schools. They object strenuously to programs that take race into account because they believe that these programs violate the important concept of equal treatment under the law. But several important questions arise in considering this argument. Chief among them is whether equality of opportunity is achievable if everyone is treated the same. This would be true only if everyone were the same. People in wheelchairs do not have equal access to an education in a school with no ramps. People who are regarded as inferior by their prospective employer do not have equal opportunity in a supposedly colorblind situation. The whole point of affirmative action is that we are not a color blind society. Thus, treating the situation as if color bias did not exist is inherently unfair. This question of whether color bias is significant will be the subject of the rest of this paper.

A SYMPTOM OF A DEEPER PROBLEM

Heated though this controversy about affirmative action is, and important though it is, it is but one facet, one symptom, of a deep problem in North America, the issue of race and racism. The substance of the rest of this paper may be summarized in this way:

> One reason it is difficult to discuss race may be exactly because race is a central issue—people of different races may experience our life together very differently. The existence of racism may be clearly perceived by those who suffer its effects while eluding almost entirely those people who appear to benefit. We need to find ways to discover our own participation in racism and deal with it, whether that participation is quite unintended or not. Only then will we be able to construct a truly egalitarian alternative to affirmative action.

WHAT IS RACISM?

The words "racism" and "racist" are used in many different ways. Often these different usages contribute to the difficulty of discussing problems related to racism. Sometimes, for example, the term is used as an insult rather than an aid in mutual communication. One condition for finding a place where people can talk to one another about race is to agree on a definition of racism that contributes to the discussion.

Many different definitions have been proposed, but most agree that "racism" is not exactly the same thing as "prejudice." Prejudice involves attitudes and beliefs, and so does racism, but racism also involves actions (Ponterotto and Pedersen, 1993, pp. 10-15; Feagin and Vera, 1995, pp. ix-xi, 7-9; Smith, 1995, pp. 29-35). Some do not make this distinction (Brown, 1995, pp. 3-9; Young-Bruehl, 1996, pp. 2-6), but it is a helpful one to make because it gives us a more precise way to talk about the issues.

Prejudice, then, is "a feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on actual experience" (Allport, 1979, p. 6); and "ethnic prejudice," the kind discussed in this paper, is "an antipathy based on a false and inflexible generalization. It may be directed toward a group as a whole or toward an individual because he is a member of that group" (Allport, p. 9). Prejudice involves feelings and incomplete or false information that is applied to people simply because of some characteristic they have—skin color or language or religion, for example.

Racism is another matter. Although racism often (but not always) involves prejudice, racism includes an action. Many definitions have been developed along these lines. Here are three useful definitions that are representative:

1. Racism is "any behavior or pattern that systematically tends to deny access to opportunities or privilege to one social group while perpetuating privilege to members of another group" (C.R. Ridley, quoted in Ponterotto and Pedersen, 1993, p. 12).

2. Racism is "the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over it" (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, pp. 3-4).

3. "Racism consists of culturally acceptable ideas, beliefs and attitudes that serve to sustain the racial pecking order" (Dalton, 1995, p. 93).

The crucial distinction between prejudice and racism is action. Notice also, that especially the first two definitions of racism say nothing about motivation. If anyone acts in such a way as to prevent equal access to opportunity, then that is racism, no matter how innocent the intentions. This is not to say that all racism is innocent or that any racism is benign, but racism is often so deeply a part of culture that it can occur without one's willing it. That brings us to other distinctions that need to be made about racism. The distinction between individual and institutional racism is:

> **Individual racism** is the harmful behavior of one person or a small group of people. It might be something as direct as one person beating another person because of the victim's race, or it might be more subtle, such as a white person putting his hand over his wallet pocket when an African-American man gets on the elevator. In cases of individual racism there is almost always a clearly traceable path between the racist act and prejudicial attitudes. This connection is not necessarily possible to trace in the case of **institutional racism**, which is the set of society policies and practices that have the effect of denying people equal access to opportunity.

A distinction between the two forms of racism can be made by thinking about housing. If an African-American or Latino family moved into a predominantly white neighborhood and someone threw rocks at their house and told them to go live somewhere else, that would be an example of individual racism. But when an African-American person who looks at housing is routinely steered into neighborhoods with high proportions of minorities or has trouble getting a mortgage, that is institutional racism.[7]

Explorations of racism by those who gather public opinion tell us some interesting things about ourselves. At first glance there has been considerable progress in race relations; at the very least a decrease in prejudice and in individual racism. For example, white Americans surveyed in 1953 showed markedly greater racial intolerance than when surveyed in 1976, and white Americans showed greater tolerance yet in 1985.[8] Yet in spite of this near national agreement on the wisdom of tolerance, polls that ask a different sort of question get different results. When Americans are asked about specific policies or actions to bring about equal opportunity, there is a "great divide" based on race. The people who conducted these studies describe their findings:

> No doubt the most striking feature of public opinion on race is how emphatically black and white Americans disagree with each other. On the obligation of government to assure equal opportunity, on federal efforts to help blacks, and on affirmative action, a huge racial divide opens up. Blacks and whites also disagree sharply on policy questions that are racial only by implication, over how generous the American welfare state should be and over the integrity of American political institutions. The racial divide in opinion widens when whites talk to whites and blacks talk with blacks, itself a sign of the difference race makes in our social and political lives (Kinder and Sanders, 1996, pp. 12-34).

The authors hasten to point out, and they are right to do so, that they are making statistical statements; that neither all whites nor all blacks agree on a single position. An emerging group of African-American conservatives clearly breaks the mold in thinking about these issues, and there are white progressives who would not be at the averages in responding to these questions. There is sharp disagreement within each group as well, but there is clearly some significance of one's racial identity to how these questions are answered. Even when controlled for income or educational differences, the differences between the races are striking.

One clue to the difference can be found in the research of Dovidio and his colleagues.[9] They find a subtle but important bias against black people arising in their studies of white people who are largely committed to an egalitarian ideal. Because of these commitments, the people studied were largely unaware of their biases. Yet in study after study, these and other psychologists are able to demonstrate that those biases exist. The investigators point out that this subtle sort of bias allows people to identify themselves as part of the solution to race problems because of their egalitarian ideas while nevertheless carrying a definite bias that could well have an effect were these people involved in hiring employees or admitting students. Yet to the person himself or herself, the bias is invisible. It is a tragedy of modern American life that so many of those in the majority culture can at one and the same time aspire to and espouse ideals of equality and community—and mean it— while also being part of a network of racial exclusion.

In a study of middle class black people, Roy Brooks finds that although they are as comfortable in terms of income as the white middle class (since income is used to define these classes), they must bear disproportionally heavy burdens because they are black. They bear as much housing segregation as poor African Americans, for example, and suffer from a variety of exclusionary experiences from their white colleagues. And there is still a wage gap between African-American males and white males of comparable education and experience (Brooks, 1992, pp. 34-47).

Biblical Anchor #2: Racism and Sin

> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me...Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:15-17, 24-25).
>
> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9).

Reformed Christians know the power of sin. So great was our sinfulness that the cure had to be the sacrifice of God himself. But it is important to assert that the cure has been applied. We are people who both confess our sin and praise our freedom from it. We know, as Paul so eloquently confesses about his own life, that our best intentions are laced with self-interest and failure; but we also know, as John assures us, that God forgives and cleanses those who repent. We are well aware that this grace is not cheap, neither for us to whom it is given nor for God from whom it comes. We have really to believe that we are enmeshed in sin. We can't just say we are, we have to feel that we are—deeply, but not irredeemably. And God has not been able simply to say, "Hey, no problem!" The cost to God is immeasurable and incomprehensible.

Where there is talk of prejudice and racism, we can face it squarely because we already know that we are sinful. That racial prejudice and racism might be in our hearts and actions should not surprise us. That institutional racism would exist even in spite of our intentions serves as

a particular example of our constant need for repentance, and the constant thankfulness that God's grace makes repentance possible. We should be able to talk humbly with one another about our failings and explore ways of making race relations better, precisely because we have no illusions.

APPARENT INNOCENCE AND INVISIBLE PRIVILEGE

Perhaps the most difficult thing about institutional racism is the illusion of innocence it provides precisely because the racist action is part of institutions in which we participate. In America, for example, the white people of European heritage who make up the majority of the population are embedded in a system of privilege which they scarcely acknowledge or are even aware of, much as we all are usually unaware that we are surrounded by a blanket of air. In the words of one commentator:

> We have long since grown accustomed to thinking of Blacks as being "racially disadvantaged." Rarely, however, do we refer to Whites as "racially advantaged," even though that is an equally apt characterization of the existing inequality (Dalton, 1995, p. 7).

In the above section on "Affirmative Action and Equality of Opportunity in the Workplace" we questioned whether a colorblind approach to employment decisions would work. In her now well-known paper, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (McIntosh, 1989, pp. 10-12), Peggy McIntosh suggests why such an approach might not work. She says that because many, if not most, white people are taught that their society and their way of doing things is normal, they come to have a collection of "invisible and unearned assets" that they can call upon each day.

McIntosh cites an impressively long list of ways in which this privilege works. If she uses checks or credit cards, she can count on her skin color not to work against her appearance of financial reliability. If a policeman pulls her over or if she is audited by the IRS she can be fairly secure that she has not been singled out because of her race. If she gets a job at an affirmative action company, her co-workers will not suspect she is unqualified and got the job because of a quota. In other words, she can think and act free of the assumption that she even has a race because of the race with which she identifies.

In arguing that affirmative action should be eliminated in favor of a policy of colorblindness, there has been a tendency for people to ignore or wish away this body of privilege that some people hold by virtue of their race. Assuming that we are all sincere about the desire for a system based only on relevant qualifications, we need to be bending every effort to the task of eliminating that invisible built-in advantage. The creative effort needed to do that will require all the imagination and vision as well as practical sense and management skills that we have. It will take people who can diagnose our condition and people big enough to swallow their pride and act on the diagnosis.

Biblical Anchor #3: The Early Church Goes Beyond Discussion?

> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:28-29).

> So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have

> been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us (Eph. 2:11-14).

Paul was a Jew, and being a Jew had special significance. In Paul's day, being a Jew was more than simply a system of belief, although, of course, it was that. The temple system and the system of law in Judaism was an institutional way of denying equal opportunity of access to God and God's blessings. Truly pious Jews avoided contact with non-Jews, a point that gives force to several stories of Jesus' willing encounter with and parables about such people[10] and the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10). Naturally enough, the early church was faced with the question of whether people had to become part of the in-group of the system in order to be a Christian. There were those who went to churches and preached the necessity of following the law, but that law was acting as a structural, institutional impediment to the Gentiles.

Paul's response was to announce that the system of institutional privilege was no more. The aliens, "strangers to the promise," were now insiders—and not by crossing over to the other side of the wall, but by the elimination of the wall. Christians around the world today are all part of a fellowship of believers that exists because a handful of members of the Jewish establishment, Paul chief among them, divested themselves of privilege and opened access to God for all. "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Divesting ourselves of privilege is the church's way when the church is at its best.

WHAT CAN ONE LITTLE DENOMINATION DO?

The problems of race and racism encompass all Americans of whatever race or ethnic group, of whatever economic level, and whether in the church or outside of it. So how can we, a small denomination of Christians, make a serious dent? Such a question, of course, can be asked about any issue. The history of the church is a history of great things being done by seemingly insignificant people in insignificant numbers. The RCA must leave to God the question of whether it is adequate to the task and do those things which it can do.

Talk to One Another

We need to talk to people we don't ordinarily talk to in order to understand the depth of the problem of race in ourselves and in our society. People of different races need to tell their stories to one another. We cannot make racism go away simply by reassuring people we know the best that all is well. We need a new perspective on ourselves and on others. To be effective, this discussion will need to be the kind that Harlon Dalton wishes for in his book, *Racial Healing*: "Put on the table all of our fears, trepidations, wishes and hopes" (Dalton, 1995, p.4).

Some discussion can go on simply by individual people taking initiative and opening a conversation with a friend or co-worker. But this is a difficult discussion for most of us. It is likely that RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods need to sponsor times for people to talk together under the guidance of those skilled in doing this. In some cases it might work well to initiate these discussions with appropriate dramatic presentations. Opening one's self up to other perspectives is not easy, and its chances of success require the right leadership. As this paper emphasizes in the above sections on biblical anchors, Reformed Christians are the right people to do this, but they need help to do it right.

"Doing it right" means, among other things, being willing for the agenda to be out of the hands of those in the majority culture. That doesn't mean that anyone should be excluded from planning, but a big point of these discussions is to set us on the road of discovering how some

of us are privileged by our racial/ethnic identity and for those so privileged to work to eliminate that privilege. The privilege of setting the agenda is one place to begin. Here is an opportunity for the RCA racial/ethnic councils to be brought into the planning at the very beginning.

The commission envisions these discussions happening all across the RCA, perhaps even at General Synod meetings, over a fairly long period. On the other hand, the commission again points out that the discussions should not become the end of the efforts. The discussions are merely meant to sharpen perspectives and open hearts to more godly discernment in the other tasks that are before us.

Work Together in Situations That Draw People Out of the Usual Frame of Reference

Honest and open discussion is one way to learn. Working together is another. It is the practice of many congregations in the Reformed Church in America to participate in summer work projects that aid another congregation in need. Congregations who do this frequently assert that they get more out of it than they give. In this spirit, work projects involving people of different races and cultural backgrounds can help move the RCA in the same direction as the open discussions. In fact, as everyone knows who has participated in work projects, discussion is not a mutually exclusive enterprise.

The important thing for these particular work projects is for them to be structured in such a way that there is considerable attention given to who is helping whom. African-American, Hispanic, Pacific Asian, or Native American congregations should not be seen only as places that need help, but also as places where those from the majority culture can receive help. This might be worked out symbolically by locating some of the work projects at predominantly white churches to which racial/ethnic people come to help out. If, as this paper argues, our prejudice and racism is largely invisible to us because it is so much a part of our everyday experience, we need to have opportunities to get out of our everyday experience. And if, as this paper also argues, minorities have experienced our behavior, whether intentionally or not, we all need to consider the awareness of that experience as essential to racial healing. Once again, the commission urges that the agenda for these projects be set by all the people who participate in them.

Form Model Congregations

We need to dream a new future. Creating models of that future is essential. We need to know what works and what does not in a church free from racism. In the world of "we've never done it that way before," we come to accommodation with our problems, and we prefer those to future problems we know nothing about. Looking to models of the future carried out by others makes the future less unknown. By loving experiment we can change for the better because then someone has done it before.

Congregations composed predominantly of one part of the racial spectrum in the Reformed Church in America should consider joining with one or more congregations from another part of that spectrum to create models for the future. The model might involve fusing the congregations into one, or it might involve regular joint ministry with shared leadership. The important thing is for the models to take racial healing as a primary goal of the project. These are risky ventures, and they will probably not all succeed. But if we are to be freed from racism, we need to take steps on behalf of our own freedom.

Of course, such experiments cost money. The Reformed Church in America can demonstrate its commitment to these experiments by offering grants to assist with the funding. Perhaps recent fund drives such as Putting People in Mission or $9.8 by '98 can be looked to as models of seed money bearing fruit when planted with careful planning and attention to the desired objectives.

Advocate on Behalf of Racial Justice

As people in the Reformed Church in America learn about their own participation in institutional racism, they will want to participate in it no longer. The discomfort people feel about the possibility that they may be part of a racist system can express itself in two ways—denial or deliverance. The discomfort is good—it tells us that we disapprove of racism. The choice is between rejection of the diagnosis (denial) or commitment to changing ourselves and the system we live in (deliverance). Remember that racism is not just prejudice, but prejudice expressed in actions, however well-intentioned. The actions of institutional racism can only be countered by other actions.

The perspectives gained by discussing and working together suggest the steps we need to take. If affirmative action is judged by our political and legal system to be irreparably flawed, it is not enough to appeal for a "colorblind" society. We must appeal for and work toward a just society which as a consequence of its justice is willing to change its biased structures and thereby become color blind. The test of whether the desire to substitute a "colorblind society" for a society that takes affirmative action based on good will should be the degree to which we work for solutions to the basic problems of race and class—problems that stimulated the creation of affirmative action in the first place. This work has to happen in every business, every school, every congregation, and every political institution where members of the Reformed Church in America are present. As RCA members come to self-understanding about race, they must be called upon to exercise their considerable creativity to bring good where there has been harm.

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R-9.
To designate the decade 2000-2010 as the "Decade Freed from Racism in the Reformed Church in America;" and further,

as the Reformed Church in America works to become freed from racism, to advocate for a society freed from racism. (ADOPTED)

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-10:

R-10.
To instruct the ~~task force~~ Commission on Race and Ethnicity, between June 1998 and January 1, 2000, to coordinate planning for the Decade Freed from Racism; and further,

to instruct the ~~task force~~ Commission on Race and Ethnicity to establish steps that truly make the year 2000 the start of the Decade Freed from Racism, for report to the 2000 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)≺

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-11:

R-11.
To instruct the ~~task force~~ Commission on Race and Ethnicity to invite RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, agencies, commissions, and institutions to plan events with the diverse people who make up the Reformed Church in America for open discussions of issues of race and racism in an atmosphere of Christian love, and to provide information about trained teams of facilitators for such discussions; and further,

to instruct the ~~task force~~ Commission on Race and Ethnicity to collect information about these discussions on race throughout the Reformed Church in America, for report to the 2005 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)≺

➢Upon a motion from the floor, Synod:

VOTED: To consider R-12 through R-17 as one motion.≺

➢The mover and supporter, in consultation with the president, accepted as editorial a change in R-12 so the edited R-12 is:

R-12.
To direct the Office of Social Witness and the RCA Distribution Center to make this paper, "Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism," (after the moderator, in consultation with members of the racial/ethnic councils review the use of the words "color-blind") and other resources on racism available to RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, agencies, commissions and institutions for study and discussion. (ADOPTED)≺

R-13.
To direct the Commission on Christian Action, in cooperation with the Office of the General Secretary and the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services, to study the hiring practices of the Reformed Church in America, to review the RCA's affirmative action policies, and to practice greater progress toward racial and ethnic inclusion. (ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-13 by deleting "Commission on Christian Action" and inserting "Commission on Race and Ethnicity." The motion LOST.)

➢Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-14, synod:

VOTED: To amend R-14 as follows:

To call for RCA congregations ~~or pairs of RCA congregations~~ to covenant to become models for the Reformed Church in America of congregations who are being freed from racism; and further

to request anecdotal accounts to be reported in *The Church Herald* at least two times a year; and further,

to include in these models pioneering projects of service, worship, prayer, and study that break down barriers between people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.≮

➢Synod then voted on R-14 as amended:

R-14.
To call for RCA congregations to covenant to become models for the Reformed Church in America of congregations who are being freed from racism; and further,

to request anecdotal accounts to be reported in *The Church Herald* at least two times a year; and further,

to include in these models pioneering projects of service, worship, prayer, and study that break down barriers between people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. (ADOPTED)≮

R-15.
To direct the Office of Stewardship and Communication Services to raise funds in order to provide grants to these model congregations; and further,

to direct the general secretary to appoint a committee to review applications for grants. (ADOPTED)

R-16.
To instruct the Office of Social Witness to publish descriptions of projects that are effective in addressing the barriers of racism; and further,

to instruct the Office of Social Witness to conduct regional meetings where the stories of such projects are told and training is provided for use of these projects by others. (ADOPTED)

R-17.
To direct the Commission on Christian Action, in cooperation with the racial/ethnic councils, to monitor issues of race and racism; and further,

to direct the Commission on Christian Action to provide an update on issues of race and racism needing advocacy to the General Synods of 2000 through 2010, the Decade Freed from Racism.

➢Upon a recommendation from the floor to amend R-17, synod:

VOTED: To amend R-17 by adding to the end of the motion the underlined additions

R-17.
To direct the Commission on Christian Action, in cooperation with the racial/ethnic councils, to monitor issues of race and racism; and further,

to direct the Commission on Christian Action to provide an update on issues of race and racism needing advocacy to the General Synods of 2000 through 2010, the Decade Freed from Racism.

and further, to urge the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, its staff, commissions, committees and task forces when working on issues that specifically stipulate involvement (i.e., collaboration or consultation) of the racial/ethnic councils or the Commission on Race and Ethnicity to truly seek the collaborative participation of the racial/ethnic councils and the commission on race and ethnicity in every phase of the work; and further,

That this collaborative participation include, but not be limited to:

- **Definition of the scope of the project**
- **Establishment of goals, objectives and purpose of the work**
- **Development of appropriate solution(s) and/or actions**
- **Trouble-shooting the proposed solutions and/or actions**
- **Drafting reports, recommendations and proposed constitutional changes**

➢Synod voted on R-17 as amended:

R-17.
To direct the Commission on Christian Action, in cooperation with the racial/ethnic councils, to monitor issues of race and racism; and further,

to direct the Commission on Christian Action to provide an update on issues of race and racism needing advocacy to the General Synods of 2000 through 2010, the Decade Freed from Racism.

and further, to urge the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, its staff, commissions, committees and task forces when working on issues that specifically stipulate involvement (i.e., collaboration or consultation) of the racial/ethnic councils or the

Commission on Race and Ethnicity to truly seek the collaborative participation of the racial/ethnic councils and the commission on race and ethnicity in every phase of the work; and further,

That this collaborative participation include, but not be limited to:

- **Definition of the scope of the project**
- **Establishment of goals, objectives and purpose of the work**
- **Development of appropriate solution(s) and/or actions**
- **Trouble-shooting the proposed solutions and/or actions**
- **Drafting reports, recommendations and proposed constitutional changes (ADOPTED)**

(Synod voted to adopte R-12 as amended; R-13; R-14 as amended; R-15; R-16; and R-17 as amended with a single motion.)

[1] The title of a book by Cornell West.

[2] The title of a book by William Wilson.

[3] Cohen, 1995, pp. 3-5

[4] Editorial, *Holland Sentinel*, Oct. 19, 1997, p. A4.

[5] For brief histories of affirmative action in the United States, refer to Holloway, 1989, pp. 9-18; Taylor, 1989, pp. 21-29; and Marable, 1995, pp. 81-85.

[6] For a relatively dispassionate review of court decisions on affirmative action, see Newman, pp. 35-42. Other useful reviews of court cases from a more committed perspective are Ezorsky 1991 and Greene 1989 (for) and Belz 1991 and Cohen 1995 (against).

[7] A similar distinction is found in Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, pp. 4-5; information on the housing issue is found in several places, including Cose, 1993, pp. 185-186.

[8] Summaries of such data are found in Brown, 1995, pp. 208-210, and Dovidio et al., 1989, p. 83.

[9] This paragraph is based on Dovidio et al., 1989, pp. 83-92; for a more complete account see Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986.

[10] See: the centurion's servant, Matt. 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10; the Canaanite woman, Matt. 15: 21-28 and Mark 7:24-30; the good Samaritan, Matt. 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:25-37; the ten lepers, Luke 17:11-19; and the Samaritan woman, John 4:1-42.

Report of the African-American Council

GOALS

At its April 1997 meeting the African-American Council (AAC) conducted an assessment of its mission. Many goals emerged:

1. To enhance support and to provide guidance to African-American congregations and pastors in preparation for becoming congregations focused for ministry that is creative, confident, healing, and radically attentive to the world outside the doors of churches.

2. To make a concerted effort to inform and educate African-American congregations and pastors about RCA policies, procedures, and government.

3. To actively work toward bridging gaps between African-American congregations and the RCA and to increase a sense of African-American congregations being equal contributors to the RCA rather than recipients of RCA benevolence.

4. To seek out innovative and practical methods to gain financial stability; i.e. to cooperate with denominational program offices in responding to federal and municipal "requests for proposals" in substance abuse rehabilitation, youth mentors, and other areas of teen health education.

5. To enhance racial reconciliation by fuller participation of African-American members throughout the RCA.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUNCIL WITH GSC

At its October 1997 meeting, GSC Planning and Administration Services formed a project team "to integrate the work of the racial/ethnic councils as ministries within the framework and mutual accountability of the General Synod Council" *(MGS 1997*, R-23, p. 296). The project team proposed that one representative from each of the four RCA racial/ethnic councils be a member of the GSC Coordinating Committee. It is the prayer of AAC that this representation will achieve a closer working relationship between the racial/ethnic councils and the various program units of GSC and will enhance mutual accountability.

RETIREMENT

In March 1998 AAC bade farewell to the Rev. John Cato, who retired as executive director of AAC. He indicated a desire in his retirement to serve as an interim minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) He leaves AAC with the ever-present challenge of doing "ministry at our doorstep" and with the challenge to continue addressing issues endemic to inner-city neighborhoods. Under his leadership and with financial assistance from the $9.8 by '98 fund drive, the Regional Synod of New York and AAC successfully carried out a lay leadership pilot program in six eastern region RCA congregations. Designed for implementation throughout all regions of the AAC caucus family of congregations, this program featured workshops on "Transforming Consistories for Mission," "Developing a Strong Christian Education Ministry," "How to Run a Stewardship Campaign," and the development of Christian education and youth ministry programs.

During the period between Cato's departure and the arrival of a new executive director of AAC, the council was led by Dr. Oliver Patterson, chairman of the African-American Council.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION

During the past two years the African-American Council enjoyed close cooperation with the Commission on Christian Action and with Congregational Services. In discussions with the Commission on Christian Action, AAC desires to enhance racial reconciliation. Matters of racial reconciliation continue to plague the United States, as evidenced by the continuing intensity of the debate over affirmative action in employment and in admission to higher education. Despite progress, the goals of the civil rights/ Martin Luther King Jr. era (1954-1968) and his vision of "The Beloved Community" remain elusive. Also, eleven o'clock on Sunday morning continues to be the most segregated hour in most North American congregations. Finally, President Clinton's initiative in the creation of a Council on Racial Initiatives deserves support.

AAC was in consultation with the Commission on Christian Action to address the issue of racism and to advise the commission in its preparation of the paper, "Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism," located in this Christian Action section.

AAC emphasizes that the four RCA racial/ethnic executives must not be the only individuals in the RCA devoting time and energy to the reduction of unconscious or overt racism within the denomination.

LAND MINES

AAC expanded its infrastructure to include an Africa Support Committee. The task of this committee is to keep AAC informed about social and political developments in African nations. The issue of land mines in Angola, Namibia, and Mozambique, as well as in many other countries, was studied by the committee. The committee reported to AAC:

1. There are currently over three thousand land mines stockpiled in South Africa from the apartheid era. Pressure from the former South African apartheid government has made a full ban on the production, stockpiling, and export of these dangerous weapons difficult.

2. Organizations and individuals, including the late Diana, Princess of Wales, cite statistics that antipersonnel land mines in sixty-eight countries kill or injure twenty-six thousand people every year—one person every twenty-two minutes.

3. According to Human Rights Watch of Washington, D. C., the land mine industry in the United States consists of a number of major companies engaged as suppliers of parts which are later assembled in government-owned army ammunition factories (Human Rights Watch Arms Project, April 1997, Vol. 9, No. 2(G), p. 28).

4. President Clinton refused to sign the December 1997 Ottawa Treaty banning land mines because the United States uses land mines in Korea.

Additional information on this issue of land mines is available by contacting:

International Campaign to Ban Land Mines
1347 Upper Dummerston Road
Battleboro, VT 05301
(802) 254-8807

R-18.
To direct the Office of Social Witness, in consultation with the RCA Southern Africa Partnership Team and the African-American Council, to communicate with members of the RCA urging them to write President Clinton and their congressional representatives to support the comprehensive treaty banning land mines; and further,

to direct the general secretary to write to President Clinton, urging him to support the comprehensive treaty banning land mines. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries

As 1998 began, the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) entered its nineteenth year of ministry. At its annual consultation held in May 1998, CPAAM focused on the theme "Call to Commitment." Having heard the challenge of mission the previous year, it became readily apparent to the CPAAM executive committee that commitment is needed before people in Pacific and Asian American RCA congregations can be engaged in meaningful mission.

The Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80) resonates for CPAAM. The presence of many Pacific and Asian immigrants in North American communities has challenged CPAAM since its inception. Each year Pacific and Asian American RCA congregations are confronted with ministry demands that require new and creative responses. As the RCA seeks to respond to the Statement of Mission and Vision, CPAAM will be a partner with the rest of the RCA in striving to assist its congregations and ministries to fulfill the mission imperative.

PRIORITIES

The CPAAM executive committee, after consulting with the RCA Pacific and Asian American pastors and church representatives during the 1994-95 year, voted on the priorities of the council's work for the next five years. From 1996 to 2000 the program priorities for CPAAM are:

1. Evangelism
2. Discipleship training
3. Ministry with youth
4. Stewardship
5. Ministry with women
6. Cross-cultural interchange
7. Ministry with the elderly
8. Recruitment, training, and support of clergy
9. Church planning and development

Evangelism

Evangelism continues to be an important issue for RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations. Demographic information continues to report many unchurched Pacific and Asian Americans in areas where RCA congregations have ministry. Personal evangelism, each person sharing his or her faith story, is the most effective model for proclaiming the gospel and bringing people into the church. In addition, RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations have used street evangelism and marketplace evangelism as a means to reach people. Many RCA Pacific and Asian American churches use Bible study, prayer group evangelism, or cell (small) group meetings as ways to reach out and support the spiritual lives of members. Language classes have also served as an effective way of reaching out to the community.

Discipling of the Laity

An ongoing way CPAAM helps in discipling laity is through consistory training. This year the elders' manual, *The Ministry of the Elder,* by the Rev. Robert White, was translated into Korean. It now joins the deacons' manual (previously translated into Korean), *As One Who Serves,* by Betty Voskuil, as a resource for RCA Korean language congregations. Some sections of the *Book of Church Order* have been translated into Korean for several years.

For RCA Chinese congregations, CPAAM is translating two resources—some sections of the *Book of Church Order* and *As One Who Serves*—into their language. There is hope that both resources will be completed during 1998.

CPAAM provides workshop leaders to meet with individual RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations in consistory training, and also supports larger gatherings of lay leaders for leadership development. The annual gathering of Korean lay leaders was held in Yonkers, New York, in February 1998.

Youth

A survey of RCA Pacific and Asian American youth pastors and sponsors indicates a need to help leaders, who are mostly immigrants, to understand second generation youth. In addition, parents are also unable to understand the ways in which Western culture shapes their children's perspectives, aspirations, and desires. In early January 1998 the first CPAAM-sponsored youth leader training event was held in Bayside, New York. Representatives from area RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations and four individuals from Southern California participated in the event. A Pacific and Asian American resource person worked with the participants and gave them an experiential workshop, including activities to use with the youth, insights on the differences between immigrant versus Asian American/Canadian, and a basic understanding of how to help youth understand Reformed theology in everyday situations.

At the 1998 CPAAM annual consultation, the youth participated in leading worship for the entire gathering. At this consultation the youth also discussed needs and concerns and received information from the RCA Office of Volunteer Services on ways they can respond in mission.

The annual gathering of Korean youth was held again this past year. The East Coast Jesus '97 event drew 250 participants. In addition, youth members of the Choongsyn Church participated in several concerts at the end of 1997.

The West Coast Jesus '97 event was held for thirty-five to forty youth. Also, youth from RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations in the West attended an ecumenical celebration held jointly with the Christian Reformed Church.

Many RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations hold day camp programs for children and youth during the summer months. Bowne Street Community Church in Flushing, New York, served as host for a Northwestern College volunteer participating in the college's Summer of Service program. The volunteer worked in the congregation's summer program. During the winter months of 1997-98 many youth group programs included a time of retreat.

Stewardship

Pacific and Asian American RCA congregations continue to seek ways to heighten awareness of stewardship as a response to God's gracious gifts. Several CPAAM pastors have intentionally woven stewardship as a discipleship issue. Workshops on stewardship were offered at the CPAAM annual consultation.

Ministry with Women

Korean women from New York City metropolitan area RCA congregations gathered for the first time in Yonkers, New York, in February 1998. Young Aie Na, the woman's representative on the CPAAM executive committee, was a speaker for the occasion. The women were grateful for the opportunity to gather and encouraged Young Aie Na in her ministry.

Cross-Cultural Interchanges

Often CPAAM ministries become focused on its language group. To counterbalance this, CPAAM encourages cross-cultural interchanges. A retreat for RCA Pacific and Asian American and Hispanic pastors has been well received in the past. Another such retreat is being planned for RCA Pacific and Asian American and Hispanic pastors of the Classis of California in the fall of 1998. The focus will be on city ministry issues as they impact ministries for Pacific and Asian Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans.

CPAAM representatives are serving on the design team for the next Spectrum youth event (an event sponsored by the three eastern RCA regional synods—Albany, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York—for African-American, Hispanic, and Pacific and Asian American youth). Cross-cultural interchange also occurred when a congregation in Flushing, New York, participated in a weekend shelter program held in another classis church. The program included meal preparation and overnight supervision of the homeless.

Elderly

Several RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations report ongoing ministries for older adults. Two congregations had a flu inoculation program early in the fall of 1997 for their seniors. In addition, the Taiwanese Senior Christian Fellowship meets in Flushing, New York, each Friday from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

Recruitment, Training, and Support of Ministers

Strengthening the ties of Pacific and Asian American ministers continues to be an important aspect of CPAAM's ministry. The Korean pastors in the East and those in the West meet bimonthly. Additionally, the East Coast Korean pastors have retreats together and plan joint revival meetings. The events are structured to support each other and to advise CPAAM on matters related to Korean ministries. Taiwanese pastors in the New York City metropolitan area meet several times a year for sharing, study, and support. Together they are editing the translation of the *Book of Church Order* and *As One Who Serves.*

During the year, members of CPAAM worked with various classes to orient Pacific and Asian American ministers interested in affiliating with the RCA. In an intentional effort to recruit new Pacific and Asian American ministers, a luncheon was held in late January 1998, to which several "handpicked" seminarians were invited. They received an overview of the RCA and were given an opportunity to ask questions. A gathering of Fuller Theological Seminary's Pacific and Asian American seminarians is being planned to tell about the Reformed Church in America and its ministry priorities.

New Church Development

New Church Development is an important priority for CPAAM. Staff of CPAAM continue to work with regional synod executives to encourage new church development among Pacific and Asian Americans. CPAAM staff also participate on the Council of Field Secretaries (COFS). During this past year CPAAM worked with the Classis of Red River to review an application of a Korean pastor interested in RCA membership (a second Korean RCA pastor is in Texas). CPAAM is also working with the classes of Chicago and Greater Palisades and with Korean pastors living within the bounds of these classes who are interested in exploring RCA affiliation.

TIBET

The 1996 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to write to the president of the United States and to instruct the Regional Synod of Canada executive secretary to write to the prime minister of Canada, urging their support of resolutions condemning China's human rights violations of Tibetan people; and further,
>
> to call on the members of the Reformed Church in America to pray for the Tibetan people (*MGS 1996, R-15,* p. 111).

During Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to the United States, President Clinton responded to public pressure by raising issues of religious freedom, human rights, and cultural survival for the Tibetan people with President Zemin. U.S. congressional leaders from across the political spectrum did the same. While this was a great beginning, it is not sufficient. A recent report by an international panel of independent legal scholars concludes that China's effort to eradicate Tibetan culture within occupied Tibet has intensified. (This information is taken from a February 1998 memorandum from Lodi Gyari, executive chair of the International Campaign for Tibet.)

President Clinton is scheduled to make a trip to China later in 1998. It is imperative that he takes this opportunity to address this moral tragedy of repression and genocide.

> **R-19.**
> **To instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to write to the president of the United States and to instruct the Regional Synod of Canada executive secretary to write to the prime minister of Canada, urging all parties to work diligently toward peaceful negotiations over the future of Tibet. (ADOPTED)**

In recent months the public in the United States and Canada has been given the opportunity to learn more about the Tibetan struggle. The feature film, *Seven Years in Tibet,* has been playing in movie theaters. Also, Martin Scorsese's film, *Kundun,* has been shown in movie theaters, and the Chinese government is strongly opposed to this film. By viewing these informative and important films, the message of truth is not suppressed.

R-20.
To encourage members of the Reformed Church in America to learn about the Tibetan oppression by China through the reading of literature and the viewing of films on this subject. (ADOPTED)

WORK ON MATTERS REFERRED BY PREVIOUS GENERAL SYNODS

Relationship of CPAAM and Other Racial/Ethnic Councils with GSC

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, the racial/ethnic councils, and the general secretary to collaboratively develop a plan that will include the racial/ethnic councils in the process of focusing the denominational vision on the tasks of new church development, church revitalization, evangelism, urban ministry, global ministry, and other priorities; and further,
>
> to integrate the work of the racial/ethnic councils as ministries within the framework and mutual accountability of the General Synod Council; and further,
>
> to instruct the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee to report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-23, pp. 295-96).

The chair and past chair of CPAAM met in January 1998 with a project team appointed by the GSC's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee at its October 1997 meeting. Following the January 1998 meeting, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, met with the CPAAM executive committee to share the specifics of a plan to integrate the work of the racial/ethnic councils with GSC. After discussion, CPAAM believes the proposed plan will enable the work of the racial/ethnic councils to be more fully integrated into the work of GSC.

Orientation Video

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To instruct Evangelism and Church Development Services, in consultation with Congregational Services and the racial/ethnic councils, to explore the creation of an orientation video about the Reformed Church in America, including its history, doctrine, organization, worship, mission philosophy, and evangelical and ecumenical nature; and further,
>
> to consider producing the RCA orientation video in various languages. (*MGS 1997*, R-8, p. 370)

A more comprehensive report on this matter is addressed in the Report of the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services located in the Evangelization and Church Growth section. CPAAM was informed that a custom church video seeks to address some of the issues in R-8, and such a video is now being field-tested. The capacity to dub the film in various languages is being explored. CPAAM continues to monitor the progress of this project.

CONCLUSION

Statement of Mission and Vision

As an agency of General Synod, CPAAM is seeking ways to implement the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80). Clearly, the issues addressed in the vision portion of the statement are challenges for RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations as well as for other RCA congregations. CPAAM is prayerfully reflecting on the Statement of Mission and Vision and will "act on the statement faithfully according to discernment of the leading of God's Spirit" (*MGS 1997*, R-2, p. 428).

The CPAAM executive committee has begun to assess ways in which the Council can shift its priorities to implement the Statement of Mission and Vision. In the future, as the General Synod Council's goal statements and strategies are adopted, CPAAM will seek to order its program life according to those goal areas and strategies. CPAAM will live out the statement in its ministry and council life. CPAAM strives always to follow "Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God" (*MGS 1997*, p. 78).

"Missionary Denomination" for the Twenty-first Century

The 1997 General Synod instructed all staff, units, agencies, task forces, commissions, and committees of the General Synod to vision, plan, strategize, prioritize, and act in ways consistent with the declaration that the Reformed Church in America is a "missionary denomination" for the twenty-first century (*MGS 1997*, R-4, p. 422). The CPAAM executive committee is seeking ways to highlight this declaration, doing so initially through its focus at the annual consultation of RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations. In the months ahead CPAAM is planning to spend portions of the CPAAM semiannual meeting to explore ways to carry out R-4.

Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

HERMANDAD

The 1994 General Synod adopted "Hermandad" (*MSG 1994*, R-14, pp. 92-94). The objective of this program is to create "sister church" relationships between congregations of the Iglesia Reformada en Cuba (The Christian Reformed Church in Cuba) and Reformed Church in America congregations. The program has been successful, creating fellowship relations that include the following congregations: First Church in Albany, New York; Hope Community Church, Orlando, Florida; and La Senda del Amor, Toronto, Ontario. Rehoboth Reformed Church in McBain, Michigan, has also set aside mission shares to allow the Council for Hispanic Ministries (CHM) to continue the council's evangelism work in Cuba.

Each year CHM sends ministers and elders for two weeks to help local congregations in Cuba preach the gospel. Many Cubans leave behind the communist ideology and receive Jesus Christ as their personal savior, an effect that continues to transform Cuba. Praise God, there is revival in the Reformed Church in Cuba! Congregations interested in participating in this program can call the Office of the Council for Hispanic Ministries.

THE CUBAN EMBARGO

The 1993 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the general secretary to urge the U.S. government to take necessary measures to lift the economic embargo on Cuba, and to call on Reformed congregations to give humanitarian assistance to the people of Cuba as an expression of their solidarity *(MGS 1993,* R-21, p. 115).

The Cuban embargo is back in the news. Recently the Pope spoke strongly on several issues while in Cuba. He called for greater freedom of religious and political expression on the island and for the release of political prisoners. He called for reconciliation among the Cuban people. He criticized international developments in which "a small number of countries grow exceedingly rich at the cost of the increasing impoverishment of a greater number of other countries." And he condemned the U.S. embargo on Cuba, saying:

> The. . . imposed isolation strikes the people indiscriminately, making it even more difficult for the weakest to enjoy the bare essentials of decent living, things such as food, health, and education.

The debate is heating up in the United States about its policy toward Cuba. Much of that debate has focused around pending legislation to lift the embargo on food and medicine. The Senate bill (S 1391: The Cuban Women and Children Humanitarian Relief Act) currently has twenty-one sponsors. The House of Representatives bill (H.R. 1951: The Cuban Humanitarian Trade Act of 1997) presently has ninety-eight sponsors.

When H.R. 1951 was introduced, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) issued a statement saying:

> The U.S. embargo has exacerbated the health care crisis in Cuba, while it has failed to weaken the Castro government or change the human rights situation there. We should be trying to improve our relationship with the Cuban people rather than causing them harm. That statement holds true still, and we urge you to sponsor H.R. 1951.

The sponsoring of the above bills is important for changing U.S. policy toward Cuba in the coming year. CHM is confident that involvement from the Reformed Church in America and other denominations will help secure passage of this legislation. An advocacy packet is available from the Latin America Working Group, P.O. Box 15, 110 Maryland Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002; (202) 546-7010; E-mail: lawg@igc.apc.org. The Latin American Working Group is a coalition of sixty-plus religious, human rights, development, policy, and grassroots organizations working together to promote a peaceful and just U.S. policy.

CHM urges renewal of efforts to end the embargo. The United States embargo is contrary to biblical principles. Children and the elderly suffer the most when they cannot receive medical and nutritional supplies so vital to their health care.

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-21:

> **R-21.**
> **To urge congregations of the Reformed Church in America to become involved in learning more about the U.S. embargo against Cuba; and further,**

to urge them to write to their congressional representatives and senators to support bills S 1391 (The Cuban Women and Children Humanitarian Relief Act) and H.R. 1951 (The Humanitarian Trade Act of 1997). (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: This makes the intention of the recommendation clearer.⋖

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-22:

R-22.
To instruct the Office of Social Witness, in consultation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries, to prepare background materials on Cuba and to write an article speaking against the Cuban embargo in an "Action Alert" letter, the City Gate (Office of Social Witness newsletter), and/or *The Church Herald*. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: To communicate this information to a wider audience.⋖

R-23.
To instruct the general secretary to write the president of the United States and U.S. congressional leaders to urge the U.S. government to end the U.S. trade embargo imposed in 1992 and to urge the U.S. government to respond with a more humane policy that does not punish the Cuban people. (ADOPTED)

UNITED STATES-PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS ACT

Puerto Rico approaches one hundred years of United States colonialism on July 25, 1998. The U.S. House of Representatives has introduced H.R. 856, "The United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act." The following is a brief summary of the bill:

This is a bill to provide a process leading to full self-government for Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is authorized to choose among three options: 1) commonwealth structure for local self-government as a U.S. territory; 2) separate sovereignty leading to independence or free association; and 3) statehood as a state of the union.

A final status is to be attained in ten or more years in measured stages. The Initial Decision Stage provides for a status referendum in Puerto Rico before the end of 1998, in which voters will choose among the above choices.

The Transition Stage will begin if a majority of the people of Puerto Rico choose one of the two options for full self-government (separate sovereignty or statehood). Within 180 days of the referendum the president of the United States will submit to Congress a Transition Plan of ten years minimum for the status selected by the Puerto Rican voters.

Once the Transition Plan is approved by Congress through expedited procedures, it will be submitted to the voters of Puerto Rico for ratification. If approved, the transition period will begin by presidential orders. If the plan is rejected, the president will be directed to consult with leaders of Puerto Rico and submit recommendations to Congress.

The Implementation Plan will begin at least two years before the end of the Transition Plan. The president will submit to Congress an Implementation Plan to fulfill the status choice of the people of Puerto Rico at least two years before the transition period expires. The Implementation Plan will follow an approval and ratification process similar to that of the Transition Plan.

If a majority of voters are not in favor of an option for full self-government (separate sovereignty or statehood), then every four years the voters will be asked the same question. This will allow the people of Puerto Rico to continue the existing Commonwealth structure for local self-government as an unincorporated territory until a majority is ready and satisfied with the terms of full self-government. The periodic referenda requirement ensures the integrity of the purpose of the bill "to provide a process leading to the full self-government for Puerto Rico."

The House of Representatives on March 4, 1998, approved the bill. The bill now goes to the Senate for consideration.

R-24.
To instruct the Office of Social Witness, in consultation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries, to alert RCA congregations that allowing for Puerto Rico's full self-determination regarding self-government is to allow the freedom and liberty desired of people of God; and further,

to affirm, as a community of faith, the process of full self-determination regarding self-government. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF SOCIAL WITNESS

Jesus Christ leads Christians to witness to their faith not only with individuals, but also in the marketplace and in the halls of government. The Office of Social Witness helps to equip and encourage congregations and members of the Reformed Church in America to stand with those whom the world often forgets by focusing on issues of justice, peace, hunger, and the well-being of God's creation. In a time of moral questioning, economic inequality, global conflict, and environmental degradation, the church's social witness is an integral part of its mission in the world.

GENERAL SYNOD REFERRALS

Welfare Reform

Voicing its concern about the effects of the 1996 welfare reform legislation (*The Personal Responsibility and Work Act*), the 1997 General Synod passed several recommendations (*MGS 1997,* pp. 96-97). RCA diaconates were encouraged to cooperate with local agencies and other congregations in meeting the needs of those who may be most severely affected

by welfare reform legislation. Diaconates were also asked to monitor the impact of the new legislation on the poor in their communities and to share that information with the Office of Social Witness (*MGS 1997*, R-8, p. 96). The Office of Social Witness was instructed to disseminate to RCA congregations information regarding the effects of welfare reform legislation and to cooperate with other groups actively involved in addressing the issue of welfare reform (*MGS 1997*, R-9, p. 97).

The Office of Social Witness contacted all RCA classis stated clerks and asked them to identify at least one ministry within the classis where RCA congregations are engaged in ministry with the poor. The office also sent to each classis information about the "charitable choice" option of the new welfare law, a provision designed to expand cooperation between state welfare programs and faith-based organizations. Both the Office of Social Witness and the Commission on Christian Action are continuing to gather information from RCA-related and congregationally based ministries with the poor. It is hoped that this "reporting from the front lines" will not only provide information about the impact of welfare reform but will also offer helpful suggestions and models for effective ministry. Some of this information was reported in the February 1998 issue of *The City Gate.*

The Office of Social Witness also facilitated RCA cooperation with other groups actively involved in addressing the issue of welfare reform. Representatives from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington, D.C., Office and the Center for Public Justice met with the Commission on Christian Action in November 1997. Commission member Terry Troia participated in a conference organized by World Relief, and Western Theological Seminary student Karsten Voskuil represented the RCA at a "Call to Renewal" gathering in Washington, D.C. Several RCA members and congregations were actively involved in the Bread for the World "Hunger Has a Cure" campaign, supporting legislation to strengthen the nutritional safety net for children, the elderly, and disabled people, as well as for adults who were willing to work but unable to find jobs. At the invitation of former U.S. Senator Paul Simon, director of the Public Policy Institute of Southern Illinois University, the minister for social witness participated in a gathering of religious leaders called to address the role of government and the role of congregations in addressing poverty in America.

Caring for Creation

In response to a Commission on Christian Action report, "Caring for Creation: The Church and Paper Use" (*MGS 1997*, pp. 89-93), the 1997 General Synod instructed the Office of Social Witness to continue to provide study material on lifestyles and the environment and to assist the church in exploring ways of making these environmental concerns a part of its life of witness and worship (*MGS 1997*, R-7, p. 93).

Through its Office of Social Witness the RCA participates in the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE), a coalition of four groups (Jewish, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and Evangelical) which work together in developing resources and programs for a faith-based response to environmental issues. The minister for social witness serves as the co-chair of the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group, one of the four NRPE partners. Such ecumenical cooperation makes it possible to develop more resources and programs than would otherwise be possible.

This year, for example, the Eco-Justice Working Group published a resource packet of study, worship, and action resources on human health and the environment which was sent to seventy thousand Protestant congregations, including each congregation in the RCA. Other activities of the Working Group which are helping to equip RCA members and congregations include an ecumenical training event, an annual public policy briefing, and a quarterly newsletter. In addition, a variety of study resources are available through the RCA Distribution Center and from the Office of Social Witness. The minister for social witness also led several workshops on the Christian response to environmental issues.

"Caring for Creation Coordinators" were enlisted in several regions of the denomination. These people serve as resource and support persons to aid congregations in their ministries of defending and restoring creation. Through the Office of Social Witness, coordinators receive resources and training to assist congregations in three areas of ministry: learning (suggesting resources that will help churches learn about environmental issues and the biblical theology of creation); lifestyle (helping churches and families with ideas for reducing consumption, conserving energy, recycling, reducing use of toxins and pesticides, etc.); and legislation (serving as a conduit of information about important environmental issues and public policy issues so that Christians can write their legislators and make their feelings known).

Several RCA caring for creation coordinators were able to attend an ecumenical training event in Estes Park, Colorado, in May 1997. Another training event in Montreat, North Carolina, is scheduled for August 1998. Caring for creation coordinators were instrumental in helping congregations organize special worship services, ecumenical events, workshops, letter-writing campaigns, educational opportunities, and service projects.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-25.
To encourage each classis to identify one person to serve as a "caring for creation coordinator" and to communicate that person's name and address to the Office of Social Witness. (ADOPTED)≺

Climate Change

In 1993, in response to a report of the Commission on Christian Action on global warming (*MGS 1993,* pp. 98-103), the 1993 General Synod voted:

> To direct the minister for social witness to continue to prepare and distribute educational materials and worship resources on environmental issues, including global warming, for study by the churches *(MGS 1993,* p. 102).

In the past few years a number of resources have been made available to RCA congregations, including, *It's God's World: Christians, the Environment, and Climate Change.* More recently, RCA caring for creation coordinators, working with colleagues in sister denominations, helped to place a public service announcement about climate change on local television stations and assisted in gathering more than twenty-five hundred postcards calling for stronger U.S. action on climate change.

The threat of climate change is of particular concern to Christians not only because of their God-given responsibility to tend the garden and to keep it (Gen. 2:15), but because climate change is an issue of justice. Industrialized nations such as the United States and Canada produce the major share of greenhouse gases, but those who live in poor and developing nations will suffer the most severe effects of climate change. Coastal flooding, more frequent and severe storms, the spread of insect-borne infectious diseases, and changes in agricultural practices would most seriously affect those least able to cope with such changes.

Climate change is also an issue of generational justice. The effects of global warming may be minimal in our lifetimes. It will not be so for succeeding generations. Current energy-rich and overly consumptive lifestyles may well be depleting the environmental capital on which the lives of future generations depend.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-26.
To encourage RCA congregations and members to take steps to reduce energy consumption and the resulting greenhouse gas emissions; and further,

to encourage RCA members to write their elected officials, urging support for public policies that encourage energy efficiency and help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.≺

➢Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-26, synod:

VOTED: To amend R-26 as follows:

To encourage RCA congregations and members to take steps to reduce energy consumption and the ~~resulting~~ effects of greenhouse gas emissions; and further.

to encourage RCA members to write to their elected officials, urging support for public policies that encourage energy efficiency and help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.≺

➢Synod then voted on R-26 as amended:

VOTED: To not adopt R-26≺

Gambling

The 1997 General Synod instructed the Office of Social Witness to keep the issue of gambling and its negative social consequences before the RCA, to assist the RCA in identifying the nature and extent of investments in the gambling industry, and to continue to identify opportunities for RCA congregations and members to be involved in this area of public policy advocacy (*MGS 1997,* R-3, pp. 88-89).

Information about gambling, its effects, and the church's response was reported in the February 1998 issue of *The City Gate.* An earlier Office of Social Witness *Action Alert* newsletter had also addressed the issue of gambling, and the office was involved in advocating for legislation in the U.S. Congress that established the National Gambling Impact Study Commission. Information from the National Coalition against Legalized Gambling was made available to RCA congregations. The Rev. Donald Baird, minister for witness in the Regional Synod of Albany, was active in opposing the expansion of legalized gambling in the State of New York. With the cooperation of the RCA managing director of investments, the current RCA investment portfolio was reviewed. There are no RCA investments in gambling-related industries.

Witness in the Public Square

The Office of Social Witness was able to facilitate RCA participation in several events that enable RCA members to interact with legislators and government officials and to consider how the biblical calls for justice, peace, and the well-being of creation can impact public policy. Such events enabled RCA members to express Christian social concern to leaders in government and to hear from others about how changes in public policy are affecting their lives. Likewise, it allows RCA members to experience firsthand the benefits and limitations of the political process. Such firsthand experience also adds insight and energy to social witness efforts in the regional synods and RCA regions.

In the past year RCA members attended Briefing '98, an interfaith legislative briefing in Washington, D.C., as well as state and local public policy meetings. In addition, the Office of Social Witness made it possible for RCA members to attend a Children's Defense Fund Annual National Conference in Los Angeles, California, in March 1998, and for students from Northwestern College to participate in the Christian Environmental Association's briefing in Washington, D.C., in April 1998.

Witness in the Corporate World

From time to time through cooperation with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, the Reformed Church in America files a shareholder resolution with a major corporation in which the RCA holds stock. Such shareholder resolutions often afford the occasion for church representatives and corporate management to come together to discuss significant ethical issues involved in participating in today's global economy. As stated in a 1985 General Synod report:

> Through its economic involvement the church may offer a significant witness in and to its society....The Reformed tradition has emphasized that the essential role of the church in society is not to enhance it own resources but to glorify God, witness to the lordship of Christ, and transform this present social order to the vision and values of Christ's kingdom. ("The Church's Peace Witness in the U.S. Corporate Economy," *MGS 1985*, p. 57.)

For the past several years the RCA has filed a shareholder resolution with Texaco Corporation concerning the company's involvement with the government of Myanmar (Burma), a military regime accused of serious human rights abuses. The minister for social witness and other RCA representatives had an opportunity to speak at the annual stockholders meetings and to meet with corporate management to discuss the company's responsibility to advocate for human rights in Myanmar. As reported in the January 1998 issue of the *Church Herald,* in the fall of 1997 Texaco announced its decision to sell its assets in an offshore natural gas project off the coast of Burma. The hope is that Texaco's withdrawal from Burma will send one more signal to the military regime that the international community will continue its strong support for human rights and democracy in Burma.

Work Group on Science, Technology, and the Church

A newly formed RCA work group on science, technology, and the church cooperated with the Office of Social Witness in planning a forum on genetic engineering. Held at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in November 1997, the forum included presentations by scientists, theologians, and lawyers. Presenters and panelists shared information about the human genome project and discussed some of the complex ethical, legal, and pastoral issues raised by the new possibilities in genetic research.

Providing Resources

The RCA has a pastoral responsibility to its members to offer resources for study, prayer, and action that offer a biblical perspective on complex social issues and encourage a faith response. The office responds to numerous requests for information and study resources. In the past year the office made available resources on physician-assisted suicide, welfare reform, abortion, capital punishment, gambling, religious persecution, genetic engineering, the church's peace witness, racial reconciliation, socially responsible investing, environmental issues, and other resources.

The 1996 General Synod, in response to a report from the African American Council concerning fostering more effective and positive dialogue between minority communities and local police departments, instructed Congregational Services, in cooperation with the

African-American Council, to prepare a discussion guide for community dialogue with police (*MGS 1996*, R-12, p. 106). The minister for social witness, members of the RCA racial/ethnic councils, and RCA pastors and lay people involved in city ministries contributed to the study guide, which is now available from the RCA Distribution Center. Additional resources developed by the Criminal Justice Program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the National Coalition on Police Accountability are also available from the Office of Social Witness.

Additional resources produced by the Office of Social Witness include: *Abortion: Seeking Common Ground*, a five-session adult study, published by Reformed Church Press; *Welcoming the Stranger*, a study/action resource for the church's ministry with people from other nations and cultures; *'Tis a Gift to Be Simple*, a resource packet for responsible living in an age of consumption; *The City Gate*, an occasional newsletter sent to each RCA congregation and to a mailing list of interested individuals; and "Do Justice, Make Peace, Keep Creation," an *Action Alert* which is sent periodically to a network of approximately eight hundred RCA members who write their elected officials about important issues.

Past *Action Alert* newsletters have focused on such issues as campaign finance reform, a call to ban land mines, immigration, gambling, and climate change. The annual peace packet that is sent to each RCA congregation in late summer contains study and worship resources for Peace with Justice Sunday. The 1997 packet included two new resources published by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program: *For God So Loved the World: Peacemaking and the Care of God's Creation* (a six session study for older youth/adults), and *God's Good World: A Peacemaking Resource for Children.*

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF HUNGER EDUCATION

The biblical mandate is clear. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God's people are implored to respond to hungry people: "Do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor" (Deut. 15:7b), "Share your bread with the hungry" (Isa. 58:7a), and "Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (1 John 3:18).

The Reformed Church in America takes this biblical mandate seriously in four primary ways: 1) relief for emergency needs, 2) development of long-term solutions, 3) education about the root causes of hunger, and 4) advocacy on behalf of hungry and needy people. These four approaches form the core of the RCA's response as a denomination.

Meeting emergency needs and developing long-term solutions for decreasing hunger and poverty are two of the primary goals of Reformed Church World Service (RCWS). Funds are collected through Partnership-in-Mission shares, One Great Hour of Sharing and Planting Seeds of Hope offerings, and special emergency appeals.

Through RCA missionaries, partner agencies such as Church World Service, and RCA regional synods, the RCA distributed funds in 1997-98, offering relief to people around the globe. Recipients included victims of floods or droughts in Kenya, the Congo, Somalia, North India, Canada, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Washington. Beneficiaries of RCWS grants included victims of storms, disasters and chronic malnutrition in Texas, Colorado, California, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Moscow; and victims of political unrest in Iraq, Sierra Leone, and Chiapas, Mexico.

Burned churches in the United States benefited from grants, and others benefited from the work of volunteers coordinated through the RCA Office of Volunteer Services. RCA regional synods disbursed RCWS grants to various food pantries and soup kitchens in their geographical areas. RCA missionaries and RCA mission partners served a pivotal role in

developing long-term solutions and offering rehabilitation with people in Nebraska, Appalachia, Chiapas, Ecuador, New York City, India, Kenya, the Philippines, and Indochina. The RCA also contributed substantially to the operational costs of Church World Service.

The most critical hunger situation is in North Korea. About 10 percent of the population has already died from the severe famine. The crisis is the result of a series of crop disasters over the past three years—destructive floods in 1995 and 1996 and a drought in 1997. A repressive government with a centrally controlled economy has also contributed to this disaster. RCWS provided blankets, rice, barley seed, biscuits, and medicine throughout the past year.

People in the United States and Canada, however, do not have to travel to other countries to witness malnutrition and hunger. Poverty is the single greatest cause of hunger in the United States and Canada. One in five U.S. children (20.8 percent) and one in seven Canadian children (13.5 percent) are poor. The United States and Canada have a serious problem in their own back yards. RCWS has responded by giving grants to all eight RCA regional synods (noted above) for use in combatting hunger in their geographical areas.

Critical components of the response to the crisis of hunger by the RCA Office of Hunger Education are hunger education and advocacy. One Great Hour of Sharing information and hunger packets were mailed to each RCA congregation during the past year. RCA congregations are encouraged to add to their church libraries two books, *For They Shall Be Fed* and *Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger,* written by Ronald Sider and updated and published in 1997 by Word Publishing.

One highlight of the year occurred in June 1997, when fifteen RCA delegates joined about five hundred other ecumenical hunger activists in Washington, D.C., for a special gathering sponsored by Bread for the World. The gathering included worship, educational and training workshops, and lobbying on behalf of hungry people.

The following item of new business was referred to the advisory committee on Christian Action:

1. To instruct the General Secretary to write to the President of the United States and appropriate members of the congress, and to instruct the executive of the Synod of Canada to write to the Prime Minister of Canada and appropriate members of parliament, urging them to secure refugee status for Indonesian Chinese with the United Nations commissioner on refugees; and further, advocate for the practice of human rights in Indonesia.

2. To call upon the congregations of the Reformed Church in America to pray for Indonesia, the human rights and freedom of religious expression be restored to all people in that country.

Stated Clerks request permission to make special presentation of T.U.L.I.P. at an appropriate time during the synod.

Reason: For the past few weeks, we have news reports about the grim situation in Indonesia. Christian churches and ethnic Chinese are victims of any socio-economic upheaval in Indonesia. Churches have been destroyed and/or burned; shops and homes of Chinese Indonesians have been looted, destroyed, and/or burned to the ground. Some Indonesian Chinese have been killed, and women raped. It has been a pattern.

As Christians, we should condemn all forms of violence, racism against minority groups, and disregard of human life and rights of religious expression. Looting of someone's property cannot be condoned. Hence, we extend our deepest sympathy to Indonesian Christians and ethnic Chinese.

Due to the recent financial crisis, many of the Indonesian Chinese are unable to meet the requirements for immigration programs from countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has thus far overlooked the struggle of Indonesian Chinese. The UNHCR should be called upon to grant Indonesian Chinese refugee status.

➢In response to this new business, the advisory committee recommended:

R-27.
To instruct the general secretary to write to the President of the United States and appropriate members of Congress, and to instruct the executive of the Synod of Canada to write to the Prime Minister of Canada and appropriate members of Parliament, urging them (a) to secure refugee status for Indonesian Chinese with the United Nations Commissioner on refugees; and (b) to advocate for the practice of human rights in Indonesia. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Christian churches and ethnic Chinese are victims of the socio-economic upheaval in Indonesia.≺

➢In response to this new business, the advisory committee recommended:

R-28.
To call upon the congregations of the Reformed Church in America to pray for Indonesia and Tibet, that human rights and freedom of religious expression be restored to all people in those countries. (ADOPTED)

Reason: People in Indonesia and Tibet are suffering from religious persecution and human rights violations.

Bread for the World is a nationwide Christian citizen's movement that works for justice for hungry people by lobbying U.S. decision-makers. The organization also provides a variety of hunger education materials to individual and covenant church members. Bread for the World receives a grant from RCWS. RCA members and congregations are encouraged to become members of Bread for the World.

Each year Bread for the World encourages Christians to give an offering of their citizenship to God by writing elected officials to support the needs of the hungry. In 1998 congregations are encouraged to participate in an offering of letters in support of "Africa: Seeds of Hope" legislation being introduced in the U.S. Congress. This legislative initiative of Bread for the World would help small-scale farmers (who are mostly women) and rural communities improve their livelihoods. This is critical since 215 million Africans lack enough food to eat. Further information can be obtained by calling Bread for the World, (301) 608-2400, or by calling the RCA Office of Hunger Education, (800) 968-3943.≺

Overture

Disney Corporation

1. **The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to communicate to every RCA congregation a concern about the direction the Disney Corporation is moving in its communication and promotion of values; and further,**

   to encourage RCA members to express their concern in the following ways:

   a. **To pray for the Disney corporation and its employees as well as for the future direction this corporation takes in its communication and promotion of values.**

   b. **To encourage RCA members to express through letter writing to the Disney Corporation their concern and disappointment with Disney's communication and promotion of values that are immoral, anti-family, and anti-Christian.**

   c. **To encourage RCA members to communicate their concern to the Disney Corporation through actions they feel communicate clearly and in a godly manner.**

Reasons:

1. In recent years the Disney Corporation, known to produce some of the most wholesome family entertainment products, has established a record of products, policies, and practices that insult families to whom it has traditionally catered.

2. The following is a partial list of the Disney Corporation's practices and products:

   a. Miramax Films, owned by the Disney Corporation, continues to produce movies with anti-Christian themes (i.e., *Priest*, a movie that depicts five Catholic priests as dysfunctional, adulterers, alcoholics, mean, and vicious; *Dogma*, a movie that presents Christian beliefs as mythology; *The House of Yes*, a movie about incest; and *Pulp Fiction*, a movie filled with deviant sexual images and violence).

   b. For seven years, on the first weekend in June at Disney World in Orlando, Florida, the Disney Corporation has hosted a homosexual celebration called "Gay Day at the Magic Kingdom that Walt Built."

   c. The Disney Corporation chairman, Michael Eisner, and other Disney Corporation executives are on the board of trustees of Holly Supports, a powerful homosexual advocacy group whose focus is to promote the gay agenda in the workplace.

   d. The Disney Corporation signed Martin Scorsese, the director of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, to a four-year directing contract.

   e. The Disney Corporation extended company benefits to live-in partners of homosexual employees.

   f. Michael Eisner approved the storyline of the Disney/ABC television network series, *Ellen,* in which the lead character declares she is a lesbian. Disney/ABC leads the television networks in the number of prime time gay characters.

g. Michael Eisner and the Disney Corporation are both donors to People For the American Way, an organization whose stated goal is to "monitor and counter the divisive agenda of the Religious Right."

h. Anti-Christian views are produced through Disney/ABC's drama, *Nothing Sacred.*

i. The Disney Corporation hired a convicted child molester to direct its movie, *Powder.*

j. The Disney Corporation supports with advertising, *Out,* a homosexual magazine.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-29.
To deny the overture.

Reasons:

1. The general secretary (Proposal 1, p. 85j) has requested that "General Synod refrain from deliberative debate...relating to homosexuality." The reasons 2b, c, e, f, and j in this overture all require deliberative debate on the issue of homosexuality.

2. It is inappropriate to identify a single corporation for condemnation, even though the Reformed Church in America abhors the corruption of moral values in the media.➢

➢Upon a motion from the floor, the following was substituted for R-29:

To instruct the Commission on Theology to prepare a study document outlining a biblical and reformed response to the influence, both positive and negative, of the entertainment media on our society and personal lives, to be presented to the 2000 General Synod."➢

➢The synod:

VOTED: To put the substitute for the advisory committee's recommendation before the synod.

VOTED: To adopt the substitute motion.➢

INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP: NURTURING AND EQUIPPING IN CONGREGATIONS AND COLLEGES

"And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless" (Phil. 1:9-10).

A major part of the Christian journey is lifelong learning. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP helps Christians understand their call to be disciples of Jesus Christ. It considers such questions as:

- What is the purpose of Christian education in the RCA?
- How are the goals of the colleges implemented?
- How is the work of Reformed Church Women's Ministries accomplished?
- What programs, resources, and training are appropriate for the variety of needs and opportunities within the congregations?
- How will such programs, resources, and training be developed? Who will do it?
- What are effective ways to relate church and college to each other?

Major responsibility for CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP involves three areas:

1. The General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee, whose mission is to serve congregations and ministries of the Reformed Church in America by providing resources, programs, and encouragement to support, nurture, and equip disciples in their witness to the gracious reign of Christ in the world.

2. Reformed Church Women's Ministries, whose purpose is to help women know Christ and share God's love in the home, church, and world.

3. Hope College, Central College, and Northwestern College, which are devoted to truth and learning, and which covenant with the church in a relationship of mutual trust and responsiveness (*MGS 1990*, pp. 138-40).

Report of Central College

For 145 years Central College has persevered in offering quality liberal arts education in the Christian tradition. It is an enviable record of service that the college's founders may never have anticipated, and certainly one in which the Reformed Church in America can take great pride. It is a record, born of a historic church-college relationship, which contends for a faith that sustains, a set of values that inspires, and a future that beckons. It is a distinct pleasure to present this report to the 1998 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

NEW LEADERSHIP

David Roe, Ph.D., a retired Air Force brigadier general and a former financial services company executive, was named president of Central College in October 1997. He officially began his duties in January 1998.

Roe, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, holds a doctorate in physiology from the University of Illinois in Urbana. He replaced Thomas Iverson, Ph.D., professor of mathematics, who was serving as Central's interim president after the resignation of William Wiebenga as president in January 1997. Effective January 1, 1998, Roe named Iverson provost and senior vice president of the college.

Roe served on active military duty for twenty-four years. Among the key posts he held during his military career were special assistant to the director of the joint chiefs of staff at the Pentagon and defense planner with the U.S. mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Brussels, Belgium. He was also an associate professor and division director of the Department of Life and Behavioral Science at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. When Roe retired from active military service in 1986, he was stationed in Washington, D.C., as director of the U.S. Defense Department's NATO policy.

In 1986 Roe joined USAA, a San Antonio, Texas-based insurance and financial services corporation. He left the company in 1991 to become president of United Services Life Company in Arlington, Virginia, a $3 billion life insurance holding company. He turned the company around from showing $10.5 million in operating losses in 1991 to reporting $21.8 million in earnings in 1994.

Following his graduation from the Air Force Academy, Roe attended Oxford University in England as a Rhodes Scholar and earned a bachelor of medicine degree. In 1975 he was named a White House Fellow and worked for a year as special assistant to the secretary of health, education, and welfare.

Roe was baptized and raised in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and was very active in the church as a youth and adult leader. As soon as he and his wife, Betsy, are fully settled in Pella, Iowa, they anticipate becoming members of one of the local RCA congregations.

ENROLLMENT AND APPLICATIONS

Central College began the fall of 1997 with 1,089 full-time students on the Pella, Iowa, campus, and another 190 students enrolled in the college's international studies program. These numbers represent a slight increase from the previous year, and the college is optimistic that enrollment may have stabilized. At the time of this writing, applications for the fall of 1998 are running 30 percent ahead of where they were one year ago, with active deposits for enrollment showing a 20 percent increase. If deposit to enrollment rates hold true, the college should see a substantial increase in the size of its 1998 freshman class.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Central College continues to be recognized by national publications that annually rank colleges for quality indicators such as academic excellence, affordability, percentage of faculty with terminal degrees, graduation rates, and library resources.

Central College was again ranked in the top 150 "best buy" colleges nationwide for 1998 by *Money Magazine*, and was listed in the fourth tier nationally by *U.S. News & World Report* for Baccalaureate I institutions.

Central College long has recognized the value of immersion in other cultures, and last year, began requiring all students to complete a cross-cultural experience for graduation. Over 40 percent of Central's students currently study at one of seven international sites, which satisfies the new requirement. However, since many students cannot arrange for study overseas, the P.L.A.C.E.S. (Program for Learning Awareness of Cultures in Experiential Settings) program was organized to provide domestic cross-cultural experiences for students who may not have the opportunity to study at one of Central's international campuses. Since the beginning of P.L.A.C.E.S., program director Dr. Pam Steinke has identified and placed students in more than twenty sites across the United States. By design, at each location the students represent the minority culture. Student experiences to date have ranged from tutoring children in a mostly Hispanic neighborhood school in Des Moines, Iowa, to a two-week immersion study of the Native American and Hispanic-American cultures in northern New Mexico.

Enrollment statistics at Central College show that nearly 80 percent of its male students and 50 percent of its female students are interested in participating in some form of athletic competition during their college careers. With a renewed interest in athletic competition and personal fitness has come an increasing desire by many students to pursue careers as athletic trainers. Prior to this year, Central College had no athletic training component for certification in its exercise science major. Since the program was introduced last fall, nearly seventy students have joined the program that ultimately leads to professional certification as athletic trainers. Central anticipates that the new program will quickly become one of its most popular majors.

FACULTY

Central College is fortunate to have an outstanding faculty comprised of talented and intellectually diverse persons who are collectively dedicated to helping students. Many of them are truly outstanding teachers, and several enjoy a national reputation in their chosen fields. Listed below are just a few of their accomplishments for the year:

Dr. Dan Bruss, associate professor of chemistry, was a visiting scientist at Gorlaeus Laboratories at Leiden University, the oldest university in the Netherlands, from January through May 1998. His purpose at the university was twofold: 1) to gain practical experience for developing new methodologies in organic compound synthesis, and 2) to discover new research ideas and collaborations for current Central chemistry majors. His work included collaboration with several European scientists currently engaged in bio-organic synthesis whose work may have impact on new gene therapies.

Dr. Phillip Webber, professor of German and well-known expert on ethnic studies in the Midwest, recently concluded a trip to the University of Belgrade, where he was a presenter at a seminar dedicated to the role of linguistics in cultural conflicts. Webber's recent collaboration with Professor Jelica Novakovic-Lopusina of the University of Belgrade has included comparative study on the positive impact of ethnic cultures in Iowa and seeming negative ethnicity in other places of the world.

Dr. Jann Freed, associate professor of business management, recently completed four years of research to study the use of continuous improvement management practices in higher education. Her work, in collaboration with another professor from Drake University, culminated in a published book titled *Quality Principles and Practices in Higher Education: Different Questions for Different Times.* Freed will be called upon as a resident expert as Central College begins its own continuous quality improvement program later this year.

This year marks the retirement of several cherished and outstanding colleagues from the Central College community. They include: Bette Brunsting, associate professor of communication; Dr. Allen Moen, professor of physics; Dr. Leland Graber, professor of mathematics; and Dr. Gloria Boodt, assistant professor of education. Each of these dear friends leaves Central College with an inestimable legacy of excellence. Collectively they account for nearly seventy-five years of service to the college.

COLLEGE ADVANCEMENT

Central College continues to benefit from the loyal financial support of its many constituencies and is particularly grateful for the ongoing support it receives from congregations of the Reformed Church in America. Congregational gifts this year accounted for nearly 20 percent of the annual fund, and these gifts provided financial assistance to the sons and daughters of the RCA and other deserving students. For the first time, student members of the RCA were awarded the Trustee Grant, which provides an annual $1,500 in assistance over and above other types of aid.

Overall gift support to Central College has risen dramatically in the last year, and as of this writing, is more than 40 percent ahead of giving for the previous year. Several individual gifts deserve special mention:

Funding for the Ron Schipper Fitness Center is nearing completion, thanks to the generosity of many friends and former athletes. The leadership gifts of Heritage Lace, Inc. of Pella ($300,000), and Larry and Cathy Pacha ($250,000), parents of a current and past Central student, will make it possible to break ground for this facility in the summer of 1998.

A $50,000 scholarship in honor of its retiring pastor, the Rev. Norman Schouten, was given by the congregation of Second Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, to support RCA students.

A $75,000 grant from the Starr Foundation was received to underwrite financial assistance to international students.

A $46,400 gift from the Fred Maytag Family Foundation was received to help fund several needs in the music department.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

The spiritual dimension at Central College continues to be an important part of educating the whole person. Under the guidance of campus chaplain Tom Trinidad, the Christian ministries program emphasizes a balance between individual nurture and opportunities for worship and service. This year over one-third of the students participated in various campus ministry programs, including campus-community worship on Monday nights, residence hall Bible study groups, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Catholic campus ministries, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. InterVarsity continues to be the largest Christian organization on campus, with nearly a fifth of all students attending weekly meetings.

Central College was named to the 1997-98 Honor Roll for Character-Building Colleges by the John Templeton Foundation of Radnor, Pennsylvania. Central College was one of only 135 four-year undergraduate institutions in forty-two states selected for the honor roll, which recognizes colleges and universities that emphasize character building as an integral part of the college experience. The foundation's selection criteria were designed to evaluate the extent to which colleges inspire students to develop and strengthen their moral reasoning skills, encourage spiritual growth and moral values, provide community-building experiences, advocate a drug-free lifestyle, and conduct a critical assessment of character-building programs and activities.

Among the programs cited by the foundation in so designating Central College were the Cultural Awareness Experiential, which requires students to work in an ethnic community different from the one in which they were raised, and the annual trek by students to impoverished areas of the United States to build homes.

CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

Several critical elements for physical plant improvements seemingly came together all at once on Central's campus this year. The master plan for 1998 includes ground-breakings for two new buildings, a remodeling project for an existing building, and the construction of a new and more energy-efficient heating and cooling system.

Construction on the Schipper Fitness Center, named for Ron Schipper, who coached the Central College football team for thirty-six years, is scheduled to begin in the summer of 1998. The fitness center will be attached to the existing Kuyper Gymnasium and will include a 7,200-square-foot fitness room, a 2,000-square-foot multipurpose room, and a recruiting lounge. Plans for a 1,440-square-foot human performance laboratory and an enlarged 200-meter indoor track are also part of the project.

Ground will be broken later in 1998 for a new academic building that will house Central's departments of international education, modern languages, and economic, accounting, and business management. Construction of the $3.75 million facility represents one of the largest building projects in Central's history. The building will include multimedia and Internet-connected classrooms, offices, and a state-of-the-art computer lab.

COCURRICULUM

Cocurricular life at Central College continues with strength. Students participate in a full range of cocurricular activities, including drama, forensics, intramural and competitive athletics, clubs, and music ensembles. Many cocurricular activities within the life of the college achieved particular distinction this year, with the following being especially noteworthy:

> Central's speech team under the leadership of Dr. Martin Feeney, associate professor of communication, collected its 263rd trophy since 1988 by finishing second place against twenty-two colleges and universities from the South and Midwest at the Pi Kappa Delta Bi Province Speech Team Championships in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Freshman Amber DeBeer from Orange City, Iowa, was regional champion in informative speaking and finished in fifth place with sophomore Dawn Everard, from Lamoni, Iowa, in dramatic duo. Overall, Central College competed in sixty-six rounds of competition in nine events, with ten students finishing in twelfth place or above.
>
> Central's nationally recognized mock trial team finished third in the twenty-team Eastern Illinois University Invitational. Central College shared a perfect 4-0 record with

Bradley University and Rhodes College and brought home two of the twelve individual awards given at the tournament. Angie Dralle, senior from Knoxville, Iowa, was chosen as the outstanding attorney; and Ryan Stensland, sophomore from Thor, Iowa, was cited as an outstanding witness.

The Central College volleyball team finished third in the nation in NCAA Division III play at San Diego, California. Abbie Brown, sophomore from Eldora, Iowa, was named to the Division III All-America first team. Earlier in the year she was named the Iowa Conference most valuable player and was selected to the Division III region first team. She was joined on the region first team by Candace Wilson, freshman from Britt, Iowa.

Central's football team, under first-year coach Rich Kacmarynski, ended the season with an 8-2 record. Senior defensive back Matt Paulsen, from Plainfield, Iowa, was named to the first team Hewlett Packard NCAA Division III All-American team, the 1997 *Football Gazette* All-West Division III first team, and the Iowa Conference first team.

CONCLUSION

Central College chooses to be a liberal arts college in the Christian tradition. Not only has this been the history of the college, but it is the very foundation upon which the college hopes to build a bright future. To accomplish this goal, the work and witness of the college and the church together must be one of integrity, mutual appreciation, and accountability. Central College gives thanks to God for the sustenance provided by individuals and congregations of the Reformed Church in America, and the college anticipates serving its youth and other capable students for many years to come.

Report of Hope College

INTRODUCTION

> The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners (Isa. 61:1).

Based on the above Scripture text, the theme of the 1998 General Synod is exemplified in the founding of Hope College and Holland, Michigan. The Spirit of the Lord was surely upon Dominie Albertus C. Van Raalte and his fellow pilgrims as they set out from the Netherlands to found a *kolonie* in the new world, to bring many who were oppressed for their beliefs to a new land and a new beginning, and later to participate in the Civil War struggle to preserve the Union and free the slaves.

Over the ensuing generations, the Spirit who was upon the founders has found expression in many whose lives were shaped by their college and their community. From this community and this college, ministers and laypeople have gone to serve churches throughout the RCA, missionaries have gone into all the world to "bring good news to the oppressed...to proclaim liberty to the captives." Today this same Spirit is alive in Hope College and in the RCA, and the world's need for that Spirit is no less than it ever was in the past.

As Hope completes its 136th year, the college looks back to generations of steady growth and loyal service to youth and to the Reformed Church in America. Every few years it is Hope's privilege to host the annual meeting of the General Synod. This year Hope College is jointly hosting the 1998 General Synod with its nearby neighbor, Western Theological Seminary. Hope College cordially welcomes all the General Synod delegates to its campus and to the

community of Holland, Michigan. Especially if you have not been here for a while, Hope College hopes you enjoy becoming reacquainted with its campus, which has continued to undergo considerable expansion and change in recent years.

ADMISSIONS

Hope College has experienced a steady increase in applications for admission in recent years, and the college has continued to grow in student enrollment. Growth may continue for several years more, though the college has established three thousand as the upper limit on enrollment. The last few years have seen a reversal in the earlier decline in enrollment of students from RCA congregations. The quality of student applications has increased as the numbers of applications have increased.

SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Holland, Michigan, marked its sesquicentennial in 1997. Celebrations occurred throughout the year. Of particular note to Hope College were the dedication of the monumental statue of Dominie Albertus C. Van Raalte in May 1997 and the unveiling of the statue's commemorative plaque by Princess Margriet of the Netherlands in October 1997. Dominie Van Raalte was the founder both of Hope College and of Holland, Michigan. The statue was originally planned for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the town's founding in 1922, but it was cancelled because of lack of funds. The original plan was updated, and the monumental statue was crafted with the generous financial support of Hope College Board of Trustee member Peter Huizenga. The Van Raalte statue is located in Centennial Park and faces Graves Hall on Hope's campus. Several sesquicentennial publications were prepared by the Van Raalte Institute located on Hope's campus, and the activities of the institute are ongoing.

CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

The Haworth Conference and Learning Center was completed in January 1996 and has seen excellent use since its opening. Hope is especially proud of the conference, dining, and lodging facilities in the Haworth Center and hopes General Synod participants become acquainted with them during their time here at General Synod. Attached to the Haworth Center is the beautiful Cook Hall. Other new additions to Hope's campus include buildings at 84 and 100 East Eighth Street, flanking the Knickerbocker Theatre, which was given to the college several years ago.

As to the future, Hope College is looking forward to the construction of a new laboratory science building to supplement the excellent Peale Science Center and, also, to the expansion of office and classroom space for a number of other departments.

HOPE ON THE INTERNET

A lot of information about Hope College is readily available on the Internet. The address of Hope's home page is http://www.hope.edu/. The home page allows access to current news about the college and events on campus, as well as information about college offices and official college documents such as the Mission Statement. The home page of the RCA can be accessed directly from Hope's home page, and vice versa.

CHAPEL PROGRAM

Four years ago Hope College initiated an expanded chapel program. Attendance at the purely voluntary chapel services continues to grow and is now at the point where Dimnent Chapel is entirely filled during most services. In addition, spring and summer mission activities for

students continue to grow, as well as on-campus religious organizations and Bible studies. One unanticipated consequence is that enrollment in first year Greek has grown to forty—an indication of a marked increase in students contemplating seminary attendance.

The fruit of this remarkable series of developments will be known in the future when, it is the college's hope and prayer, many will go out from Hope College "to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit" (Isa. 61:3).

THE HOPE ACADEMY OF SENIOR PROFESSIONALS

About ten years ago Hope College established the Hope Academy of Senior Professionals (HASP). Dr. John Hollenbach, formerly dean of the faculty at Hope College, was instrumental in starting the organization. HASP offers to retired people excellent opportunities for intellectual and social enrichment through numerous regular courses and seminars, trips to places of cultural interest, and involvement in the Hope academic program. Many HASP participants are Hope alumni, but many others have no previous connection with Hope. HASP has grown to include several hundred members from Holland and the surrounding communities.

It is the college's hope and expectation that organizations like HASP will spring up in many other colleges and universities to help meet the social and intellectual interests of the growing group of Americans who have retired and who remain active and vitally interested in learning and intellectual discussion.

PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH

At the January 1998 meeting of the Hope College Board of Trustees, John Jacobson announced that he will retire from the presidency of Hope College as of June 30, 1999. At that time he will be sixty-five years old and will have completed twelve years of service as president of Hope College. The board of trustees has formed a search committee which is conducting its work over the next ten months. The new president is expected to take office as of July 1, 1999. Nominations are earnestly sought from RCA ministers and laypeople. Inquiries and nominations can be sent to the Rev. Dr. Elton Bruins, who is serving as executive secretary to the search committee. His address is:

The Rev. Dr. Elton Bruins
A. C. Van Raalte Institute
Hope College
P.O. Box 9000
Holland, MI 49422-9000

STATISTICS

Year in which college-level instruction was first offered	1862
Number of students enrolled[1]	2,911
Number of full-time equivalent students	2,764
Number of full-time equivalent faculty[1]	208
Number of major fields offered	39
Total assets	$214,000,000
Value of endowment (as of January, 1998)	$90,000,000
Operating budget, 1997-98	$64,000,000
Value of financial aid from all sources awarded to Hope students	$29,900,000
Costs for 1998-99:	
Tuition	$15,380

Room	$2,228
Board	$2,656
RCA student representation[2]	22 percent

CONCLUSION

Hope is proud to be a college of the Reformed Church in America. While the formal legal connection between the RCA and the college was abandoned many years ago, the two are linked by a significant Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities (see *MGS 1990*, pp. 139-40). Hope College looks forward to the meeting of General Synod as a time to remember and renew that covenant.

Hope is a church-related college. It is also an important fact about the Reformed Church in America that it is a college-related church. The tie between the RCA on the one hand and Central, Hope, and Northwestern colleges on the other is no nominal tie. It is vital to the RCA no less than to the colleges. It is our prayer that the significance of this relationship will grow in the coming years; and that those who teach, serve and study here "will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory" (Isa. 61:3).

[1] As of the fall term 1997

[2] This is the largest single denominational group. Other well-represented groups include the Roman Catholic, Christian Reformed, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Methodist churches. Also, many students come from independent congregations.

Report of Northwestern College

INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure to present the report of Northwestern College to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. The college community deeply cherishes its covenantal relationship with the denomination and looks forward to maintaining, even enhancing this relationship in the future (see *MGS 1990*, pp. 139-40).

In previous years this report has typically identified the major individual and institutional achievements at Northwestern. While these accomplishments have been no less evident this year, this report will focus instead on what it is that Northwestern College is trying to accomplish. It is hoped that this effort will provide insights about the life of the college which will enable the relationship of the college with the RCA to grow and mature in the years ahead.

MISSION

> **The mission of Northwestern College is to provide a distinctly Christian liberal arts education of recognized quality in a primarily undergraduate, residential, coeducational environment.**

Development of the Intellect and Christian Mind

As an educational institution, Northwestern believes that the development of the intellect is of primary importance. As a distinctly Christian institution, Northwestern believes that the development of the Christian mind is foremost. Northwestern desires to deliver a challenging, rigorous, academic experience that will stretch individual students and help them to become all that God intends for them to be. In an era when many institutions are disturbingly "dumbing down" to the lowest common denominator, Northwestern is intent on assisting

students in earning an education. This is in sharp contrast to the too popular idea of merely giving a diploma. There is a huge difference! Northwestern continues to attract increasingly more able students. The current average ACT of incoming freshmen is nearly 24. Northwestern does not desire to become an elite institution, but rather one of the premier Christian liberal arts colleges in the country. Though a lofty goal, this is certainly achievable.

Northwestern prides itself on being a very special kind of liberal arts institution. The distinctly Christian description is very real and meaningful. The name of Jesus Christ will continue to be honored above all others.

Northwestern has continued to maintain a required chapel program which meets on a daily basis. While this is perhaps the most visible religious dimension on campus, it certainly is not the only one and perhaps not even the most important one. Arguably, the most distinguishing feature about Northwestern is the teaching of every discipline from a Christian perspective. This perspective is ensured by the hiring of Christian faculty, the unwavering commitment of the administration, and the inservice education of professors. The resolve to bring a Christian perspective to every experience is a fundamental distinctive of the ninety-member Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities, of which Northwestern is a proud member.

"Praise and Worship" experiences, Bible study groups, and cocurricular attempts to permeate all activities with a Christian perspective are further attempts to enhance the spiritual dimension at Northwestern.

Finally in this regard, the college sponsors many local, regional, national, and international service opportunities in which the Christian faith is applied in tangible and helpful ways. More than 50 percent of the Northwestern student body participates in such activities.

Cocurricular Activities

Not every waking moment of a Northwestern College student is spent in the library, the laboratory, or the classroom! In keeping with the philosophy of educating the whole person, the college provides an array of cocurricular activities, ranging from theater and music to intercollegiate sport and intramurals. Important lessons like teamwork and leadership are often learned better in these settings than in the classroom. The college maintains such activities primarily for the benefit of the participants and intends that they will complement the academic program and generally enhance the overall collegiate experience at Northwestern.

Residence Life Program

The college is committed to a wholesome residence life program. This program is designed to build up rather than tear down. It is intended to build on the firm foundation established in the homes of so many of Northwestern's students. Living in a campus community has many privileges, but it also has responsibilities. There is considerable freedom within certain parameters. When these community boundaries are selfishly violated at the expense of the group, individuals are confronted, with compassion, in an attempt to help them meet certain fundamental campus community expectations.

Recruitment and Student Population

The college is committed to recruiting talented young women and men who will both benefit from and contribute to the Northwestern experience. Current campus facilities and philosophy limit this experience to approximately twelve hundred full-time equivalent students. The caliber and character of these twelve hundred students may well be the most crucial

component of a Northwestern College education. It is fully anticipated that all campus personnel—faculty, staff, and students—will together contribute to an enriching, uplifting education that will enable Northwestern's graduates to glorify God and serve humankind.

Facilities

Without question, facilities and equipment enhance a college education. They allow students to perform at the very highest levels. While Northwestern is not about the business of building buildings as an end in itself, the college is committed to construct and maintain facilities that attract students and faculty and allow for their highest achievement in a pleasant environment. In this regard, the college has constructed or renovated virtually every campus building in the last decade, including the recently completed restoration of century-old and historic Zwemer Hall. The future will demand continual attention to the physical plant of the institution.

College Education Costs

Northwestern desires to provide "affordable excellence" with respect to the education described above. While grants, including those from federal, state, and institutional resources, are plentiful, college educations today remain expensive. Very few can afford to pay the full cost and, of course, none do. Gifts from alumni and friends enable a price tag far less than the actual cost of delivering a Northwestern College education. Still, higher education is not an entitlement, but rather necessitates a commitment by families to complement their ability to pay with a willingness to do so. Northwestern remains committed to securing the necessary financial support that will enable every student who desires a Northwestern College education to be able to afford it. Hopefully, the investment value of a Northwestern College education will be apparent to students and their families today, tomorrow, and even more in the future.

CONCLUSION

The college is currently in the midst of a strategic thinking process that will refine and focus the mission identified in the preceding paragraphs. Because God has so richly blessed Northwestern's efforts in the past, the college looks forward with confidence to the future, believing that a faithful commitment to the mission of the college will be honored in ways even beyond the college's fondest expectations and imaginations.

Report of Reformed Church Women's Ministries

RCWM SELF-STUDY

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To strongly urge Reformed Church Womenn's Ministries, in the next year, to engage in a comprehensive self-study of future directions, toward the goal of ministry that includes and serves the needs of all the women of the Reformed Church; and further,
>
> to strongly urge Reformed Church Women's Ministries to report its findings and anticipated actions to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-4, p. 133).

In response to R-4, Reformed Church Women's Ministries (RCWM) engaged in a process of self-study toward the goal of ministry that includes and serves the needs of all women of the Reformed Church in America. The self-study process identified current needs and concerns, clarified future goals, and focused on creating new structures.

Five leadership teams assisted in the self-study: 1) the RCWM executive committee, 2) the RCWM denominational board, 3) the RCWM triennial committee, 4) the RCWM task force, and 5) a joint committee with members from RCWM and the Commission for Women.

A VISION FOR WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

In November 1997 the RCWM executive committee articulated the following vision for women's ministries, emphasizing partnership, inclusivity, personal and spiritual growth, generosity, and courageous Christian living for today's women:

REFORMED CHURCH WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

SIDE BY SIDE

WOMEN TAKING A STAND

For Christ—witnessing through words and acts of love.
For women—addressing issues that afflict, divide, and violate.
For children—protecting and nurturing children in our homes, churches, and communities.
For families—strengthening our relationships, healing brokenness, celebrating joys, and establishing traditions.

WOMEN CREATING BRIDGES

Between women of all ethnic heritages and economic positions.
Between ordained and nonordained.
Between women and men.
Between generations of women.

WOMEN PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES

For personal and spiritual growth.
For the sharing of dreams and stories.
For the development and utilization of women's gifts and talents.
For offering service and support to and for the benefit of others.

WOMEN COMING TOGETHER

To worship God.
To develop friendships and enjoy one another.
To learn and share learnings.
To unite in action and purpose.

RCWM...HELPING WOMEN KNOW CHRIST AND SHARE GOD'S LOVE IN THE HOME, CHURCH, AND WORLD

FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

The RCWM executive committee approved a $4.5 million fundraising campaign for ministries to, with, and by women of the RCA. This approval supports RCWM's goal of eliminating RCWM dues and organizational membership requirements. Requiring RCWM membership gifts has long been a divisive factor and was often perceived by RCWM women to be a "double assessment." The campaign kick-off will be at the 1998 Triennial in August.

RCWM TASK FORCE

RCWM gathered nine visionary women experienced in church leadership and women's ministries to formulate further directions. Members of this task force are:

Belen Alicia
Barbara Boss
Marylin Bright
Patricia Clary
Karin Granberg-Michaelson
Alicia Hermance
Sherry Vander Eyk
Gerry Wakeland
Arlene Waldorf

Included in part of the the task force's conversations were the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, Ella Campbell, and the Rev. Jeffrey Japinga.

The task force is working on the following initial draft of recommendations for future directions of women's ministries in the RCA:

1. RCWM requests the RCA be committed to women's issues and uphold women in ministry and in leadership within all RCA congregations.

2. RCWM challenges the RCA to invest in women's ministries and create a place in its structure where women's ministries work side-by-side within the RCA structure without sacrificing the strengths and advantages (to both RCWM and the RCA) gained through RCWM self-governance and self-funding.

3. RCWM requests that its executive director be a member of the Leadership Advisory Team (formerly called the Administrative Council) and be present at other important decision-making tables.

4. RCWM enters the new millennium with a new structure.

JOINT MEETING: RCWM AND THE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

RCWM held a joint meeting with the Commission for Women "to explore means for fostering future contact and cooperation" (*MGS 1997*, R-5, p. 133). This joint meeting group identified the following mutual goals for RCWM and the Commission for Women: 1) support women in professional ministries, 2) integrate women's stories into educational materials, 3) gather and promote women's resources, 4) develop a mentoring program, 5) establish an advocacy network and hotline, and 6) meet together annually to continue the review and discussion of shared work.

RCWM COMMUNICATIONS

In 1997 RCWM purchased pages in four issues (March, May, July/August, and November) of the *Church Herald*. The RCWM feature articles in these four issues focused on women in ministry and the "how to's" of women's ministries. The information sections advertised conferences for women, mission projects, and resources. In the November 1997 *Church Herald* issue, RCWM encouraged RCA-wide financial support by including a contribution envelope. Response to the RCWM pages has been very positive. Advanced donations have been received to continue the RCWM pages in the *Church Herald* through 1998. There is evidence of increased awareness about women's ministries throughout the RCA.

RCWM FINANCES

At year-end 1997 contributions to RCWM showed an increase over 1996 and enabled RCWM to complete the year 1997 with a slight financial surplus. The overall 1997 RCWM administrative income was $216,308, and expenses were $207,709. At mid-year 1997 the RCWM executive director, Arlene Waldorf, sent an appeal letter to each RCA congregation. Individuals, families, and women's groups responded from mid-year and through the remainder of 1997 with great generosity to this appeal. RCWM mission giving was in addition to the administrative income received.

MISSION GIVING

One ongoing strength of RCWM is its extensive and unified mission support. At the completion of the second year of the three-year RCWMission Commitment to China program, RCWM exceeded its 1997 goal and raised over $111,717. The two-year total now stands at $212,317 towards the three-year goal of $300,000.

Through the Children in Covenant and PS I Love You programs, RCWM sent $11,965 to the Rottschafer Day Care Center in Brewton, Alabama.

The 1997 FOOTSTEPS program sent nineteen women to three mission sites: Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico; Prince of Peace Children's Home in Guayaquil, Ecuador; and Cook Theological School in Tempe, Arizona.

These denomination-wide projects are only a portion of the total mission giving and efforts of RCA women. If all local, regional, and denomination-wide projects were totaled, the sum would be well over $1 million. Synodical (regional) unions send Christmas gifts to American Indian congregations, the Rottschafer Day Care Center, and Jackson County Ministries. Women's groups share in the support of RCA missionaries, run homeless shelters, send financial support to the Appalachian Assistance Fund, and give of themselves in countless ways to countless projects. RCWM is grateful to God for the immeasurable gifts of time, talent, and money contributed by the wonderful women of the RCA.

RCWM THEME

Mid-year 1998 ends the three-year theme emphasis on "God's People Transformed: A Living Sacrifice, Renewed in Mind, and Discerning and Doing God's Will," based on Romans 12:1-2. The Rev. Phyllis Steenhoek Palsma wrote the third-year Bible study and leader's guide entitled *Discerning and Doing the Will of God: Living in Faithful Obedience*. A new three-year theme will be introduced in August 1998 at the RCWM Triennial celebration.

RCWM CONFERENCES

In 1997 RCWM synodical unions planned regional conferences which thousands of women attended. In April 1997 Crossroads was held in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, and Interlude was held in the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. The Regional Synod of Albany's conference took place in October 1997. Joy, the Regional Synod of the Far West's conference, was held in November 1997.

RCWM THIRTEENTH TRIENNIAL ASSEMBLY: GOD'S SPIRIT UPON US: PROCLAIMING, CELEBRATING, REBUILDING

RCWM issued an invitation to all RCWM women to attend the Thirteenth Triennial Assembly: a time for women to learn, to be renewed and refreshed spiritually, to join in fun and fellowship with other women, and to respond to the Holy Spirit's call in their lives. Inspiring worship, missionaries, keynote speakers, concert artists, workshop and activity options, displays, banquets, and many fellowship opportunities are all part of this four-day event to be held August 1-4, 1998, at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Registration forms were enclosed in the January 1998 *Church Herald* and are available at the RCWM office, 4500 60th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49512. The telephone number is (616) 698-7071.

CONCLUSION

RCWM seeks to represent, encourage, and unite the creative and spiritual gifts of all women in the RCA for shared ministry in RCA congregations and the world and for enhancement of lives at home and in the workplace. Living courageously and being faithful to God's call during changing and sometimes threatening times requires unity, partnership, vision, faith, and mutual love. Having embarked on a process of purposeful change, RCWM seeks to honor the past, evaluate and enjoy the present, and invite the future with God's help and guidance and with the support of every Reformed Church in America congregation.

Report of the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND YOUTH MINISTRY

> God save us from what the mind alone produces. Christian education is more about people's souls.
>
> —Thomas Groome, February 5, 1998, at the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators

There is a revolution going on in North American society; no less so than the ones that have been fought on the plains and the hills of the United States with guns and armies throughout its history; no less than the revolutions of liberation which have toppled governments around the world. We will not see the bloodshed of the battlefield; what we will see is a society and culture changed in ways we have scarcely imagined.

Ours is a technological revolution, and if it does not leave behind the same bloodied scars of battle, it is no less formidable, and perhaps more so. For this revolution is happening every day: thousands of times in thousands of places. Every time you turn on a computer to access the internet; every time you turn on a television to watch a movie; every time you shop for an updated appliance or drive your car or use the telephone or send your children off to school or write a check—you are participating in a revolutionary act.

And unlike those revolutions of the past, even those fueled by the stated desire to return power to the masses, this revolution is truly democratic in nature. For it is happening at personal computers and in basement workshops more often than in corporate board rooms. The revolution of the new millennium is truly a revolution of the people. It is also a revolution without a clear end. Continued change is its marker.

Because of that constant change, the issues and challenges we face are no longer simply technical problems for which a single solution is needed. They are adaptive problems which demand of the church a model of ministry and teaching that prepares our members to make complex spiritual and moral decisions every day in vastly different circumstances and ever-changing ministries: living the gospel of Jesus Christ in a world at best indifferent to his name. It is an understanding that ministry and education is the work of the whole congregation that calls the church back to its original essence: reaching out to people, welcoming them to a life of faith, forming them as disciples in a covenant community, and commissioning them to a love of God and neighbor in the world.

It is, in the common language of the day, education as mission. In a culture that no longer identifies itself with the Christian faith, the church can no longer assume that persons have a background shaped by the stories, images, values, and traditions of the church and of the Bible. The faith community must intentionally guide and nurture those in its midst, especially seekers, so that they can live lives of faith that are rooted in the truth of the gospel and the gospel community.

This is not an easy task. The church as a whole could benefit from a new and focused look at the role of Christian education in the life of the church and the lives of those who are part of this covenant community as part of a more complete understanding of what it means to live in mission today. The RCA must affirm a philosophy of Christian education in the church that gives members the necessary foundation to live, work, and minister in a society ever-changing. And that will mean continued creative thinking and new models that emphasize the priesthood of all believers.

Amid this need to understand and re-evaluate the role of education in the life of the church, the Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry continues to seek to provide leadership, resources, and challenge to local congregations in their ministries of Christian education. Here are some of the ways and means by which that is happening.

Children's Curriculum

LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday) is the Bible-based curriculum for children in preschool through sixth grade, jointly developed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America. Introduced in the fall of 1994, after five years of designing, writing, and editing, LiFE focuses on three critical aspects of faith development in young people: faith knowledge, faith nurture, and faith modeling. LiFE emphasizes a faith journey jointly traveled by leaders and learners through the hearing of biblical stories and through regular opportunities to wonder, reflect, question, create, interact, and talk about the impact of that story on their faith.

Using feedback from users, LiFE editors have made revisions in the fall, winter, and spring quarters for the two-year cycle. The revised LiFE curriculum will be available, quarter-by-quarter, beginning in the fall of 1998.

A network of regional consultants, working under the direction of regional synod education staff and with support from the Office for Christian Education, provides direct support and training for RCA congregations using LiFE. In addition, *Here's LiFE*, a video training workshop for LiFE leaders, was introduced in the fall of 1996 and is available for loan through TRAVARCA or purchase through the RCA Distribution Center. *LiFE Support*, a four-page newsletter for LiFE leaders, provides regular suggestions on subjects such as room management helps, craft activities, and alternative response ideas. A copy is included in all LiFE orders.

While seeing LiFE as the key core curriculum for RCA congregations, the education office has continued to review and recommend other curricula that can appropriately meet the needs for faith development of children amid the highly diverse needs of ministry in the RCA. For example, Bible Way, now teaching the Scriptures to the children of its original users, continues to provide a solid, traditional curriculum grounded both in Scripture and Reformed creeds and confessions.

Whole People of God, an ecumenical, lectionary-based curriculum, allows every age group in the congregation to study the same topic or biblical text on the same day. In addition, it features an RCA-specific supplement that helps adapt the curriculum to specific RCA concerns.

One-Room Sunday School, a nongraded curriculum for children age three through eighth grade, addresses the need of smaller congregations for a broader, more inclusive program for children of various ages.

God Loves Me is a new curriculum specifically for two- and three-year-olds. Published by CRC Publications, it focuses on fifty-two Bible stories and will be available for fall 1998. The education office is also participating with several denominations and publishing houses in the initial development of a lectionary-based curriculum (a replacement for Whole People of God) for the year 2001.

In addition to the core curricula, the RCA participates in the development and publication of the StoryTeller series, a five-day vacation Bible school program published by a partnership of several denominations. "Shepherd King: Stories of David," the newest in the StoryTeller series, is available for 1998.

The General Synod Council assigned responsibility for children's mission education to Congregational Services. Congregational Services, along with Mission Services and Stewardship and Communication Services, has initiated plans for a twelve-session study, Living in Mission Everywhere, for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. Coordinated with the Mission of the Month focuses, the first session, "Native American Indian Ministries," is available at this 1998 General Synod.

Leader training designs and workshops for denominationally supported curricula are available to support planners, leaders, and teachers. Regional synod education staff and a network of twenty-eight regional education consultants are available to lead continuing education events, provide teacher training, and consult with churches regarding the development of sound children's ministry programs. Ongoing support for all congregations is provided through a toll-free RCA Resources Information Helpline, (800) 968-7221, and through the Office for Children's Ministry, (800) 968-3943.

Children and Worship

In addition to providing core curricula for the support of congregational ministries with young children, the Office for Christian Education remains deeply committed to the Children and Worship program. Children and Worship provides a unique and innovative worship experience for children ages four to seven in their own setting and at the same time prepares them for worship with the whole congregation.

A network of twenty-one regional Children and Worship trainers in the U.S. and Canada are available for scheduling and presenting either introductory sessions for congregations who want to learn more about the program or basic training events for congregations who want to become involved in the ministry. In addition, the trainers provide enrichment events or specialized events for congregations that have been involved in the program for a number of years.

The trainers include Barbara Cullum (Regional Synod of Albany); Nina Dupuis, Cathy Francis, Wendy Pauw, Marie Prins, Linda Shaw, Diane Tait-Katerberg, and Anelia Wierbos (Regional Synod of Canada); Candy Baylis, Nancy Errico, and Ann Jean Vander Veen (Regional Synod of the Far West); Alice Apol, Deb Swanson, and Ellen Vellenga (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes); Marcia Floding (Regional Synod of the Heartland); Dot De Boer, Carol Humme, and Karen Stabelfeldt (Regional Synod of Mid-America); Kay Weeks (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics); and Betsy Tamlyn (Regional Synod of New York).

In response to increasing requests for more Children and Worship stories, Reformed Church Press will publish a book of Children and Worship supplemental stories. Written by Janet Schreuder and illustrated by Judy DeWitte, the book will be available for fall 1998.

Congregations interested in Children and Worship are encouraged to contact the RCA's Office for Children's Ministry, (800) 968-3943, for information about localized training and personnel available to support the Children and Worship program.

Youth Ministry

Ministry to youth at the denominational level continues to be coordinated through the Denominational Youth Team, formed from representatives of each of the regional synods and each of the RCA racial/ethnic councils, as well as from the General Synod Council. Ron Den Hartog brings extensive youth ministry experience to the GSC as Denominational Youth Team leader on a forty-day per year contract. He is also a member of the pastoral staff of Central Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Coordinating ministry to youth through the youth team acknowledges the unique, necessary, and, indeed, primary contributions to youth ministry that are happening through staff and programming at the regional synod level and in the RCA racial/ethnic councils. Regional synods, for instance, are the sponsors of all the major youth gatherings that take place across the Reformed Church: Spectrum for the three eastern synods; Genesis in the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes; Winter Happening in the Regional Synod of Mid-America; Rocky Mountain High in the Regional Synod of the Heartland; and several classis-based events in the Regional Synod of the Far West, including "Converge," an outreach event in the Classis of California.

Yet, through their interaction at the youth team table, both creative and financial resources are moved between parties and can enhance the quality of all the events. For example, the regional synods of the Great Lakes and the Heartland, as well as the RCA's Office for Youth Ministry, made financial gifts that enabled Spectrum to sponsor a full program for its youth in December 1997. That's just one example of the cooperative nature of youth ministry modeled by the Denominational Youth Team.

Cooperative tables of ministry work, however, only when each group at the table brings its own unique contributions and its personal commitments to that table. The denomination has clearly said that it wants to remain a partner in youth ministry. That means each of us finding our unique places of ministry. One specific area in which the RCA has committed to provide specific leadership is urban youth ministry. On January 1, 1998, the Rev. Jason Perry, a member of the Classis of Illiana and of Pembroke Community Reformed Church in Hopkins Park, Illinois, began service to the RCA under a thirty-five-day-per-year contract. His major responsibility is in the identification of congregational needs in urban youth ministry and in the identification and linking of key urban youth ministry resources and initiatives (from both inside and outside the RCA) with congregational needs. In this, he will work closely with the Denominational Youth Team and with Mission Services staff, especially for the new initiative in urban ministry.

The Office for Youth Ministry also continues to sponsor Project Timothy, an annual ten-day summer mission immersion event for high school youth and adult sponsors. The Rev. Randy Wieland, minister for youth at Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California, and Denominational Youth Team member from the Regional Synod of the Far West, remains on contract with the RCA to coordinate the program. Last year more than forty youth gained powerful new insights into faith and discipleship through their participation in Project Timothy. Listen to what they said:

> Project Timothy changed my life drastically and showed me what life is really about. I'd be lost without this experience.
>
> It caused me to reevaluate my priorities. It was a turning point in my life.
>
> Before the trip I read through the brochure. A quote from a kid who had been in Project Timothy said, "It made me believe in God." I thought, nah, that won't happen to me. But now I know what I believe, and I've opened the door for God into my heart.
>
> Project Timothy was the best two weeks of my life. It helped me open myself to the Lord and answer some questions I had about myself.

This summer, Project Timothy participants will serve at the following sites: 1) Palm Canyon Community Church in Moreno Valley, California; 2) Herkimer Reformed Church in Herkimer, New York; 3) First Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa; 4) First Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington; 5) First Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ontario; 6) Church of the Good News in Chicago, Illinois; and 7) Honduras, Central America.

The specific responsibilities of individuals like Ron Den Hartog, Jason Perry, and Randy Wieland reflect a denominational strategy approved by the General Synod Council, at its March 1995 meeting, to use part-time contract staff to focus on certain key, strategic ministries to youth that are not adequately nurtured by other parts of the church. Limited funding remains for additional contract staffing. Identification of particular areas of staffing remain a part of the agenda of the Denominational Youth Team.

No less important is the identification and availability of a full range of learning materials and curricula for youth in both Christian education and youth group settings. The RCA benefits here from the cooperative relationships it has built with other denominational publishers, providing through the RCA Distribution Center such outstanding resources as Fast Lane and Crossroads for junior highs, and Generation Why, Lifewise, and Prime Time Bible Study series for senior highs. In addition, the Office of Youth Ministry is able to recommend a wealth of leadership resources to aid youth group sponsors in planning and carrying out those gatherings in a meaningful way.

Finally, the RCA continues to provide opportunities for its youth leaders to attend a wide variety of resourcing events. Youth leaders benefit from their attendance with new and creative means by which youth ministry can be carried out on all levels, from a single gathering in a particular congregation to ecumenical events.

Family Ministry

In the 1980s the education office, through the work of part-time contract staff, sought to maintain a vital presence in ministry to families across the RCA. In fact, this area of ministry was valued enough that in 1990 the General Synod approved a recommendation instructing the then-General Program Council "to develop a plan, including a job description and means of funding, to provide full-time staff for the Office of Family Life, making family ministry a major program priority in the Reformed Church in America" (*MGS 1990*, R-16, p. 101).

One of the disappointments for the Office for Education has been the inability to fully carry out R-16. Small steps toward the goal, such as the hiring in 1995 of the Rev. Tom Schwanda on a limited-basis contract, have produced some important resources for congregations to use with families and provided some liaisons with other family ministry organizations. But those eighteen-to-twenty-days per year are simply not enough to sustain any real momentum in ministry to families. The need is still there, and indeed it has increased since the 1990 General Synod vote. There are possibilities and energy for further work in this area, including strategic partnerships with other organizations that could provide leadership for the RCA in family ministry. There is not, however, any easily identified income source that would put this ministry on sound footing. Until that is identified, the RCA will continue to struggle to adequately serve its congregations in an area of ministry where the need is increasing, not decreasing.

Adult Education

It is not that knowledge of faith is no longer relevant in today's society; knowledge is simply no longer enough. That's what makes the need so urgent for a multifaceted approach to the ministry of adult Christian education.

The RCA is indeed well served with resources for adult study of both the Scriptures and contemporary issues. A quick review of the *RCA Resources for Ministry Catalog* reveals a variety of biblical study resources and adult study guides. Most of those were produced outside the RCA Office for Education. Given the limited resources available to the office, a conscious decision has been made not to focus efforts on the creation and publication of new resources, but rather to work in partnerships with other denominations and Christian ministry organizations in first identifying helpful and sound resources and then making those resources available through the RCA Distribution Center.

But the question for adult education is not only how we increase our knowledge of faith, but also how we live out and model what it is we know. Last year the Office for Education introduced at General Synod a new initiative in biblical engagement, tied to the theme of the 1997 General Synod. Here is the stated goal of that effort:

> We desire to see the Reformed Church actively engaged with Scripture, in order to experience the transforming power of God's Word. In the life of the General Synod and through its work, individuals, congregations, and the whole of the church will be invited to question and examine how this active engagement with Scripture can be realized in every area of their individual and collective lives (*MGS 1997,* p. 143).

The word "engagement" was purposefully chosen, to challenge us to move beyond simply acquiring more biblical knowledge to asking how Scripture engages our life, work, and

ministry. The design team that planned this initiative passionately believed that such an "engagement" with Scripture could make all the difference in the world; the difference between stagnation and growth; between skepticism and faith.

Toward that end the design team designed a full program aimed at providing both the inspiration and resources necessary for individuals and congregations to embark on a program of biblical engagement and dialogue. *Turning Points: The Dangerous, Liberating, Holy, Transforming, Everyday Stories of People Engaging the Bible* includes a broadcast quality video emphasizing the transforming power of Scripture that can come to individuals and congregations who seek it; and a complete resource book, with articles and direct resource listings, that provides congregations and teachers with information necessary to match the ethos and needs of a particular congregation with an appropriate resource.

Out of this initiative, approximately one hundred RCA congregations have named 1998 the "Year of the Bible," using a resource of that same name to provide its members a guided reading through the entire text of the Scriptures. While we are not yet even halfway through the year, the excitement that is being generated by "Year of the Bible" is tremendous and widespread. The Office for Education congratulates those congregations who took seriously the recommendation overwhelmingly approved at the 1997 General Synod:

> To urge every RCA congregation to ask how it can incorporate an ongoing emphasis on biblical engagement for transformation into its life and witness; and further,
>
> to commend the resources provided through the Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry to each RCA congregation (*MGS 1997,* R-6, p. 140).

Further, the education office encourages those congregations who might be interested to contact the office as soon as possible to begin planning for 1999. Those congregations already involved in "Year of the Bible" have been generous in providing for the education office the means by which they have implemented this program; those responses have been put in a form that will be of great assistance to any congregation seeking active engagement with Scripture.

Other key initiatives and resources for adults are also focused primarily on training for leadership and spiritual growth. *Branches on the Vine,* a self-contained consistory training workshop, continues to be a widely accepted and used resource. The workshop combines the previously published books, *Ministry of the Deacon*, by Betty Voskuil, and *Ministry of the Elder*, by the Rev. Robert White, and the video, *As One Who Serves*, with a newly created workshop structure for joint training of elders and deacons. The package is available through the RCA Distribution Center.

The Office for Christian Education has also entered into partnership with RCA camps and conference centers around the themes of spiritual formation and spiritual retreating. We have long known through our young people of the wonderful resources the RCA enjoys in its camps and conference centers. Now, in a joint initiative, the camps and conference centers and the education office will offer at least three opportunities in 1998 for leadership groups from congregations to explore how to combine spirituality and decision-making in faithful ways.

Leader Support for Education

A key to any effective educational program, whether at the local, regional, or denominational level, is a provision for first identifying those people gifted for educational ministry, and then providing training and leadership resources that allow those gifts to grow, blossom, and be appreciated in the church.

The Office for Education and the regional synods have joined together in providing a network of regionally based, trained consultants available to all RCA congregations. Consultants can provide congregations with assistance on a number of levels, including teacher training, program recommendations, educational workshops, or even redesign of educational ministries. Consultants can be contacted through the education ministry of the regional synods. Names and numbers are printed in the *Plan Calendar*. The Office for Christian Education, (800) 968-3943, will also make a referral to a consultant.

The Office for Christian Education also produces resources that can be used directly by congregations in leadership training. *Branches on the Vine*, a consistory training workshop, and *Here's LiFE*, a video-training workshop for LiFE curriculum leaders, were both introduced in the past two years and continue to be widely used. In addition, the office supports the publication of *Servant Leaders*, a resource newspaper for congregational leaders, as a key means of identifying important congregational resources.

One key component in all ongoing educational initiatives from the Office for Christian Education is the Council for Christian Education. The council meets three times annually, under a shared funding agreement between the denomination and regional synods, and operates under the umbrella of a document approved in 1995 outlining eight assumptions about the joint work of the denominational education office and regional synod education personnel. The Council for Christian Education continues to play a central role in the future development of RCA educational philosophy and in the development or evaluation of educational resources. In the council is the embodiment of a commitment that Christian education can be done best and most efficiently when it is done on a collaborative basis and with the local congregation in mind.

Certification

The work of the Office for Christian Education also includes the care and nurture of Christian educators. The process of the certification of Christian educators as associates in ministry becomes an essential means by which the whole church can assert the importance both of the ministry of Christian education and of those persons who are gifted and trained to provide leadership in this area. An open enrollment period in the certification process allowed many Christian educators certified under previous plans in the RCA to become certified as associates in ministry under this new process, and to take up their important role not only in congregations but also in the classis.

While the Office for Education rejoices in this new visibility for these associates in ministry, it also acknowledges that the communication of the importance of certification to the church and the means by which this can best happen has not been as helpful as it should have been. With the timetable for those to be certified under open enrollment now expired, it is time for the education office to carefully refocus the means by which it oversees the certification process at the denominational level and by which it works with classes and stated clerks of classes to monitor and assist in its implementation and use.

Funding

In light of the Statement of Mission and Vision (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80), and following the directional goals of the GSC, the staff of Congregational Services of the General Synod Council, which includes the Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry as well as the Office of Social Witness and Worship plus many of the program ministries of the racial/ethnic councils, have begun to dream about the programs and priorities that the mission and vision statement is calling us to be about. In the midst of that dreaming and visioning—asking where God would have us go in our ministries —we have been caught short by the simple

reality that vision is expensive. How will we pay for the vision we together seek? What happens when the dreams for ministries in Christian education, social witness, and leadership development run up against walls which seem to impede their progress?

These are questions that engender both thanks and concern. Thanks, first of all, to the generosity of the congregations through their classes in providing assessment funding for most of the staff and office costs of the office. This fundamental support forms the foundation for all that we do. But assessments form only part of the funding picture; some staff costs, plus the funds for all programs, resource development, training, and joint educational planning must come from other sources. Income from denominational investments provide some support; so do fees connected to certain programs. Finally, a number of congregations generously support the ministry of Christian education. In 1997 Congregational Services received about $60,000 in voluntary contributions from congregations and individuals. While our thanks have been expressed directly for this generosity, the Office for Education wishes publicly to thank again those churches and individuals who sponsor the work of education in the RCA. Without you, there would literally be many essential initiatives this office could not undertake. Thank you.

That's not to say that funding is or historically has been flush for RCA ministries in Christian education and discipleship. Even a cursory glance at our recent history reveals numerous documents drawn up in response to budget shortfalls. Just a decade ago, in the report of the General Program Council to the General Synod, delegates were alerted that the "problem of sustaining minimum programs in the two divisions [Christian Discipleship (CD) and Church Planning & Development (CP&D)] becomes more acute each year" (*MGS 1987,* p. 266), even as the report was raising "a need for further development of the CD division in order to move forward in response to Christ's call to build his kingdom" (*MGS 1987,* p. 267).

Assessments were put into place that year (1987) to do that (*MGS 1987,* R-11, p. 265). Yet just five years later the General Synod was again told that "the survival of the programs of the CD/CP&D divisions has been a constant matter of concern" (*MGS 1992,* p. 448). This was the year the current funding formula for what is now Congregational Services—the formula that included in a staff report three years ago, "a guaranteed program budget floor from which these units could build toward the future"—was put in place. It was further agreed that these units would be weaned from investment income as revenue source as they discovered new ways to fund the ministries assigned to them.

We are now at the end of that agreement and facing acute challenges on how Congregational Services will fund its work, even as direct General Synod mandates remain unaccomplished or underaccomplished. In recent years General Synod has asked the Office for Education to focus more attention on family ministry, ministry with older adults, and programs for equipping the laity, to name three. Yet while ideas abound, the funding for implementation remains problematic. The General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee continues to creatively examine new ways by which the RCA can affirm and fund its ministries in Christian education with a fair and long-term solution.

General Synod Referrals

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To instruct Congregational Services, in consultation with regional synods and classes, to develop and begin implementing a specific plan for continuing to raise the visibility of the ministry of the laity at all levels of the church, including a means for gathering and communicating to local congregations key resources or processes that can identify and evoke the gifts of laity; and further,

to instruct Congregational Services to include in this plan a proposal and models for congregationally and geographically based celebrations of the gifts of the laity, to be held in the year 2000; and further,

to instruct Congregational Services to include this plan in its report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-9, p. 145).

The strategy for implementation of R-9 must be developed though the Council for Christian Education in order to insure the kind of cooperative effort needed to make this effort a success. However, prior to receiving this referral, the council had implemented a plan for a denomination-wide, grassroots information-gathering conference in June 1998. The conference, to be held in place of the annual consultant training event and utilizing that funding as its support, is intended to raise up from the grassroots of the church key needs and issues in Christian education, so that future strategies in Christian education can be developed with these needs of the church firmly in mind. In addition, the education office has been asked to participate in the planning for a major convocation, tentatively scheduled for the spring of the year 2000, around a "Future of Mission" theme. Given the holistic sense of "Mission is One" embodied in the mission and vision statement for the RCA adopted by the 1997 General Synod, this convocation could and probably should include the ministry of the laity as a portion of its focus.

With these two major events still in the planning stages, it seemed premature to proceed immediately with plans for programs or initiatives for increasing the visibility of the laity. This item will be on the agenda of the fall 1998 meeting of the Council for Christian Education, to be combined with the results of the conference and the planning outlines for the mission convocation. Together, this input will help the education office evaluate and select the right means by which to accomplish this important goal without unnecessary duplication of other initiatives and thus unnecessary expenses.

The 1997 General Synod voted:

To encourage Congregational Services, in consultation with the African-American Council, to explore congregation-based leadership development workshops for existing, new, and emerging multicultural workshops (*MGS 1997*, R-12 p. 99).

The Office for Education has continued to work with the African-American Council in funding pilot workshops in leadership development. In addition, it has sought to incorporate learnings from these workshops into other efforts intended at enhancing the development of leadership within congregations. This partnership was positively promoted through 1997 and the early part of 1998 by the executive director of the African-America Council, the Rev. Dr. John Cato, prior to his retirement, and will hopefully be maintained through the new director, even as it is expanded to include the learnings of the other racial/ethnic councils.

The 1997 General Synod, in response to an overture from the Classis of Orange, voted:

To instruct Congregational Services to prepare criteria for Associates in Ministry to be certified in areas such as administration, visitation, church music, preaching, outreach/ evangelism, or other areas of ministry that can be carried out by capable and trained laity under proper guidance and supervision; and further,

to report these criteria to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-21, p. 353).

While the Office for Education affirms the intent of R-21, the office felt it was premature to develop and forward criteria for associates in ministry in a number of new areas for the following reasons:

1. Classes, during 1997-98, were voting on major changes in the *Book of Church Order* regarding the place and role of preaching elders. Since preaching was one of the areas mentioned in the overture, including reason four in support of the overture ("an associate in ministry certification in the specified area of preaching establishes parameters and a clear relationship to the classes" — *MGS 1997*, p. 353), it seemed only prudent to await the outcome of this classis vote.

2. While certification of associates in ministry in Christian education has been in place now for a couple of years, it is clear that this process needs additional attention and clarification. To seek implementation of new certification categories prior to a more thorough evaluation of the one category we do have would likely not yield good results.

3. To engage in this new process will require a collaborative effort between the Office for Education, the Ministry and Personnel Services Committee of the General Synod Council, the classes, stated clerks or classes clerks, and persons with specialties in these particular areas. That process will require a significantly longer timeline in order to be effective.

The 1995 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the Congregational Services Unit though its Office of Education, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, to provide materials and resources in keeping with the above prospectus outline in order to enable RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods more fully to fulfill the 1994 General Synod's call to repentance, prayer, learning, and growth in ministry to and with persons of homosexual orientation (*MGS 1995,* R-5, p. 388).

A study guide, based on the prospectus, "Material for the Study and Discussion of Homosexuality: A Prospectus," of the Commission on Theology (*MGS 1995*, pp. 381-388) and including a full appendix of foundational papers on the issue of homosexuality, has been completed and is currently available through the RCA Distribution Center.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF DIACONAL MINISTRY

The diaconal ministries program recommended by the 1993 General Synod (*MGS 1993*, R-2, p. 153) continues to encourage, motivate, and undergird deacons to serve as leaders in their congregations in ministries of mercy, service, and outreach.

The diaconal ministries staff team, under the leadership of the coordinator for diaconal ministries, Betty Voskuil, met in Chicago, Illinois, October 6-7, 1997, to do strategic planning as the program moves into its fifth year of operation.

The staff team affirmed the present direction of the program and identified five of the most important issues to focus on in the next few years:

1. Establish diaconal centers where possible and identify a variety of models for resourcing local diaconates.

2. Develop a format for spiritual reflection by participants after diaconal ministry transpires.

3. Highlight diaconal ministries at General Synod in 2000.

4. Form parallel classis-wide organizations for deacons and hold classis diaconal gatherings.

5. Provide working models and develop a four-to-six-week curriculum for use in RCA congregations before consistory members are chosen.

Staff team members were actively involved in helping establish the Grand Rapids, Michigan, Deacons' Coordinating Center. Karen Navis was hired as coordinator. Her office is located in the former parsonage next to First Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan. A board of eight deacons from the classes of North and South Grand Rapids worked together since September 1997 to develop a mission statement and select the part-time coordinator. Funding for the Deacons' Coordinating Center comes from the two classes, the RCA Office of Diaconal Ministries, and a grant from the $9.8 by '98 fund drive.

The annual diaconal gathering of delegates from all eight RCA regional synods was held in Belleville, Illinois, at the King's House Retreat and Renewal Center on April 24-26, 1998. Delegates were encouraged to tell their stories of diaconal ministry. In keeping with the 1997 General Synod vote to request the RCA diaconates to monitor the impact of the new welfare reform law on the poor in their communities (*MGS 1997*, R-8, p. 96), part of the weekend training event focused on how welfare reform affects poor people in the United States.

Delegates were also introduced to the so-called "charitable choice" option of the 1996 federal welfare law. This option is designed to expand cooperation between state welfare programs and faith-based and grassroots organizations.

Regional synod groups spent time strategizing possible actions and plans within their regional areas to help deacons take up the towel and follow the example set by Jesus Christ, who said, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27b).

This report is submitted in compliance with the 1993 General Synod instruction to Congregational Services and Mission Services "to begin additional programs for diaconal ministries...and to report progress toward fulfillment to the General Synods of 1995 through 2000" (*MGS 1993*, R-2, p. 153).

Report of the Task Force for Calling Forth Leaders to Serve as Missionary Pastors in the Twenty-First Century

MANDATE

This task force was born out of passion; out of the strong and forceful beliefs of General Synod president the Rev. Tony Vis, as expressed in his report to the 1997 General Synod:

> Generation X—whatever you want to call them or whatever they want to be called—is ready to come alongside the rest of us and lead a missionary church into the twenty-first century. Indeed, we cannot do it without them. The coming century is theirs far more than it is ours. We need to identify from among our young people those who are spiritually gifted for visionary, mission-driven, pastoral leadership. We need to tell them we want them; we need to tell them we need them; we need to tell them we believe that God is calling them into ministry (*MGS 1997*, p. 39).

Passionate words, but also practical, in also asking the General Synod to name a task force to ask how the church can call forth leadership for a new century (*MGS 1997*, R-6, p. 39).

The specific mandate of the task force by the 1997 General Synod was spelled out as follows:

> to instruct the task force to develop a denomination-wide strategy for calling forth those committed and appropriately gifted RCA youth and children needed by the Reformed Church in America to serve as missionary pastors in the twenty-first century, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-8, p. 144).

R-8 also provided guidelines for the makeup of the task force. Based on those guidelines, the following persons were named to the task force by the General Synod Council at its October 1997 meeting:

Paul Boersma	Hope College chaplain
Kathy Barnes	Hope College student
Thomas Trinidad	Central College chaplain
Elizabeth Brown	Central College student
Matthew Floding	Northwestern College chaplain
Brian Keepers	Northwestern College student
Amanda Walvoord	Western Theological Seminary student
Edry Jemmott	New Brunswick Theological Seminary student
Randy Wieland	at-large
Jody Rice	at-large
David Vanderwel	at-large

Jeffrey Japinga served as the staff resource person for the task force.

FORMAT

The format for this report is reflective both of our time of meeting together and our own experiences of God's callings in our lives. Part One is the descriptive core of the report and is presented in ways that reflect, often through our own stories, the advice we would present to the church. Like our own lives, this portion of the report can be read in many different ways.

> If you are a person who learns best by stories and experiences, focus on the *italic print*. It recalls the journeys of the members of our task force: stories that framed our meeting and helped us see how God has worked in the lives of those assembled at the table. You can draw your own conclusions of how best to support God's call by learning from the experience of this group.
>
> If you are a person who prefers exposition to narrative, focus on the text as it flows down the left margin. It highlights general principles necessary to nurture, affirm, and encourage young people to consider ministry, and lifts out examples of how these principles could be implemented in the local church. These examples are intended to be a beginning point; a triggering mechanism, for other possibilities that individuals or congregations could develop on their own as a means for accomplishing this goal.
>
> Finally, if you are a person who likes the quick and dirty, "give us the highlights" approach, then all you need do is read the **bold print**. That's where you will find the general principles the church must consider and implement if it desires to encourage its young people toward faith and service.

While the mandate of the task force was directed at the nurturing and calling forth of young people to ministry and service, this portion of the report is intended to be a call for and extended to the entire membership of the church. Congregations modeling a ministry where all serve equally, according to their gifts, will ultimately be the most effective means by which young people will experience their call.

Part Two of the report is in the form of a prayer. Times in prayer were at the foundation of our meeting and are significant in faithfully responding to God's leading. Thus it seems like an important part of our response to this task as well. The prayer includes instruction on how they could be used liturgically, should you wish.

Part Three is designed to help congregations process this report in an educational setting and determine the ways the principles of the report might be implemented in a particular congregation.

> *We began our meeting in worship, letting God's calling of Samuel and Isaiah remind us of how God has always used a variety of means to call people to serve. And then we took the time to listen to each other's stories of how God had worked in our lives to call us to use our gifts within the church. We were impressed by the diversity we represented—east and west coasts, students and chaplains, pastors and denominational executives. And we were moved by how the Spirit of God calls us to ministry, and how the church can encourage its members to be sensitive to and respond to that calling—and regrettably, in some cases, how the church had actually discouraged us. It is from the sharing of our stories and our personal experiences, and our reflections on those stories, that this response to our synodical mandate is written.*

PART ONE: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

If the church is to call forth from its children, youth, and experienced members appropriate leadership for the twenty-first century, it must pay attention to the themes which emerge from the stories of God calling people to use their gifts in ministry.

> *I've heard how God works, and it certainly isn't the same for us all. There are times when I wonder if I know what God's call is like at all. Yet, when God's call comes, and so often it comes through the voice of someone else, we know it to be God speaking because the message is so clear. I can't help but feel that, to encourage young people to see that God could be calling them, we must invite them to sit at this table with us and hear our stories.*

In some sense, any strategy to call forth young people to consider ministry is simply asking the church to be the church. That is, in its attempt to be faithful as God's children, the church is expected to be open to the (sometimes mysterious) workings of the Holy Spirit and to answer God's call to use the gifts it has been given. We have, after all, been blessed by God in order to be a blessing in the world into which we've been placed. We won't be able to do that unless we take advantage of the gifts of all God's people. Thus, the most effective "strategy" can never be a one-size-fits-all prescription for the church as much as it must be descriptive of how we've heard God's calling: illustrations of how God has worked through the lives of individuals that will spark each congregation to seek new ways in which it might help its members be more sensitive to the working of the Spirit in their lives.

There are, however, ways and means by which the church can help all its members, including its young people, to hear and reflect upon the call of God and be open to the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The five thrusts the task force identified and urge the church to consider follow below in bold print.

From the beginning my parents instilled in me that, as a child of God, all of us are called to honor God. Therefore, whatever my occupation (and this could change throughout my life), my vocation is to honor God. For me there was no lesser or greater occupation in which to honor God, only arenas in which to do the primary thing we were created to do—"to proclaim the mighty acts of God."

1. **We must celebrate God's continuing work throughout history and in the lives of people by willingly sharing the stories of our own relationships with God and how we have sensed that claim on our lives, for it is in hearing how God has worked in the lives of others that we come to see that work in our own.**

It's easy now to see how God was directing my experiences and choices, because now they all fit. At the time, it was really hard to understand all the times that doors seemed to close while those unwanted ones opened. And it's really amazing to see how each experience I've had has helped prepare me for the next stage of ministry.

We often learn best by example. We learn how God might speak to us by hearing about how God has worked and spoken in the lives of others. In fact, the basis of our whole understanding of God is built on such stories. Most of our Bible is simply a collection of stories of God's relationship with individuals and the community of faith. Likewise, one of the main ways that Jesus chose to teach about God and the kingdom was by telling stories, or parables. Through these stories, we've come to learn how God calls people into relationship; how God expects them to impact the world around them; how God equips them for the tasks they are given; how God raises up leaders to bring the people back when they sin; and how God is faithful in demonstrating that covenant love.

It is still in the stories of how God has worked in the lives of others that we sense how God could be at work in our own lives today. The church needs to help its people—young and old, men and women, in their triumphs and in their struggles—tell the stories of how the Holy Spirit has shaped their lives so that young people can see that the Spirit is still at work today and could be calling them as well.

Having grown up in the church, I attended summer church camp. There I was impacted by a counselor whose faith was contagious. I vowed to pursue the necessary training and become "just like him." That was the catalyst God used to begin a process of identifying gifts and using them at camp and in the church.

Where might such times of storytelling occur in the church? In short, any where and any time. But it can also be intentionally structured into the life of the church in a variety of ways:

- In church school programs. The RCA's LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday) curriculum builds into weekly lessons time and space for leaders to share their own stories and personal faith with the children in their classroom as a model to help children see that God is still at work today. Whether your church uses LiFE or some other curriculum, that's a sound, biblical practice to follow.

- In church camps. These are places successful in stimulating faith in our children because campers see God at work in their counselors so openly throughout the week that they are drawn to claim that faith for themselves.

- In youth programs. "Relational leadership" is effective because it provides opportunities for young people to learn from their leaders.

- In worship. Testimonies from individuals or illustrations in sermons that describe God's work in the lives of individuals and families give the congregation cause for celebration and praise.

- In our adult study groups. Small groups are safe places where our stories can be created and nurtured.

2. We must understand the significance of positive models of ministry, for it is in seeing ministry affirmed that it becomes appealing to us.

> *One thing I'll never forget is the comment by one of my pastors that he could never recommend the ministry as a career. It was at a time when I wondered if I should consider seminary and had gone to talk with him about it. His bitterness made me wonder whether that was something that I should pursue. For a long time that held me back from pursuing ministry as a vocation.*

Why is it that some congregations are noted for the number of their sons and daughters who go into the professional ministry or into mission fields, while other congregations might never had that happen? Just as younger brothers or sisters might follow an older sibling to the same college, or students from one high school suddenly begin attending a certain college because they've been exposed to it through the enrollment of an older friend, so the exposure to the living out of one's call to ministry as a vocation can awaken an interest or a sensitivity to God's call in the lives of others.

There was a time when the church was seen as one of the most crucial institutions in the community, and its pastor was one of the community's most prominent citizens. In most places that time is past, just as the church no longer stands at the focal point of our family life as it once did. Too often our dinner conversations dissect the errors of the church, the shortcomings of our preachers, and the failures of our elders and deacons. Yes, there are times the church must be challenged to live out faithfully its call to be God's people. But we need to celebrate more often the occasions when the church has succeeded in bringing God's presence to an individual in need or making a difference in the community, and affirm in those ministries the importance of its leadership. We will care for and encourage our members toward ministry in our care and encouragement of our pastors and other lay leaders.

> *One of the people who influenced me most was my pastor—but not through his sermons or Sunday school lessons. He taught me more about the Christian life by his actions on the softball field and with his own children than he ever did in the pulpit.*

You have likely seen some of these evidences of a more positive ministry model in some churches:

In those special occasions in which the gifts of the pastor are recognized and affirmed, and gratitude for leadership is expressed.

In worship settings, when missionaries supported by the church are affirmed and their needs upheld in prayer; when congregational members are regularly recognized for living out their calling in the name of Jesus in a variety of vocations.

In church school classes as young people learn about the work done by various mission projects and on the mission fields their church supports.

In the narthex and out in the community, where children and young people come to know the pastor as a real person who knows them by name and is interested in them as individuals.

In consistory meetings, as positive, open, supportive relationships are built between the pastor and the elders and deacons.

In churches who boldly affirm the importance of ministry by offering to pay some or all of the tuition for students choosing to attend seminary.

In our colleges, where the positive spiritual leadership of our chaplains and the faith modeling of the faculty are together causing increasing numbers of students to consider enrolling in seminary.

3. **We must create experiences which provide active involvement in ministry, for it is in the context of actually doing ministry that we come to understand more fully what it means to serve God and sense how God is calling us toward full-time service.**

> *My love and passion for children and serving the Lord through ministry was fostered by "new" experiences and creative risks taken by my church and my mother. I was allowed to play assistant roles in children's worship at the early age of eleven. I was given the opportunity to teach vacation Bible school during junior high school, and then I was able to teach the three- and four-year-old Sunday school class my junior and senior years of high school. My church invested in me. They saw maturity and desire, and they allowed me to grow through children's ministry areas.*

There is probably no better learning situation than that of being an apprentice. It's only as you do the work that you come to understand what that work is really like and how good you are at it. Thus one of the most important things that the church can do in encouraging its members to consider their ministries is to actually create opportunities for them to be involved directly in ministry. When people are actually involved in ministry, they have the opportunity to envision themselves in that kind of role, sense how their gifts might fit and be used in that context, and see the kind of satisfaction and enjoyment that comes from such work.

> *I spent two summers as a camp counselor during college. This experience, coupled with other experiences while at college, helped lay the foundations into a call into the professional ministry. During that time, pastoral ministry was something I wanted to stay away from, thinking I did not fit that role and because of my distorted perspective of the pastorate (i.e. boring, stuffy, dry, no fun). Working alongside those ministers at camp, however, and seeing them as real people in another context, freed me from that stereotype, and allowed me to consider that this could be a direction for me.*

Some of the most powerful examples of experiencing God's call come from those firsthand experiences. That's why, for example, the church requires of all seminary students some form of field education or internship. But why should we wait until then? The local congregation can intentionally create experiences that will give its members actual experiences in ministry and in service, working alongside committed ministers and laypersons. For example:

Within the local church structure, as young people have the opportunity to participate in the functioning of the church through membership on standing committees, boards, and search committees, thus observing firsthand how the church carries out its ministry.

Within church programs, teaching church school classes and vacation Bible school, leading the Children and Worship program, and assisting with choirs, thus giving of their time and abilities as well as learning how well God can use them.

Within worship services, by greeting, ushering, taking offerings, leading worship, and offering prayers, thus demonstrating for the church and themselves that leadership comes in many forms.

Within youth programs, in service projects, mission trips, work camps, and denomination-wide options like Project Timothy, all of which give young people a chance to sense the rewards of service.

Within church camps, where college-age young people can spend a summer sharing their faith with children and youth, thus sensing how God can speak through them and change the lives of others.

4. **We must create opportunities for people to reflect on their experiences, for often it is only in reflection that experiences take on meaning and that God's hand is seen.**

> *In college the faith I had largely taken for granted was challenged by a very secular perspective. As I struggled to put the pieces together in a way that "worked," I became increasingly intrigued by my religion classes and fell in love with studying the Bible. One day, over a cup of coffee, my pastor remarked to me, "Don't rule out the possibility that your love of studying the Bible and all your inner feelings could be God working in your life." This was a revelation to me, the first time the possibility of God's call entered my life. I had always assumed God's call had to be a dramatic spectacle, and I had missed the subtle, seemingly "everyday" ways that God indeed was calling me—through all these people, through the feelings, and tuggings I could not escape—over all these years.*

We enhance the experiences of our lives when we couple those experiences with an opportunity for some kind of reflection or debriefing. The church needs to help those who are involved in direct experiences to ask (and answer) for themselves questions such as, "What have I learned about God, myself, the church, community, or my faith as a result of this experience?" When those questions are asked and pondered, we begin to see more clearly how God leads us through life and how God calls us in the midst of events and experiences.

God doesn't always speak as clearly as Saul heard him on the Damascus Road, or in the gripping vision that Isaiah had. More commonly for many of us, that revelation likely comes through a sense of satisfaction from using our gifts fully, or through an awareness of how closely our gifts match those needed for a specific task, or how doors seem to open and close before us as we seek to live our life. We've always found it easier to see God's hand as we look back and reflect on an experience than when we are in its midst. But if we are not encouraged to reflect intentionally on our everyday experiences, and if we do not encourage and provide the means for our young people to do the same, we may miss all those subtle nudgings of God.

> *During our senior year our youth group was asked to do a youth service for our church. Being one of the verbal ones, fingers pointed to me for the sermon. Reluctantly I agreed. The youth service was an excellent experience, but I was grateful that it was over. That was, at least, until an elder walked up, put his hand on my shoulder, looked me in the eye, and asked if I ever had considered a career in the ministry. I laughed out loud and responded "No way, man, not me!" Despite my self-assured quick response, a gnawing doubt began to appear in my soul—because of the statement, but more importantly because of who said it. This elder was far more than a casual observer. He had taught our Sunday school class for four years and had invited us to his house monthly to sing, talk*

about life, pray, and (best of all!) eat dessert. He knew me. He had invested in me. And then a woman I didn't know from the church called my home and asked to speak to me. She told me of the profound impact that service had made in her heart and life and she thanked me. The gnawing feeling came back with a vengeance.

There are a variety of ways in which this kind of reflection can happen within the church. Some places that you've likely seen that include or could include:

In worship services, as we regularly acknowledge how we see God at work during the events of the prior week.

In meetings, workshops, and special events, when leaders take time to discuss the experience and debrief the participants as a part of the event.

In the relationships between our young people and their leaders and mentors, as they discuss how they've heard and seen God at work.

In families, as we give young people the freedom to ask questions and struggle with the meaning of their faith and in turn tell them of our own.

In our connections, as camp counselors and college chaplains communicate back to local pastors and youth leaders regarding the activities and observed gifts of young people with whom they have worked, in order to foster a nurturing of gifts in young people.

In the quiet of our own souls, as we reflect on our own experiences of ministry and service, especially outside of the church.

5. **We must recognize and nurture a wide variety of gifts among God's people, for it takes a diversity of gifts to make up the covenant community and provide the leadership we need.**

I first experienced God's call to be a minister when I was very young, only three or four years old. My desire was to be "just like Grandpa," who was a pastor. As I grew up, I felt affirmed through a variety of leadership roles I had in the church, especially in public speaking, Sunday school programs, and even in making confession of faith at one of the earliest ages in our congregation's history. When I finally dared to verbalize what I felt and wanted to do, I was told in no uncertain terms that was not an option because I was a female. I spent years rebelling against the church, struggling with what was God's will for me and the church.

So often when we think of the leadership needed in the church for the future, our minds focus on the outgoing, charismatic, follower-generating class-president type. But in reality, it takes a variety of gifts within the church for it to function well. It is important that we affirm and recognize all the gifts that we see displayed in our congregations, for all will play a significant role in the church of the future. We will need compassion as well as charisma, forgiveness as well as forcefulness, virtue as well as vision.

All of our members need affirmation to nurture their gifts as each journeys into a deeper understanding of discipleship. To do that, the whole church must focus on its baptismal vows, joining with the parents in assuming responsibility for the development of faith within our young people. Significant in that faith development is the identification and calling forth of the gifts each persons holds for the benefit of the covenant community.

In our task force we experienced in our own sharing the joy of persons called by God to ministry in the church. We also experienced the pain of persons called by God but rejected by the church. (You read a piece of one of those stories above.) Throughout the ages, the church has all too consistently erected barriers to persons, usually by group characteristics like gender or race, that, in our small, human way, hinders what God wills for the church.

With the General Synod of 1989, this task force again calls upon the members of the RCA "to create a climate within the church whereby all persons will be truly accepted and treated as God's children" (*MGS 1989*, R-44, p. 81). With the past president of General Synod, Tony Vis, the task force reminds the church that "a people serious about mission in the twenty-first century will eagerly receive from the Lord of the harvest all of those workers whom the Lord calls and to whom the Spirit gives gifts for mission and ministry, regardless of their gender. Surely, to do less is to sin against the Giver and to grieve the Spirit" (*MGS 1997*, p. 36). Never should it be said about the Reformed Church in America that we are too small and narrow-minded to accept both the gifts and the gifted of God.

> *Open doors and closed doors give new direction, and during my sophomore year of college a door was closed when taking chemistry; it was not only closed, but slammed! At the same time another door was opened by one of my other teachers. A religion prof wrote on one of my papers, "This is the stuff sermons are made of." This small comment triggered feelings toward ministry from my childhood, and my life was drastically changed.*

The church can provide this intentional recognition and nurturing of gifts for all young people in many ways. These are some examples:

In Sunday school and youth groups, by making room for young people to ask hard questions and wonder openly. Adults need to listen and embrace the questions of young people, even questions of disbelief. We also need to take a cue from them and do some wondering ourselves.

In worship and liturgy, by including in our confessions the barriers to ministry we have raised for certain groups or types of people and by giving opportunities to parents of older children to renew their own baptismal vows.

In prayer, by intentionally providing ways by which all our members are prayed for by name.

In Christian love, where all Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, camp counselors, and other mentors for youth are encouraged to regularly identify and affirm at least two gifts in each young person, as a way of letting them know they are important to the body of Christ.

> *To this day, I feel "excited and scared" about my service as an ordained minister of Word and sacrament. One of my theology professors affirmed this attitude, saying, "If you are only excited, you don't understand God's holiness. If you are only scared, you don't understand God's grace."*

PART TWO: ACTS

Part Two, in the manner of liturgical prayer, serves both to represent and inform Part One of our report. It follows the popular acronym ACTS: Adoration (A), Confession (C), Thanksgiving (T), and Supplication (S). We submit it for your personal reflection and for congregational use. Towards the latter end, it is arranged for easy excerption and use as a call to worship, responsive reading, call to confession, benediction, etc. For example: the statements of

adoration followed by confession may be used as a call to confession; the statements of thanksgiving may be used as the assurance of pardon; the statements of thanksgiving coupled with supplication may serve as offertory prayers. Additionally, numbers three and four may be used as responsive readings of preparation for the sacraments of the Lord's Table or baptism respectively.

1. **(A)** Eternal Word of God, who proclaimed our existence, declared our justification, and promised our victory, we return words of adoration. In your forbearance you have spoken to us in many and various ways.

   (C) Even so, we have been impatient people, impatient with you and with ourselves. We have abandoned piety and pursued pleasure. We have forsaken true worship and embraced vain idols. We have deserted missions and inhabited mansions.

   (T) Thank you for continually calling us into covenant community where all serve, all suffer, and all rejoice together as one. Thank you for our congregations, our camps, and our colleges where your children are encouraged, uplifted, and embraced through the pilgrimage of faith.

   (S) Bless all who take charge over our spiritual maturity. Grant us patience as we continue on our journey. We need wisdom in the guidance of your flocks. We need courage to risk new ventures. We need strength to endure. We need time for reflection. May we faithfully engage the process of spiritual formation.

2. **(A)** O Creator of heaven and earth, all of creation is full of your glory. As with the stars, you call us each by name.

   (C) But unlike the stars, some whom you have called are missing. For reasons of our own making, we have prohibited some from serving you. They are too young or too old, they are not skilled, they are not worthy. We confess our concern for outward appearances.

   (T) Thank you that in spite of our failures and flaws, you regard the heart and call forth servants whose hearts are after your own.

   (S) Give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Enable us to serve as a prophetic voice, calling those whom you have chosen and rendering service with them unto you.

3. **(A)** Great High Priest, you know our trials and triumphs, our worries and hopes. A "man of sorrows," you are acquainted with our infirmities. Still your sacrifice and supplications are sufficient for all people.

   (C) As members of your royal priesthood, we have failed to remain steadfast. We have allowed the cares of our world to so burden us that we sigh in anguish under its weight. In our weariness we have surrendered to cynicism and bowed to bitterness.

   (T) We give you thanks for your Table, which rescues us from despair and renews our strength. We are grateful that while your messengers may fail, the message remains true.

   (S) Sanctify our labors and redeem our service. May your Holy Spirit use our ordinary lives as vessels of extraordinary grace. Allow us to see your presence among us in all that we do.

4. **(A)** Holy Spirit, you descended as a dove to baptize our Lord, and as tongues of fire to baptize the church. We praise you for your continued presence in the waters of our own baptism.

   (C) Still, as members of your body, we doubt our worth and the value of our role. We make comparisons among each other and feel discouragement, envy, or pride. In place of praise we often critique; instead of aid we offer judgment.

   (T) In thanksgiving, we acknowledge that the dividing walls have been broken down, that we are one in Christ. We are together the body of Christ, the church over which he is head. Thank you for our Reformed heritage, a tradition in which we depend on you.

   (S) Show us now how we may encourage one another, supporting each use of gifts as you have given them. Enable us to do our part, that the entire body may be mature. Call us again to service as well as salvation, and reform our churches according to your perfect will.

5. **(A)** Sovereign God, in your wisdom you provide for the needs of your people. Your thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and the vastness of your knowledge cannot be exhausted.

   (C) We confess that sometimes the joy of knowing you brings uncomfortable challenges. We are called outside of our established and comfortable ways. You broaden our vision to see new horizons, and we fear what we do not know.

   (T) Still you are faithful to preserve us. Thank you for the desire to serve you and for the fulfillment and satisfaction of doing so. We are grateful for the opportunities to grow in greater knowledge of you.

   (S) Grant us discernment, that we may know when opportunities are temptations and when frustrations are tests of faith. Help us to understand the meaning of doors that are opening or closing. Give us strength to endure trials, and comfort us throughout.

6. **(A)** Perfect Lamb, who in humility and obedience reveals God as our redeemer, worthy are you to receive praise and honor.

   (C) We confess that we have pursued leisure before labor, ease before exertion, occupation without vocation.

   (T) Thank you Emmanuel, God With Us, that whatever our yoke, you bear it with us. Thank you that every work is a sacred work where you are glorified, from small business owner to Sunday school teacher, from custodian to consistory, from engineer to elder, from doctor to deacon, from mechanic to minister.

   (S) Redeem now our labors, making of our lives good and faithful stewardship, that we ourselves may know and show you to be the redeemer of the world.

7. **(A)** Enthroned Almighty, whose voice shakes the very foundations, with the Seraphs I proclaim that you are holy.

   (C) I confess that in myself I am unable to do your work.

   (T) Yet I give you thanks for your faithfulness, that the work you have begun you are sure to complete.

(S) Cleanse me this hour, that I might serve you without fear, in holiness and righteousness.

PART THREE: EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Purpose: To assist a church in the process of identifying and creating a nurturing environment to call forth those gifted by the Spirit and graced by experience to serve as missionary pastors in the twenty-first century.

Time: Three hours.

Participants: Pastors, consistory members, leaders of children's and youth ministries, anyone concerned about identifying and nurturing tomorrow's missionary pastors.

Leadership: Someone familiar with group process and dynamics, sensitive to diversity, open to group insight.

Objectives: This process will seek to:

1. Identify God's presence in the participants' vocational life journey.
2. Examine and reflect upon God's presence throughout the biblical story as God called persons to leadership in the kingdom.
3. Identify themes from participants' stories and biblical stories regarding God's call.
4. Develop a congregation-based strategy to identify and nurture those who God may be calling to be missionary pastors.

Resources:

1. "Graffiti posters'" on walls with the following: "Leadership is?" "Youth are?" "What the twenty-first century needs from the church is?" (You may wish to put on additional sheet under your poster in case the markers bleed through.)
2. Markers by each poster
3. Overhead or poster containing the following statement:

   Generation X—whatever you want to call them or whatever they want to be called—is ready to come alongside the rest of us and lead a missionary church into the twenty-first century. Indeed, we cannot do it without them. The coming century is theirs far more that it is ours. We need to identify from among our young people those who are spiritually gifted for visionary, mission-driven, pastoral leadership. We need to tell them we want them; we need to tell them we need them; we need to tell them we believe that God is calling them into ministry (*MGS 1997,* p. 39).

4. Additional sheets of newsprint and masking tape.

Setting: A comfortable room with a lot of wall space on which to hang newsprint.

Preparation: Encourage people to attend this event. Be intentional about encouraging those who are passionate about God, the church, and leadership. Be proactive in promoting diversity among the participants.

Beginnings: A. As participants arrive

1. Warmly greet people as they arrive.

2. Direct the participants to graffiti posters on the walls and encourage them to write their thoughts on each poster.

B. Opening activity (15 minutes)

1. Welcome the group and explain the purpose of the meeting using the overhead or poster of Tony Vis's report.

2. Make note of what is written on the graffiti posters. Do not evaluate; simply list the contributions.

3. Explain the process of the meeting, identifying the various parts.

   a. Sharing our stories.

   b. Exploring the biblical story.

   c. Carrying on a dialogue between our story and the biblical story.

   d. Developing a local strategy.

4. Open with prayer.

Part One: Sharing Our Stories
(45 minutes)

A. Explain to participants that we will begin by exploring God's leading and guiding in our own lives. Ask participants to reflect upon and identify:

1. People and events that led them to their current occupations.

2. People and events that led them to their current positions of involvement and leadership in the church.

B. Give a few moments for reflection and then invite participants to share their stories. If the group is large, divide the members into groups with five to six participants in each.

C. After sharing, take a few minutes to pull together the themes mentioned by the participants. Write these on newsprint and post them on the wall.

Part Two: Exploring the Biblical Story
(45 minutes)

A. If there is significant biblical memory in the group, have them list "calls" in the Bible. (Remember: a call may come in many forms and to many different kinds of ministry.) Compile a list and then look them up. If the group has limited biblical memory, suggest several biblical examples to look up and examine. These may include:

Moses	Exodus 3:1 to 4:17
Samuel	1 Samuel 3
David	1 Samuel 16:1-13
Ruth	Ruth 1:1-18
Esther	Esther 4:1-17
Jeremiah	Jeremiah 1:4-10
Jonah	Jonah 1:1-17; 2:9; 3:1-3
Peter	Matthew 4:18-20; 16:13-19; 26:31-35, 69-75, John 21:15-19
Paul	Acts 9:1-22
Lydia	Acts 16:11-15

B. Have the participants pull from the biblical narratives themes regarding call.

Part Three: Exploring the Story of the Community of God
(15 minutes)

A. Ask participants to take a few minutes to read over the text of the report of the task force which prepared this study guide. This report includes the mandate, format, and general principles sections. However, do not read the items which contain specific implementation suggestions for a local congregation. These can be used later; for now, they would be intrusive in the process.

B. When the participants have absorbed the content of the report, ask for questions of clarification. But don't do too much analyzing or evaluating here; save that for the next section.

Part Four: Dialogue Involving Our Stories, the Biblical Story, and the Story of the Community of God
(30 minutes)

A. Ask participants to review the themes presented thus far. Have them note comparisons between the biblical story, the stories of the community contained in the task force report, and their own stories.

B. How does the biblical story further our understanding of the stories of the community and our own stories? The biblical writers interpret history through the lenses of God's overall purpose and mission. As you look at your stories, how do you see "God's fingerprints all over the photographs of our stories?"

C. What can we learn about God and God's call to leadership in the church from the intersection of these stories?

Part Five: Developing a Local Strategy
(45 minutes)

NOTE: As the task force worked through its mandate, using a process similar to the one you've been using, it identified themes and ideas from the local church experiences of its members. Those are included in the report of the task force as items under the section "General Principles." You may refer to these as background in developing your own efforts and strategies.

A. Barriers

1. Direct participants to look once again at the stories posted around the room. Then make a list of potential barriers that may keep youth from considering or hearing God's call to be a missionary pastor.

2. Which of these may be present in our context?

3. How do we strategize to eliminate or minimize these barriers?

B. Bridges

1. What can we identify as the "bridges" that help youth hear God's call to be missionary pastors?

2. Which of these are currently present in our congregation? Which could we add?

3. How can we maximize these bridges?

C. Building a strategy

1. What processes and people can we list that could help us identify those gifted and graced to be missionary pastors?

2. How could we be intentional about mentoring and nurturing the identified individuals through the process of considering God's call?

3. How might we intentionally involve parents, grandparents, and other key individuals in this process?

4. What specific recommendations do we want to make and to whom should they go?

5. How will we communicate our process and findings to the congregation?

6. How and when will we evaluate our progress toward achieving an atmosphere that encourages youth to hear God's call to be missionary pastors and our efforts to nurture them in the exploration of that call?

Closing:

1. Thank the participants for their good work and significant contributions.

2. Close with a celebratory song or hymn. Have a time of prayer, praising God for God's faithfulness, confessing our barriers, and thanking God for the young people in our midst. Then pray that youth will hear God's call to be missionary pastors for the twenty-first century and that God will equip us to be faithful in nurturing these women and men.

R-1.
To instruct the Office of Education and Faith Development to produce the Report of the Task Force for Calling Forth Leaders to Serve as Missionary Pastors in the Twenty-First Century in booklet form and distribute it to all RCA congregations, camps and conference centers, and campus ministries. (ADOPTED)

R-2.
To instruct the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry to gather responses from RCA congregations to the report of the task force, including means by which congregations have implemented an intentional effort to invite young people into ministry; and further,

to instruct the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry to provide the results of its findings to all RCA congregations, camps and conference centers, and campus ministries, in order to further promote intentional efforts to invite young people into ministry.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-2, synod:

VOTED: **To instruct the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry to gather responses from RCA congregations to the report of the task force, including means by which congregations have implemented an intentional effort to identify young people whom God is calling into ministry, and subsequently to affirm that calling by encouraging them to enter into ministry; and further,**

to instruct the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry to provide the results of its findings to all RCA congregations, camps and conference centers, and campus ministries in order to further promote intentional efforts to identify those young people whom God is calling into ministry with the subsequent affirmations described above.

Report of the Task Force on the Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes

FORMATION AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK FORCE

The 1996 General Synod voted:

To direct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the general secretary and the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, to appoint a task force comprised of eight persons with representation from the General Synod Council, the General Synod Council unit directors, regional synod executives, and stated clerks of classes; and further,

to direct this task force to conduct a review of the purpose and responsibilities of regional synods and classes; and further;

to direct this task force to take into account the following:

1. The historical evolution of responsibilities of regional synods and classes within the RCA church order and the relationship of these assemblies and their responsibilities to each other and to the General Synod and the General Synod Council;

2. The purposes and programs that are most appropriately assigned to regional synods and classes without violating the prerogatives of the General Synod; and

3. The need to develop a coordinated and integrated funding strategy for the work of the RCA carried out through the General Synod, the regional synods, and the classes;

and further,

to direct this task force to report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1996,* R-4, p. 427).

Following consultation with the general secretary and the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, the 1996-97 moderator of the General Synod Council, the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, appointed the following persons to serve on the task force:

Anthony Vis, chair	Past president of General Synod Moderator of the General Synod Council Pastor of Meredith Drive Reformed Church in Des Moines, Iowa
Jon Norton	Executive minister of the Regional Synod of New York
Raymond DeDoes	Synod executive of the Regional Synod of the Far West
Ann Akers	RCA specialized ministry, psychotherapist Stated clerk of the Classis of Brooklyn
Phyllis Palsma	Copastor of Pitcher Hill Community Church in North Syracuse, New York Minister for teaching, dean of Ephesus Two, the Regional Synod of Albany Former General Synod Council member
Nancy Miller	Elder General Synod Council member
John Kapteyn	Pastor of First Reformed Church in Chatham, Ontario Former stated clerk of the Regional Synod of Canada
Louis Lotz	Past president of General Synod Pastor of Morningside Reformed Church in Sioux City, Iowa General Synod Council member

The Revs. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson and Kenneth Bradsell served as staff resource persons for the task force.

Following the resignation of the Rev. Ann Akers from the task force in the fall of 1997, the moderator of GSC, the Rev. Anthony Vis, appointed the Rev. Paul Janssen (pastor of Pascack Reformed Church in Park Ridge, New Jersey, and stated clerk of the Classis of Greater Palisades) to replace Akers on the task force. Vis reported to GSC, at its January 1998 meeting, that he felt the task force needed representation from the western region of the RCA. In response, GSC approved increasing the membership size of the task force from eight members to nine. Vis then appointed Lisa Teague (elder and stated clerk of the Classis of Rocky Mountains) to the task force.

ORIENTATION AND OVERVIEW FOR THE TASK

In September 1997 the task force met with the general secretary, GSC unit directors, and executives of the regional synods to hear their perspectives on the past, present, and future (based on the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod) responsibilities of the assemblies in which they conduct their work. At this September 1997 meeting the task force also had extensive conversation about areas of work in the past and

present that caused tension between regional synod staffs and GSC staff because assignments from the church overlapped and/or were redundant or conflictive. The task force then requested the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services to compile and distribute to the task force an organizational chart of the GSC and regional synod staffing, along with position descriptions for all GSC and regional synod staff personnel.

The task force, at its September 1997 meeting, concluded that its work needed to be carried out in the context of the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80). The task force then concluded that its work needed to be in accord with the following recommendations also adopted by the 1997 General Synod:

1. To . . . prayerfully reflect on the statement of mission and vision and then to act on the statement faithfully according to. . . discernment of the leading of God's Spirit (*MGS 1997*, R-2, p. 428).

2. To instruct the General Synod Council to audit all of its present programs and commitments in light of the statement of mission and vision (*MGS 1997*, R-3, p. 428).

In January 1997 the chair of the task force and some members of the task force, along with regional synod staff, the general secretary, and members of GSC staff, participated in a continuing education event facilitated by the Alban Institute. The event focused on the responsibilities and future of middle judicatories.

CLARIFICATION OF THE TASK

At its December 3-4, 1997, meeting the task force came to the following clarification of its work:

> The task force is working within the mandate given to it by the 1996 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, R-4, p. 427) in the context of the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80), and in accord with the related action of the 1997 General Synod in which it called upon the GSC to audit all of its programs, ministries, and functions in light of the Statement of Mission and Vision (*MSG 1997*, R-3, p. 428). The task force understands its focus to have been expanded by the 1997 General Synod actions and that its charge is to consider how best the Reformed Church in America can make available the resources that can equip and empower congregations for ministry and mission locally and globally. It understands that it must consider the responsibilities and purposes of regional synods and classes as well as the relationships these assemblies have with each other and with congregations/consistories and pastors. It also must consider the responsibilities and purposes of the GSC as it works in relationship with these assemblies, pastors, and congregations/consistories.

ASSUMPTIONS TO GUIDE TASK FORCE

At its December 3-4, 1997 meeting the task force also agreed by consensus that it would be guided in its work by the following assumptions:

1. The situation of the mission of the church requires that the denominational culture must change. The ways in which the RCA comes together to do the business of the church need to be reconsidered.

2. The resources of the denomination need to be maximized for support of RCA congregations.

3. The RCA needs to move more of its resources and personnel closer to RCA congregations for the purposes of enhancing, encouraging, and enabling ministry and mission.

4. The RCA must shift denominational energy (resources and staff) from the development and dissemination of programs and materials toward consultative support, enabling, and networking for ministry (consulting/supporting generalists).

5. Most classes find it difficult to do well all of the things they are called upon to do and will value systems that provide greater support for their work.

6. There are aspects of the RCA's organization that the task force agrees are important to sustain under the rubric of supporting the ministry of congregations. These aspects need to be evaluated—and, in most cases, are being evaluated—but they are beyond the scope of this task force's responsibility.

7. There needs to be agreement on the responsibilities of the various RCA assemblies, entities, and organizational groupings that is also consistent with the mission, purpose, and theological understanding RCA members have of the church.

SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE TASK FORCE

Background

A subcommittee of the task force met February 13, 1998, to develop a model for organizing the RCA staff (GSC, regional synod, and classis) to maximize support for the ministries carried out by the classes and through congregations. At the direction of the task force, two non-task force members were invited to participate in the subcommittee's meeting: the Rev. Donald Troost (synod executive for the Regional Synod of Albany), and the Rev. Everett Zabriskie (stated clerk of the Classis of Passaic Valley).

The task of the subcommittee was to develop a model for organizing the personnel and offices of the RCA's General Synod Council, regional synods, and classes. The subcommittee carried out its work in light of the shared assumptions (see above) developed by the task force at its December 1997 meeting.

Eight Principles

The subcommittee developed eight principles to guide its work. These principles were:

1. Recognize and make an effort to overcome the perceived "inhibitors" to mutual or shared accountability for the use of money, personnel, and other resources by the present RCA structures, organization, and staffing patterns at the General Synod Council, regional synod, and classis levels.

2. Strive to maximize cooperation and collaboration across the present General Synod Council committees/units and among the various levels of staffing (denomination-wide, regional synod, and classis).

3. Give highest priority to the need to support the mission and ministry of RCA congregations.

4. Recognize that in RCA polity the classis is the assembly with responsibility for the supervision/support of congregations and ordained ministers of Word and sacrament, and that the priority of supporting the mission and ministry of RCA congregations is

met best when the denomination (at all staffed levels) makes available trained, equipped, and effective staff to work in cooperation with and through the classes.

5. Reduce unnecessary redundancies in denominational systems and services.

6. Reduce perceived competitiveness among RCA systems and services.

7. Flatten/simplify RCA administrative layers.

8. Be capable of implementation in the RCA without requiring large-scale structural or constitutional changes. Reasons for requiring minimal structure or constitutional changes are: 1) there is no assurance that large-scale structural or constitutional changes would accomplish the objective of shifting denominational staff support to congregational mission; 2) the RCA does not have enthusiasm for engaging in another restructure process; and 3) structural and constitutional changes in the RCA require a two-year approval process.

The Model

Based on the above assumptions and eight principles, the subcommittee developed the following model for becoming a denomination that "equip[s] congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God" (RCA Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod—*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80).

Concept: Redefine the position descriptions of forty-six personnel serving on the staff of the General Synod Council and on the staffs of the RCA's eight regional synods so that each position description has a primary responsibility to provide staff support to an assigned classis and the congregations within the bounds of the assigned classis.

The Model:

1. The forty-six personnel are formed into a congregational/classis services team.

2. Team members meet together at least annually for training, support, and to review/fine-tune the way in which they carry out their work.

3. The team functions with a common missional perspective, but the team members have maximum freedom to carry out their responsibilities in a manner appropriate to the context of the classis/congregations to which they are assigned.

4. Team members develop their assignments in collaboration with their assigned classis.

5. Team members are equipped to carry out services as liaisons, ombudsmen, and consultants with classes and the congregations within the bounds of their assigned classis. Their tasks could include consulting, training, and planning with a classis, with leaders from congregations, or with individual congregations. They would also assist the classis or its congregations in identifying appropriate resources (including personnel) to respond to needs/requests for support, i.e., revitalization consultant, youth or education consultant/trainer, conflict management specialist, etc.

6. The forty-six person team is subdivided or "clustered" geographically, possibly (but not necessarily) according to present RCA regional synod boundaries.

7. The clusters each have a cluster leader/coordinator. Clusters come together periodically for planning, strategy formation, support, etc.

8. The model is developed to operate five to seven years with a mid-term full evaluation. If, at the mid-term, it is clear the model is not working, it could be terminated prior to operating for its full term. Mid-term corrections to the model can be implemented as needed.

9. Oversight for the implementation and management of the model is assigned to a ministry team made up of executive staff from the General Synod Council and regional synods. This team also assumes many of the responsibilities presently carried out by the Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (COURSE), the Administrative Council, and the Council of Synod Executives (COSE).

10. The model is implemented by July 1, 1999.

CONSULTANT REVIEW OF THE MODEL

At its March 3-4, 1998, meeting the task force reviewed the above model prepared by its subcommittee. George Bullard, an executive with the South Carolina Conference of the Southern Baptist Convention, a consultant on national church structures and a contributing editor to *Net Results* magazine, was invited to attend this March 1998 meeting to review the model as a consultant. He was invited in order to provide advice and a perspective from outside the organization and structures of the RCA. He participated in an in-depth review and discussion of the proposed model and offered the following observations and suggestions:

1. Take very seriously the need to build into the model assessment tools at the beginning and as a regular part of the denomination's responsibility to support congregations.

2. Do not minimize the need to build into the model a strong and ongoing training/support component for those assigned to work with classes, cluster leaders, and the cabinet.

3. Some means should be built into this model to allow/encourage congregations to "cluster" according to nongeographic factors such as size, age, type of ministry, location, ethnicity, etc.

4. In a small denomination like the RCA, with few staff, this model is difficult to implement and there is the danger of "losing heart." The proposed model is really about "changing the culture" of the RCA as well as transforming the old corporate hierarchical model for doing the church's business. The task force and staff leadership for this process need to stay focused on the objective of transformation of "one congregation at a time." The task force and staff leadership must understand the central importance of the employed personnel of the RCA (denomination-wide and regional) owning the model and being committed to making it work.

5. Areas of the denomination's life that need to be strong and effective to support this network-intensive and locally focused ministry are: information technology, communications, and traditional phone support networks. The entire system will rise or fall on the ability to communicate clearly and to gather and share information accurately, efficiently, and effectively.

6. Consider an implementation strategy that includes a series of implementation focus groups. Reconvene these focus groups twenty-four months later to assist in assessment of the effectiveness of the model.

Bullard concluded his comments with an affirmation of the model.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES TO GUIDE WORK WITH THE MODEL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN

At its March 3-4, 1998, meeting the commitment of the task force was to urge the RCA to make the ministry/mission of its congregations the primary focus of its energy and staffing resources. Following further discussion of the model, the task force agreed that the model provided the basis for an organizational plan that needed to be developed further so that the personnel and other resources of the RCA could be directed primarily to equipping and empowering classes and congregations for ministry and mission locally and globally. The task force also agreed that the subcommittee's report provides only a "model" and that extensive work is required to develop an organizational plan and an implementation timeline based on this beginning preliminary work.

The task force summarized discussion of the model with a list of questions and responses to provide guidance for its continuing work on the organizational plan:

Question: Should staff who serve, or are assigned to, a classis be assigned to more than one classis?

Response: Yes in some cases, and no in others, depending on the number of congregations in a classis and depending on other tasks assigned to the staff person. In all cases, staff assigned to a classis have this assignment as his or her first/primary responsibility. (George Bullard strongly recommended to the task force that if a staff person is going to serve more than one classis, he or she should serve three classes, not two classes, as this seems to offer a structure that avoids the danger of comparisons and competition.)

Question: What is the ongoing role of regional synods in this model?

Response: This is an open question. It appears clear that initially the regional synods provide the framework for the "clusters." Other regional synod services may continue for the present. This question will be referred to a new design subcommittee (still to be appointed) to provide a more detailed design of the organizational plan based on the model. The task force agreed with its subcommittee (that met in February 1998) that all RCA personnel will work with a common missional perspective, but the clusters and the classes within the clusters need maximum freedom to carry out their responsibilities in a manner most appropriate to the context of ministry they are serving.

Question: How are position descriptions defined for those staff assigned to classis ministry positions?

Response: This is still an open question for further consideration by the design subcommittee, but it is clear to the task force that each position description needs primary input from the classis to whom a staff person is assigned.

Question: How does funding transfer between regions and from the General Synod Council to classes and clusters?

Response: This question needs to be fully addressed by the design subcommittee and by staff of the regional synods and the General Synod Council as they work on implementation of the model. It is evident that the model will need some funding transfer or a system of credits/remuneration from assemblies to other assemblies to guarantee the seamlessness of the service and support system for all congregations.

Question: Would regional synod staff be available to serve beyond their regions?
Response: It is assumed in the model that all staff serving on the classis ministry service team, regardless of their "employer of record" (General Synod Council, regional synod, or classis), become available across present RCA boundaries to provide support in an area of specialization (e.g. revitalization, evangelism, education, etc.). The design subcommittee will be asked to consider guidelines for the utilization of team members in classes and regions other than the one to which they are primarily assigned.

Question: Does the staff person assigned to a classis become a member of that classis?
Response: Maybe. The preference may be "yes." The design subcommittee will consider this further.

Question: Who do members of the classis ministry services team work for?
Response: They will be employed by their present or an agreed-upon "employer of record." They will be accountable for their work to a classis, within a cluster, and to the cluster leader.

Question: How is the cluster leader chosen?
Response: The regional synod executives may serve as cluster leaders. Or, a search/selection process within the classis services team may be used. Or, the leader, if not serving a classis, may be selected more broadly for supervisory and coordinating skills. This will be referred to the design subcommittee for additional work.

Question: To whom are the cluster leaders accountable?
Response: Mutual lines of accountability need to be developed within the "cabinet," with the general secretary, and with the General Synod Council.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE TASK FORCE

The task force agreed to take the following steps to continue its work:

1. To draft its report to the 1998 General Synod inclusive of the model, and to continue its work throughout the spring of 1998 in an effort to develop the model more fully prior to the June 1998 meeting of General Synod.

2. To share the substance of its work to date with the personnel of the General Synod Council, regional synods, and classes.

3. To recommend to the 1998 General Synod that the proposed organizational model be developed for implementation.

4. To request a continuation of the task force up to two additional years to assist in the continued development of the proposed model and its implementation across the RCA.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-3:

R-3:
To develop fully the proposed model for allocating the RCA staff and resources outlined in the above report of the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes, under the guidance of the general secretary working in cooperation with the director of Policy, Planning and Administration Services, the executives of the regional synods, the members of the task force and the officers of the General Synod; and further,

to carry out the organizational design in a manner that includes broad consultation across the Reformed Church in America with representatives of the RCA's classes, classis officers and stated clerks; and further,

to continue the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes for up to two additional years; and further,

to instruct the task force to present to the 1999 General Synod recommendations for an organizational plan with implementation steps and a timeline for deployment of RCA staff to support the ministries of classes and congregations as outlined in the above report of the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes; and further,

~~**to instruct the task force to present to the 2000 General Synod a final report on the completion of its work.**~~

to instruct the task force to report its work to the 1999 and 2000 General Synods.

Reason: The complexity of this issue and the ongoing development of the model in this report requires a timeline that provides more flexibility for the task force while still requiring annual updates for the General Synod.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-3, synod:

VOTED: To delete the words "~~fully the proposed~~" and inserting the words "fully a" in the first line of R-3, and deleting the words "~~outlined in~~" and inserting the words referring but not limited to in the second line of R-3.

(The motion as adopted reads:

R-3:
To develop ~~fully the proposed~~ fully a model for allocating the RCA staff and resources ~~outlined in~~ referring but not limited to the above report of the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes, under the guidance of the general secretary working in cooperation with the director of Policy, Planning and Administration Services, the executives of the regional synods, the members of the task force and the officers of the General Synod; and further,

to carry out the organizational design in a manner that includes broad consultation across the Reformed Church in America with representatives of the RCA's classes, classis officers and stated clerks; and further,

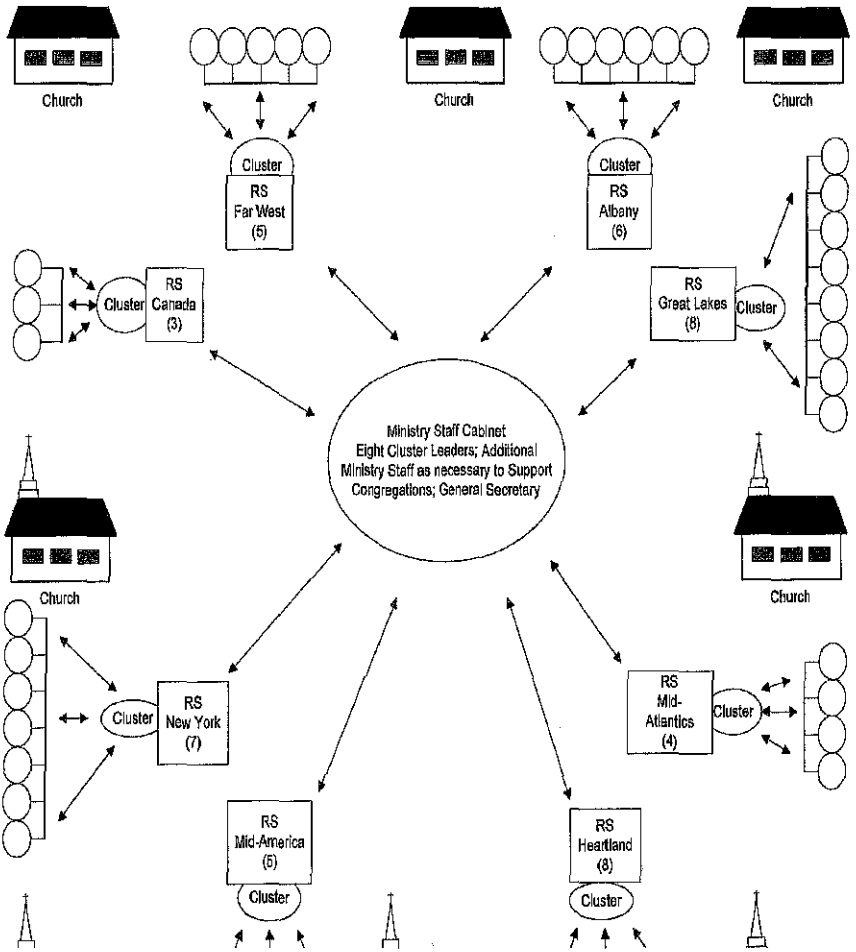
to continue the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes for up to two additional years; and further,

to instruct the task force to present to the 1999 General Synod recommendations for an organizational plan with implementation steps and a timeline for deployment of RCA staff to support the ministries of classes and congregations as outlined in the above report of the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes; and further,

~~**to instruct the task force to present to the 2000 General Synod a final report on the completion of its work.**~~

to instruct the task force to report its work to the 1999 and 2000 General Synods.)

APPENDIX I



RS=Regional Synod

950+ Reformed Church in America congregations; 46 classes with ministry staff assigned, working in 8 clusters initially aligned according to present regional synods. Cluster leaders will serve in a Ministry Staff Cabinet.

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

RELATIONSHIP OF RACIAL/ETHNIC COUNCILS WITH GENERAL SYNOD AND THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Background

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, the racial/ethnic councils, and the general secretary to collaboratively develop a plan that will include the racial/ethnic councils in the process of focusing the denominational vision on the tasks of new church development, church revitalization, evangelism, urban ministry, global ministry, and other priorities; and further,
>
> to integrate the work of the racial/ethnic councils as ministries within the framework and mutual accountability of the General Synod Council; and further,
>
> to instruct the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee to report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-23, pp. 295-96).

In response to a proposal in the general secretary's report to establish a Commission on Multicultural Life (*MGS 1997*, P-5, pp. 52-53), the 1997 General Synod also voted:

> To postpone any decision on the establishment of a Commission on Multicultural Life (*MGS 1997*, R-24, p. 296).

The Advisory Committee on Church Order at the 1997 General Synod prepared R-24 above and gave as its reason:

> The collaboration in R-23 above needs to occur without presupposing related recommendations (MGS 1997, p. 296).

At its October 1997 meeting, the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee of the General Synod Council, in response to R-23, formed a project team comprised of three GSC members, the chairpersons of the four racial/ethnic councils, one additional member from each racial/ethnic council, the general secretary, and the president of General Synod. The director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services designed the project team meeting format and served as staff resource person. Subsequent to the October 1997 meeting of the General Synod Council, and in consultation with the moderator of the PPA committee, the project team was expanded to include the executives of the four racial/ethnic councils.

The project team met January 9-10, 1998, at the Alma Matthews House in New York City. The following persons attended:

Charles Van Engen	President of General Synod
Gregg Mast	GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee member
Helen Monsees	Moderator, GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee
Oliver Patterson	Chair, African-American Council
Annie Lee Phillips	African-American Council member
Norman Chang	Chair, Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries
Moody Yap	Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries member

Raymond Nauni	Chair, Native American Indian Ministries Council
Regina Brannock	Native American Indian Ministries Council member and General Synod Council Mission Services member
Brigido Cabrera	Chair, Council for Hispanic Ministries
Carlos Rivera	Council for Hispanic Ministries member
John Cato	Executive director of the African-American Council
Ella Campbell	Secretary for the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries
Reaves Nahwooks	Interim secretary for the Native American Indian Ministries Council
Luis Perez	Secretary for Hispanic Ministries
Kenneth Bradsell	Director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson	General secretary, Reformed Church in America

John Buteyn, Jr., GSC Stewardship and Communication Services member, was unable to attend.

Review and Discussion of Racial/Ethnic Councils and Relationship within the RCA

Prior to its January 1998 meeting, the project team members received for background reading the 1997 General Synod Report of the General Secretary (*MGS 1997*, pp. 41-55).The project team gave specific attention to the section in the report entitled, "A Multicultural Future" and the proposal for the establishment of a Commission on Multicultural Life (*MGS 1997*, pp. 52-53). The project team also read the book, *The Wolf Shall Dwell With the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*, written by Eric H.F. Law (published by Chalice Press in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1993). In addition to being very helpful and instructive, the book provided process suggestions that were utilized during the team's times of worship and prayer and throughout the team's planning time to facilitate open and honest interaction.

At its January 1998 meeting the project team began its work with a review of the present roles, responsibilities, and order/structure of the racial/ethnic councils within the constituencies they represent and within the wider mission, program life, and policy formation work of the RCA. The project team identified what it appreciated about the current role, responsibilities, and order/structure of the racial/ethnic councils and the relationship of the councils to the wider church. The project team then identified what the current order/structure of the councils does not adequately address and what the racial/ethnic project team members and the bodies they represent value. Below is a summary of the responses of the project team:

Appreciate:

- The ability to maintain constituent racial/ethnic uniqueness within the broader life of the denomination.
- The ability to "have and be responsible for our own house."
- The ability the present order/structure gives racial/ethnic staff to operate as generalists within their particular constituencies.
- The ability to gather annually as a council/fellowship sustains identity.
- The ability to interact/interface with other denominational and regional RCA staff in program, mission, and administration.

- The "proximity" the racial/ethnic councils have been afforded in the past two-and-one-half years to the unit director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services and to the general secretary, and the wider "access" this has given to the mission and program of the church and to policy-making bodies.

Present Order Does Not Address Adequately:

- When the staff of the racial/ethnic councils come to GSC meetings and attempt to participate in GSC committees, as well as attending other RCA agencies, commissions, etc., they are often not listened to (or heard) and are regarded as "intrusive."

- "Nothing apart from the goodwill of RCA council/board/commission members, and staff makes programs and mission of the wider denomination and/or of the racial/ethnic councils accountable to one another, or even to engage one another."

- Racial/ethnic councils are visitors, not residents, even at the General Synod.

- Racial/ethnic councils are present in the RCA but are groups without equal access to the resources of the church.

- The racial/ethnic councils lack the connectivity to the decision-making arenas of the RCA's life and therefore lack the ability to seriously impact or influence/transform the RCA.

- The racial/ethnic councils have no direct connection to GSC to accomplish, or to request assistance in accomplishing, the tasks/objectives they believe to be important to sustain, revitalize, and grow the ministries of the constituencies they represent.

- The current order/structure arrangement creates divisions within staff and makes it difficult to involve staff in providing resource support, training, or other forms of response to the constituencies of the racial/ethnic councils. (This is because of the perception that the churches represented by the racial/ethnic councils have "their own staff person.")

- The RCA has avoided the need to address its institutional racism and is blocked from becoming a truly multiracial, multiethnic church by marginalizing this concern within the racial/ethnic councils and by making it the responsibility of the racial/ethnic councils to be the primary (only?) advocates for addressing this core issue.

- The white majority in the RCA are not being held accountable for their participation in sustaining racism. This is not the racial/ethnic councils' problem. The responsibility rests with those who have the power to change.

- The members and staff of the racial/ethnic councils have been trying to "tell our stories but you are not hearing/understanding our stories...we need the room/time and the space to tell the stories so we can participate in the change in the life of the RCA."

- The staff of the racial/ethnic councils need the support of the wider staff of the RCA to respond to the needs and challenges faced within their constituent congregations.

- The staff of the racial/ethnic councils have gifts that can/need to be utilized by the wider denomination.

Following extensive discussion of the issues identified in this exercise, the project team considered alternative ways of organizing the work of the racial/ethnic councils in relationship to the General Synod Council and General Synod so that the above appreciated items will not be lost and the RCA can begin to focus more effectively on the concerns not being addressed adequately.

The Organization, Relationship, and Purpose of the Racial/Ethnic Councils within the Reformed Church in America

The project team believes the Reformed Church in America will continue to be a vital and vibrant voice for Christ and Christ's mission in North America and throughout the world into the coming century only if it engages in some fundamental transformation of its life, its culture, the manner in which it enters into mission locally and globally, and how it speaks of Christ in word and deed wherever it has a presence. The Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod says, "Imagine... A denomination, locally oriented, globally connected, that prays in many languages and beholds the face of Christ in every face; a denomination renewed and renewing, raising up leaders, always directing its resources toward the front lines of ministry..." (*MGS 1997*, p.79). In fulfilling this vision, and in responding to the missional situation before it, one of the fundamental transformations the RCA must embrace is become a fully inclusive church of diverse constituencies representing the racial and ethnic makeup of the North American continent.

The formation of the racial/ethnic councils began in 1968 with the organization of the Black Council, now called the African-American Council. This was an important transformational step for the RCA. The RCA recognized the significance of its growing multiracial and multiethnic constituencies. However, the racial/ethnic councils need now to be at the center of the hard work of transforming the very culture and institutional makeup of the RCA. The project team does not believe the RCA will be able to move into the future it desires so long as the institution keeps the racial/ethnic councils (and, in a sense, the racial/ethnic councils keep themselves) marginalized from full responsibility for the decisions that have the capacity to transform the RCA and its missional focus.

The project team doubts the RCA would be moving forward with fresh commitments to ministry in North America's urban centers if the racial/ethnic councils had not engaged in the often frustrating task of speaking to a seemingly deaf church for so many years. The project team believes these commitments might have developed more quickly if the concerns of the racial/ethnic councils and the dialogue about how best to carry out this work could have happened within the General Synod Council and around the tables of its mission and program standing committees. Further, the project team believes that this work will not succeed in the future if it is left to develop without the full voice of all of the RCA's racial and ethnic constituencies in both the planning and implementation of ministries. This missional task, and indeed the full scope of the mission and program of the RCA, now require that the constituencies represented by the racial/ethnic councils be drawn fully into the arena where the discussion and decisions about this work takes place. Also, the executive staff of the racial/ethnic councils need to be full colleagues in ministry with other RCA staff serving the whole church, and they need to be accountable within the same organizational structure (see the project team's report in the Church Order section for proposed reorganization, restructure, and relationship of racial/ethnic councils within RCA church order).

INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS:
Preserving Our Past and Sharing the Present

"Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end" (Ps. 119:111-112).

How can we know where we're going if we don't know where we've been? CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS looks both to the future and the past. It gathers and chronicles the historical materials of the Reformed Church in America and shares with its members the current life and mission of the RCA. It is concerned with such questions as:

- How can the RCA best preserve meaningful resources from its past?
- How can those resources best be used to illumine the RCA's present?
- What present materials should be preserved for the future?
- How does the RCA best tell the story of its varied life and work in a way that will generate support, provide financial resources, and elicit participation?
- How can the RCA best interpret the challenges and issues before the RCA, and how is the RCA responding to them?
- How can the RCA promote the personal and spiritual growth of the members of the RCA through stewardship education?
- What are the best media and methods to use?

Major responsibility for CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS is embodied in:

- The Commission on History, which gathers and preserves important RCA records and promotes scholarly study and research through its Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America.

- The General Synod Council's Stewardship and Communication Services Committee, which maintains a communication network within the RCA designed to:

  1. Build community, enhance mutual understanding, promote cooperation in denominational programs, and provide opportunities for personal growth, spiritual challenge, and involvement in ministry.

  2. Develop and produce print and audiovisual resources that promote and strengthen the total ministry of the RCA.

  3. Provide production and distribution services for the RCA.

REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report of the Commission on History

The Commission on History was established in 1966 and given responsibility for collecting and preserving the official records of the Reformed Church in America, promoting interest in the history and traditions of the church, and disseminating and stimulating research in the history of the RCA. Within the past year the commission met twice: on October 2, 1997, in Newark, New Jersey, and on March 20, 1998, at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

As part of its responsibilities, the commission receives reports from the RCA archivist detailing the accession of records and other operations of the archives. The commission is pleased with the installation of new movable shelving units in the basement of Gardner Sage Library at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. This greatly eased the storage space problem in the archives.

HISTORICAL DIRECTORY 2000

At its October 1997 meeting the commission approved publication in the year 2000 of a *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America (1628-2000).* This directory will include names of all RCA ordained ministers and congregations from the "birth" of the denomination in 1628 through January 1, 2000. This directory edition will serve as a "landmark" or "baseline," to which future electronically published editions will be added as supplements.

To assist in the cost of publication, $2,500 of seed money is included in the proposed 1999 General Synod operational budget. (See 1999 General Synod Operational Budget in the Report of the General Synod Council in the General Synod Council section.) Another $2,500 will be requested next year at the 1999 General Synod in the proposed 2000 General Synod operational budget. It is anticipated that the remaining cost of publication for this directory will be recovered from sales.

NEW PUBLICATIONS IN 1998

The commission is active in publishing the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America under the general editorship of the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink. Twenty-six volumes have appeared since the inception of the series in 1968.

The commission is pleased to announce the publication of four new volumes to be added to the series this year. They are:

1. The Rev. Lewis Scudder's work on the RCA Arabian mission, *In Search of Abraham's Other Son: The Arabian Mission Story.*

2. Morell Swart's work on the history of RCA mission in Africa, *The Call of Africa: The Reformed Church in America Mission in the Sub-Sahara, 1948-1998.*

3. Janny Venema's work, *The Deacons' Account Books of the First Dutch Reformed Church of Beverwijck—Albany, 1552-1674.*

4. The Rev. Gregg Mast's work on the life and ministry of the late Rev. Dr. Howard G. Hageman, *In Remembrance and Hope: The Ministry and Vision of Howard Hageman.*

FUTURE PUBLICATIONS

The commission approved future publication of a one-volume popular history of the RCA to be authored by Donald Bruggink and Kim Baker. The commission also approved a future publication on the work and contributions of women in the RCA. Publication dates for these two publications are still to be determined.

The commission continues to review manuscripts for possible future publication in the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. The commission encourages persons who are contemplating RCA research projects to contact the commission and ascertain how the commission may offer assistance.

RECOGNITION

For the past thirty years the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America has been under the untiring and capable editorship of the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink.

R-1.
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS for the past thirty years the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America has been enriching RCA mission in the present by opening to the Reformed Church in America the past; and

WHEREAS for the past thirty years thirty volumes in the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America have been published by the William B. Eerdmans Company, covering the history of Reformed Church in America missions, education, biography, and theology, as well as providing other necessary reference materials; and

WHEREAS for the past thirty years each volume in the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America has been carefully edited, lovingly nurtured through the production process, and gracefully promoted in the Reformed Church in America by Donald Bruggink; and

WHEREAS for the past thirty years Donald Bruggink in his work on the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America has faithfully served without remuneration or compensation;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eighth day of June 1998, commends the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink for his tireless and dedicated service of over thirty years as editor in producing and overseeing the publication into print of thirty volumes in the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

The Rev. Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell, moderator of the Commission on History asked the president for permission to invite the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink to address the Synod (granted).

The Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink addressed the Synod.

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

RCA ARCHIVES AND OFFICE OF HISTORICAL SERVICES

Introduction

The archival task in the Reformed Church in America is to preserve the essential documentation of the life and ministry of the church. This documentation usually takes the form of written records (including handwritten, typewritten, and computer generated), but it also includes audio, video, pictorial, and oral testimonies. The goal is to document the "five Ws" of history:

What happened?
When did it happen?
Who did it?
Where did it happen?
Why did it happen?

The usual manner in which documentation is generated is through the preservation of regular correspondence about the daily life and work of the RCA—the regular reports, letters, minutes, agenda documents, and other such material. These are witnesses to the work and ministry of the RCA.

Responsibilities

The Office of Historical Services is responsible for the ministry of memory and the corresponding management of the Reformed Church in America archival program. The RCA Archives are located in the Gardner A. Sage Library at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and have been in this location for more than 120 years. The office provides many historical services to RCA staff, agencies, and congregations throughout the denomination. Some of these services offered are:

1. Collecting, arranging, preserving, and making available the records of the denomination. This includes:

   a. Appraising and transporting records from congregations and denominational offices.

   b. Arranging, describing, and making the records available for public research.

   c. Working with and assisting a wide range of research workers who are engaged in historical study of either the RCA or its mission areas.

   d. Assisting RCA staff with their records management needs and in their decisions for retention and disposition of current records.

2. Providing staff support and services for the Commission on History.

3. Updating, researching, and publishing the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America.*

4. Updating, researching, and publishing the *Digest and Index of the Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.*

5. Providing historical background studies for RCA staff, agencies, and congregations.

6. Managing the RCA Historical Society and publishing *Historical Highlights* and the RCA Historical Society Occasional Paper Series.

7. Providing assistance and workshops for congregations to write congregational histories, celebrate anniversaries, and preserve congregational records.

8. Serving at New Brunswick Theological Seminary on the Albert A. Smith Fellowship Committee and the Standing Seminar on RCA History Committee.

Reference Assistance

On a daily basis the archives office receives a number of requests for assistance and reference. During the past year the archivist researched 153 requests for genealogical information and 201 requests for reference and historical background information. The nature of this reference work ranged from the preparation of substantial research papers for denominational staff and agencies to biographical information on RCA ministers. In addition, seventy-three individuals visited the RCA Archives to engage in research during the past year. The use of the RCA Archives in 1997 was at its highest level since the RCA archival program was established in 1978.

Publications

The archivist also continues work on the update to the *Digest and Index of the Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.* The basic data and information have now been gathered through the *1996 Minutes of the General Synod,* and this task will continue on an annual basis. It is anticipated that this digest and index (1778-1999) will be made available in the year 2000. The archivist also collects data and edits the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America.* The next volume will provide brief biographical information on all ordained RCA ministers and congregations for the years 1628 to 2000. (The most recent directory was published in 1992.)

The Office of Historical Services is engaged in publishing a variety of other historical and resource materials. Historical resources are available in print, on disk, via e-mail, and through the RCA's web site. These resources will become increasingly available in machine-readable formats.

Preservation of Records

As stated at the beginning of this report, the primary task of the office is the preservation of important documentation of the RCA. Storage, staffing, and budget limitations remain a continuing problem for the effective operation of the office. However, in 1997 a major aspect of the storage problem was solved. Additional storage space became available in the basement of the Gardner A. Sage Library through the construction of movable shelving units. This construction doubled the present storage capacity of the RCA Archives.

In 1997 the General Synod Council reviewed the role and function of the RCA Archives and decided to establish regional RCA archival centers. In this way, RCA congregational and other RCA records are closer to their origins for ease of research. A regional center in Canada at Camp Shalom in Cambridge, Ontario, is already established. This regional center is responsible for congregational records of the Reformed Church in Canada and is established under the authority of the denominational archives. The establishment of other regional centers continues.

Records are appraised and transferred to the RCA Archives on a regular basis. As the steward of the RCA documentary heritage, the RCA Archives accessioned the following records during 1997:

Denominational Records

Boards and Agencies

Historical Society of the Reformed Church in America. Rensselearswyck Chapter No. 1. Records of the secretary of the chapter include the Albany Synod Historical Commission and its efforts to establish the first RCA Historical Society as well as the records of the chapter that developed in the RCA's denominational society in 1980. The chapter was disbanded in 1990.

New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Agenda documents, reports, and self-study of the Board of Trustees, 1991 to 1997.

Reformed Church Women (RCW)— Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics. Records of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics RCW consultant include: copies of *Directions,* 1989 to 1996; *RCW News*, 1986 to 1993; RCW synodical board minutes, 1976 to 1993; RCW synodical newsletters, 1985 to 1991; Crossroads programs, 1985 to 1992; slide presentation on *Encouraging and Equipping Reformed Church Women*; special events; and news clippings on the centennial celebration in 1975.

General Synod

The *Church Herald.* Records of the editor include: a sabbatical report of the editor, John Stapert; agenda documents for editorial council meetings; policies and procedures for the *Church Herald* office; and correspondence relating to the 1992 General Synod assessment to mail the *Church Herald* to all RCA households.

General Program Council

Council for Hispanic Ministries. Typescript of "A Celebration of Mission: The History of the Council for Hispanic Ministries of the Reformed Church in America," by Jhonny Alicea-Baez.

Extension Foundation. Records of the executive secretary include correspondence with noteholders, minutes, agenda documents, correspondence with staff, note copies, and financial summary records, 1967 to 1974.

Secretary for World Mission. Report on the closure of the Al Amana School in Oman, by the Rev. Peter Ford, July 5, 1987.

Secretary for Asia and the Far East. Correspondence and brochures relating to the International Christian University in Tokyo, Japan, 1981 to 1984; and records of the area secretary for Asia, Elaine Tanis, 1989 to 1995.

Secretary for the Americas. *Charm and Challenge of Chiapas,* 1957 to 1988 (gaps); *Dialogo Hermandad Maya,* 1978-1980; and *Chiapas for Christ,* 1958. Records of the secretary for the Americas, the Rev. Richard Vander Voet, include correspondence with missionary personnel and agencies in Central and South America, 1988 to 1989.

General Synod Council

Minister for Education and Faith Development. Records include: correspondence regarding RCA publications and other print and video productions; the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible; minutes and documents of the Council for Christian Education; minutes of Administrative Council meetings; documents on alcohol and substance abuse, Christian education, deacons in the RCA, educational consultants, ministries in Christian education of the National Council of Churches; minutes and correspondence of Presbyterian and Reformed Educational Ministries meetings; Christian Education Workshop Design volumes; minutes of Joint Educational Development Committee meetings; youth ministry materials and publications; and RCA/CRC cooperation, 1983 to 1995.

Office of Human Resources. Records of the Task Force on Procedural Steps to Ordination.

TRAVARCA. Approximately one thousand slides in a series of slide/tape presentations received from the TRAVARCA library. Included are: *An Applachian Quilt: Ministries of the RCA; Rising to the Challenge: The Reformed Church in Mission in Alale, Kenya; American Indians: A People Who Belong; Moving Toward Self-Reliance: American Indian Ministries in the RCA; New Life and Mission in Taiwan; Seeking the 99 in Japan: Student Ministries; Seeking the 99 in Japan: Pastoral Ministries; Beautiful Island: A Story of Christian Witness in Taiwan; Sam Zwemer Remembers* (from *O That Ishmael Might Live Before Thee);* and *God's Children in Chiapas.*

Regional Synod Records

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics. Minutes of the Synod Foundation, 1987 to 1991. (The Synod Foundation was incorporated in 1987 for assisting in the ministry of the regional synod and to receive and hold real estate and investment properties of the regional synod.) Minutes of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics executive committee, January 1991 to January 1993.

Regional Synod of the Heartland—Coordinator for Mission Stewardship. Records include chronological files, events and meetings, and subject files for the Middle East, 1994 to 1996.

Classical Records

Classis of Greater Palisades. Records include annual consistorial reports, marriage records of the Ridgefield Park Reformed Church, and correspondence and documentation regarding the complaint against the Old Paramus Reformed Church, 1989 to 1993.

Classis of South Grand Rapids. Minutes, 1986 to 1994. Papers relating to the Anchor Community Church in Mobile, Alabama, 1986 to 1994; and the purchase by Nehemiah Baptist Church of the Garfield Park Reformed Church building, 1990-1996.

Local Church Records

Detroit, Michigan, First Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1872. Records include historical pamphlets and papers; membership list, 1918; souvenir booklet of the church's seventy-first anniversary and burning of the church's mortgage, 1943; booklet for new building, 1948; dedication booklet, 1952; and one hundredth anniversary booklet, 1972. These records supplement previous records deposited after the disbanding of the congregation in 1987.

Englewood, New Jersey, Community Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1928 and disbanded in October 1995. Records include members, 1928 to 1996; baptisms, 1928 to 1993; marriages, 1951 to 1989; and deaths, 1950 to 1995.

Grand Rapids, Michigan, Garfield Park Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1917 and was also known as Zion Reformed Church. Records include membership registers, transfers, financial papers, property and tax information papers, ledger books, and church disbanding and closure papers, 1970 to 1990. These records supplement previous records deposited after the disbanding of the congregaton in 1990.

Interlaken, New York, Interlaken Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1830 and was known first as the Reformed Church in Farmerville and later as Farmer Village. Records include: consistory minutes, 1830 to 1976; members, 1830 to 1869 and 1878 to 1922; baptisms, 1831 to 1873 and 1876 to 1922; marriages, 1831 to 1858, 1862 to 1873, and 1876 to 1922; deaths, 1831 to 1847, 1850 to 1869, and 1887 to 1922; ministers, 1831 to 1834; lectures in the church, 1833 to 1834; delegates, 1831 to 1834; pastoral visitations, 1849; dismissals, 1887 to 1922; and classis reports, 1889 to 1911.

Jersey City, New Jersey, Central Avenue Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1872. Records include: consistory minutes, 1872 to 1985; elders' minutes, 1883 to 1885; ladies mission society minutes, 1923 to 1965; treasurer's record books, 1920 to 1936 and 1969 to 1978; benevolence fund book, 1946 to 1958; archives list, 1945; members' attendance book, 1904 to 1915; church attendance log book, 1934 to 1981; Sunday school minutes, 1952 to 1974; and miscellaneous papers, pamphlets, and financial records.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, New Life Community Church. The congregation organized in 1847 as First Reformed Church. Celebration booklet of the 150th anniversary of the church, *Celebrating 150 Years: New Life Community Church, 1847 to 1997*. This booklet includes historical background, family photos, names and addresses, calendar, notes, and miscellaneous information, 1997.

New York City. West Farms Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1839 and disbanded in 1948. Minutes of the spiritual consistory, 1883 to 1929.

Pompton Plains, New Jersey, First Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1736. Records include miscellanous pamphlets, books, photographs, and member directories relating to the life and ministry of the congregation.

Raritan, New Jersey, Third Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1848. Records include petitions and reports relating to the proposed merger of Second Reformed Church and Third Reformed Church of Raritan, and 1972 financial report.

Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, Neighborhood Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1924 and disbanded in December 1994. Records include: members, 1924 to 1990; baptisms, 1924 to 1990; marriages, 1925 to 1991; and deaths, 1925 to 1991.

Rocky Hill, New Jersey, First Reformed Church. The congregation organized in 1857. Records include: consistory minutes, 1854 to 1951, 1960 to 1973, and 1975 to 1984; members, baptisms, marriages, and deaths, 1854 to 1974; Christian Endeavor Society records, 1898 to 1910; Sunday school records, 1876 to 1967; Ladies Missionary Society records, 1883 to 1947; Church Workers' Society records, 1936 to 1945; financial records, 1857 to 1972; and photographs, historical pamphlets, and newsclippings.

Staten Island, New York, Reformed Church on Staten Island. The congregation organized in 1680 and was also known as Cityville, North Side, and Port Richmond. Records include consistory minutes, members, baptisms, marriages, deaths, various organizations in the congregation, pictures, and publications.

Gifts

The RCA Archives received as gifts the following:

Boslooper, Thomas. *The Van Gieson Family in America*. Self-published, 1997.

Harrison, Edward N. *Introduction and Abstract: History of Dutch Reformed Church Education in the Colony and State of New Jersey over Three Hundred and Fifty Years.*

Japinga, Lynn. "When is the Minister Too Religious: Theodorus Frelinghuysen and the Raritan Controversy." Unpublished paper.

Vander Kolk, Justin. Notebooks and journals of daily thoughts, poetry, and reflections, 1972 to 1976, 1978, and 1984 to 1986; notes and lectures on Augustine; notes, reflections, and studies of the Gospel of John; and, a typescript of "Having Been Elsewhere" (poetry written during the 1970s).

The RCA Archives continues to gather the corporate records of the denomination from RCA staff offices, regional synods, classes, and congregations. As the steward of the RCA's heritage, the RCA Archives continues to engage in the ministry of memory. It is the responsibility of the RCA Archives to assure that tomorrow has a yesterday.

NECROLOGY

Name	Date of Death	Age
Stuart Blauw, Jr.	**July 11, 1997**	**90**
John Cornelius Frey	**July 25, 1997**	**77**
Albertus George Bossenbroek	**August 25, 1997**	**86**
George B. Van Pelt	**October 20, 1997**	**57**
Simon G. Ter Louw	**November 8, 1997**	**90**
Fred R. Buseman	**November 12, 1997**	**78**
Kenneth Henry Hesselink	**December 18, 1997**	**80**
Peter Van Es, Jr.	**January 8, 1998**	**97**
Thomas Boslooper	**January 11, 1998**	**74**
Luther E. Ratmeyer	**January 17, 1998**	**59**
Andrew Mouw, Jr.	**January 24, 1998**	**81**
Arthur Robert Geddes	**February 8, 1998**	**89**
H. Eugene Speckman	**February 19, 1998**	**77**
Warren M. Hietbrink	**February 23, 1998**	**71**
Arnold Eugene Dykhuizen	**April 16, 1998**	**87**

Stuart Blauw, Jr.

Stuart Blauw was born in the Netherlands on January 29, 1907. He began his undergraduate education at Moody Bible Institute, which he attended from 1928 to 1932. He also studied at Union College in Kentucky from 1948 to 1952. His theological education was received at Louisville Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1954.

He was ordained by the Independent Fundamentalist Churches of America in 1937. He served the Laural County Independent Church in Kentucky from 1937 until 1953 and was received into the Reformed Church in America by the Classis of Illiana in 1953. He then pastored the following congregations: First, Lafayette, Indiana, from 1953 to 1959; Palm Springs, Lake Worth, Florida, from 1959 to 1962, Fourth, Holland, Michigan, from 1962 to

1968; and First, Byron Center, Michigan, from 1968 to 1973. During his retirement he served as a representative for Portable Recording Ministries in Holland, Michigan, from 1973 to 1977.

Stuart Blauw, Jr. died in Holland, Michigan, on July 11, 1997.

John Cornelius Frey

John Cornelius Frey was born at Aplington, Iowa, on July 13, 1920. He received his undergradute education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951.

He was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie in 1951. He pastored the following congregations: Elim, Kings, Illinois, from 1951 to 1957; Homewood, Illinois, from 1957 to 1963; Randolph, Wisconsin, from 1963 to 1972; Central, Oskaloosa, Iowa, from 1973 to 1980; and Cedar Hills, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from 1980 until his retirement in 1986. He also served as the president of the Synod of Chicago.

John Frey died in Cedar Falls, Iowa, on July 25, 1997.

Albertus George Bossenbroek

Albertus George Bossenbroek was born at Brandon, Wisconsin, on October 16, 1910. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1932. His theological education was completed at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1936. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Hope College in 1977.

He was licensed by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1936 and ordained by the Classis of Schenectady that same year. He pastored the following congregations: Helderberg, Guilderland Center, New York, from 1936 to 1941; First, Chatham, New York, from 1941 to 1947; and First, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, from 1947 to 1964. Bossenbroek served as field secretary for the Synod of New York from 1964 to 1972 and as executive secretary for the Synod of New York from 1972 until his retirement in 1979. He then served as director of field education at New Brunswick Theological Seminary from 1979 to 1981. Bossenbroek served the Synod of Albany as president in 1946, served the General Synod as vice president from 1976 to 1977, and served the General Synod as president from 1977 to 1978.

Albertus Bossenbroek died in Hastings-On-Hudson, New York, on August 25, 1997.

George B. Van Pelt

George B. Van Pelt was born at Jersey City, New Jersey, on April 15, 1940. He received his undergraduate education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1966. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1969.

He was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Palisades in 1969. He pastored the following congregations: Herkimer, New York, from 1969 to 1980; First, Catskill, New York, from 1980 to 1988; and First, Wynantskill, New York, from 1988 to 1992. He worked in business from 1992 until his death.

George Van Pelt died on October 20, 1997.

Simon G. Ter Louw

Simon G. Ter Louw was born at Pella, Iowa, on July 7, 1907. He studied at Lethbridge College in Canada from 1966 to 1967.

He was licensed as a preaching elder by the Classis of Cascades in 1963. He was granted a dispensation by the 1969 General Synod and ordained in 1969. He served as lay pastor of Monarch Reformed Church in Monarch, Alberta, from 1963 to 1968. He then pastored two congregations: Zion Reformed, Amherst, South Dakota, from 1968 to 1974; and Community Presbyterian-Baptist, Pierpont, South Dakota, from 1969 to 1974. During his retirement Ter Louw served in specialized ministry with Words of Hope from 1974 to 1975 and as minister of care at Trinity Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, from 1978 to 1980.

Simon Ter Louw died in Pella, Iowa, on November 8, 1997.

Fred R. Buseman

Fred R. Buseman was born at Aplington, Iowa, on June 11, 1919. He received his undergraduate education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1944. He began his theological education at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, which he attended from 1944 to 1945. He completed his theological education at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1947. He also studied at the University of Chicago Divinity School, from 1951 to 1952. He received an S.T.M. degree from Dubuque University in 1967.

He was licensed by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie in 1947 and ordained by the Classis of Rochester the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Buffalo, New York, from 1947 to 1948; First, Waterloo, New York, from 1948 to 1955; Southridge Community, Denver, Colorado, from 1955 to 1959; Cedar Hills Community, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from 1959 to 1963; Hawarden, Iowa, from 1969 to 1973; Bethel, Chicago, Illinois, from 1975 to 1980; and Christ Community, Fishers, Indiana, from 1980 to 1984. He served as chaplain at Northwestern College from 1963 to 1969. He served in specialized ministry with the Evangelical Association in Des Moines, Iowa, from 1973 to 1975. He also served as associate pastor at Grace, Lansing, Illinois, from 1984 to 1987.

Fred Buseman died in Clinton, Iowa, on November 12, 1997.

Kenneth Henry Hesselink

Kenneth Henry Hesselink was born at Oostburg, Wisconsin, on June 12, 1917. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1938. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1941.

He was licensed by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1941 and ordained by the Classis of Illinois the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Raritan, Illinois, from 1941 to 1947; Trinity, Inkster, Michigan, from 1947 to 1952; Laketon-Bethel, Muskegon, Michigan, from 1952 to 1964; and Church of the Savior, Niles, Michigan, from 1978 to 1982. He also served as stated clerk for the Synod of Michigan from 1961 to 1964; as assistant field secretary for the Synod of Michigan from 1964 to 1975; and as field secretary for extension ministries for the Synod of Michigan from 1975 to 1978.

Kenneth Hesselink died in Niles, Michigan, on December 18, 1997.

Peter Van Es, Jr.

Peter Van Es, Jr. was born at Orange City, Iowa, on November 1, 1904. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1927. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1930.

He was licensed and ordained by the Classis of West Sioux in 1930. He entered RCA missionary service and pastored the following American Indian congregations: Colony, Oklahoma, from 1930 to 1932; Mescalero, New Mexico, from 1932 to 1944; and Macy, Nebraska, from 1944 to 1952. After his service as an RCA missionary he pastored the following congregations: Grace, Sonoma, California, from 1952 to 1958; Yakima, Washington, from 1958 to 1963; and Christ, Newark, New Jersey, from 1963 to 1971. During his retirement he served as interim pastor in San Jose, California; Edmonds, Washington; and Denver, Colorado.

Peter Van Es died in San Jose, California, on January 8, 1998.

Thomas Boslooper

Thomas Boslooper was born at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on December 30, 1923. He began his undergraduate education at Calvin College and completed his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1945. He received his theological education at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1947. He received his Ph.D. degree from Union Theological Seminary/Columbia University in 1954.

He was licensed by the Classis of Grand Rapids in 1947 and ordained by the Classis of Paramus the same year. He began his ministry as assistant pastor at First, Hawthorne, New Jersey, in 1947. He served as stated supply at Riverside, Paterson, New Jersey, from 1947 to 1948. He then pastored the following congregations: Closter, New Jersey, from 1948 to 1955; Second, Pella, Iowa, from 1955 to 1960; Second, Schenectady, New York, from 1960 to 1965; and Closter, New Jersey, from 1965 to 1976. He continued his ministry in teaching and other aspects of specialized ministry.

Thomas Boslooper died in Palm Harbor, Florida, on January 11, 1998.

Luther E. Ratmeyer

Luther E. Ratmeyer was born at Forrston, Illinois, on September 13, 1938. He received his undergraduate education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1961. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1964.

He was licensed by the Classis of Illinois in 1964 and ordained by the Classis of Lake Erie the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Church of the Saviour, Livonia, Michigan, from 1964 to 1970; Westwood Heights, Omaha, Nebraska, from 1970 to 1979; and Fifth, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979 to 1982. He served in specialized ministry in new church development in the area of Atlanta, Georgia, from 1982 to 1986 and was the organizing pastor for North Atlanta Community Church in Roswell, Georgia, which he served from 1986 to 1993. At the time of his death he was organizing pastor for Christ the King Reformed Church in North York, Ontario.

Luther Ratmeyer died in North York, Ontario, on January 17, 1998.

Andrew Mouw, Jr.

Andrew Mouw, Jr. was born at Paterson, New Jersey, on September 8, 1916. His undergraduate education was received at Rutgers College. His theological education was received at Bloomfield Seminary and at the Galilean Bible Theological Seminary.

He was ordained by the United Christian Church in 1945. He pastored the following non-RCA congregations: Union, West Caldwell, New Jersey, from 1943 to 1946, and Calvary Methodist, Elizabeth, New Jersey, from 1946 to 1947. He served as stated supply for West End Reformed Church in Port Jervis, New York, from 1947 to 1949. He then pastored the following RCA congregations: Riverside, Paterson, New Jersey, from 1949 to 1952; Watervliet, West Troy, New York, from 1952 to 1955; Wanaque, New Jersey, from 1955 to 1961; Trinity, Taylor, Michigan, from 1961 to 1969; Ferry Memorial, Montague, Michigan, from 1969 to 1973; and Community, Hudson Ave, Englewood, New Jersey, from 1973 to 1983.

Andrew Mouw, Jr. died in Whiting, New Jersey, on January 24, 1998.

Arthur Robert Geddes

Arthur Robert Geddes was born at New York City on June 24, 1908. He received his undergraduate education at Rutgers College, from which he graduated in 1932. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1935. He also undertook additional graduate studies at Syracuse University, from 1937 to 1939; and at Biblical Seminary, New York City, from 1945 to 1946.

He was licensed by the Classis of New York in 1935 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery the same year. He pastored the following congregations: St. John's, St. Johnsville, New York, from 1935 to 1939; Florida, Minaville, New York, from 1940 to 1944; Tappan, New York, from 1944 to 1947; St. John's, St. Johnsville, New York, from 1960 to 1967; and Rockaway, Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, from 1967 to 1973. He also served as the field secretary for new church development in the Synod of New Jersey from 1948 to 1960. He served as a senior pastor for the Board of Pensions from 1974 to 1990.

Arthur Geddes died in Millersville, Maryland, on February 8, 1998.

H. Eugene Speckman

H. Eugene "Bud" Speckman was born at Corwith, Iowa, on January 25, 1921. He began his undergraduate education at Hofstra University and completed his undergraudate education at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1962. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1964.

He was licensed and ordained by the Classis of New Brunswick in 1964. He pastored Six Mile Run Reformed Church in Franklin Park, New Jersey, from 1964 to 1988. He also served as a pastor to pastors from 1989 to 1993.

H. Eugene Speckman died in Kendall Park, New Jersey, on February 19, 1998.

Warren M. Hietbrink

Warren M. Hietbrink was born at Firth, Nebraska, on December 3, 1926. He began his undergraduate education at Northwestern College in 1943 and completed his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1947. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1950.

He was licensed by the Classis of East Sioux in 1950 and ordained by the Classis of Illinois the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Peoria, Illinois, from 1950 to 1952; First, Rock Rapids, Iowa, from 1952 to 1957; Emmanuel, Paramount, California, from 1957 to 1965; First, Roseland, Chicago, Illinois, from 1965 to 1987; and First, Sheldon, Iowa, from 1987 to 1992. He also served as president of the Synod of Chicago from 1971 to1972.

Warren Hietbrink died in Sibley, Iowa, on February 23, 1998.

Arnold Eugene Dykhuizen

Arnold Eugene Dykhuizen was born on September 30, 1910, at Jamestown, Michigan. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1931. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1934.

He was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1934 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Stone Arabia, New York, and Sprakers, Newe York, from 1934-1939; Johnstown, New York, from 1939 to 1944; Second, Marion, New York, from 1944 to 1950; First, Chicago (Berwyn), Illinois, from 1950 to 1960; Riverford Heights, Detroit, Michigan, from 1960 to 1967; and Holland, Nebraska, from 1967 to 1972. Following retirement he served as president of the Synod of Albany in 1947 and the Synod of Chicago in 1960.

Arnold Dykhuizen died in Holland, Michigan, on April 16, 1998.

The Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, president of the Board of Pensions, led the General Synod in a service of "Commemoration of those who have died in Faith." The service concluded with Synod standing to sing the hymn, "For All the Saints."

Report of the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald*

The *Church Herald* continues to take seriously its role as a sidewalk connecting members of the denomination to each other, but it also acts as a mirror, reflecting the diversity and the struggles of the RCA's members. As with most mirrors, we don't always like what we see when we look at ourselves, but even if we never learn to love other people's opinions, the mirror helps us to learn to accept each other.

MAGAZINE CONTENT

During 1997 the *Church Herald* continued its practice of offering content that sought to deepen personal spirituality and promote denominational programs. Articles ranged in scope from AIDS to ecumenism, finances to family; and while one issue or article might give the impression of bias, over time the magazine is balanced and fair.

The *Church Herald* also offered a forum for discussion for RCA members. On the letters pages RCA members offered opinions on the uniqueness of Christ, debated the importance of the constitutional question, and raised concerns regarding the proposed *Formula of Agreement.* By providing advertising space for opinion on the *Formula,* the *Church Herald*

drew criticism from many and generated a request from the 1997 General Synod that the editorial council review its advertising policy (*MGS 1997,* R-1, p. 171). A revision of the advertising policy now prohibits ads that "challenge or denigrate Reformed Church in America policies, programs, or personnel."

Church Herald Personnel

There were no staffing changes at the magazine during 1997, allowing for a stable, smooth year in the office. The *Church Herald*'s four full-time and four part-time employees represent more than seventy years of experience at the magazine, a testimony to their commitment to the RCA and to the product. A summer intern, added to the staff for three months, allowed the *Church Herald* office to cover summer absences and provide an educational experience for a student at an RCA college.

Finances

It was also a remarkably stable year for the *Church Herald* financially. The prices of paper and of postage, both predicted to increase, did not. That, coupled with good investments and careful stewardship, allowed the *Church Herald* to finish 1997 solidly in the black, returning over $100,000 to cover other denominational assessment-funded costs. The strength of the *Church Herald*'s financial position has given the magazine the courage to take a 5 percent budget cut for 1998, despite predictions of an 11 percent postage hike, a sizable increase in the cost of production, and anticipated cost of living increases.

The *Church Herald* continues to explore the possibility of creating an endowment that might offset some of the magazine's operating costs in addition to allowing for potential enhancement of the magazine and its mission. Items under consideration are an endowment to promote gifts in the arts, for an internship program, and for technology.

The Future

Technology evolves, and the *Church Herald* continues to test how that technology will impact its future. Print and electronic media have much in common and yet differ greatly; finding the common threads and capitalizing on them will be important in the years to come. As the church at large and the RCA specifically explore technology, the *Church Herald* will likely evolve or expand into something quite different.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-2.
To commend the editors, staff, and editorial board for the content and quality of The Church Herald. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Those responsible for the ongoing publication of the RCA's denominational publication deserve appreciation and support.➢

Report of the *Perspectives* Board of Editors

The *Perspectives* Board of Editors appreciates this opportunity to report to the 1998 General Synod. The goal of *Perspectives* is to express the Reformed faith theologically; to engage issues that Reformed Christians meet in personal, ecclesiastical, and societal life; and thus to contribute to the mission of the church of Jesus Christ.

Structure

Perspectives operates with a three-tiered structure that the board has refined over the years to operate efficiently and to keep overhead low. *Perspectives* has two coeditors, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Boogaart and the Rev. Evelyn Diephouse, who meet weekly to prepare the material for publication each month. *Perspectives* has a regional board that meets monthly to evaluate articles and discuss issues that arise in the course of publishing. *Perspectives* has a national board that meets twice a year to oversee the publishing of the journal and to review performance. All board members volunteer their time, which makes this publication unique in the theological world. The Board of Editors was especially productive in the last year. The strength of the journal is in the commitment of this group of people who graciously share their time and their talents.

Craig Stapert resigned as managing editor in November 1997. *Perspectives* takes this opportunity to thank him for all he contributed to the journal. *Perspectives* was able to find volunteers to pick up and do what he did in the areas of bookkeeping and subscription list maintenance, but *Perspectives* is still looking for someone to take over the task of developing the journal financially, both in the area of advertising and subscription development. *Perspectives* is looking for someone with expertise in publishing who is willing to volunteer about ten hours a week.

Accomplishments

Perspectives continues to benefit from the contributions of award-winning writers in the Reformed tradition. Unlike other journals, these writers offer their contributions without remuneration. In addition to the well-known writers, *Perspectives* encourages young, less well-known writers to submit articles. *Perspectives* published in the past year a number of these articles written by college and seminary students. *Perspectives* takes particular joy in seeing the encouragement this gives to future leaders in the Reformed tradition.

Perspectives continues to focus on publishing spiritual autobiographies. *Perspectives* finds that these spiritual autobiographies allow for literary achievement and theological profundity. Putting spiritual autobiographies alongside theological essays has also allowed *Perspectives* to broaden its appeal.

Finances

Perspectives is a volunteer organization with all the corresponding strengths and weaknesses of a volunteer organization. *Perspectives* is proud of the fact that it produces a quality journal at a fraction of the cost of other theological journals. *Perspectives* has a dedicated and highly efficient organization. However, given the nature of a theological magazine, a certain amount of money has to be invested each year to retain and increase the number of subscriptions. The money from institutional support ($16,000) and subscriptions (approximately $30,000) is spent on the costs of production. There are no funds to develop the journal, and each year *Perspectives* falls a little farther behind financially. To be viable in the future, *Perspectives* needs more institutional support and a managing editor.

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Stewardship and Communication Services Committee

COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

Stewardship and Communication Services (SAC) is responsible for the program areas of stewardship and communications. The Rev. E. Wayne Antworth serves as the director and is responsible for the administration, coordination, and supervision of SAC staff.

The mission of the communication program is:

> To develop and maintain a communication network that connects individual RCA members, congregations, and the denomination, thus building community, enhancing mutual understanding, and promoting cooperation and involvement in our common ministry.

The mission of Stewardship and Communication Services is to effectively communicate the vision and ministries of the Reformed Church in America. The communications staff of SAC provides print, audiovisual, and electronic resources to RCA congregations.

STEWARDSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

Over the past several months the RCA Distribution Center, TRAVARCA, and RCA Video Productions staffs, along with SAC communication staff, have engaged in a process of re-imaging how SAC might better serve RCA congregations and denominational staff in light of the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision (*MGS 1997,* pp.78-80). Several factors informed those discussions:

1. SAC communication staff is smaller than it has been in years, and staffing in the RCA Distribution Center, TRAVARCA, and RCA Video Productions has remained at the same level for several years while the workload has increased considerably.

2. Most of the production and program money from the former Office of Promotion, Communications, and Development was transferred to Mission Services as part of the last GPC/GSC restructure. More recently, electronic communications was added to SAC without program funds allocated to support it.

3. While the RCA Distribution Center, TRAVARCA, and RCA Video Productions provide valuable services to RCA congregations and staff, all three operations have struggled financially. RCA Video Productions and TRAVARCA have been receiving significant grants from the SAC budget toward their operating expenses.

4. The RCA Distribution Center, TRAVARCA, and RCA Video Productions operate as three independent operations. Individually they pay bills, track expenses, take and fulfill orders, invoice customers, maintain databases, and design, produce, and package products. Consolidating these departments would eliminate redundancy, increase efficiency, offer congregations better customer service, and allow staff to focus on areas of expertise. Aging computer software and the need to automate several areas make this an opportune time for such a consolidation.

Also taken into consideration were three areas deserving special focus: marketing, news and information, and electronic communications.

1. **Marketing.** Many resources produced by GSC would be more widely used by RCA congregations and the broader Christian community if they were marketed more effectively. The same could be said for GSC services and programs. While the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA use several avenues for promotion (including general catalogs, minicatalogs, fliers, display advertising, and so on), their advertising budgets are relatively small. Neither the RCA Distribution Center nor TRAVARCA has ever employed a person with expertise in market research and professional experience in marketing.

2. **News and Information.** SAC produces and distributes *RCA Today* (monthly bulletin insert and annual video), "Together" (quarterly *Church Herald* insert), and *Prayerline* (monthly flier). In addition, SAC distributes occasional press releases and submits news stories to the *Church Herald.* SAC could be more proactive with the secular media and work more cooperatively with the *Church Herald* in generating RCA news and in coordinating articles that support GSC program initiatives.

3. **Electronic Communication.** SAC staff, in cooperation with the Office of Information Systems, established the RCA's web site in 1996. Recent enhancements now make it possible for all RCA congregations to have and maintain home pages lodged on the RCA site. It also allows staff to develop and maintain their own program areas on the site. Plans for the site include such things as on-line resource catalogs and order taking. Identifying funding sources for this growing program area are essential.

The goal of these discussions was to propose a restructure of the RCA Distribution Center, TRAVARCA, and RCA Video Productions into a coordinated, self-sustaining operation that is guided by the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision. The objectives are:

1. To more effectively equip RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods for ministry in their own contexts.

2. To enhance internal and external communication, including print, video, and electronic communications.

3. To assist GSC committees and staff in reaching their objectives.

To achieve these objectives several strategic goals were identified:

1. Develop and maintain a communication network that connects RCA members, congregations, classes, regional synods, and GSC committees and staff, in order to enhance mutual understanding and promote cooperation and involvement in our common ministry.

2. Enable RCA congregations, classes, regional synods, and GSC committees and staff to develop or enhance their own communication skills and methods.

3. Provide one place for RCA members, congregations, classes, and regional synods to order print, video, and other resources for ministry.

4. Provide resource information helpline services to RCA congregations, linking educators and other end users with the most appropriate resources to meet their specific needs in their own contexts for ministry.

5. Provide marketing expertise to assist GSC committees and staff in needs assessment, product development, and resource acquisition.

6. Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy to more effectively promote RCA resources for ministry.

7. Develop and produce quality print, video, and other resources from a Reformed perspective for use by RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods.

8. Provide staff and others with design and production services at or below market rates, ensuring a high level of consistency and overall quality.

9. Provide staff with distribution services at or below market rates.

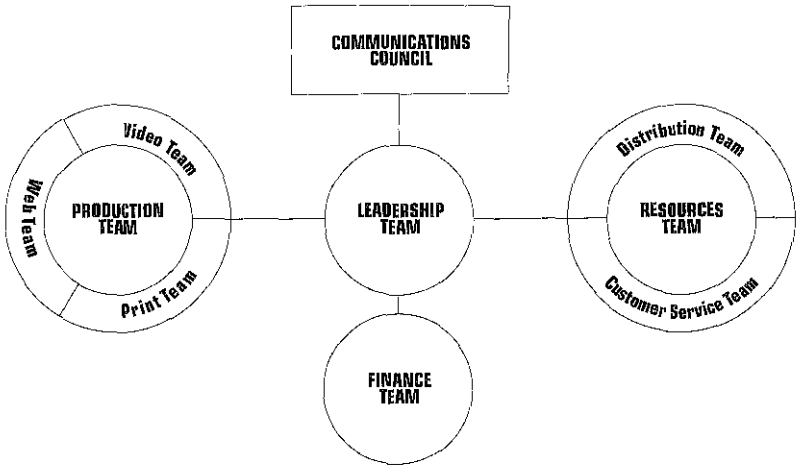
The results of these discussions yielded a restructure proposal which was presented to the GSC Stewardship and Communication Services Committee in April 1998 for discussion. The following changes will be presented at the October 1998 GSC meeting for approval:

1. Stewardship and Communication Services will be renamed Communication and Production Services. The responsibilities for stewardship will be shifted to the RCA Foundation.

2. Communication and Production Services will not have a standing committee that will meet during GSC meetings. Policy issues and budget approval for Communication and Production Services will be presented to GSC through the GSC Coordinating Committee in plenary sessions for discussion and appropriate action.

3. Communication and Production Services will operate with a team approach. Each employee will be assigned to at least one of three functional teams. Teams will be empowered to make decisions, and all decisions will be made by consensus.

COMMUNICATION AND PRODUCTION SERVICES



4. Communication and Production Services will use project groups to oversee the planning, producing, packaging, and evaluation of print, video, and electronic products. Project groups may include an educator, an artist/designer, a writer/editor, the marketing specialist, an end user, and other specialists, depending on the nature of the project.

5. Communication and Production Services will strive to select and distribute the best resources for ministry that are consistent with Reformed theology and meet the diverse needs of the Reformed Church in America community of faith. A Resource Selection Committee will be appointed to receive resource recommendations, review resources, and aid in the selection process.

6. A Communications Council with representation from the various GSC committees/ units, the *Church Herald*, Reformed Church Women's Ministries, and RCA congregations will guide the denomination's overall communication strategy.

RCA DISTRIBUTION CENTER

Mission Statement

The mission of the RCA Distribution Center is to provide Reformed Church in America congregations with print and audiovisual resources and to provide RCA staff and agencies with production and distribution services.

Financial Overview

From 1988 to 1993 the RCA Distribution Center generated a modest "profit," contributing a total of $103,917 toward the capitalization of new products and $68,612 into general reserves. Since then the operation has fallen short of meeting its projected budget. In 1996 the deficit was slightly over $60,000, and several steps were taken to stem this tide:

1. Throughout 1997 RCA Distribution Center staff carefully monitored expenses and exercised tight control of capital and discretionary spending.

2. The RCA Distribution Center, in coordination with Congregational Services, introduced several new curricula and educational resources. These include The Whole People of God, Generation Why, FastLane, One Room Sunday School, and Kerygma. Sales reports in 1997 indicate that each of these resources fills a niche market within the Reformed Church in America.

3. The RCA Distribution Center increased its marketing efforts—committing more dollars to advertising and promotion, using more full-color in its promotional pieces, and making more frequent contact with customers. In June 1997 over three thousand full-color catalogs were distributed to RCA congregations and non-RCA customers. Mini-catalogs (four scheduled in 1997), *Church Herald* display ads, numerous product fliers, and *Servant Leaders* were additional key components to the center's marketing mix—informing customers of new products and keeping the RCA Distribution Center in the mind of the consumer.

4. The RCA Distribution Center wrote all RCA congregations who continue to order CRC Publications materials (LiFE, Bible Way, Coffee Break, Men's Life, etc.) through the CRC distribution center. As an incentive to order from the RCA Distribution Center, the center offered each congregation a 10 percent discount on their next order. Twenty-five out of one hundred fifty churches who received the letter took advantage of this special offer.

As a result, the RCA Distribution Center ended 1997 with $1,000 excess income over expenses. Income for the RCA Distribution Center was $1,634,893, with sales representing $928,379 of the total. This was an all-time high. Income generated through the sale of production and distribution services also increased.

Curriculum Update

The RCA Distribution Center capitalized the development of the new LiFE curriculum produced in partnership with CRC Publications. A payback schedule has been established between the RCA and CRC Publications, allowing the RCA Distribution Center to recover its investment of $256,289 through a special discount arrangement. To date, $179,850 has been paid back to the denomination. The RCA Distribution Center currently has over 350 LiFE customers, and 1997 sales amounted to $312,585.

Servant Leaders

In January 1995 the RCA Distribution Center produced and distributed the first issue of the new leadership newspaper, *Servant Leaders: A Practical Publication Serving RCA Congregations*. Produced on a quarterly basis, *Servant Leaders* is mailed to over twenty thousand RCA members at their home addresses and is very well received. The winter 1998 issue contained articles on helping children understand baptism, web sites for kids, biblical engagement, prayer chains, congregational singing, church publicity, and church nurseries.

The purpose of *Servant Leaders* is to serve congregations by providing professional and lay leaders in the Reformed Church in America with useful information about new resources, creative programs, special services, upcoming events and conferences, and continuing education opportunities. *Servant Leaders* is funded by the RCA's seven General Synod Council service units and is sent free of charge to pastors, elders, deacons, missionaries, chaplains, seminary students, professors, and lay leaders in RCA congregations.

Kim Baker serves as the publication's editor, and an editorial team (Wenda Fore, the Rev. Daniel Plasman, Carol Myers, Jane Schuyler, and Ann Saigeon) assists in planning and evaluating each issue.

PRINT PRODUCTION

The production of print resources provides RCA members the opportunity to hear about, understand, and receive the many services and programs of the denomination. The Rev. LeRoy Koopman and Ann Saigeon provide writing and editing services for the production of resources. The following materials are written and/or prepared for publication by SAC:

RCA Today

RCA Today is a bulletin insert that reports current news of the Reformed Church in America. Copies are sent free to congregations on request. This is the eleventh year of publication for *RCA Today,* which is published monthly except for a combined July/August issue. Usage has remained fairly constant, with about 820 of the RCA's 947 congregations requesting a total of 160,000 copies each month. A Spanish edition, *¡Hoy!* , is published in cooperation with the RCA's Council for Hispanic Ministries. Both *RCA Today* and *¡Hoy!* are also posted on the RCA's Internet web site each month.

Mission of the Month

Mission Today, a four-page bulletin insert created in 1996, is the main communication piece of the Mission of the Month program. *Mission Today* highlights one mission area each month but includes news, photos, and prayer requests from other areas as well. The Mission of the Month mailing also includes a sheet of additional information and resources for the focus area, a children's bulletin, offering envelopes, and a full-color mission poster. Nearly six hundred congregations have requested a total of 110,000 copies of *Mission Today.* These

materials are sent free, but they must be requested. Mission of the Month offerings generated nearly $156,025 for support of RCA mission in 1997. *Mission Today* is also posted on the RCA's Internet web site each month.

Prayerline

Prayerline was initiated in 1993 to share prayer needs across the RCA, thus encouraging a greater sense of community throughout the denomination. While most RCA congregations have their own internal prayer communication links, *Prayerline* is concerned with needs of broad concern that might not otherwise be communicated. *Prayerline* is enclosed in all *RCA Today* and *Mission Today* mailings and is sent free to an additional three hundred people who have requested it. It is also posted on the RCA's Internet web site.

"Together"

Quarterly inserts called "Together" have been published in the *Church Herald* since 1993, with the *Church Herald* providing the space and SAC providing the materials. These four-page inserts generally include a first-person testimony of faith, a feature about an RCA service or ministry, and a profile of new missionaries.

Mission Calendar

The 1998 mission calendar, like the ones published in 1996 and 1997, follows the Mission of the Month schedule and includes a photo, the birthdates of RCA missionaries and their children under the age of eighteen, missionary addresses, and a short summary of the mission work in each area. The 1998 calendar also includes the addresses and birthdays of former and retired missionaries who served the RCA for ten years or more. A calendar was also sent to each RCA congregation as an expression of thanks for support of RCA mission programs. The mission calendar is available to others upon request.

Profiles in Mission

Profiles in Mission, usually used as bulletin inserts, give information about RCA missionaries, staff, programs, and projects. These profiles are sent free in quantity to RCA congregations wishing to raise new mission support, to provide background information for introducing a missionary speaker, or to share general information about RCA missionaries and programs. These profiles are updated as personnel and program changes occur. Twelve new or updated profiles were produced in 1997.

Missionary Letters

RCA missionaries are asked to correspond regularly with their supporting congregations. To make it easier for them to do so on a regular basis, SAC staff edit, format, and distribute their letters to supporting congregations and individuals. Last year 127 letters totaling 44,402 copies were distributed. These letters give insight into the work and ministry of missionaries and provide an opportunity to pray specifically for their concerns and needs.

Reformed Church in Mission Packets

Reformed Church in Mission packets are useful for making mission displays and promoting the RCA's work in specific geographical areas. Each packet contains photos, a mission map, missionary profiles, *Church Herald* reprints, a brochure, a prayer card, and other useful materials. Packets are available free for the following areas: Africa, Japan, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, American Indian Ministries, Appalachian Ministries, Volunteer Services, Chiapas, Central and South America, and Reformed Church World Service.

The Reformed Church in Mission

The Reformed Church in Mission is an annual publication that describes the personnel, programs, and projects included in the Mission Services budget, together with financial information about how RCA mission dollars are designated.

Study Books, Brochures, Newsletters, and Other Resources

A significant number of study books, brochures, leaders' guides, newsletters, and other resources are produced each year to meet specific program needs of GSC and related organizations. A few were written by SAC staff; all were edited and proofread by SAC staff.

Study books included those by Reformed Church Women's Ministries, Mission Services, and Congregational Services. Leaders' guides were written and/or edited for several videos. Packets included materials on the subjects of peace, television, youth, RCA colleges, and hunger. Brochures were produced for the African-American Council, Triennial, Spring Sabbath, the RCA Foundation, Project Timothy, Genesis, Reformed Church Women's Ministries, and the RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc.

Newsletters were produced for the African-American Council, the Office of Diaconal Ministries, the Office of Social Witness, the RCA Foundation, and Reformed Church Women's Ministries. Booklets included such subjects as the RCA Foundation's annual report, a guide for a seeker service, and a handbook for Korean elders. *And Grace Shines Through,* by Gregg Mast, was among the books published. Added to the regular production schedule in 1997 were *SGL Today* (bulletin insert for the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes) and *Perspectives*.

Ads

In 1997 SAC assisted in the preparation and placement of nineteen display ads in the *Church Herald.* These ads communicated the work of Congregational Services, Evangelism and Church Development Services, Mission Services, $9.8 by '98, the RCA Foundation, the RCA Distribution Center, and TRAVARCA.

Plan Calendar

The *Plan Calendar* continues to be published annually for ministers and other church workers. Free copies are sent to each minister in the RCA, and an additional eleven hundred copies were sold in 1997 by the RCA Distribution Center. The cover of the 1998-99 *Plan Calendar* highlights the RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision.

reSOURCES

The quarterly reSOURCES mailing, using bulk postage rates, is an inexpensive way to distribute the many resources that are available to RCA congregations.

News Service

In 1997 SAC sent eleven special news releases to all RCA congregations, in addition to providing ten news releases and nine "Missionary Corners" for the *Church Herald.* SAC also provides print and broadcast news coverage of General Synod meetings, sending news releases to several hundred newspapers in areas of RCA constituency and providing a daily news report available by calling toll-free (800) 283-1160. News releases are also posted on the RCA Internet web site.

Displays

SAC coordinates the displays at General Synod each year and assists in the design and preparation of several of them. Six portable displays are widely used for area and local mission conferences. Display materials are also available for use at other RCA events. Upon request, materials are sent to congregations for special program displays.

TRAVARCA

The TRAVARCA lending library supplies quality audiovisual resources for the congregations, assemblies, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America; for the Christian Reformed Church in North America; and for the wider Christian community. The TRAVARCA collection currently houses audiovisual resources in two formats: VHS video and 16mm motion pictures. The diverse titles include programs for a variety of audiences in a wide range of subjects.

Through resources that reflect a Christian perspective, TRAVARCA strives to strengthen and enrich the mission and ministry of the church of Jesus Christ. TRAVARCA provides a balanced collection of more than two thousand titles to support ministries in worship, education and faith development, evangelism and church development, family life, leader development, missions, social witness, and stewardship. All TRAVARCA videos and films are licensed for use at church functions. A study guide is provided with each resource. The resource arrives several days before the actual show date to allow the leader to become familiar with the program and guide. A USPS return postage-paid card, addressed to TRAVARCA, is included with every shipment in the continental United States. (Canadian customers return via Canadian Post.)

TRAVARCA strives to select resources that are consistent with the theology and practice of the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), and others in the Reformed/Presbyterian family of churches. Some resources, while reflecting a Christian perspective, may not necessarily represent the official stand of either the Reformed Church in America or the Christian Reformed Church. Resource descriptions contained in the *Video Resources for Ministry* catalog and updates endeavor to alert users to sensitive materials and to suggest the most appropriate settings for their use.

Jane Schuyler manages the daily operation of the TRAVARCA library and supervises the media assistants, Laurie Rodgers and Nancy Ellens. Schuyler, in consultation with the TRAVARCA Selection Committee, previews, selects, and purchases new audiovisual resources for the collection. Schuyler is available during regular business hours (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. eastern time) to answer customer questions concerning the content of print and audiovisual resources and their suitability for specific educational settings. The toll-free number for the Resource Information Helpline is (800) 968-7221, and the Fax number is (616) 698-6606. Inquiries can also be made through the RCA's web site or by e-mail (travarca@iserv.net).

Schuyler also serves as a consultant to the Council for Christian Education and the Youth Ministry Team. She attends SAC production meetings for print and audiovisual resources and serves as a member of selected project groups in the development and production of RCA media resources. Schuyler produces mediagraphies of videos that coordinate with various curricula, including LiFE and Bible Way, and leads workshops as assigned. She reports periodically to the TRAVARCA Management Committee.

With an annual TRAVARCA membership fee, a church or organization is entitled to use every resource in the TRAVARCA library free of additional charge, including shipping and handling. There is no limit to the number of resources a member may use. TRAVARCA

memberships are based on the size of the congregation and denominational affiliation. All memberships expire on August 31. Nonmembers may also use TRAVARCA resources but must pay the established handling and shipping fees.

In January of 1998 the new, comprehensive *Video Resources for Ministry* catalog was sent to every RCA/CRC congregation, TRAVARCA members, staff, selected lay leaders, and other Christian churches. As of March 11, 1998, TRAVARCA has 590 members and houses more than 5,121 videos and films (more than 1,849 different titles). It distributed more than 10,496 resources during 1997.

Under the current income structure, TRAVARCA's major source of income is generated by annual memberships. The financial viability of TRAVARCA depends on increasing the membership base (through marketing to non-RCA/CRC congregations and institutions). Currently TRAVARCA is exploring a partnership with the Evangelical Covenant Church. TRAVARCA is also assessing the income structure to determine if there is a better method to sustain the operation.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-3.
To instruct Stewardship and Communication Services to seek ways and financial means for small congregations to afford and access TRAVARCA resources. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision says that "our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry," and it is imperative that the RCA provide a way for small congregations with limited financial resources to access TRAVARCA.≺

AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTIONS

RCA Productions is the RCA's office for audiovisual production. With cameras, field acquisition equipment, and editing and graphics capabilities, the office is fully capable of producing broadcast quality video resources. Senior producer John Grooters, associate producer Terry Bowersox, and secretary Barb Koorndyk staff the department. Working together with other staff and editors from Stewardship and Communication Services, they produce audiovisual resources that help tell the story of RCA mission and ministry. RCA Productions also does contract production work for other ministry-oriented groups outside the RCA. These outside projects help offset the costs of maintaining the office. In 1997 $309,358 was derived from the sale of production services, supplies, and equipment rental.

Available at competitive rates are rentals of cameras, lighting and audio equipment, AVID nonlinear editing and graphics services, image magnification, event video support, and video duplication. Also available are production, writing, editing, videography, and technical support services. Production bids are available on a per-project basis.

RCA-produced media resources can be ordered through the TRAVARCA lending library. Some items are also available for sale through the RCA Distribution Center. Descriptions are included in the TRAVARCA *Video Resources for Ministry* catalog.

The following is a list of new audiovisual resources produced over the past year specifically for committees/units of the General Synod Council:

1. ***RCA Today 1998*** (Stewardship and Communication Services)

This annual RCA video magazine, which is sent to every RCA congregation, highlights interesting stories from around the world. City ministries; new RCA congregations in Boise, Idaho, and Yonkers, New York; campus ministries with a focus on the Hope College chapel program; and U.S. Navy chaplain Allen Baker were highlighted in the *RCA Today 1998* video.

2. ***Turning Points*** (Congregational Services)

This video shares the personal accounts of people who have made the Bible part of their lives—a transforming part. Members of a Michigan congregation tell about their commitment to a year-long journey through the Bible, showing how active and ongoing engagement with Scripture has the power to transform individuals, small groups, and entire congregations.

3. ***Bearers of the Light*** (Mission Services)

This video presents a broad overview of the RCA's mission program. It highlights the locations of RCA mission work and the extensive scope of the ministries of RCA missionaries.

4. ***Vision and Biblical Faith*** (Policy, Planning, and Administration Services)

This video accompanies a study process designed to introduce and stimulate discussion about the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80). This video was offered free to any congregation who submitted a request.

5. ***General Synod—Wes's Report*** (Office of the General Secretary)

These seven video segments were produced to accompany the general secretary's report to the 1997 General Synod.

6. ***General Synod Synopsis*** (Policy, Planning, and Administration Services)

Following each General Synod meeting, the RCA producer interviews the elected president and vice president of General Synod to discuss the highlights and significant issues of General Synod. Footage from floor debates of plenary sessions, as well as footage from other areas of Synod life, comprise this twenty-minute video. This video is sent free to every RCA congregation in July.

7. ***Mission Services Night at General Synod 1997*** (Mission Services)

This video recorded the events of the Mission Services night at the 1997 General Synod, where American Indian ministries were featured.

8. ***Hand-in-Hand*** (Congregational Services)

This audio cassette was produced to accompany the Hand-in-Hand curriculum which helps children celebrate diversity. The cassette included songs, stories, and activities.

9. **Missionary Conversation Series** (Mission Services)

Videos in the missionary conversation series are five-minute glimpses into the lives and ministries of RCA missionaries. Illustrated with video or photographs, these

videos are an excellent way to share briefly with a congregation something about a particular area of RCA mission work. A video of each missionary is sent free to each of the missionary's contributing churches. The following videos were completed in 1997-1998:

Gail Beran (Japan)
George and Joyce Magee (Japan)
Cornelia Roghair (Japan)
Thomas and Barbara VandeBerg (Japan)
Merle and Karen Vander Sluis (Ethiopia)
William Swanson and Twila Schock (Russia)
Arlene Vander Loon (Ukraine)
Harold Vogelaar (Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago)
Robert and Linda Schut (Mescalero, New Mexico)
George Goff (Honduras)
Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos (Ethiopia)
Paul and Rebecca Armerding (Bahrain)
Gary Brown (Bahrain)
Pamela Ryan (Bahrain)
Lewis and Nancy Scudder (Cyprus)
Richard and Maja Westra (Bahrain)
Martin Wang (Taiwan)
Brian and Elizabeth Bruxvoort (Alaska)

10. **Kids' Missionary Conversations** (Mission Services)

This new series is designed especially for children. RCA missionaries are interviewed by Jordyn Grooters, an eight-year-old, while scenes from the missionaries' area are shown. The following Kids' Missionary Conversations are available:

Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos (Ethiopia)
Thomas and Barbara VandeBerg (Japan)

11. **Partnership-in-Mission Series** (Mission Services)

These Partnership-in-Mission programs are videos initiated and written by RCA missionaries, and the scenes usually come directly from the cameras of the missionary. The following videos were completed in 1997-1998:

Building the Church in Estonia (James and Beth Harrison)
Full Circle: Celebrating the Church in Chiapas (Vern and Carla Sterk)

The following videos were produced for other clients during the past year by RCA Productions:

1. ***Today's Western Theological Seminary*** (Western Theological Seminary)

This video features students and staff from Western Theological Seminary. An advancement version encourages financial support and a student version is given to prospective seminarians.

2. ***Camp Manitoqua: Vision 2000*** (Manitoqua Ministries)

This video highlights the activities of Camp Manitoqua and the camp's need for funds to expand its ministry.

3. ***Summer Days at Camp Manitoqua*** (Manitoqua Ministries)

   This music video features the camp experience at Camp Manitoqua and is designed to interest students in registering for a summer session.

4. ***The Message of First Reformed*** (First Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan)

   This video highlights the programs and people of First Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan, and was produced as a tool for evangelism and outreach.

5. ***Settler's Sunday (Dr. Robert H. Schuller)*** (First Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan)

   As part of the 150th anniversary celebration of First Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, the Rev. Dr. Robert Schuller spoke at a special service.

6. ***Remembrance 2000*** (Remembrance Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan)

   This video was a foundational part of the church's Remembrance 2000 capital campaign.

7. ***Kids' Hope*** (Image Group)

   Kids' Hope is a volunteer program connecting adult volunteers from local congregations with elementary students who need tutoring.

8. ***Upper Room TV spots*** (Kathy McNair, Independent Producer)

   These sixty-second TV spots feature music, Scripture passages, scenic shots at Yellowstone National Park, and the Upper Room logo.

9. ***Laawol Iisaa: The Jesus Way*** (Christian Reformed World Mission)

   This video features the work of Christian Reformed World Mission in Mali, West Africa.

10. ***A Week in the Window*** (Christian Reformed World Mission)

    This video features the work of Christian Reformed Church World Mission in Guinea, West Africa.

11. ***Mission Vision*** (Christian Reformed World Mission)

    This three-minute video was produced with three different endings and was designed for mission awareness, fundraising, and recruitment.

The following videos are in progress:

1. **Urban ministry video** (Mission Services)

   This video, premiering at the 1998 General Synod, illustrates the RCA's commitment to urban ministry. Footage and interviews from around the world will be included.

2. ***"Let Us Introduce Ourselves"*** **Custom Church Video Series** (Evangelism and New Church Development Services)

This video series is designed to provide a way for every RCA congregation to have a low-cost, high-quality video highlighting the ministry and spirit of its congregation. Any congregation will be able to insert its own story into the video series. A template video containing four vignettes was sent to five pilot churches in January 1998. A meeting with those churches will be held in August 1998 to evaluate the video series.

3. **American Indian video** (Mission Services)

This video focuses on the historic and contemporary ministry of the RCA among Native American communities in the United States.

4. **Prince of Peace** (Mission Services)

This video features the Prince of Peace Children's Home in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

5. **Kids' Missionary Conversations** (Mission Services)

Kids' conversations with the following RCA missionaries are in the production process:

Robert and Linda Schut (Mescalero, New Mexico)
Paul and Rebecca Armerding (Bahrain)
Gary Brown (Bahrain)
Richard and Maja Westra (Bahrain)
Lewis and Nancy Scudder (Cypress)

In addition to production services, RCA Productions staff provided video support for the following meetings: 1997 General Synod, Genesis 1998 (two weekends in March 1998), General Synod Council (fall 1997 and winter 1998), and Spring Sabbath 1998. In its first full year of operation, RCA Productions was able to duplicate nearly 5,000 VHS dubs.

In the past year RCA Productions received several national awards: Telly Awards for *Daring to Be Different, Evangelism in a Changing World,* and *A Missionary Conversation with Marty Weitz*; and Communicator's Awards for *RCA Today 1997* and *Camp Manitoqua: Vision 2000.*

INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIAN UNITY: BECOMING ONE IN CHRIST

> *"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity"* (Ps. 133:1).

Coming together in Christ is one visible sign of the kingdom. CHRISTIAN UNITY deals with RCA participation and membership in ecumenical bodies, interchurch relations, and other expressions of our unity in Christ. It is concerned with such questions as:

- What is the nature of Christian unity?
- How can we best realize that unity?

The RCA expresses this commitment to unity through a solid tradition of ecumenical involvement. It is a charter member of the World Council of Churches, of the National Council of Churches in Christ of the U.S.A., and of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. It belongs to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, to the Canadian Council of Churches, and—through some regional synods, classes, and local congregations—to the National Association of Evangelicals. The RCA's mission work exemplifies the ecumenical spirit.

The purpose of Christian unity is:

- **To attain maturity in Christ.** "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Eph. 4:15-16).

- **For mission to the world.** "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).

The *Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 3b, assigns responsibility for ecumenical relations for the RCA to the Commission on Christian Unity. The commission coordinates the whole range of ecumenical involvements at all levels throughout the RCA. The commission advises the General Synod on matters of ecumenical import; communicates with other denominations, ecumenical councils, and interdenominational agencies; educates the denomination on ecumenical matters; and advocates for actions and positions consistent with the RCA's confession and practice.

REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

The Commission on Christian Unity met twice since the last session of the General Synod: October 27-28, 1997, at the Alma Matthews House in New York City, and March 2-3, 1998, at the San Pedro Retreat Center in Winter Park, Florida, in conjunction with the National Association of Evangelical's (NAE) annual meeting in Orlando, Florida.

INTRODUCTION

The *Constitution* of the RCA gives responsibility for ecumenical relations to the General Synod (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 5). To carry this out, the General Synod created the Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) in 1974 (*MGS 1974*, R-6, pp. 201-02) and formally adopted the commission in 1975 (*MGS 1975*, R-4, pp. 101-02). The commission coordinates the whole range of ecumenical involvements at all levels throughout the RCA. The commission advises the General Synod on matters of ecumenical import; it communicates with other denominations, ecumenical councils, and interdenominational agencies; it educates the whole denomination on ecumenical matters; and it advocates for actions and positions consistent with the RCA's confession and practice.

A paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," was adopted by the 1996 General Synod for use in the RCA as a foundation and guide for its ecumenical relations (*MGS 1996*, R-1, p. 197). This paper guides the work of CCU. By means of its ongoing ecumenical commitments, both at home and abroad, CCU keeps before the RCA the essential questions regarding the nature of Christian unity and suggests ways of giving visible expression to the unity all believers have in Jesus Christ. Conversely, through referrals, the General Synod presents Christian unity matters to CCU for study and implementation and possible recommendations to General Synod.

Since the 1997 General Synod meeting, CCU spent considerable time reflecting and discussing future agenda items in light of the present ecumenical climate and the RCA's current priorities with the RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80). During the past year the work pace of CCU was less intense than the previous two to three years when CCU was engaged in presenting to the RCA, for adoption, two historic documents: the "Ecumenical Mandate" (as referenced above) and the *Formula of Agreement* adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-2, p. 186). In addition to setting a course for the future, CCU was engaged with followup work regarding the formula. CCU is committed to helping the RCA realize its historic calling to be both evangelical and ecumenical. As such, CCU has sought to maintain strong ties with the national and world ecumenical bodies and recently began a course of action to develop official relations with the National Association of Evangelicals (see report which follows).

ECUMENICAL OFFICER AND ASSOCIATE FOR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

The general secretary of the RCA is its chief "ecumenical officer." As such, the general secretary serves the denomination through varied degrees of engagement with the leaders of other church bodies. Due to the vast scope of this engagement (both national and worldwide), the general secretary is enlisted as an *ex officio* member of CCU.

Serving CCU as its staff resource person is the Rev. Douglas Fromm, who serves the RCA part time as the associate for ecumenical relations. Fromm is also pastor of Upper Ridgewood Community Church, an RCA congregation in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

ECUMENICAL NETWORK WITH CLASSES

In existence since 1993, the RCA Ecumenical Network assists CCU in its dissemination of information to classes. The network is comprised of one individual from each classis who serves as an "ecumenical liaison" between CCU and the classis. CCU has asked classes to provide a regular agenda time in their stated sessions to enable the ecumenical liaison to provide updates on ecumenical matters which come before the church and also to receive feedback from the classes for CCU's attention. Most classes have been very responsive to the network. However, some classes have yet to appoint an ecumenical liaison.

RCA STATEMENT OF MISSION AND VISION

In an effort to be living in accord with the new RCA Statement of Mission and Vision, CCU had a lengthy discussion about its work and responsibilities. While in agreement with the Statement of Mission and Vision and the direction it envisions for the RCA, CCU believes the statement can be strengthened by a significant addition with regard to the denomination's ecumenical commitment.

Additional reasons for revising the Statement of Mission and Vision are:

1. The addition reflects ecclesiastical concern for the real possibility that this Statement of Mission and Vision, though addressed to the RCA, will be shared with the whole church and thus must have the whole church in view.

2. To faithfully live out the Statement of Mission and Vision, the RCA needs the support of the whole body of Christ (John 17:20-21).

3. The addition reflects that RCA's heritage as a church that has been historically evangelical and ecumenical, and that presently seeks to live out that calling more conscientiously (see *MGS 1997*, pp. 53-54).

➢The advisory committee recommended to not adopt R-1:

R-1.
To adopt the following revision of the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision (addition is underlined):

> **The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world. <u>Our calling is to be a church that is both evangelical and ecumenical seeking fellowship for mission with the whole people of God</u>. (NOT ADOPTED)**

Reason: The RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision is an adequate and concise statement of the general calling and task of the RCA, and it implicitly includes within it the church's evangelical and ecumenical calling.➢

LUTHERAN-REFORMED RELATIONS/FORMULA OF AGREEMENT

Following the ratification process in the spring of 1998 by the presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the *Formula of Agreement* became official. In the summer of 1997 the formula was adopted by the highest judicatories of all four of the participating churches (the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., the United Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). The adoption of this formula brought

Lutheran and Reformed relations within the U.S. to a new experience of Christian unity and a higher level of ecumenical cooperation in service to the mission of Jesus Christ. Representatives from the four communions have begun discussing implementation of the formula's provisions. The first official action by the partner churches will take place on World Communion Sunday, October 4, 1998, in a celebration of full communion at a "National Convocation" in Chicago, Illinois, at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Chapel.

Meanwhile, CCU seeks to stay cognizant of concerns raised by some RCA classes and congregations regarding the adoption of the formula by the 1997 General Synod. These concerns have primarily to do with the participation of the United Church of Christ (UCC) as one of the Reformed partner churches and the UCC's stand on the issue of homosexuality (see next section).

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND RCA DIALOGUE

Background

The 1996 General Synod, out of discussions pertaining to the *Formula of Agreement*, voted to enter a dialogue with the United Church of Christ "on the issue of homosexuality for the purpose of encouraging the UCC to move toward a more biblically faithful understanding of human sexuality and to move toward a repeal of all its policies condoning homosexual behavior." The vote was yes, 112; no, 110 (*MGS 1996*, p. 214).

In October 1996 the UCC responded favorably to the RCA's request for a dialogue. To date three dialogue meetings have been completed. CCU receives regular reports on the dialogue and provides feedback via its two members on the RCA dialogue team (the Rev. Heino Blaauw and the Rev. Douglas Fromm). (See *MGS 1997*, pp. 173-76, for a summary of the initial dialogue meeting held April 17-19, 1997, in Chicago, Illinois.)

Second Dialogue Meeting

The second dialogue meeting took place September 16-18, 1997, in Chicago, at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Center. The focus of this dialogue was on how the UCC and the RCA each use the Bible in reaching moral and ethical decisions on issues and, specifically, on such an issue as homosexuality. The dialogue asked the following question: "What authority does the Bible have over how we address ourselves to the issues that confront us?"

The dialogue group heard presentations from each side. UCC theologian the Rev. Dr. Paul Hammer addressed the subject of the UCC's use of Scripture in making moral and ethical decisions; and the Rev. Jeffrey Japinga, RCA minister for education and faith development, discussed the RCA's recently developed "Homosexuality Curriculum Resource." After discussion, several points of agreement and unresolved issues were identified.

While both the UCC and RCA take Scripture seriously and agree with regard to general principles about hermeneutics, there is a clear distinction between the two denominations on the role that experience plays in the interpretation of biblical texts. The UCC, leaning more heavily upon the experience of "gay and lesbian persons among the baptized" than does the RCA, believes the UCC's approach to Scripture has integrity and hopes that the dialogue demonstrates this to the RCA participants. Another question emerged as to what extent the issue of homosexuality parallels the positions that each denomination has come to with regard to women and slavery.

Third Dialogue Meeting

The third dialogue meeting was held April 20-22, 1998. This dialogue was a group Bible study process giving attention to how texts function with authority.

General Synod Report on Dialogue Meetings

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To request the United Church of Christ and RCA dialogue delegations present a report no later than the 1999 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-15, p. 227).

A full report on the dialogue meetings will be presented at the 1999 General Synod. CCU will present an interim report on the dialogue at this year's Synod, with a fuller report from the dialogue teams scheduled for 1999 as requested by the General Synod (*MGS* 1997, R-15, p. 227).

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH (CRC) AND RCA RELATIONS

The 1996 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to request the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in North America to consider making provision for union churches with the Reformed Church in America (*MGS 1996*, R-9, p. 221).

At the CRC 1998 General Synod meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a formal recommendation will be brought before CRC delegates to make provision for union churches between the CRC and RCA. Plans are underway in Holland, Michigan, for the organization of the first RCA/CRC union church. A cooperative RCA and CRC ministry task force has been developed to foster church revitalization in western Michigan.

In addition, over the past couple of years, staff relations between the CRC and RCA have developed. The RCA and CRC denominational staffs have each hosted a denominational joint staff gathering. The next such meeting is scheduled for October 27, 1998, in Chicago, Illinois. On the regional level, much of the impetus for the movement toward cooperation between the RCA and CRC has come from the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes.

CCU continues to monitor and encourage these developments.

THE EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH

For the past two years the RCA and the Evangelical Covenant Church have exchanged ecumenical delegates at their respective annual meetings. The two denominations have much in common: 1) they are approximately the same size; 2) they are ethnically rooted (Dutch and Swedish); 3) they each have a strong mission emphasis; and 4) they face similar issues in their respective constituencies.

On October 22, 1997, joint staff discussions were held at the RCA Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The discussions were a fruitful exchange of information about each other's structures and ministry emphases. Further such meetings are in the planning stages.

UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA (URCSA)

Partnership Project Team

The associate for ecumenical relations, the Rev. Douglas Fromm, is a member of the South Africa /RCA Partnership Project Team, and as such he keeps CCU abreast of the work of the project team. CCU maintains an interest in the work of this project team as it pertains to the formation of a general policy statement on "ecumenical partnerships" which the CCU, together with Mission Services, is in the initial stages of developing.

URCSA Delegation Visits RCA Sites

Historically, CCU has been a participant in the long-term relationship the RCA has enjoyed with the members of URCSA and its predecessors.

On March 7, 1998, an URCSA delegation arrived in the United States for meetings with various RCA groups. Fromm prepared a schedule of events and meetings for the URCSA delegation. This schedule included meetings with the administration and faculty of both New Brunswick and Western Theological Seminaries; a series of conversations with RCA denominational program staff, unit directors, and the general secretary; visits with RCA Africa-American congregations for worship and fellowship; and conversations with representatives from the Christian Reformed Church and Christ Memorial Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, for the specific purpose of framing a cooperative venture in deaconal ministries.

As a result of the conversations the following points of agreement were reached, giving specific direction to the developing partnership between the RCA and the URCSA:

1. The co-drafting of a basic document establishing the principles of the joint relationship between the URCSA and the RCA.

2. The mutual sharing of information about the governmental and programmatic structures of the URCSA and the RCA, along with areas of staff responsibilities for each denomination.

3. Connections between the component parts of the RCA and the URCSA will be explored, especially in the following areas: urban ministry, theological exchange, stewardship, Christian education, the Children and Worship program, and youth exchange programs.

4. The RCA will continue to monitor the decision of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) regarding the "Proposed Joint Resolution" between WARC and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK—the white Dutch Reformed Church), in light of the failed attempt toward church union between the URCSA and the NGK.

5. Discussion and possible cooperation focusing on the issue of religion in public life, a major initiative of URCSA.

6. Continued cooperation in the development and implementation of the partnership on diaconal work initiated by Mission Services, Christ Memorial Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, and offices within the Christian Reformed Church.

The Belhar Confession

The Belhar Confession, drafted in 1982, later became one of the standards of unity (along with the Belgic Confession, the Cannons of Dordt, and the Heidelberg Catechism) for the new URCSA. CCU has placed on its agenda a study of the Belhar Confession, which has come to have significance far beyond the church in South Africa.

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)

WCC Self-Study

The RCA is a charter member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and continues to participate in the programs of WCC as RCA resources and time allow. Currently the RCA is preparing to send delegates and visitors to the upcoming Eighth Assembly meeting (see below), and recently the RCA participated in a major WCC self-study, "Toward a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC." This self-study, now "A Policy Statement" of the WCC, was published in September 1997. (Copies of this document are available from the WCC office in New York City, [212] 870-2470.)

Eighth Assembly Meeting

Most of CCU's recent focus with regard to WCC has pertained to the upcoming Eighth Assembly meeting, to be held December 3-14, 1998, in Harare, Zimbabwe. The theme of this assembly is "Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope." Official RCA delegates are Carol Wagner and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, with a possible third delegate pending. RCA visitors will include Jan Wager and Karin Granberg-Michaelson and the vice president and president of General Synod with their spouses.

Also attending and participating from the RCA will be Willa Brown, associate for children's ministry. She will present the RCA's Children in Worship program at the *Padare* (a Shona word meaning "meeting place"—a place of encounter and exchange). This is a new event at this year's assembly meeting. About two hundred *Padare* offerings from WCC member churches are expected.

WCC Video

A new video on the WCC will be made available in the fall of 1998 through the RCA ecumenical network. Each classis ecumenical network liaison will be provided with three tapes for distribution within classis.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (NCC)

Financial Development Consultation

To address its financial struggles of the recent past, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCC) just concluded a "Financial Development Consultation." NCC has initiated an action plan to implement the recommendations of the consultation.

NCC General Secretary, a Presenter at General Synod

The Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, will address 1998 General Synod participants at an ecumenical breakfast on Monday morning, June 8, along with the interim director of the National Association of Evangelicals (see below). The theme of the presentation is "The Ecumenical Challenge into the Next Millennium."

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WARC)

Gender Equality

The 1996 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to participate with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in its discussion of gender equality as *status confessionis*; and further,
>
> to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to identify and examine the issues at stake in this discussion, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, p. 310).

In response, CCU asked its *ex officio* member, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, a delegate to WARC's Twenty-Third General Council Meeting held August 8-20, 1997, in Debrecen, Hungary, to follow up on this matter. Granberg-Michaelson reported to CCU, at its fall 1997 meeting, that the debate regarding gender equality at WARC does not appear to be moving in the direction as originally outlined in the presentation given in 1995 at the European Area Council by Milan Opocensky, WARC's general secretary. Granberg-Michaelson did indicate, however, that there was a lot of conversation at the meeting in Debrecen regarding the partnership between women and men in ministry, and that there was a presentation addressing the topic of breaking the chains of injustice that presently exist in this area.

Two RCA Members Elected to Office in WARC

The Rev. Dr. Choan Seng Song, an ordained RCA minister and member of the Classis of Queens, was elected in Debrecen to the office of president of WARC. Currently Song is a professor of theology at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. Also elected to serve on the WARC executive committee was Anna James, a student at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. James also serves on the staff at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS (NAE)

As noted at the beginning of this report, CCU held its spring 1998 meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting of NAE in Orlando, Florida. The entire commission was able to hear a very heartening plenary address by NAE president Donald Argue. Additionally, after CCU concluded its meeting, two CCU members attended the NAE annual meeting—a first for CCU—as official observers from the RCA. Two other CCU members attended the NAE annual meeting as visitors.

Background

CCU took this unprecedented action of attending the NAE annual meeting in response to recent developments within NAE. There is a new receptivity from NAE toward RCA initiatives aimed at closer cooperation between the two bodies. Previously the RCA's relationship with NAE has been primarily through the Regional Synod of Mid-America, which holds membership in NAE on its own accord. Because denominationally the RCA holds membership in the World and National Councils of Churches, the RCA has been unable to hold membership in NAE, owing to the latter's constitution which prohibits dual membership. The new receptivity on the part of NAE was most dramatically demonstrated when Dr. Don Argue, president of NAE, was invited in 1996 to address the executive board of the National Council of Churches in Christ (see *MGS 1997*, p.177).

NAE is a Presenter at General Synod

Further indications of receptivity on the part of NAE was shown when Argue accepted an invitation from the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson to join NCC general secretary, the Rev. Dr. Joan Campbell, in a co-presentation at the RCA's ecumenical breakfast at the 1998 General Synod (see also above). Since his acceptance of this invitation, however, Argue has decided to leave NAE to take a position as a college president. The NAE executive board has agreed, however, to honor the RCA's request for a representative from NAE. Most likely the NAE interim president will be the presenter at the ecumenical breakfast.

Explore RCA Membership in NAE

CCU believes the timing is right for the RCA to more directly pursue a mutually beneficial relationship with NAE.

R-2.
To permit the Commission on Christian Unity to explore the possibility of, and issues related to, the RCA holding membership in the National Association of Evangelicals, for report to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This recommendation is consistent with the goals outlined in the RCA "Ecumenical Mandate" paper adopted by the 1996 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, pp. 94-96).

2. CCU believes that many within the RCA welcome this initiative with NAE.

3. This recommendation seeks to fulfill the commitment of the RCA to be both evangelical and ecumenical, as described in the Report of the General Secretary presented at the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 53-54).

Overtures

RCA Suspend Relations with United Church of Christ

1. **The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to suspend the Reformed Church in America's association with the United Church of Christ (UCC) as currently delineated in the *Formula of Agreement* approved by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-2, p. 186).**

Reasons:

1. The issue of the UCC's approval of the homosexual lifestyle is not resolved, and it is inconsistent with the RCA's biblical interpretation of the homosexual lifestyle.

2. The UCC is structured differently in its church government from the RCA and as such allows a broad spectrum of different thinking to permeate the denomination. One evidence of this broad spectrum is the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle by some UCC congregations and not by other UCC congregations. Another even more significant aspect of this broad spectrum is the variety of theologies surrounding the belief in Jesus Christ. As a result, conservative UCC congregations are voting to leave the UCC.

3. The RCA has failed to convince the UCC that the UCC needs to come to a more biblically faithful interpretation regarding the issue of homosexuality. This fact constitutes validity for the RCA to suspend fellowship with the UCC.

4. In suspending fellowship with the UCC formally, there is no intent for the RCA to suspend fellowship with individual UCC congregations that remain faithful to the Word and are practicing Reformed faith consistent with the RCA's practice.

5. To continue a relationship with the UCC undermines the RCA by association, in that the RCA could potentially be construed as a denomination that tolerates liberal interpretations of Scripture.

6. Relative to the issue of homosexuality, it is not possible to be faithful to the item in the *Formula of Agreement* that calls for a cessation of "condemnation by one side or the other" (*MGS 1997*, p. 193). For the RCA to cease to condemn the UCC's interpretation of Scripture is to silently assent to the UCC's interpretation.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-3.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The 1996 General Synod voted to enter a dialogue with the United Church of Christ on the issue of homosexuality (*MGS 1996*, R-5, p.214). The 1997 General Synod voted "to request the United Church of Christ and RCA dialogue delegations to present a report no later than the 1999 General Synod" (*MGS 1997*, R-15, p.227). In view of the fact that the dialogue is not yet completed, and that the fourth and final dialogue between the delegations is scheduled for January 1999, it would be premature to suspend the RCA's association with the United Church of Christ.➢

2. The Classis of Dakota overtures General Synod to withdraw its relationship of full communion with the United Church of Christ (UCC) in view of the Reformed Church in America's biblical conflicts and issues of theological integrity with the UCC concerning the authority of Holy Scripture.

Reasons:

1. The 1991 (eighteenth) General Synod of the UCC stated that it "boldly affirms, celebrates, and embraces the gifts of ministry of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons" (from a "Resolution on Affirming Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Persons and Their Ministries," adopted by the Eighteenth General Synod, Norfolk, Virginia, June 27-July 2, 1991, p. 44).

2. The 1983 (fourteenth) General Synod of the UCC recommended that associations throughout the UCC consider the nomination and election of avowed lesbian and gay clergy and lay persons to their Church and Ministry Committees (from a "Resolution Recommending Inclusiveness on Association Church and Ministry Committees

within the UCC," adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 20).

3. The 1983 (fourteenth) General Synod of the UCC also passed a resolution recommending to UCC regional associations that "in considering a candidate's qualifications for ministry, the candidate's sexual orientation should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination."

4. Specifically, the 1985 (fifteenth) General Synod of the UCC encouraged "the congregations of the United Church of Christ to adopt a nondiscrimination policy and a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay, and bisexual orientation within the community of faith" (from a "Resolution Calling on the United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming," adopted by the Fifteenth General Synod, Ames, Iowa, June 28-July 2, 1985, p. 23).

5. It is unconstitutional for the RCA to be in a relationship with a denomination in which Holy Scripture is not the only rule of faith and practice as is declared in the Preamble of the RCA *Book of Church Order.*

6. The RCA has recognized the practicing homosexual lifestyle as contrary to Scripture (*MGS 1990*, R-11, p. 461).

7. Since the United Church of Christ accepts as right what the Bible declares to be sinful, the UCC does not rightly preach the gospel.

8. In the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," adopted by the 1996 General Synod for use in the RCA as a foundation and guide for its ecumenical relations (*MGS 1996*, R-1, p. 197), it states:

> There are times when the organizational unity of the church threatens the integrity of its confessions, forcing it into a *statu confessionis* ("state of confession"), where apparent disunity may be the necessary price to pay for the sake of the gospel. In such cases, although the Reformed Church in America does not dare to judge another denomination's spiritual unity in Christ, it may be forced in grief and without triumphalism, to withdraw from apparent unity (*MGS 1996*, p. 188).

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-4.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The 1996 General Synod voted to enter a dialogue with the United Church of Christ on the issue of homosexuality (*MGS 1996*, R-5, p.214). The 1997 General Synod voted "to request the United Church of Christ and RCA dialogue delegations to present a report no later than the 1999 General Synod" (*MGS 1997*, R-15, p.227). In view of the fact that the dialogue is not yet completed, and that the fourth and final dialogue between the delegations is scheduled for January 1999, it would be premature for the RCA to withdraw its relationship of full communion with the United Church of Christ.➢

3. The Classis of the Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to begin the process of loosening, if not entirely severing, the Reformed Church in America's ecumenical relationship with the United Church of Christ (UCC) should the RCA's current dialogue with the United Church of Christ not result in the UCC's declaring the ordination of the practicing homosexual lifestyle to be unbiblical.

Reasons:

1. It is entirely likely that the UCC will not change its current position.

2. If the RCA does not anticipate any response on its part, should that be the case, then why bother with what would then be a mere pretense of interaction with the UCC?

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The 1996 General Synod voted to enter a dialogue with the United Church of Christ on the issue of homosexuality (*MGS 1996*, R-5, p.214). The 1997 General Synod voted "to request the United Church of Christ and RCA dialogue delegations to present a report no lather than the 1999 General Synod" (*MGS 1997*, R-15, p.227). In view of the fact that the dialogue is not yet completed, and that the fourth and final dialogue between the delegations is scheduled for January, 1999, it would be premature to begin the process of loosening, if not entirely severing, the RCA's association with the United Church of Christ.➢

RCA Sever Ecumenical Relations with the United Church of Canada

4. **The Classis of the Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to formally and publicly sever all ecumenical relations with the United Church of Canada should the United Church of Canada continue to uphold its moderator's right to express unbiblical statements.**

Reasons:

1. The Rev. William Phipps, moderator of the United Church of Canada, denied a number of nonnegotiable doctrines of the Christian faith during an interview on October 24, 1997, with the *Ottawa Citizen* and during an interview on December 15, 1997, with *Maclean's* magazine. In these interviews, Phipps denied the deity of Jesus Christ; denied the bodily resurrection of Christ, considering the issue to be irrelevant; denied that Christ is the only way to God; dismissed the Bible as a valid historical record; and rejected the classic Christian understanding of heaven and hell. In later statements, Phipps defended his position, stating: "I believe that nothing I said is outside the broad mainstream of United Church belief."

2. Contrary to condemning Phipps for his remarks as a heretic and attempting to have him removed from his office of moderator, the Executive of General Council (the seventy-person "board of directors") of the United Church of Canada voted to support the right of Phipps to express his belief that Jesus is not God. In a formal response issued and released, the Executive of General Council stated that it does not "use doctrinal standards to exclude anyone from the circle of belonging." Peter Wyatt, general secretary of theology, faith, and ecumenism for the United Church of Canada, said: "Our strength is our diversity and the freedom that we give people (*Maclean's* magazine, November 24, 1997, p. 44). In response to petitions and demands for the resignation of Phipps as moderator, the Executive of General Council went so far as to "express gratitude and respect for the unique gifts our moderator brings, and for the contribution that he will be able to make to the church during his term of office."

3. The Belgic Confession states that "we ought to diligently and circumspectly discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church" (Article 29). The confession goes on to

state that among the marks of the true church is the preaching of "the pure doctrine of the gospel" and that "discipline is exercised in punishing of sin." By these standards, the United Church of Canada has once again proven itself to be outside of the true church of Christ despite its name. Since ecumenical relations at minimum imply a shared Christianity, it is incumbent upon the RCA to sever such ties that might cause the RCA to be "unequally yoked." By severing ecumenical ties with the United Church of Canada, the RCA is publicly proclaiming there is a set tenet of beliefs that, if denied, an individual or even a denomination ceases to be part of the one holy catholic apostolic church.

4. The furor created by Phipps' heretical statements ignited a nationwide controversy and debate in Canada. However, many denominations, including the RCA, have remained publicly silent. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada expressed some limited concern. But commenting on the concern expressed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Phipps said on December 24, 1997, to the *Calgary Herald* that he "has not received any other expressions of concern from other denominational leaders in Canada." It is time for the Reformed Church in America to stand up and publicly proclaim its separation from the apostate United Church of Canada. By doing so, the RCA not only provides leadership to the RCA denomination as a whole but also sends a clear message and invitation to the many Canadians who are frustrated with the drift of their own church and who are searching for a denomination that believes and proclaims "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-6.
To instruct the General Secretary to write a letter to the Executive of General Council of the United Church of Canada expressing the RCA's grave concern over the unbiblical statements of the moderator of the United Church of Canada, the Rev. William Phipps, and requesting the Executive of General Council of the United Church of Canada to disassociate itself from these statements, and to instruct the General Secretary to report through the Commission on Christian Unity to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The advisory committee noted the reasons that accompanied the overture.≺

Full Communion

5. **The Classis of British Columbia overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to send to RCA congregations a brief statement clarifying the nature and implications of full communion as compared to other and lesser forms of ecclesiastical fellowship with partner churches.**

Reasons:

1. The term "full communion," used on the denominational level, is new and foreign to Reformed thinking.

2. Traditional Reformed terminology such as "sister churches," "correspondence churches," and other terminologies had the advantage of being precise in reference to the level of ecumenical relationship involved and the implications for theological consensus and accountability.

3. The RCA now officially employs two sets of definitions for full communion—one for usage with Reformed partners and another for usage with the RCA's Lutheran partner.

4. The resulting ambiguity of usage has caused much confusion in RCA congregations—leading to considerable anxiety and concern on the one hand, and a measure of apathy on the other.

5. The term "full communion" suggests the closest possible ecumenical partnership with another denomination. All other forms of ecclesiastical fellowship have to be less than "full," and none can be more than "full."

6. The term "full communion" suggests there is full agreement between the ecumenical partners on all major confessional issues and in theology and practice; yet such is not necessarily the case at the current time.

7. It is not clear whether we, as the RCA, are in full communion—in spirit, if not by letter—with all other World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) members, or for that matter with all World Council of Churches (WCC) members.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-7.
To instruct the commission on Christian Unity to send to RCA congregations a brief statement clarifying the nature and implications of full communion as compared to other forms of ecclesiastical fellowship with partner churches. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The advisory committee noted the reasons that accompanied the overture.➢

6. The Classis of the Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to recognize only one definition for "full communion," namely the definition used in the Preface of the *Formula of Agreement* (*MGS 1997*, pp. 192-93); and further,

to restrict the usage of this definition to the relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to propose suitable different terms and definitions for other types of RCA ecumenical relations, for report to the 1999 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The 1997 General Synod utilized two different definitions for "full communion" (*MGS 1997*, R-1, p. 185 and *MGS 1997*, pp. 192-93; see also *MGS 1996*, p. 192).

2. Imprecise language leads to imprecise thinking, poor action, ambiguity, and widespread confusion among RCA members.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-8.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Recommendation 1 in the report of the Commission on Christian Unity (*MGS 1997*, R-1, p.185) includes the RCA's definition of full communion as distinct from the definition provided in the *Formula of Agreement*. There is therefore no reason to provide further definition.

2. Assuming the 1998 General Synod's passage of the recommendation in response to Overture 5, RCA congregations will be provided a brief statement clarifying the nature and implications of full communion.≺

Other RCA Ecumenical Relations

7. The Classis of the Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to compile a list of all RCA ecumenical relationships and to specify for each RCA ecumenical relationship what type of ecumenical relationship it is, for report to the 1999 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. Ecumenical relationships imply responsibility.

2. Having a current listing of RCA ecumenical partners that specifies the type of ecumenical relationship it is, helps the RCA to determine whether to strengthen or weaken ecumenical ties with any given ecumenical partner, based on changes that either the ecumenical partner or the RCA determine to make.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-9.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The RCA lives out of a heritage of open ecumenical engagement. The creation of lists of ecumenical partners has the potential to narrow the denomination's ecumenical engagements, and to produce an environment of suspicion among the RCA and sister denominations.

2. The annual reports of the Commission on Christian Unity and the Commission on World Mission include information concerning the RCA's ongoing ecumenical relationships.≺

8. The Classis of the Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to ask the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) to clarify what membership in WARC means beyond mere recognition of Reformed heritage and Presbyterian church order; and further,

to ask WARC to state under which circumstances members of WARC might be asked to leave WARC, for report to the 1999 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The Reformed Church in America is associated with many other denominations through its membership in WARC.

2. The implications of such associations in WARC depend on what standards of membership are employed by WARC.

3. If there are no membership standards for WARC beyond mere recognition of Reformed heritage and Presbyterian church order, the RCA needs to propose some other standards for membership in WARC or rethink its own membership in WARC.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-10.
To direct the Commission on Christian Unity to ask the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) to clarify what membership in WARC means beyond mere recognition of reformed heritage and Presbyterian church order; and further,

to ask WARC to state under which circumstances members of WARC might lose their membership, for report to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The advisory committee noted the reasons that accompanied the overture.➢

9. The Classis of the Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to pursue deepening ecumenical ties with evangelical denominations.

Reasons:

1. Christ's prayer for unity in the church is not limited to mainline churches. Establishing closer relationships with evangelical churches demonstrates the RCA's commitment to unity.

2. Many segments of the RCA identify themselves as evangelical. Strengthening ties with evangelical denominations reflects this RCA evangelical identification.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-11.
To affirm the current efforts and ongoing intentions of the Commission on Christian Unity to deepen ecumenical ties with evangelical denominations. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The report of the Commission on Christian Unity includes evidence that the Commission is active in and committed to the deepening of ecumenical ties with evangelical denominations (see paragraphs concerning relations with the Christian Reformed Church (p.115), the Evangelical Covenant Church (p.116), and the National Association of Evangelicals (p. 118)).➢

INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: PRAISING GOD

> *"Praise the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts"* (Ps. 33:2-3).

Worship, in all its different styles, flows from our gratitude for God's saving love. CHRISTIAN WORSHIP shapes the forms worship takes in the RCA. It deals with the official liturgies of the church and provides worship guidelines and other resources. In doing so, it considers such questions as:

- What liturgical forms are required to express the RCA's faith?
- What liturgical resources can best assist the people of God in worship?
- How can the experience of worship be enriched?

The RCA's attitude towards its liturgy can perhaps best be described as one of ordered freedom. This spirit is well-expressed in the first constitution of the RCA (1793):

> (The) mode of worship is expressed in the liturgy, where forms of several prayers are given, without any idea, however, of restraining her members of any particular terms or fixed standards of prayer. Firmly believing that gifts of the Holy Spirit for the edification of Zion in every age are promised and bestowed, the Reformed Dutch Church judges it sufficient to show a few specimens of the general tenor and manner in which public worship is performed, and leaves it to the piety and gifts of (its) ministers to conduct the ordinary solemnities of the sanctuary in a manner they judge most acceptable to God, and most edifying to His people.

A fundamental principle of Reformed worship is that liturgy is the response of the worshiping congregation to the saving act of God in Jesus Christ. With so much freedom, it is not surprising that the relationship between the life of the RCA and its official liturgy has, at least for the last 150 years, been tenuous indeed.

But the liturgy also shapes the church through the hymns we sing and the orders of service we follow. The RCA regards its liturgy as a part

of its denominational polity—a concept expressed in the publication of the liturgy as part of its constitution. In 1985 the RCA again expressed its commitment to biblically based worship with the publication of *Rejoice in the Lord*, a hymn companion to the Scriptures.

Major responsibility for CHRISTIAN WORSHIP is assigned to the Commission on Christian Worship, the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee, and the Office of Worship.

REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The Commission on Christian Worship met September 29-30, 1997, and February 9-10, 1998, at the House of the Redeemer, an Episcopal retreat house in New York City.

LITURGICAL ORDERS

As part of its continuing liturgical work, the commission has been developing a revision of the orders for "The Ordination and Installation of a Minister of the Word" and "Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of the Word." The proposed revisions of these orders have been developed with a concern for: 1) faithfulness to Reformed theology, 2) vivid, biblical imagery, 3) clear, concise language, 4) breadth of biblical imagery for God and inclusive language for people, 5) congregational participation, 6) historical sensitivity, 7) attention to the oral nature of liturgy, and 8) sensitivity to emerging ecumenical convergence.

In addition, these revisions seek to respond to several concerns that have been shared with the commission over a period of years, particularly the need to recover language which names the moral responsibility of the office of minister of Word and sacrament. Separate orders are brought for "The Ordination of a Minister of Word and Sacrament" and "Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament" because ordination normally takes place in a candidate's home congregation and classis and the installation occurs at the place of call. Two discreet orders simplify use for classes by avoiding confusing alternates within the orders.

PROPOSED ORDER FOR THE ORDINATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

The Book of Church Order *(Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 5), directs the classis to appoint a time for the ordination service of candidates for the ministry and to conduct the service, in regular or special session, with proper solemnity. A brief sermon suitable to the occasion shall be preached. The presiding officer of the classis shall begin following the proclamation of the Word.*

PRESENTATION

Beloved in the Lord,
we have come to ordain a minister of Word and sacrament
in Christ's holy church.
Christ alone is the source of all Christian ministry,
through the ages calling men and women to serve.

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry [1]
to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and
to love and serve those with whom they live and work.[2]
We are ambassadors for Christ,
who reconciles and makes whole.
We are the salt of the earth;
we are the light of the world.

Following his resurrection and ascension,
Christ gave gifts to the church.
These gifts were that "some would be apostles, some prophets,
some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,
to equip the saints for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ."[3]

We stand within a tradition
where deacons, elders,
ministers of Word and sacrament, and professors of theology
are called and empowered to fulfill an ordained ministry
which enables the whole mission of the church.[4]

Therefore let us welcome *NN (using full name)*,
who comes to be ordained to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

A minister and elder of the classis student supervision committee, together with a representative of the congregation or other ministry requesting the ordination, bring the candidate forward. The classis minister and/or elder say:

We present *NN*_____.

We have examined *N*_____ and found *her/him* to be a person of sound learning and Christian character.

On behalf of the Classis of *N*_____,
we affirm that *s/he* is ready to be ordained minister of Word and sacrament.

The candidate shall remain standing, the presenters return to their places, and the presiding officer continues:

Ministers are called to build up Christ's church.

They are to proclaim God's Word,
to declare forgiveness through Jesus Christ,
to call publicly on the name of the Lord
on behalf of the whole congregation,
to celebrate Christ's holy sacraments,
baptizing and presiding at the Lord's Supper.

They are to be pastors and teachers,
sharing people's joys and sorrows,
encouraging the faithful, recalling those who fall away,
helping the sick and the dying.[5]

*N*_, before almighty God
and in the presence of this congregation,
the classis asks you to answer sincerely these questions:[6]

Do you confess together with us and the church throughout all ages
your faith in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?[7]

Yes, truly, with all my heart.[8]

The presiding officer shall invite the congregation to stand:

Let us all stand with *N*_____, confessing our Christian faith
in the words of the Apostles' Creed.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The congregation is seated; the candidate shall remain standing.

Do you believe in your heart that you are called by Christ's church,
and therefore by God, to this ministry of Word and sacrament?[9]

Yes, truly, with all my heart.

Do you believe the books of the Old and New Testaments
to be the Word of God and the perfect doctrine of salvation,
rejecting all contrary beliefs?[10]

Yes, truly, with all my heart.

Will you proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,
upholding the witness of Holy Scripture against all schisms and heresies?[11]

I will, and I ask God to help me.[12]

Will you be diligent in your study of Holy Scripture and
in your use of the means of grace?
Will you pray for God's people and
lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?[13]

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you accept the order and governance of the Reformed Church in America,
submitting to ecclesiastical discipline
should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine?[14]

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you be loyal to the witness and work[15]
of the Reformed Church in America,
using all your abilities to further its Christian mission
here and throughout the world?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you strive to fulfill faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully
all the duties of a minister of Christ:
to preach the Word of God in sincerity,
to administer the holy sacraments in purity,
to maintain proper discipline in the household of God, and
to shepherd the flock faithfully?[16]

I will, and I ask God to help me.

ORDINATION

The candidate shall kneel. The presiding officer shall call the elders and ministers of the classis to come forward (all shall stay through the welcome). The classis may invite other ordained elders and ministers to join in the laying on of hands. The presiding officer shall pray:

Let us pray.

God of grace,
pour out your Holy Spirit,
gentle as a dove, living, burning as fire,
upon *N.* and fill *her/him* with grace and power
for this ministry of Word and sacrament;
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

At the conclusion of the laying on of hands, the candidate shall stand, the classis remains in front, and the presiding officer continues:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the only head of the church,
I now declare that *NN*_____ is ordained to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

RESPONSE TO ORDINATION

*N*_____, will you publicly declare your commitment to Christian ministry among us?

The Candidate shall respond by reading aloud the Form of the Declaration for Ministers. *The congregation shall stand for the reading and signing of the formulary.*

In the name of our Lord,
welcome to *N*_____Classis.
We pledge our support, affection, and prayers
while you live and work among us
as a servant and minister of God's Word.

Classis members and delegates extend the right hand of fellowship[17] to the new member before returning to their places.

Robing may occur at this time.

The person designated by the classis shall deliver the charge. The charge which follows shall be read. Additional brief counsel, if authorized by the classis, may be made before the charge is read.

Beloved servant in Christ,
be attentive to yourself and to all the flock
given to your care by the Holy Spirit.
Love Christ: feed his lambs, tend his sheep.
Be an example in speech, in conduct,
in love, in faith, in purity.
Attend to reading, prayer, study,
preaching, and teaching.
Do not neglect the gift that is in you.
Put these things into practice,
devote yourself to them,
so that all may see your progress.
Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching;
continue in these things,
for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

*N*_____, guard what has been entrusted to you.
And when the chief shepherd appears,
you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.[18]

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD'S PRAYER

Almighty and ever-loving God,
you taught us to pray
for ourselves and for others,
and to give thanks for all of life.

May every grace of ministry rest on *N*_____,
keep *her/him* strong and faithful,
may *s/he* herald the joy of your kingdom,
serving rather than being served.

Inspire your whole church
with your Spirit of power, unity, and peace.
Grant that all who trust you
may live together in love.

Lead all nations in the way of justice.
Direct those who govern,
that they be fair, maintain order,
support those in need, and defend the oppressed,
that the world may know true peace.

Give grace to all who proclaim the gospel
through Word and sacrament and deeds of mercy,
that by teaching and example
others may come to live for you.

Comfort and deliver, O Lord,
all who are in trouble . . .
sorrow . . . poverty . . . sickness . . . grief. . . .
Heal them in body, mind, spirit, or circumstance,
working in them, by your grace,
wonders beyond their dreams and hopes;
through Jesus Christ our Savior,
who taught us to pray . . . .

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

The SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER *should be celebrated; an officer of the classis shall preside. The communion elements may be presented at this time. Following the sacrament, a* HYMN OF THANKSGIVING *may be sung, after which the newly ordained minister shall deliver the* BENEDICTION.

THE ORDER FOR ORDINATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

THE APPROACH TO GOD

VOTUM
SENTENCES
SALUTATION
HYMN
PRAYER OF CONFESSION
ASSURANCE OF PARDON
THE LAW OF GOD
PSALTER AND GLORIA PATRI or another appropriate hymn

THE WORD OF GOD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION
LESSON/S
HYMN
SERMON
PRAYER FOR BLESSING ON THE WORD
THE ORDER FOR ORDINATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT
THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE RESPONSE TO GOD

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING AFTER COMMUNION
BENEDICTION

PROPOSED ORDER FOR RECEPTION INTO THE CLASSIS AND INSTALLATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

The Book of Church Order *(Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 2) directs that after a call to a minister of Word and sacrament to the pastorate of a church has been approved by the classis and accepted by the minister, the name of the person so called "shall be published in the church on three successive Sundays, so that opportunity may be afforded for the raising of lawful objections." There being none, the classis shall install the minister of Word and sacrament according to the order for installation in the* Liturgy. *The classis shall appoint a time for the installation service and conduct the service, in special session, with proper solemnity. A brief sermon suitable to the occasion shall be preached. The presiding officer of the classis shall begin following the proclamation of the Word.*

PRESENTATION

Beloved in the Lord,
we have come to install a minister of Word and sacrament
in Christ's holy church.
Christ alone is the source of all Christian ministry,
through the ages calling men and women to serve.

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry [19]
to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and
to love and serve those with whom they live and work.[20]
We are ambassadors for Christ,
who reconciles and makes whole.
We are the salt of the earth;
we are the light of the world.

Following his resurrection and ascension,
Christ gave gifts to the church.
These gifts were that "some would be apostles, some prophets,
some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,
to equip the saints for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ."[21]

We stand within a tradition
where deacons, elders,
ministers of Word and sacrament, and professors of theology
are called and empowered to fulfill an ordained ministry
that enables the whole mission of the church.[22]

A representative of the congregation says:

*N*_____ Church of the Reformed Church in America, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has called *NN*_____ *(using full name)* to be its pastor and teacher.

The presiding officer continues:

The Classis of *N*_____, has approved the call given to *NN*_____ by the *N*_____ Church of *N*_____ to be its pastor and teacher.

We invite you to come forward, *N*_____, as a sign that you accept this call.

The candidate comes and stands before the classis and congregation; the presiding officer continues:

Ministers are called to build up Christ's church.

They are to proclaim God's Word,
to declare forgiveness through Jesus Christ,
to call publicly on the name of the Lord
on behalf of the whole congregation,
to celebrate Christ's holy sacraments,
baptizing and presiding at the Lord's Supper.

They are to be pastors and teachers,
sharing people's joys and sorrows,
encouraging the faithful, recalling those who fall away,
helping the sick and the dying.[23]

*N*_____, you are here to be received into this classis and installed into the new ministry of this call.
So all may know you are both willing and able
to accept this call to ministry in Christ's church,
the classis asks you to reaffirm the vows you made
at your ordination as a minister of Word and sacrament:

Do you confess together with us and the church throughout all ages your faith in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?[24]

Yes, truly, with all my heart.[25]

The presiding officer shall invite the congregation to stand:

Let us all stand with *N*_____, confessing our Christian faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The congregation is seated; the candidate shall remain standing.

Do you believe in your heart that you are called by Christ's church, and therefore by God, to this ministry of Word and sacrament?[26]

Yes, truly, with all my heart.

Do you believe the books of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and the perfect doctrine of salvation, rejecting all contrary beliefs?[27]

Yes, truly, with all my heart.

Will you proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, upholding the witness of Holy Scripture against all schisms and heresies?[28]

I will, and I ask God to help me.[29]

Will you be diligent in your study of Holy Scripture and in your use of the means of grace? Will you pray for God's people and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?[30]

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you accept the order and governance of the Reformed Church in America, submitting to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine?[31]

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you be loyal to the witness and work[32] of the Reformed Church in America, using all your abilities to further its Christian mission here and throughout the world?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you strive to fulfill faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully all the duties of a minister of Christ:
to preach the Word of God in sincerity,
to administer the holy sacraments in purity,
to maintain proper discipline in the household of God, and
to shepherd the flock faithfully?[33]

I will, and I ask God to help me.

RECEPTION INTO CLASSIS

*N*_____, will you publicly declare your commitment to Christian ministry among us?

The candidate shall respond by reading aloud the Form of the Declaration for Ministers. *The congregation shall stand for the reading and signing of the formulary.*

In the name of our Lord, welcome to *N*_____ Classis. We pledge our support, affection, and prayers while you live and work among us as a servant and minister of the Word of God.

The congregation may be seated while classis members and delegates extend the right hand of fellowship[34] *to the new member, then return to their places.*

INSTALLATION

The person designated by the classis shall deliver the charge to the minister. The charge that follows shall be read. Additional brief counsel, if authorized by the classis, may be made before the charge is read.

Beloved servant in Christ,
be attentive to yourself and to all the flock
given to your care by the Holy Spirit.
Love Christ: feed his lambs, tend his sheep.
Be an example in speech, in conduct,
in love, in faith, in purity.
Attend to reading, prayer, study,
preaching, and teaching.
Do not neglect the gift that is in you.
Put these things into practice,
devote yourself to them,
so that all may see your progress.
Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching;
continue in these things,
for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

*N*_____, guard what has been entrusted to you.
And when the chief shepherd appears,
you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.[35]

The presiding officer shall continue.

Will all the members of *N*_____ Church
rise to affirm their covenant with the minister
whom God has given them?

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,
do you receive in the name of the Lord,
this servant *N*
to be your pastor and teacher?[36]

We do.

Do you promise to receive with meekness and love
the word of truth *he/she* proclaims?

We do.

Do you promise to
honor *her/his* authority
welcome *her/his* pastoral care,
and follow as *s/he guides* you
in serving Jesus Christ,
the only head of the church?

We do.

Do you promise to encourage and pray for *him/her*;
to labor together in obedience to the gospel
for the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the unity, purity, and peace of the church, and
the welfare of the whole world?[37]

We do.

Do you promise *him/her*
such financial and personal support[38]
that *he/she* shall serve among you
with joy and not with grief[39]
as long as you covenant together?

We do.

The person designated by the classis shall deliver the charge to the congregation. The charge which follows shall be read. Additional brief counsel, if authorized by the classis, may be made before the charge is read.

Beloved people of God,
receive with joy your minister in the Lord.
Remember God speaks to you through *him/her.*
Receive the word *he/she* shall preach to you
as it is in truth, the Word of God.[40]
Respect those who labor among you,
esteem them highly in love
because of their work.[41]
Let those who preach the gospel of peace,
bringing good news and announcing salvation,
be beautiful and pleasant to you.[42]

The presiding officer shall continue.

In the name and by the authority of the Classis of *N*_____,
I now declare that the pastoral relationship
between the Reverend *NN*_____ and the *N*_____ Church
is fully constituted, and that
the Reverend *NN*_____is the lawfully installed
pastor and teacher of this church.[43]

Thanks be to God.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD'S PRAYER

Almighty and ever-loving God,
you taught us to pray
for ourselves and for others,
and to give thanks for all of life.

May every grace of ministry rest on *N*_____,
keep *her/him* strong and faithful,
may *s/he* herald the joy of your kingdom,
serving rather than being served.

Give your grace to this congregation:
strengthen them as they labor together,
preserve them in peace,
enlighten them through your Word.[44]

Inspire your whole church
with your Spirit of power, unity, and peace.
Grant that all who trust you
may live together in love.

Lead all nations in the way of justice.
Direct those who govern,
that they be fair, maintain order,
support those in need, and defend the oppressed,
that the world may know true peace.

Give grace to all who proclaim the gospel
through Word and sacrament and deeds of mercy,
that by teaching and example
others may come to live for you.

Comfort and deliver, O Lord,
all who are in trouble . . .
sorrow . . . poverty . . . sickness . . . grief. . . .
Heal them in body, mind, spirit, or circumstance,
working in them, by your grace,
wonders beyond their dreams and hopes;
through Jesus Christ our Savior,
who taught us to pray . . . .

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

The SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER *should be celebrated; the newly installed minister shall preside. The communion elements may be presented at this time. The service shall conclude with a* HYMN OF THANKSGIVING *and the* BENEDICTION *given by the newly installed minister.*

THE ORDER FOR RECEPTION INTO THE CLASSIS AND INSTALLATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

THE APPROACH TO GOD

Votum
SENTENCES
Salutation
Hymn
Prayer of Confession
Assurance of Pardon
The Law of God
PSALTER AND GLORIA PATRI or another appropriate hymn

THE WORD OF GOD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION
LESSON/S
HYMN
SERMON
PRAYER FOR BLESSING ON THE WORD
THE ORDER FOR RECEPTION AND INSTALLATION
THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE RESPONSE TO GOD

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING AFTER COMMUNION
BENEDICTION

R-1.
To approve and distribute to RCA classes and congregations "The Ordination of Minister of Word and Sacrament" and "Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament" for a two-year period of study and provisional use, with responses submitted to the Commission on Christian Worship by January 1, 2000. (ADOPTED—see Editorial Report, p. 501)

SUPPLEMENTAL WORSHIP RESOURCES

The 1996 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Christian Worship to produce worship resources which include supplemental forms of worship and hymns, songs, and choruses which reflect our faith and speak to our time; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Worship to submit the first of such resources to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1996,* R-5, p. 232).

After seeking input from several people across the denomination, the commission and the minster for social witness and worship have been working in three areas: 1) updating and simplifying liturgical orders, 2) producing a collection of hymns, songs, and choruses, and 3) developing additional prayers for use in celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Updating Liturgical Orders

The commission has begun work on updating five liturgical orders that are frequently used by congregations: 1) the Order of Worship for the Lord's Day (with Communion), 2) the Order for the Sacrament of Baptism, 3) Profession of Faith, 4) Ordination and Installation of Elders and Deacons, and 5) the Orders for Christian Healing. The commission hopes to be able to print these resources in a small booklet and to make them available in Spanish, Korean, and Taiwanese as well as English. Most of these worship resources will also be made available on the RCA web site.

Hymnal Supplement

In December 1997 a joint Christian Reformed Church/Reformed Church in America committee began work on developing a hymnal supplement. The Calvin Institute for Christian Worship is also cooperating in this project. RCA members of the committee are: Barbara Boertje of Grandville, Michigan; James Brumm of Walden, New York; Al Fedak of Albany, New York; Amy Van Gunst of Grand Rapids, Michigan; and John Paarlberg, RCA minister for social witness and worship.

The supplement will be a collection of 200 to 250 worship songs and will include Psalm settings, praise and worship songs, songs of the world church, and new hymns and worship music in traditional meters and forms. The committee has sought input from consultants and from others in the RCA through advertisements in the *Church Herald* and other publications, as well as through a series of regional hymnsings and workshops. The committee plans to have a draft copy of the supplement ready by the 1999 General Synod.

The hymnal supplement will be published by CRC Publications and will sell at a projected price of $9.95. The terms of the agreement with the Christian Reformed Church Board of Publications call for the RCA to cover the expenses of RCA participation in committee meetings and 20 percent of the development costs, and to purchase two thousand copies of the first printing at unit cost. Total projected costs to the RCA are estimated to be approximately $13,000. These expenses will be covered by the Congregational Services worship resources budget and by Putting People in Mission (PPIM) funds designated for worship resources and training.

The hymnal supplement committee is also exploring the possibility of a companion/leader's edition of the hymnal supplement. The leader's edition could include background notes on the hymns, suggestions for use of the songs in worship, alternative harmonizations, instrumental parts, cantor verses, etc. It is the committee's strong opinion that a leader's edition is necessary for the success of this project. A projected budget for the development of a leader's edition has not yet been drafted.

OTHER WORK IN PROGRESS

In addition to the above resources, the commission is also working on revising or developing an Order for the Organization of a New Church, an Order for the Commissioning of Church Workers (including associates in ministry), and additional communion prayers.

Preparing Adults for Baptism and Discipleship

At the 1997 General Synod the commission reported on initial explorations of the ministry of preparing previously unchurched adults for baptism and discipleship (*MGS 1997*, p. 233). For many RCA congregations it is frequently the case that people are coming to the church with little or no experience in a Christian community or even exposure to the Christian faith. As the RCA becomes more and more a missionary church in a secular culture, it is important that the church become much more intentional about the spiritual formation of new Christians.

Several denominations have begun to recover and adapt the early church practice of the catechumenate, a process for preparing adult inquirers for Christian baptism and discipleship. This is a ministry of the whole congregation that includes regular worship, modeling a life of prayer, biblical reflection, and engagement in some form of ministry. Those preparing for baptism take a journey, with their sponsors, through several stages of preparation. Each stage is marked by a liturgical rite in which the entire congregation has the opportunity to pray for the inquirers and their sponsors. The process leads to baptism and admission to the Lord's Table, and the journey continues thereafter as the newly baptized Christians with their sponsors engage in a period of discernment and preparation for ministry. Although intended especially for adults who have not been previously baptized, the catechumenate process can also be adapted for those baptized as infants who are making their profession or reaffirmation of faith.

The minister for social witness and worship, together with other appropriate staff, are continuing to explore the catechumenate process for use in Reformed Church congregations. The Office of Worship has made it possible for some RCA pastors and elders, including some members of the Commission on Christian Worship, to attend training sessions and workshops. The commission has begun to study the liturgical orders currently in use in other denominations and will consider developing orders of worship to accompany the catechumenate process for possible use in RCA congregations.

Lutheran-Reformed Full Communion

The 1997 General Synod adopted the *Formula of Agreement* and affirmed: "in full communion with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ, [the Reformed Church in America] declares that it is in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" (*MGS 1997*, R-2, p. 186.) The Commission on Christian Worship received a report from the minister for social witness and worship concerning the implementation of the *Formula of Agreement* between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. A worship service celebrating the adoption of the *Formula of Agreement* is planned for Sunday afternoon, October 4, 1998, in Rockefeller Chapel of the University of Chicago. The minister for social witness and worship represents the RCA on the Lutheran-Reformed Subcommittee on Worship, which is responsible for planning the October 4 worship service. This committee was also asked to prepare an order of worship for local/regional joint celebrations of the adoption of full communion between the four church bodies and to prepare guidelines for conducting such services.

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-2:

R-2.
To commend for <u>occasional</u> use the order of worship prepared by the Lutheran-Reformed Subcommittee on Worship for joint celebrations of the adoption of full communion between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: To clarify the recommendation.≺

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-3:

R-3.
To encourage RCA congregations to join with congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ in local/regional services of worship and celebration of Holy Communion on Sunday, October 4, 1998, and/or other appropriate times; and further,

to encourage RCA congregations to make occasional use of the order of worship and the guidelines prepared by the Lutheran-Reformed Subcommittee on Worship. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: To clarify the recommendation.≺

On October 4, 1998, a liturgical celebration of the Formula of Agreement will take place in the Rockefeller Memorial on the campus of the University of Chicago. At this service, representatives from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ will join in proclaiming our unity in the Body of Christ. An outline of this service is presented below.

It is the hope of the task force which designed this liturgy that the Rockefeller Chapel service might serve as a template for the creation of local celebrations of the Formula. While the full text of this service may not be appropriate to every situation, the design and spirit of the Chicago service may be of help in planning local liturgy. Hymns and prayers, Scripture and ceremony are suggested. Care should be taken to modify these suggestions in ways appropriate to the authentic worship of local congregations.

A CELEBRATION OF FULL COMMUNION

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

GATHERING

PROCESSION TO THE FONT[1]

(Sung by the congregation) SOUTHWELL
Have mercy on us, Lord, and hear our solemn prayer.
We come to hear your living Word; it saves us from despair.

Have mercy on us, Christ, and wash away our sin.
Pour out your grace and make us whole that new life may begin.

Have mercy on us, Lord, make sin and shame depart.
Renew us with your saving power; create in us new hearts.

ACCLAMATION

Our help is in the name of the Lord *Psalm 124:8*
who made heaven and earth.

DECLARATION OF PURPOSE[2]

P We gather as representatives of the churches we now name:
ELCA The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
PCUSA The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
RCA The Reformed Church in America
UCC The United Church of Christ
RCA We gather to recognize each other as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly administered according to the Word of God.
ELCA We gather to repent of the ways we have condemned each other, to recognize our mutual baptism, and to encourage the sharing of the Lord's Supper among our members.
PCUSA We gather to recognize our mutual ministry and to claim as valid the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments by our ordained ministers.
UCC We gather to pledge ourselves to live under the gospel in mutual affirmation and admonition that respect and love for each other may grow.

BAPTISM RENEWAL[3]

P We gather at the water of baptism, the source of our unity in the Body of Christ, to reaffirm our baptism into that body.

Do you renounce all the forces of evil?
We renounce them.
Do you believe in God?
We believe in God.
Do you believe in Jesus Christ?
We believe in Jesus Christ.
Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?
We believe in Holy Spirit.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P Let us confess our sin before God and one another:

We have sinned by building walls that divide the Body of Christ.
Forgive us, O God.
We have sinned
by claiming our differences as more important than our oneness in the Body of Christ.
Forgive us, O God.
We have sinned by not honoring each others' gifts and traditions.
Forgive us, O God.
We have not shown our love for you, O God, in loving relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
Forgive us, O God.

P Hear the good news! Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone, a new life has begun. You are forgiven. Be at peace.
Amen.

ENTRANCE HYMN[4] "Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation" WESTMINSTER ABBEY

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.
And also with you.

PRAYER[5]

Let us pray.

O God, worker of wonders,
you made this day for joy and gladness.
Let the risen Christ abide with us this evening,
opening the scriptures to us
and breaking bread in our midst.
Set hearts aflame, and open our eyes,
that we may see in his sufferings
all that the prophets foretold,
and recognize him at this table
as the Christ, now entered into his glory,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.
Amen.

THE WORD

FIRST READING[6] Isaiah 25:6-9

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM[7]

SECOND READING I Corinthians 5: 6b-8

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION[8]

GOSPEL READING

P The Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ as recorded in Luke 24:13-35
C **Glory to you, O Lord.**
P The Gospel of the Lord
C **Praise to you, O Christ.**

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY[9] "Come Down, O Love Divine"
DOWN AMPNEY

NICENE CREED[10]

Let us confess our faith.

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE[11]

With our minds and in our hearts,
let us pray for all of creation,
the people of the world,
the church of Christ,
and all in need of prayer.

O God, Holy Fountain,
all that is good and worthy pours from your abundance.
We give you honor for the blessing of the earth,
the glory of the heavens,
the preciousness of life.
Open our eyes to recognize you in your creation,
and to walk our road here in awe and wonder and praise.

God of mercy
Hear our prayer.

O God for whom we wait,
you alone are God.
All the nations of the earth are nothing before you.
Reach out your wounded hands to the nations of the world,
that battle and armament, deception and fear may be stilled,
and your peace burn in every heart.

We call to mind today N *(specific locations, events, and people may be named).*

God of mercy
Hear our prayer.

O God, Midwife of creation,
holy are you,
for you bring forth newness in life,
newness in spirit,
newness in the human heart.
Guide and assist your people
in the new relationship coming to birth
out of our earnest repentance and desire for your will.
Bless with your helping presence
all members in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),
the Reformed Church in America,
and the United Church of Christ
as we seek to embody your oneness to the world,
and to serve as you have served.

God of mercy
Hear our prayer.

O God, Holy Wisdom,
from the beginning you took delight in creation;
you led your people Israel,
you inspired the young church.
Call to us gain
that we may hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church
and live our lives rooted in justice and loving kindness,
in sincerity and truth.

God of mercy
Hear our prayer.

O God, Mysterious and Loving Presence,
you are a comforting embrace to those in pain,
the rising sun to the dying,
Through your servant Jesus Christ you bring healing to the groaning world.
Through your Spirit you enter the stories of every person.
Stay with all who cry out for release:
the empty, the enslaved, the diseased, the despondent,
those in the dust, those on high, the lonely, the unloved, the lost.
Especially today we remember N *(specific people may be named).*

Stay with us, make yourself known,
wipe away the tears from all faces,
and grant you peace.

God of mercy
Hear our prayer.

O God, rich Banquet,
you feed the people with a feast of rich food.
Praise to you for the diversity of life.
Praise to you for the oneness of creation.
Praise to you for the diversity of your saints.
Praise to you for the oneness of your church.
Gather us at your table with the blessed of all places and ages,
that we may become your body in the world, diversity in unity.

God of mercy
Hear our prayer.

May our prayers rise to you as sweet-smelling incense, O God,
and may our intentions be pure.
Look upon us in love; hear us in mercy;
and strengthen our hearts to work for the things for which we pray.

Amen.

THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

EUCHARIST

OFFERING OF GIFTS[12]

PRAYER[13]

A As the bread broken was first scattered on the hills,
then was gathered and became one,
so let your church be gathered
from the ends of the earth into your kingdom
for yours is the glory and power through all the ages.
Blessed be God, forever and ever.

GREAT THANKSGIVING[14]

P The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Loving God, the Source of all,
we thank you and praise you
with our lips and our lives
that having created us and all things through your Word,
you welcome and accept our prayer and praise.

For the goodness of creation
and the glory of redemption to which you call us,
we praise you.
For the law of holiness inviting our obedience,
and the call of prophets, rebuking our disobedience,
we praise you.

With all that is, seen and unseen,
and with all the faithful of every time and place,
we join to sing this hymn of praise and thanksgiving:

(Sung)[15]
Holy, holy Lord most holy, God of power and God of might;
Heaven and earth reveal your glory, hail, hosanna, Lord of light!
Blessed be the coming Savior, hail, hosanna, Lord of light!

Loving God, the Holy One,
we offer you praise and thanksgiving
over this bread and cup
because in Jesus Christ, your only begotten
you have forever joined yourself to us,
uniting heaven and earth.

Now therefore we gratefully recall and remember
the wonder of his incarnation:
his birth as one of us
his baptism for our sin,
his compassion for our suffering,
his intimacy with our frailty,
his rebuke of our pride
his bearing of the cross with its death
and his rising from the tomb by the power of God.

It was he, who on the night when he was betrayed
took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks,
he broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying:
"Take, and eat; this is my body given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me."

Again, after supper, he took the cup,
gave thanks and gave it to all to drink, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me."

According to his command and promise of presence
we affirm the mystery of faith:

Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

Loving God, Creative Power,
blessing your Name we seek your Spirit.
Come to us and bless these gifts of bread and wine

that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ,
the sign and seal of our forgiveness in him
and our adoption as the children of God.

As we eat and drink together,
make us one with Christ and one in Christ,
a sign of his eternal reign in all the world.
This sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving
we offer you, loving God,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God to ages of ages.

Amen.

With the confidence of the children of God, let us pray:[16]
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

BREAKING OF THE BREAD ST. COLUMBA

(Sung)
O Lamb of God, you bear the sin of all the world away;
you suffered death our lives to save: have mercy now, we pray.

O Lamb of God, you bear the sin of all the world away;
you set us free from guilt and grave, have mercy now, we pray.

O Lamb of God, you bear the sin of all the world away;
eternal peace with God you made, give us your peace, we pray.

COMMUNION OF THE PEOPLE

MUSIC AT THE DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

CANTICLE[17] KUORTANE

(Sung by the congregation)
O Lord, now let your servants depart in heavenly peace,
for we have seen the glory of your redeeming grace
a light to lead the gentiles unto your holy hill,
the glory of your people, your chosen Israel.

Then grant that we may follow your gleam, O glorious Light,
til earthly shadows scatter and faith is changed to sight;
til raptured saints shall gather upon the shining shore,
where Christ, the blessed day-star shall light them evermore.

SENDING

CHARGE[18]

P Let this be a day of new beginnings.

ELCA Remember this day on which we have joined together
to hear the Word and share the Sacrament.
May our proclamation of the Word and sharing of the Sacrament
be a sign of healing and hope to the world.

PCUSA Remember this day on which we have joined together
to reaffirm our baptism and share the joyful Feast.
May we be a sign of unity in a broken world.

RCA Remember this day on which we have joined together
to affirm each others' ordained ministries.
May we be one in the Spirit
as we proclaim the Word and celebrate the Sacraments.

UCC Remember this day on which we have joined together
to celebrate our full communion.
May we serve the world together as an expression of our love of Jesus Christ.

BLESSING

P The blessing of God:
the God of Sarah and Abraham,
made known to us in Jesus Christ born of Mary
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.
Amen.

DISMISSAL

A Let us go forth to serve the world as members of the Body of Christ.
Thanks be to God!

HYMN[19] "We all are one in mission" KUORTANE

[1] Baptism is the common point of entry into the Christian faith. For this reason, a baptismal font may appropriately be placed at the entrance to the place of worship or in full view of the congregation. Whether a procession is used or not, the presiding minister or other ordained denominational representatives may lead the opening liturgy from the font.

[2] This portion of the liturgy may be appropriate only for an initial celebration of full communion. It is not necessary for representatives from all four communions to be present. Leadership and text may need to be adapted. The "P" designation suggests that the minister who will be presiding at the Table lead these portions of the liturgy.

[3] Other prayers and musical responses appropriate to the gathering my be substituted.

[4] See a complete listing of alternative hymn suggestions.

[5] A Prayer for the Day and/or Prayer for Illumination appropriate to the readings for the day should be selected.

[6] When designing the principal Sunday liturgy, worship planners are encouraged to use the readings appointed in the lectionary. For services at other times, readings from Scripture appropriate to the time and place of the service should be selected.

[7] The Psalm serves as a response to the first reading and should be selected to reflect this relationship. Ideally psalms are sung. Resources for singing the Psalm may be found in denominational hymnals, worship books, or psalters.

[8] The Gospel Acclamation is a proclamation of joy. Brief hymn stanzas, joyous refrains, and spiritual songs from many racial and ethnic traditions may be appropriate. This acclamation usually contains joyful Alleluias, except during the season of Lent.

[9] A hymn which reflects the essence of the Gospel or other text central to the liturgy may follow the sermon.

[10] The Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed are affirmations of faith held in common by our four churches.

[11] These prayers, written for the Chicago liturgy, may be reprinted and used in local settings. Worship planners are also encouraged to compose original petitions in addition to or in place of these prayers. It is appropriate that a lay person lead these prayers and, when possible, be involved in writing them.

[12] Local worship planners should determine the purpose of the offering, giving particular consideration to shared mission possibilities. The offering may include money and other gifts like food for a local pantry or blankets for a shelter. In preparation for communion, bread and wine may be presented as part of the offering. A musical offering (instrumental, choral, vocal and/or congregational) may be presented as gifts are received and/or presented.

[13] The "A" used here comes from Lutheran usage and suggests that this prayer be led by an assisting minister. This should be a lay person, if possible, serving as a representative of the gathered congregation. The assisting minister leads the prayer at the offering, assists at the altar or table, serves communion, leads the prayer following communion, and delivers the charge at the conclusion of the liturgy, encouraging fellow worshippers to go into the world in the service of the Gospel. Within the tradition and polity of the PC(USA) and the RCA, it would be appropriate to assign this leadership to a deacon.

[14] Copyright 1985 English Language Liturgical Commission, used with permission. The text of the Eucharistic prayer was created by Horace Allen for the Consultation on Common Texts and adapted for this celebration of full communion. The text of the prayer may be reprinted and used in local celebrations. Other Eucharistic prayers may also be used, especially for on-going shared worship.

[15] This paraphrase of the *Sanctus* may be sung to many different hymn tunes. While the tune selected for the Chicago liturgy is Picardy, the text may also be sung to Regent Square, Praise my Soul (Lauda Anima), Westminister Abbey, or any other tune of 8.7.8.7.8.7 meter. Worship planners may consult the metrical index in denominational hymnals for possibilities. If churches will be worshipping together regularly, worship planners are encouraged to seek new musical settings of liturgical texts that can be learned and enjoyed together.

[16] There are many variations in the translations of the Lord's Prayer. Worship planners should carefully consider which translation to use in local settings, and are encouraged to print the full text in the worship materials. The translation of the prayer included here was created and approved by the International Consultation on English Texts, with cooperation by all our churches.

[17] This or another appropriate canticle, hymn, or song may be sung here or prior to the prayer. In some situations, especially if a sending hymn will be sung, it may be best to move directly from the prayer to the blessing.

[18] This portion of the sending rite may be led by the same representatives who participated in the gathering. Like portions of the gathering rite, this section will probably be used only for an initial celebration of full communion , not at on-going shared worship, and may be adapted to meet specific needs of local celebrations.

[19] The sending hymn may precede the blessing or dismissal.

1998 GENERAL SYNOD WORSHIP PLANNING

Continuing a practice begun at the 1995 General Synod, the Commission on Christian Worship was asked to be responsible for planning and implementing the General Synod worship services. Members of the commission, the preachers for daily worship, John Bell, and the Rev. John Paarlberg formed the worship planning team for the 1998 General Synod. It remains the tradition that the president of General Synod appoints the preacher(s) for daily worship.

COMPLETION OF TERMS

Among the joys of serving on a commission of the RCA are the collegial relationships that develop among the members and the mutual support that commissioners are able to give and receive from one another. The Commission on Christian Worship expresses its deep appreciation to two members who are completing their terms of service. The Rev. Timothy Mulder and the Rev. L'Anni Hill have served faithfully and with joy. They brought many gifts to the work of the commission and will be deeply missed.

[1] Each Christian is to be engaged in ministry. See *BCO* Preamble, "there is only one ministry and that ministry is shared by all Christians." The common ministry of all Christians, grounded in Christian baptism, is receiving growing ecumenical liturgical emphasis.

[2] See *BCO* Preamble, "The purpose of the Reformed Church in America . . . is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . and by all Christian good works."

[3] Eph. 4:11-12.

[4] See *BCO* Preamble, "The particular ministries of those who hold office arise out of this common ministry [to announce the good news of his Saviorhood and extend his Lordship throughout the world] in order to serve it."

[5] Luke 9:2.

[6] The 1987 order had six questions; this order has eight. Some are shortened, and two concerned with living a holy life are restored from the 1968, 1908, 1882, and earlier liturgies.

[7] See 1987 order.

[8] This wording is used in the *Liturgy*, editions of 1968, 1908, and 1882.

[9] See liturgies of 1987 and 1968.

[10] See liturgies of 1987, 1968, 1908, and 1882.

[11] See 1987 *Liturgy*.

[12] This response makes it clear that the candidate is to be active in seeking God's help.

[13] This question contains important personal disciplines and recovers the attention to godly/holy living found in the liturgies of 1968, 1908, and 1882. See also 1 Pet. 1:15-16: "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy for I am holy.'"

[14] See the *Liturgy*, editions of 1968, 1908, and 1882.

[15] See the *Liturgy*, editions of 1987, 1968, and 1908.

[16] See the *Liturgy*, 1968.

[17] Gal. 2:9.

[18] Adapted from John 21:15-17; 1 Tim. 4:13-16; 6:20-21; and 1 Pet. 5:4.

[19] Each Christian is to be engaged in ministry. See *BCO* Preamble, "there is only one ministry and that ministry is shared by all Christians." The common ministry of all Christians, grounded in Christian baptism, is receiving growing ecumenical liturgical emphasis.

[20] See *BCO* Preamble, "The purpose of the Reformed Church in America . . . is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . and by all Christian good works."

[21] Eph. 4:11-12.

[22] See *BCO* Preamble, "The particular ministries of those who hold office arise out of this common ministry [to announce the good news of his Saviorhood and extend his Lordship throughout the world] in order to serve it."

[23] Luke 9:2.

[24] See 1987 order.

[25] This wording is used in the *Liturgy*, editions of 1968, 1908, and 1882.

[26] See the *Liturgy*, editions of 1987 and 1968.

[27] See the *Liturgy*, editions of 1987, 1968, 1908, and 1882.

[28] See the *Liturgy*, edition of 1987.

[29] This response makes it clear that the candidate is to be active in seeking God's help.

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[31] See the *Liturgy*, editions of 1968, 1908, and 1882.

[32] See the *Liturgy*, editions of 1987, 1968, and 1908.

[33] See the *Liturgy*, edition of 1968.

[34] Gal. 2:9.

[35] Adapted from John 21:15-17; 1 Tim. 4:13-16, 6:20-21; and 1 Pet. 5:4.

[36] See *Liturgy and Psalms*, 1968, also editions of 1908 and 1882.

[37] See *Liturgy and Psalms*, 1968, also editions of 1908 and 1882.

[38] See *Worship the Lord*, 1987.

[39] Liturgy 1882.

[40] See *Liturgy and Psalms*, 1968 and earlier.

[41] 1 Thess. 5:12-13.

[42] See Isa. 52:7 and *Liturgy*, 1882.

[43] See *Worship the Lord*, 1987; *Liturgy and Psalms*, 1968; *Liturgy and Psalms*, 1908; and *Liturgy*, 1882.

[44] See *Worship the Lord*, 1987.

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF WORSHIP

The Office of Worship provides congregations with resources for worship and worship education through occasional resource packets, articles in *Servant Leaders* and other publications, regional workshops, and by responding to numerous requests from individual congregations for information and resources. The office also coordinates the planning for General Synod worship services, represents the denomination on the Council of Common Texts and the Lutheran-Reformed Subcommittee on Worship, serves on the CRC-RCA Hymnal Supplement Committee, and provides staff assistance for the Commission on Christian Worship. Much of this work is reported in more detail in the report of the Commission on Worship.

In his presidential report to the 1996 General Synod, the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink raised serious concerns about worship practices in the Reformed Church in America; noting in particular little commonality across the denomination, lack of attention to Reformed theology and liturgy in many RCA congregations, and the need for greater variety in some of the RCA liturgical forms *(1996 MGS*, p. 32).

The Office of Worship, together with the Commission on Christian Worship, is responding to this concern in a variety of ways. One is to place a greater emphasis on worship education. The educational video and study guide, *Liturgy and Life: A Reformed Understanding of Worship,* has been used in more than two hundred congregations. Many have purchased the video and study guide for repeated use in consistory and worship committee training, new member education, and adult study groups. The minister for worship and members of the

Commission on Christian Worship have designed and led workshops on worship using the video and other resources. The Office of Worship is also working closely with the commission in revising existing orders of worship and in developing new resources. Many of these resources will be made available on the RCA web site in addition to being published in print form.

The Office of Worship reported to the 1997 General Synod that it was cooperating with the Commission on Christian Worship, the Office for Education and Faith Development, and Evangelism and Church Development Services in exploring ways to better prepare previously unchurched adults for profession of faith and baptism (*MGS 1997*, p. 233). A greater focus and intentionality in the spiritual formation of new Christians is made necessary by the new missionary situation in which the church in North America increasingly finds itself:

> When the dominant culture does not identify with the Christian faith, the church cannot assume that persons have a background shaped by the stories, images, values, and traditions of the church and of the Bible. The faith community must intentionally guide and nurture seekers so that they come to the waters of baptism consciously professing a faith that is relationally rooted in the truth of the gospel and the gospel community (Dan Benedict, *Come to the Waters: Baptism and Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples.* Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996).

Several denominations are recovering the early church practice of the catechumenate and have begun to develop materials and train people for implementing this ministry in their congregations. The process involves accompanying adult inquirers on their spiritual journey toward baptism and discipleship. It is neither another program nor a curriculum, but a ministry of the whole congregation. This ministry includes a one-on-one mentoring process, small group ministry, and a series of liturgical rites that involve the entire congregation in prayer for the catechumens and their sponsors. The process includes regular worship, reflection on biblical passages, modeling a life of prayer, and engagement in some form of ministry. The catechumenate process culminates in baptism and admission to the Lord's Table. Newly baptized adults continue to receive support for several weeks from their sponsors and church leaders, who help them explore ways of living out their faith. The process can also be adapted for previously baptized adults who are making reaffirmation of their faith and for baptized children and young people who are making their first public profession of faith.

During the past year members of the Congregational Services staff, representatives from the Commission on Christian Worship, pastors, and lay people participated in training events sponsored by the North American Association of the Catechumenate and by some of the denominations that are developing this ministry for use in their churches. The Commission on Christian Worship has begun a review of the liturgical rites used in the catechumenate process. Congregational Services and the Office of Worship plan to send additional RCA representatives to training events and workshops. The Office of Worship is also exploring the possibility of regional workshops for interested RCA congregations and possible cooperation with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

INTRODUCTION

CHURCH ORDER: ORGANIZING FOR ACTION

> *"All these, who were chosen as gatekeepers at the thresholds, were two hundred twelve. They were enrolled by genealogies in their villages. David and the seer Samuel established them in their office of trust. So they and their descendants were in charge of the gates of the house of the Lord"* (1 Chron. 9:22-23a).

Tending to the business of the church equips us for witness, service, and love. CHURCH ORDER deals with all aspects of the *Book of Church Order*, RCA agency constitutions, and other organizational matters requiring the attention of General Synod. It is concerned with such questions as:

- What offices, agencies, and procedures are needed for the RCA's life and work?
- How can organizational relationships best be structured?

The purpose of the Reformed Church in America, together with all other churches of Christ, is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works. That purpose is achieved most effectively when good order and proper discipline are maintained by means of certain offices, governmental agencies, and theological and liturgical standards.

The four basic or focal governmental units in the Reformed Church in America are: 1) the consistory, 2) the classis, 3) the regional synod, and 4) the General Synod. Three offices are employed in the governmental functions of the Reformed Church, namely, the minister of Word and sacrament, the elder, and the deacon. A fourth office, that of General Synod professor of theology, is employed in the seminaries of the RCA for the training of students for ministry.

The governmental functions of these offices takes place, not apart from, but in harmony with the understanding of the mission of the church and the nature of its ministry. This basic affirmation has three

consequences: 1) the purpose of church government is to aid the church in the development of its own life, in order that it may carry out the mission of its head—to announce the good news of his Saviorhood and extend his Lordship throughout the world; 2) there is only one ministry, and that ministry is shared by all Christians; and 3) the ecclesiastical office which the Reformed Church in America deems necessary for its ordering are understood to be essentially functional in nature, and the term "office" is everywhere viewed in terms of service.

Major responsibility for CHURCH ORDER is assigned to the Commission on Church Order and the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee.

REPORTS ON CHURCH ORDER

Report of the Commission on Church Order

Since the 1997 meeting of General Synod, the Commission on Church Order (CCO) met September 26, 1997, and March 6, 1998, near O'Hare airport in Chicago, Illinois, to consider referrals from the General Synod and other matters related to church order.

REVISE "PASTORAL MINISTRY" TERM IN *BCO*

The Classis of Orange submitted the following overture (Overture 2) and reasons to the 1997 General Synod:

The Classis of Orange overtures General Synod to revise the term "pastoral ministry" in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1d...in order to identify gifts (in addition to pastoral ministry) for all phases of ministry, such as missionary work, chaplaincy, etc.

Reasons:
1. The term "pastoral ministry" is limiting and excludes other ministries.
2. The RCA has many specialized ministries that are not "pastoral ministries."
3. The need for missionaries...should not be excluded from the prayerful concerns of the church. (*MGS 1997*, pp. 353-54).

Upon recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Church Vocations, the 1997 General Synod voted:

> To refer Overture 2 to the Commission on Church Order for study and report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-22, p. 354).

In order to meet the intent of Overture 2 and to use language consistent with other sections of the *BCO* referring to ministers of Word and sacrament, the commission recommends:

> **R-1.**
> **To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1d, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined; deletion is stricken out):**
>
> **d. Has the consistory prayerfully considered persons within the congregation, especially the young people, in order to identify with them their gifts for ~~pastoral~~ ministry <u>of Word and sacrament</u>, to encourage the development of these gifts, and to pray for those individuals on a regular basis? (ADOPTED)**

CONSISTORY VACANCIES

The Classis of Passaic Valley submitted the following overture (Overture 1) to the 1997 General Synod:

> The Classis of Passaic Valley overtures General Synod to adopt the following revisions to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 10f...(additions are underlined; deletion is stricken out):

Sec. 10f. When a vacancy is to be filled, the person may be elected ~~shall~~ and installed to serve the remainder of the unexpired term; or the consistory may appoint and install a member of the greater consistory to the same office of his or her previous service for the duration of the unexpired term.

Reasons: 1. Unofficially, some consistories are already making appointments to fill vacancies on consistories.

2. Calling a congregational meeting for a special vote to fill an unexpired term of a consistory member is often cumbersome for what is generally routine approval.

3. The amendment gives congregations/consistories the flexibility to choose an alternative method for filling a vacancy on a consistory *(MGS 1997,* p. 287).

Upon recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Church Order, the 1997 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to incorporate the substance of Overture 1 in its proposed revisions to the *Book of Church Order,* for report to the 1998 General Synod *(MGS 1997,* R-16, p. 288).

In its review of the proposed revision of *BCO,* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 10f, CCO was in agreement with the basic intent of Overture 1, which provides for an appropriate process of filling consistory vacancies without requiring special congregational meetings. However, to limit the length of time for filling a vacancy of an unexpired term, CCO recommends that the vacancy be filled only until the next congregational meeting rather than for the duration of the unexpired term (proposed in the above overture).

R-2.
To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO),* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 10f, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

***Sec. 10f.* When a vacancy is to be filled, ~~the~~ a person may be elected ~~shall~~ and installed to serve the remainder of the unexpired term; or the consistory may appoint and install a member of the great consistory to the same office of his or her previous service until the next congregational meeting for the election of elders and deacons. (ADOPTED)**

MEMBERSHIP COMPOSITION AND TERMS ON REGIONAL SYNOD JUDICIAL BUSINESS COMMITTEES

The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes submitted an overture (Overture 8) to the 1997 General Synod to revise the *BCO,* Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 4 to change membership composition and terms for regional synod committees on judicial business (*MGS 1997,* pp. 294-95).

Upon recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Church Order, the 1997 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to incorporate the substance of Overture 8 in its proposed revisions to the *Book of Church Order*, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-22, p. 295).

In its review of *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 4, CCO determined that Section 4 is not necessary. Reasons for deletion of Section 4 are:

1. The deletion allows each regional synod greater flexibility in membership composition and terms for its judicial business committees.

2. Since there is no *BCO* provision for classes to define membership composition or terms of judicial business committees or there is no *BCO* provision for classes to "constitute, by election or otherwise, permanent committees on judicial business," (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III (regional synod), Article 6, Section 4 provision), the deletion of this judicial business committee stipulation (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 4) in the regional synod section (Part III) of the *BCO* results in parallel consistency to the classis section (Part II) of the *BCO*.

3. The *BCO* already provides in Chapter 1, Part III, Article 1, Section 3; and in Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 2 authority to regional synods for the creation of regional synod committees.

4. Chapter 2 of the *BCO* (disciplinary and judicial procedures) already requires judicial business committees in classes and regional synods.

➢The advisory committee recommended to not adopt R-3:

R-3.
To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 4, for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletion is stricken out):

~~*Sec. 4.* The regional synod shall constitute, by election or otherwise, a permanent committee on judicial business. The clerk of the synod shall refer to this committee all appeals and complaints, with all papers and documents pertaining thereto, before these matters are presented to the synod. The permanent committee on judicial business shall consist of three ministers and two elders, who need not be delegates to the synod. The term of one member of the committee shall expire annually and a successor shall be chosen at the regular meeting of the synod for a term of five years. A vacancy occurring from death, resignation, or other cause shall be filled in the same manner for the unexpired term. The committee shall elect its own moderator.~~ **(NOT ADOPTED)**

Reasons:

1. Judicial business committees are necessary when conflicts arise. No judicatory should be in the position of needing a judicial business committee and not having one. Retaining the requirement provides immediate clarity on who should do what when the need arises.

2. Retaining the requirement for all regional synods assures a judicial business committee structure that is consistent for judicial cases throughout the RCA.

3. Retaining the requirement assures that the offices of the church charged with judicial responsibility will be represented on all regional synod judicial business committees.≺

TRANSFER OF MINISTERS FROM OTHER DENOMINATIONS

CCO reviewed a May 22, 1997, communication from the stated clerk of the Classis of Greater Palisades that expressed a concern about classis receiving as a member a minster from another denomination before obtaining a letter of transfer from the minister's denomination attesting that the minister is in good and regular standing.

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-4:

***R-4.**
To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 4a <u>for recommendation to the classes for approval</u> (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Sec. 4.

a. When an ordained minister of another denomination wishes to be considered for a call from a congregation in the RCA, that minister shall furnish the stated clerk of classis with the following:
<u>1.</u> A ~~letter of transfer and a~~ <u>written</u> statement from the <u>body holding the</u> minister's ~~denomination~~ <u>credentials</u> attesting that the minister is an ordained minister in good and regular standing.
~~1~~<u>2.</u> A completed Minister's Profile form.
~~2~~<u>3.</u> Copies of academic degrees.
~~3~~<u>4.</u> A seminary transcript.
~~4~~<u>5.</u> Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of five persons who are qualified to comment on the applicant's ministry.
~~5~~<u>6.</u> A statement from the applicant that attests to knowledge of Reformed Church history, readiness to adhere to the *Standards* of the RCA, and a basic knowledge of and readiness to support Reformed Church agencies and institutions. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)≺

*See R-3, p. 501 in the editorial report. The recommendation printed here has been corrected in accord with that action.

TRANSFER OF MEMBERS

At their June 1996 meeting the stated clerks requested the Commission on Church Order to consider deletion of *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 16.

In its consideration of this request, CCO noted at its September 1997 meeting that a provision already exists in the *BCO* (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2e) that requires boards of elders to impress upon members of the church who move the duty of obtaining a certificate of transfer to another church. CCO also noted that although Section 16 is certainly a good procedure, it does not require RCA constitutional status.

***R-5.**
To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 16, for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletion is stricken out):

~~*Sec. 16.* The consistory shall forward to the appropriate congregation or classis stated clerk within one month the names, addresses, and pertinent information regarding persons moving from the bounds of the local church.~~ **(ADOPTED)**

*See p. 501, R-4 in the editorial report. The recommendation printed here has been corrected in accord with that action.

GSC/COMMISSION ON HISTORY ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP WITH RCA ARCHIVES

At its April 1997 meeting, the General Synod Council voted:

> To request the Commission on Church Order review the *Bylaws of the General Synod,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6d and Article 5, Section 5; and further,
>
> to request the Commission on Church Order prepare (if necessary) appropriate revisions of the *Bylaws of the General Synod* to clarify the role of the General Synod Council and the Commission on History with the RCA Archives.

At its September 1997 meeting CCO noted that the General Synod Council is responsible for maintaining a permanent archive for the collection of official records and documents of the RCA (*Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6d). CCO, in its review of the responsibilities of the Commission on History (*Bylaws of the General Synod,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5b [1-6]), determined that Section 5b [2] is redundant concerning the responsibilities assigned to the General Synod Council to maintain the RCA Archives.

The commission recommends:

R-6.
To adopt in first reading the following amendment to the *Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5b, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Sec. 5. Commission on History

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall advise the General Synod on the collection of official records and documents of the Reformed Church in America, its churches, assemblies, and agencies.

~~**2. The commission shall constitute the advisory board for the RCA Archives, receiving reports at all commission meetings from the archivist concerning the operation of the archives.**~~

32. The commission shall promote interest in, and reflection on, the history and traditions of the Reformed Church in America through publications and such other means as it may find effective.

43. The commission shall actively stimulate and encourage research in the history and traditions of the Reformed Church in America.

54. The commission shall inform the Reformed Church in America of the relevance of the denomination's history and traditions to its programs.

65. The commission shall ensure that the General Synod receives an annual report of information concerning ministers who have died since the previous General Synod meeting. (ADOPTED)

CALLING OF PASTORS IN NEW CHURCH STARTS

The Classis of Illinois submitted the following overture to the 1996 General Synod:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions to the *Book of Church Order,* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2, in order to clarify how Section 2 applies to new church starts in which the pastor is present in the community before any church or consistory is organized (*MGS 1996*, pp. 279-80).

Upon recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Church Order, the 1996 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions of the *Book of Church Order* to clarify how and when new church start pastors are installed (*MGS 1996*, R-16, p. 280).

At its February 1996 meeting the commission reviewed its report and proposed a *BCO* amendment (see below) that was presented to the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 238-39).

Upon recommendation of the Commission on Church Order, the 1997 General Synod voted:

To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO),* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

Sec. 2. ...The instrument of the call to a minister shall be signed by the members of the consistory...If the call is approved by the classis and accepted by the person called, the latter's name shall be published in the church on three successive Sundays, so that opportunity may be afforded for the raising of lawful objections. <u>(For organizing churches, the classis may waive the three successive Sundays requirement.)</u> If no such objections are raised, the classis or its committee shall install the minister according to the office for installation in the *Liturgy* (*MGS 1997*, R-1, p. 239).

During 1997-98, classes approved the above *BCO* amendment, and the 1998 General Synod will vote to declare incorporation of the above amendment into the 1998 edition of the *Book of Church Order.*

In its review of R-1 at the 1997 General Synod, however, the Advisory Committee on Church Order requested the Commission on Church Order to also review for purposes of consistency other sections of the *Book of Church Order* concerning election of elders and deacons in new

church starts *(BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9b-c) and the three successive Sunday requirement for elders and deacons in new church starts *(BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 10).

At its September 1997 meeting, CCO reviewed *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9b-c and *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 10 and determined, by consensus, that no revisions of these *BCO* provisions are necessary. As distinguished from a call to a minister requiring the instrument of the call to be signed by members of a consistory (a consistory does not formally exist until a congregation is formally organized), notice of a congregational meeting for the election of elders and deacons and publication of the names of the persons elected as elders and deacons can occur in the worshipping congregation prior to the formal organization of the congregation.

FOURTH OFFICE (OFFICE OF GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY)

In its report to the 1997 General Synod, the Board of Trustees of the Theological Education Agency recommended:

> To instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions of the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8 *(The Office of General Synod Professor of Theology)*, Section 3, to provide for the director of the Theological Education Agency to become a General Synod professor of theology, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-9, p. 274).

The board of trustees also recommended to the 1997 General Synod:

> To instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions of the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8 *(The Office of General Synod Professor of Theology)*, Section 3, to provide for professors (ordained as Reformed Church in America ministers of Word and sacrament) teaching at non-RCA seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools to become General Synod professors of theology, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-10, p. 275).

Upon recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Church Order, the 1997 General Synod voted:

> To refer R-9 to the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, for study and report (along with the proposed *Book of Church Order* revisions, if applicable) to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, p. 274).

Upon recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Church Order, the 1997 General Synod also voted:

> To refer R-10 to the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, for study and report (along with the proposed *Book of Church Order* revisions, if applicable) to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, p. 274).

At its September 1997 meeting, CCO reviewed a history of General Synod studies and reports on the fourth office. General Synod reviewed this office within the framework of a larger study of the nature of office in 1968 (*MGS 1968*, pp. 185-86, 190-98). In a long and ongoing review of ecclesiastical office in 1980 (*MGS 1980*, pp. 98-116), the Commission on Theology reviewed the "fourth office" (*MGS 1980*, pp. 111-15). In 1986 a Committee on Ecclesiastical Office and Ministry considered all the offices of the RCA and included a study

of the fourth office (*MGS 1986*, pp. 207-10). In 1988 and in 1989 this same Committee on Eccleasiastical Office and Ministry prepared reports on the office of deacon and the fourth office (*MGS 1988*, pp. 261-67 and *MGS 1989*, pp. 209-117).

CCO also received the following communication from the Commission on Theology, prepared at its June 1997 meeting, in response to the referrals of R-9 and R-10:

> The commission sees no rationale for expansion of the fourth office apart from a wider denominational restructure that would assign broader responsibilities to the professorate.

CCO agreed with the above response from the Commission on Theology. In further discussion, CCO also considered whether there is sufficient demand and/or need within the RCA to initiate another thoroughgoing new study of the fourth office, especially as this opens the question of office in the whole. Until General Synod is convinced that a full restructure of office is in order, CCO presents no recommendation on this topic at this time.

From the Report of the Task Force on the Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes

REVIEW OF CHURCH ORDER

At its March 3-4, 1998, meeting, the Task Force on the Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes reviewed monographs provided by the RCA Archives and discussed input received from prior meetings with RCA personnel. The task force then noted that the order of the Reformed Church in America has not changed substantially since the development of the *Explanatory Articles* in 1792, which were an explanation of the church order of Dort (1619). It was also noted that although in 1992 the Ad Hoc Committee on Services, Structures, and Funding in the Reformed Church in America encouraged classes and regional synods to engage in periodic self-studies, the shape of the relationship between classes and regional synods was left untouched (*MGS 1992*, pp.73-76).

Given the seven assumptions identified by the task force at its December 1997 meeting (see the Report of the Task Force on the Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes in the Christian Education and Discipleship section for a listing of the seven assumptions), the task force concluded that it is time for the RCA to undertake a thorough, full, and comprehensive review of its order, inclusive of the biblical, theological, and ecclesiological assumptions that undergird that order. The task force believes this task is beyond its mandate and needs to be done by a different and new General Synod task force that is given sufficient time to carry out this work with care and thoroughness.

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-7:

> **R-7.**
> **To call upon the Reformed Church in America to undertake a comprehensive review of its church order through enter a four-year process of dialogue and discernment; ~~with the aim of accomplishing a complete revision of the Government of the Reformed Church in America (Chapter 1 of the *Book of Church Order*) and the Preamble of the *Book of Church Order*~~; and further,**

to instruct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the president of General Synod and the general secretary, to appoint a task force of up to twelve members that is representative of the Reformed Church in America to guide the above process; and further,

to instruct the task force to conduct its work in consultation with representatives at all levels of church order and church office; and further,

to instruct the task force to present interim reports, which may propose changes, to the General Synods of 1999, 2000 and 2001, and to present a final report to the 2002 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Report of the American Indian Council

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

For the past two years the American Indian Council (AIC) has recognized the need for changes: 1) to strengthen and revitalize AIC ministries; 2) to improve communications among the six AIC congregations; 3) to develop training programs for elders, deacons, and Sunday school teachers and to conduct an annual leadership conference for identifying, developing, and training leaders; 4) to improve youth programs, increase efforts to encourage youth to enter the ministry, and provide increased scholarship assistance to youth; 5) to restructure AIC; and 6) to change the name of the American Indian Council to the Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC).

AIC presented to the 1997 General Synod a proposed reorganization and restructure of AIC (*MGS 1997*, pp. 420-21). In response, the 1997 General Synod voted:

> To affirm the...proposed changes for the American Indian Council (AIC); and further,
>
> to direct the General Synod Council and the American Indian Council to begin, during the coming year, implementation of the...proposed reorganization and restructure of the AIC, subject to approval by the 1998 General Synod of revisions to the *Constitution* of the American Indian Council (*MGS 1997*, R-3, p. 421).

NAME CHANGE AND REVISIONS OF *CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS*

During the past year, AIC focused on reorganization, restructure, and revisions of its *Constitution and Bylaws*. It was a rewarding experience. The revised *Constitution and Bylaws* is substantially changed from the previous *Constitution and Bylaws* due to significant internal restructure and the proposed name change; thus only the new *Constitution and Bylaws* is presented to the 1998 General Synod for approval.

R-8.
To celebrate the ministry of the American Indian Council; and further,

to change the name of the American Indian Council to the Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC); and further,

to adopt the following revised *Constitution and Bylaws* of the Native American Indian Ministries Council of the Reformed Church in America, effective July 1, 1998, the same to supersede all previous editions of the *Constitution* of the American Indian Council:

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS
NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN MINISTRIES COUNCIL
Reformed Church in America

ARTICLE I NAME

The name of this organization shall be the Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC) of the GSC of the Reformed Church in America.

ARTICLE II VISION AND PURPOSE

The vision of the Native American Indian Ministries Council is to embrace and live in the spirit of our Lord, utilizing all our gifts for one another. The Native American Indian Ministries Council seeks to work with other cultures in North America and the world, giving testimony to God's grace and God's activity among us, and the making, teaching, and sustaining of disciples throughout the earth.

In acceptance of and in response to God's call and teaching through Jesus Christ, the Native American Indian Ministries Council proclaims the gospel of Christ and seeks to empower RCA Native American ministries. The Native American Indian Ministries Council seeks to strengthen the discipleship, fellowship, leadership, and stewardship of Native American Indian congregations, ministries, and members of the Reformed Church in America. The Native American Indian Ministries Council seeks to create opportunities for RCA Native American Indian ministries to gather together; to design resources through RCA mission and program offices for Christian nurture and leadership development; to sponsor an annual leadership conference; to encourage faithful stewardship practices of finances, time, and talents with a view toward self-sufficiency of member congregations; and to pray for RCA ministries among Native American people. The council seeks to work ecumenically.

ARTICLE III MEMBERSHIP

A. There shall be one Native American Indian Council member from each RCA Native American Indian congregation. Membership in the Native American Indian Ministries Council shall be open to all those of Native American Indian descent who are confessing members of RCA Native American Indian

congregations and who are duly selected by their congregation to represent them at meetings of the Native American Indian Ministries Council.

B. All terms shall begin on July 1 and end on June 30. A partial term of more than one year shall be considered a full term in determining eligibility. Two (2) Native American Indian Ministries Council members shall be elected annually according to the schedule in Appendix 1.

C. Corresponding Delegates

1. Two pastors serving RCA Native American Indian congregations shall serve the Native American Indian Ministries Council as corresponding delegates on a rotating basis. The term shall be two (2) years and is not renewable.

2. Other Native American Indian ministries may be invited to appoint a corresponding delegate (without vote).

D. The Native American Indian Ministries Council Executive Secretary shall serve *ex-officio* without vote.

ARTICLE IV MEETINGS

A. There shall be at least two Native American Indian Ministries Council meetings per year, the place and time to be determined by the Native American Indian Ministries Council.

B. A quorum shall consist of two-thirds of the number of voting Native American Indian Ministries Council members.

C. Meetings shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order.

D. The chairperson of the Native American Indian Ministries Council may call a special meeting of the council whenever it is deemed necessary. A two-week written notice shall be given to all members concerning special meetings.

ARTICLE V OFFICERS AND THEIR DUTIES

A. The positions of chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, and treasurer shall be elected annually from among the voting Native American Indian Ministries Council membership.

B. Chairperson.

The chairperson shall preside at all Native American Indian Ministries Council meetings, ensuring conformity to the Native American Indian Ministries Council *Constitution and Bylaws*. The chair shall make an annual report to the Native American Indian Ministries Council and assure implementation of council decisions. In consultation with the executive secretary of the Native American Indian Ministries Council, the chair shall

prepare the agenda for council meetings and the annual report to the General Synod of the RCA. The chair shall have the authority to call special meetings whenever it is deemed necessary.

C. Vice-chairperson.

In case of absence of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson shall assume all the duties and powers of the chairperson.

D. Secretary.

The secretary shall be responsible for keeping permanent records of Native American Indian Ministries Council meetings; for distributing copies of minutes and reports to Native American Indian Ministries Council members and RCA Native American Indian congregations, and also to the offices of the General Synod and the General Synod Council; for maintaining correspondence of the Native American Indian Ministries Council; and for performing other such duties as assigned by the council. The secretary shall transfer Native American Indian Ministries Council records to his or her successor upon the completion of his or her term, and periodically transmit records to the RCA Archives.

E. Treasurer.

The treasurer shall be responsible and accountable for all funds and financial records and shall submit a report at each meeting of the Native American Indian Ministries Council. The treasurer shall also submit an annual financial statement to the Native American Indian Ministries Council. On completion of the treasurer's term of office, the treasurer shall deliver to his or her successor all monies, record books, documents, bills, vouchers, etc., in his or her possession. The treasurer shall make reports to the RCA Office of Finance as may be required. The treasurer shall perform other duties and functions as assigned by the Native American Indian Ministries Council.

ARTICLE VI COUNCIL RELATIONSHIPS

A. Classes.

The Native American Indian Ministries Council shall encourage each classis in which a Native American Indian congregation or ministry is located to establish a classis advisory committee for partnership with the council. These committees and the Native American Indian Ministries Council together shall respond to the concerns of Native American Indian ministries (e.g. congregation development and revitalization, development of new congregations and ministries, advocacy issues, leadership development, etc.).

B. Representation on Other Assemblies and Committees.

1. Native American Indian Ministries Council representatives to RCA denominational assemblies and committees shall be nominated or appointed in accordance with the RCA *Book of Church Order*.

2. Native American Indian Ministries Council representatives to other committees shall:
   a. Be elected to a two- (2) year term.
   b. Serve no more than three (3) consecutive terms.
   c. Shall attend at least one (1) Native American Indian Ministries Council meeting annually and shall submit a written report to the council at that time.

ARTICLE VII REMOVAL FROM OFFICE

A. After a thorough and proper review by Native American Indian Ministries Council members, the council shall remove from office, or from assignment, all those who discontinue active participation in an RCA Native American congregation or those members who fail to fulfill the duties of their office.

B. The Native American Indian Ministries Council and/or the appropriate RCA assembly shall fill vacancies.

ARTICLE VIII AMENDMENTS

A. The Native American Indian Ministries Council *Constitution and Bylaws* shall be amended by the following procedure:

1. The substance of the proposed amendment shall be presented in writing to the Native American Indian Ministries Council at a regular meeting.

2. If, in the judgment of the Native American Indian Ministries Council, the proposed amendment significantly impacts Native American Indian congregations, the council shall distribute the proposal to its member congregations for comments in writing.

3. A two-thirds vote of Native American Indian Ministries Council members present shall be required to ratify an amendment, following receipt and review of any comments.

B. The Native American Indian Ministries Council shall review its *Constitution and Bylaws* at least once every five years.

APPENDIX I

In accordance with Article III, Section B, the following schedule shall govern the election of Native American Indian Ministries Council members. In order to provide a smooth transition, the initial terms for the council were chosen by lot and are designated as follows:

Class of 1999	**Apache Reformed Church, Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church**
Class of 2000	**Mescalero Reformed Church, Winnebago Reformed Church**
Class of 2001	**Comanche Reformed Church, Umonhon Reformed Church**

Thereafter, each congregation shall elect members to three-year terms following the established rotation.

Any new Reformed Church in America Native American Indian congregation will elect its council member in the year after the congregation is organized

APPENDIX II

In accordance with Article III, Section C, the following schedule shall govern the rotation of pastor representatives. Pastors shall be divided into two groups based on alphabetical order within each state. The order of rotation within each group shall be determined by date of installation. One pastor will serve from each group simultaneously. Terms shall expire in alternating years. The initial terms shall be as follows:

Group A	
Apache Reformed Church	**George Montanari**
Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church	**William DeBoer**
Umonhon Reformed Church	**Earl Smith**
Group B	
Mescalero Reformed Church	**Robert Schut**
Winnebago Reformed Church	**Darrell Dalman**
Comanche Reformed Church	**Charles Spencer**

(Note: Upon adoption of the *Constitution and Bylaws* by the 1998 General Synod, Group A shall rotate in odd years and Group B in even years. In the first rotation, Group A shall serve a one-year term.)

New pastors shall be added into the rotation based on date of installation. (ADOPTED)

PURPOSE, REORGANIZATION, AND RESTRUCTURE

With the approval of the *above Constitution and Bylaws*, the Native American Indian Ministries Council recommends:

R-9.
To affirm the following purpose and organization of the Native American Indian Ministries Council of the Reformed Church in America:

Vision Statement: Our vision is to embrace and live in the spirit of our Lord, utilizing all our gifts for one another. We seek to work with other cultures in North America and the world, giving testimony to God's grace and God's activity among us, and the making, teaching, and sustaining of disciples throughout the earth.

Mission Statement: In acceptance of and in response to God's call and teaching through Jesus Christ, we proclaim the gospel of Christ and seek to empower RCA Native American ministries. The Native American Indian Ministries Council seeks to strengthen the discipleship, fellowship, leadership, and stewardship of Native American Indian congregations, ministries, and members of the Reformed Church in America. The Native American Indian Ministries Council will seek to create opportunities for RCA Native American Indian ministries to gather together; to design resources through RCA mission and program offices for Christian nurture and leadership development; to sponsor an annual leadership conference; to encourage faithful stewardship practices of finances, time, and talents with a view toward self-sufficiency of member congregations; and to pray for RCA ministries among Native American people. The council will seek to work ecumenically.

Name: The name of this organization shall be the Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC) of the Reformed Church in America.

Organizational Structure The Native American Indian Ministries Council shall be composed of one delegate from each Native American Indian congregation. The Native American Indian Ministries Council shall have an executive secretary who shall serve *ex-officio* without vote. Two pastors of RCA Native American Indian congregations shall serve as corresponding members. Other Native American ministries may be invited to appoint a corresponding delegate (without vote).

Responsibilities: Responsibilities of the Native American Indian Ministries Council shall include:

Program involvement in identifying and responding to congregational needs.

An annual leadership conference.

Identifying and equipping lay leadership.

Initiating and supporting new Native American Indian congregations.

Working cooperatively with classes where Native American Indian congregations and other related ministries are located or willbe established in the future.

Coordinating with classes the formation of advisory committees for Native American Indian ministry concerns.

Oversight of scholarship funds entrusted to the Native American Indian Ministries Council's care.

Executive Secretary: The Reformed Church in America shall make available staff support to the Native American Indian Ministries Council through the General Synod Council (GSC). The appointed staff person shall serve *ex-officio* without vote on the Native American Indian Ministries Council. He or she shall be appointed in accordance with GSC policies and procedures, and in consultation with the Native American Indian Ministries Council. Supervision and performance reviews shall be carried out by the appropriate GSC staff supervisor, in consultation with the Native American Indian Ministries Council.

The executive secretary of the Native American Indian Ministries Council shall provide vision and leadership for Native American Indian ministries within the RCA, especially in the areas of lay and professional leadership development, congregational revitalization and outreach. The executive secretary shall work closely and cooperatively with pastors and consistories of Native American Indian congregations, the classes who supervise these congregations, and all RCA staff who relate and respond to Native American Indian ministries. The executive secretary and the Native American Indian Ministries Council chairperson shall work cooperatively with the other RCA racial/ethnic councils.

Congregations/ Ministries: Congregations of the Native American Indian Ministries Council shall select from among their confessing membership one voting delegate to serve on the council. A noncongregational ministry member of the Native American Indian Ministries Council shall be invited to appoint a corresponding delegate, preferably from the Reformed Church in America.

Pastors: **Two pastors serving RCA Native American Indian congregations shall serve the Native American Indian Ministries Council as corresponding delegates on a rotating basis.**

Classes: **The Native American Indian Ministries Council shall encourage each classis in which a Native American Indian congregation or ministry is located to establish a classis advisory committee for partnership with the Native American Indian Ministries Council. These committees and the council together shall respond to concerns of Native American Indian ministries (e.g. congregation development and revitalization, development of new congregations and ministries, advocacy issues, leadership development, etc.). These committees may also help classes to celebrate their cultural diversity and serve as resources for classes concerning culturally sensitive issues.**

It is recommended these committees include the Native American Indian Ministries Council delegates from within the classis, at least one pastor from an RCA Native American Indian congregation and other at-large members. It is also recommended that at least two members of each of these committees are of Native American Indian descent.

General Synod: **General Synod recognizes the Native American Indian Ministries Council as one of its agencies. The Native American Indian Ministries Council shall report annually to General Synod.**

Scholarship Program: **Funds designated for scholarship assistance for Native American students shall be administered by the Native American Indian Ministries Council in cooperation with the General Synod Council (GSC) and will be distributed in accord with the procedures used for administration of the racial/ethnic scholarship program of GSC. These scholarship funds are in addition to funds already available through the GSC racial/ethnic scholarship program. (ADOPTED)**

CONCLUSION

The Native American Indian Ministries Council is in the infancy stage of its new reorganization and restructure. The council requests the prayers of the Reformed Church in America as it continues serving Native American Indian congregations as well as serving all of the Reformed Church in America.

From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

RELATIONSHIP OF THE COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES WITH GSC

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, the racial/ethnic councils, and the general secretary to collaboratively develop a plan that will include the racial/ethnic councils in the process of focusing the denominational vision on the task of new church development, church revitalization, evangelism, urban ministry, global ministry, and other priorities; and further,
>
> to integrate the work of the racial/ethnic councils as ministries within the framework and mutual accountability of the General Synod Council; and further,
>
> to instruct the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee to report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-23, pp 295-96).

The Council for Hispanic Ministries was a participating member of the initial discussion held at the Alma Mathews House in New York City, January 9-10, 1998. The council is in agreement that participation "as an outsider looking in" does not help the development of ministry in the best possible way and to the glory of God. Therefore, the Council for Hispanic Ministries supports the challenge and aim presented in R-23 above.

Yet, as an agency of the Reformed Church in America, the responsibility and calling of the Council for Hispanic Ministries is to identify needs of Hispanics, to encourage ministry among Hispanics, to advocate for programs, to be a prophetic voice in announcing God's will to the nation and beyond, to denounce injustice and oppression, and to be a blessing to the Reformed Church in America. These Christian moral, ethical, and religious values are essential if an impact is to be made in the life of the church.

It is therefore important when considering any changes to the present RCA racial/ethnic council structures to allow for expressions (views and opinions) to be exhibited completely and clearly by each racial/ethnic council. The leadership provided by the racial/ethnic councils has expanded the traditional individual and denominational world view of the church. Appropriately, the ability that enables analysis, evaluation, and decision-making using the racial/ethnic councils' long-term knowledge of their own peoples and cultures needs to be strengthened, not diluted. The Council for Hispanic Ministries welcomes changes to structures that maintain balance, self-identity, leadership responsibility, and vision for ministry aims. To be absorbed into the greater RCA structure without self-determination is turning back the clock. The council asks for your prayers.

1997 SPANISH EDITION OF THE *BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER*

This year the Council for Hispanic Ministries completed a 1997 edition of the *Book of Church Order* in Spanish. After five years of working with an old edition, this was a tremendous task. The council hopes in the future to do annual revisions of the *Book of Church Order* into Spanish.

From the Report of the Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund, Inc.

AMENDMENT OF BYLAWS

To ensure that the GSC member on the RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc. (RCABEF) has the qualifications necessary to serve on this corporation, the following amendment of clarification is recommended in the *Bylaws of the Reformed Church in America Building and Extension, Fund, Inc.*

The following proposed amendment to RCABEF's bylaws was submitted to the RCABEF's board members in writing prior to their regular meeting on February 23, 1998. At that meeting the RCABEF board voted to forward this amendment to the General Synod Council (approved at its April 1998 meeting) and to the 1998 General Synod for approval.

➢The advisory committee recommended to ammend R-10:

R-10.
To adopt the following amendment to the *Bylaws of the Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund., Inc.* (additions are underlined):

ARTICLE III MEMBERSHIP

B. The voting members shall be elected by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, each for a three-year term beginning on July 1 following such election, so that the term of two members shall expire each year. No member shall serve more than two full successive terms plus a one-year unexpired term. The voting membership shall be composed of one member who shall be a member of the General Synod Council Finance Services Committee, with a coextensive term, at the time of election, and with competence in at least one of the fields noted below, and five members at large. All members shall be of full legal age; at least one voting member shall be a resident of the State of New York, and at least two-thirds of the voting members shall be citizens of the United States of America. The nominees of the General Synod, for members at large, shall be the persons requested by the Board of Directors. A competence in the fields of banking, finance, accounting, real estate, or law, particularly as they relate to the evaluating of mortgage investments, shall be the primary qualifications of a majority of the voting members of the corporation. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)≺

From the Report of the Commission on Theology

BYLAW REVISION

The Commission on Theology requests General Synod to approve a change in the *Bylaws of the General Synod* concerning the observer to the Commission on Theology. Currently the bylaws provide for one observer from the Christian Reformed Church and make no provision for a term of office for this observer. The 1997 General Synod adopted a *Formula of Agreement* with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ (*MGS 1997*, R-2, p. 186); and the commission recommends that an observer or observers from the churches represented in the *Formula* attend Commission on Theology meetings.

R-11.
To adopt in first reading the following amendment to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Sec. 8a, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Sec. 8. Commission on Theology

a. **Membership**

The commission shall have ten members. The membership shall include three persons from among the Reformed Church seminary faculties, two persons from among the faculties of the Reformed Church colleges, three pastors, and two laypersons. There shall also be ~~one observer from the Christian Reformed Church,~~ two ecumenical observers named by the Commission on Theology, subject to the approval of the General Synod: one from other reformed bodies and one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The term of office for ecumenical appointees shall be three years. They shall be subject to re-election for one additional term. Competence in theology is required of all members. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the Board of Pensions

BOARD OF PENSIONS CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Board of Pensions Membership Composition Revision

At its January 1998 meeting the Board of Pensions instructed its staff to review the membership composition of the Board of Pensions in order to increase the number of members with financial expertise.

A feature of the present composition of the Board of Pensions is that by drawing its members from the General Synod Council, as well as the provision that the elected officers of General Synod are voting *ex officio* members of the Board of Pensions, plus the designation of the general secretary as executive secretary of the Board of Pensions, ensures that those responsible for the policies that direct the life of the Reformed Church in America also control and have the ability to influence the policies of the Board of Pensions.

This is a unique arrangement among church pension boards. Through this arrangement, the RCA has successfully avoided tensions that have arisen in a number of other denominations between those who are responsible for the broader concerns of the church and the pension board, which by virtue of substantial assets sometimes pursues directions that run counter to those broader concerns. "Fiduciary responsibility" on the part of Board of Pensions members need not be in violation of theological and ecclesiastical values. A significant overlap in the membership of both policy bodies, the General Synod Council and the Board of Pensions, is intended to make what has often been an issue in other church bodies a nonissue in the RCA.

That said, the Board of Pensions has primary responsibility to look after the best interests of the participants in its programs, especially life savings that will provide security in retirement years. There has been a sense that the RCA's Board of Pensions has had an inadequate number of members who have the financial expertise to meet that primary responsibility. Since selection of General Synod Council members to serve on the Board of Pensions usually relies on other qualifications, the time may well come when it will be impossible to find those best qualified to be Board of Pensions members from within the ranks of the General Synod Council. Nor does election to the offices of General Synod vice president and president necessarily correlate positively with the experience necessary to guide the affairs of a multimillion-dollar pension fund.

What might be done to remedy a need for broader expertise while still making it likely that the pension fund serves the church rather than becoming its master? The following recommendation is intended to achieve this purpose.

R-12.
To adopt the following amendment to the *Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions*, Article II, Section 2.1 and Section 2.7 (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Section 2.1. **The management of the Board of Pensions shall be vested in a Board which shall consist of sixteen members, all of whom are members of the Reformed Church and not less than five shall be ordained ministers and not less than five shall be lay members. The executive secretary shall be an *ex-officio* member without vote. ~~The president of the General Synod, the vice-president of the General Synod and t~~The moderator of the General Synod Council shall be a voting *ex-officio* members. ~~The twelve~~ Ten members of the Board shall be elected from the membership of the General Synod Council. They will be nominated by the Coordinating Committee and elected by the General Synod Council for one year ~~terms so as to include three members from the General Synod Finance Services Committee, three members from the General Synod Council Ministry and Personnel Services Committee and six additional members of the General Synod Council.~~ Four members shall be nominated by the General Synod Commission on Nominations and elected by the General Synod to terms of three years and may be re-elected for a second three-year term.**

At least two members shall be professionally qualified in the field~~(s)~~ of law, ~~and~~ four in the field of finance, and one in the field of medicine ~~respectively~~.

Section 2.7. **The Board of Pensions shall appoint such committees as may be necessary to carry on its work.**

(a) A finance committee, an insurance committee, and a policy committee shall be appointed to consist of at least five persons in each committee, ~~five of whom must be members of the Board.~~ (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administrative Services Committee

REVIEW OF GENERAL SYNOD COMMISSIONS

One of the responsibilities of GSC is "to review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that necessity for continuation shall not be assumed (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6b). The first review under this section was conducted in 1984-85 for report to the General Synod in June 1985. The second review was conducted in 1989-90 for report to the General Synod in 1990.

At its April 1990 meeting, General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) voted to review at least two commissions each year, beginning in 1992, rather than review all commissions at one time every five years. A 1991-95 schedule for review of commissions was then approved at the January 1991 GSEC meeting.

GSC, at its March 1995 meeting, voted to continue reviewing at least two commissions each year, beginning in 1997. The following 1996-2000 schedule for review of commissions was then approved:

1996—No review of commissions
1997—Commission on Judicial Business
Commission on Church Order
Commission on Nominations
1998—Commission on Christian Worship
Commission on Theology
1999—Commission on History
Commission on Christian Unity
2000—Commission on Christian Action
Commission for Women

For the review of the Commission on Christian Worship and the Commission on Theology, GSC appointed the following special committee: the Rev. Anthony Vis, the Rev. John Buteyn, Jr., and Dr. Carolyn Jones-Assini.

Following a review of its task, the committee proceeded as follows:

> Each commission was sent a questionnaire on what it viewed as its major accomplishments over the previous five years, the value of its work for the life of the denomination, its plans for the future, etc.
>
> The moderator of each commission was interviewed by the committee during the 1997 meeting of the General Synod in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

GSC received the final report of its committee in April 1998 and makes the following recommendations for each commission. It should be noted that, in addition to specific recommendations, there are brief descriptions of the functions of each commission and sometimes a comment or suggestion.

Commission on Christian Worship

The commission undertakes its task in accordance with its responsibilities as delineated in the *BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. The primary work of this commission is in response to referrals from General Synod. Among recent or current works of this commission are a revised order for the ordination of a minister of Word and sacrament, a revised order for profession of faith, writing of a liturgy for the organization of a new church, writing of a liturgy for the commissioning of an associate in ministry, preparation of a hymnal supplement, and preparing alternate orders for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The commission is also involved with the diversity of worship styles in the RCA and with providing worship resources and educational resources on worship for congregations. Each year the members of the commission do the planning of General Synod worship services. Full-time staff assist this commission in bringing before the RCA its worship and liturgical interests.

> **R-13.**
> **To affirm the continuation of the Commission on Christian Worship as specified in the *Bylaws of the General Synod,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. (ADOPTED)**

Commission on Theology

This commission undertakes its task in accordance with its responsibilities as delineated in the *BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8. The primary work of this commission is in response to referrals from General Synod. The commission seeks to balance responding to referrals in a timely manner with the adequate amount of time needed for report preparation. Three factors introduce further constraints: 1) the uneven rate of referrals from General Synod, 2) the rigidity of the funding process in relationship to the commission's periodic need of expertise beyond its membership, and 3) the limit to meeting two times per year due to budget constraints.

> **R-14.**
> **To affirm the continuation of the Commission on Theology as specified in the *Bylaws of the General Synod,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8. (ADOPTED)**

COMMISSION PROGRESS REPORTS

The *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 1b, state:

All commissions of the General Synod, except the Commission on Nominations, shall present to the General Synod Council each January a progress report for the purpose of facilitating consultation on commission operations and the reporting process to the General Synod.

At its April 1998 meeting, GSC reviewed the progress reports presented by all the commissions (except the Commission on Nominations). GSC determined it was not necessary to receive these reports since full commission reports are always available prior to General Synod for information. Also, GSC staff serve as resource persons for the commissions and facilitate communication between the commissions and GSC on the operations and work of the commissions and the reporting process of the commissions to General Synod. It is the opinion of GSC that Section 1b is cumbersome, burdensome, and creates unnecessary additional work.

R-15.
To adopt in first reading the following amendment to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 1b, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (deletion is stricken out):

Article 5. Commissions

Sec. 1. General Provisions

b. Responsibilities

The commissions shall prepare studies and develop policies for recommendation to the General Synod as they shall consider useful or as the Synod shall assign. They shall also carry out other responsibilities specifically assigned in the *Bylaws* or by legislative act of the General Synod. ~~All commissions of the General Synod, except the Commission on Nominations, shall present to the General Synod Council each January a progress report for the purpose of facilitating consultation on commission operations and the reporting process to the General Synod.~~ **(ADOPTED)**

RELATIONSHIP OF RACIAL/ETHNIC COUNCILS WITH GENERAL SYNOD AND GSC

In order to more effectively respond to the challenge of the Statement of Mission and Vision, and to support the challenges before the Reformed Church in America into the twenty-first century, the project team (see also the project team report in the Christian Education and Discipleship section for additional background information) believes the relationship of the racial/ethnic councils within the organization and structure of the Reformed Church in America established in the late 1960s and in the 1970s needs to be revised, and the role and purpose of the racial/ethnic councils need to be clearly defined.

The project team also believes the Reformed Church in America needs a policy body representative of its best leaders from all of its constituencies that is empowered to advise the General Synod on how it may best direct the RCA toward a future that moves beyond its historic and institutional racism.

Proposed Reorganization, Restructure, and Relationship of Racial/Ethnic Councils within RCA Church Order

The project team developed the following plan of revision for the current organization, structure, and the relationship of the racial/ethnic councils within the RCA church order (see Appendix I and Appendix II for visual representations of the current and proposed revised plan):

1. The racial/ethnic councils retain their identity as racial/ethnic councils. The racial/ethnic councils become part of the General Synod Council.

2. The racial/ethnic councils no longer are identified as "agencies" of the General Synod.

3. The requirement in the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 9, that each racial ethnic/council "appoint one of its members as a corresponding delegate [to the General Synod]" is deleted. (See 8c below for further explanation of racial/ethnic council representation at General Synod.)

4. The racial/ethnic councils continue to function according to bylaws determined by each racial/ethnic council. The bylaws and amendments are approved by General Synod Council upon recommendation from the racial/ethnic councils and review by the GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee.

5. The racial/ethnic councils report to General Synod on their work through the General Synod Council.

6. The racial/ethnic councils each have a representative who serves as an at-large member of the General Synod Council.

7. The racial/ethnic councils each recommend to the Commission on Nominations persons from their membership to be nominated for election to the General Synod Council by General Synod.

8. The General Synod Council amends its bylaws as follows:

   a. The racial/ethnic councils are defined within the General Synod Council bylaws with respect to their relationship within GSC and their relationship to the wider church.

   b. The GSC representative from each racial/ethnic council, in addition to serving as a GSC at-large member, serves on the GSC Coordinating Committee as a representative from that racial/ethnic council. (Note: The members of the GSC Coordinating Committee attend General Synod as corresponding delegates and serve as the Committee of Reference—*Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6j.)

   c. The number of at-large delegates on GSC is expanded from thirteen to seventeen.

9. The racial/ethnic councils continue to have executive staff who are selected in accord with the employment practices of the Reformed Church in America as outlined in the *General Synod Council Handbook* and in the *Executive Procedures Manual* of the RCA, and according to a process determined by each racial/ethnic council executive committee, in consultation with the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services.

10. The racial/ethnic council staff are staff of the General Synod Council. They continue to be accountable to Policy, Planning, and Administration Services. The director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services is responsible for the performance of the racial/ethnic council executive staff, in consultation and cooperation with the executive committees of the racial/ethnic councils.

11. The racial/ethnic council staff and the executive committee of each racial/ethnic council is responsible for the formation of work objectives that are consistent with and supportive of the identified and articulated mission of the Reformed Church in America. Supervision for racial/ethnic council staff is provided by the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services. The annual performance review process is carried out by the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services with the racial/ethnic council executive committee and in consultation with the general secretary. This process will continue to include: 1) opportunity for open discussion among the racial/ethnic council executive committee, the racial/ethnic council executive, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, and the general secretary; and (2) opportunity for consultation by the racial/ethnic council executive committee with the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services and, if requested, the general secretary.

12. Staff assigned to serve as executives for the racial/ethnic councils may serve the wider mission, program, and/or administrative life of the Reformed Church in America. When/if this wider service opportunity is desirable, the proposed assignment is reviewed with the executive, the executive committee of the affected racial/ethnic council, and the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services. If an expanded assignment warrants an adjustment in the executive's position description, the adjustment is developed in consultation with the appropriate racial/ethnic council executive committee, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, and the general secretary.

13. The General Synod Council recommends that General Synod form a new commission in the RCA to assume responsibility for advising the RCA on policies and initiatives that address issues of institutional racism, the commitment of the RCA to become a fully multiracial and multiethnic denomination, and such other related matters and issues deemed appropriate for the work of this commission.

14. The commission membership will include a minimum of eight persons. Four of the members are to be nominated from recommendations provided by the racial/ethnic councils to the Commission on Nominations. Each racial/ethnic council will have at least one representative on the commission at all times.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the racial/ethnic councils is:

> The racial/ethnic councils are constitutional bodies of the Reformed Church in America which express the collective vision of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies or racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically.

To implement the above proposed plan, the General Synod Council recommends:

R-16.
To adopt in first reading the following amendments to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are in stricken out):

Article 4. Membership on General Synod Agencies and Commissions

Sec. 4. Racial/Ethnic Participation

A racial/ethnic council recognized by the General Synod as ~~one of its agencies~~ Council may request racial/ethnic participation in ~~other~~ agencies and commissions of the General Synod. Such requests shall be directed to the General Synod Council, which shall consult with the affected agencies and commissions and make recommendations to the General Synod. If the request for participation is granted by the General Synod, it shall be implemented by the Commission on Nominations.

and further,

Article 6. General Synod Agencies

Sec. 1. Definition

General Synod agencies shall be those boards, ~~councils,~~ and institutions the enabling documents or constitutions of which have been approved by the General Synod.

and further,

Article 8. Corresponding Delegates

Delete Section 9 (existing sections 10-14 to be renumbered 9-13)

~~*Sec. 9. Racial/Ethnic Councils*~~

~~Each racial/ethnic council of the General Synod shall appoint one of its members as a corresponding delegate.~~

and further,

Article 3. General Synod Council

Sec. 1. Membership

The membership of the council shall consist of the following:

a. The president, vice-president, and the immediate past president of General Synod.

b. One member nominated by each of the classes and elected by the General Synod. Nominations shall be open to ministers

and all confessing members of the Reformed Church in America. Members shall hold office only as long as they remain resident within the bounds of the classes they represent.

c. ~~Thirteen~~ Seventeen members at large elected by the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations. In making such nominations, the commission shall insure that there is are within the membership of the council ~~at least one member from within each ethnic minority group represented by a council recognized by the General Synod and that~~ at least two members who are professionally qualified in each of the following fields: law, finance, marketing, and general management. Each of the racial/ethnic councils of the General Synod Council shall recommend persons from their membership to the Commission on Nominations, and the commission shall insure that one person recommended from each of the racial/ethnic councils is serving on the General Synod Council at all times.

Sec. 2. Composition

New Section 2b.

b. The General Synod Council shall have racial/ethnic councils. The racial/ethnic councils are constitutional bodies of the Reformed Church in America which express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically. (ADOPTED)

R-17.
To establish a Commission on Race and Ethnicity, for the purpose of monitoring the Reformed Church in America's commitment to be a fully multiracial and multiethnic fellowship, united in Christ, and to be an advocate for institutional transformation toward this end; and further,

to adopt in first reading the following amendments to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 5, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined):

New Section 7 (existing sections 7-10 to be renumbered 8-11)

Sec. 7. Commission on Race and Ethnicity

a. Membership

The commission shall have eight members. The membership shall include at least one person recommended from each of the racial/ethnic councils of the General Synod Council of the

Reformed Church in America. At least one-half of the membership shall be laypersons.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall advise the church on policies and initiatives that address issues of institutional racism and the commitment of the Reformed Church in America to become a fully multicultural and multiethnic denomination.

2. The commission shall serve as an advocate for transformation of the Reformed Church in America in regard to its multiracial and multiethnic life.

3. The commission shall recommend policies, objectives, guidelines, and strategies to assist the Reformed Church in America in its effort through all of its agencies, commissions, institutions, and other affiliated bodies to become a fully multiracial and multiethnic church.

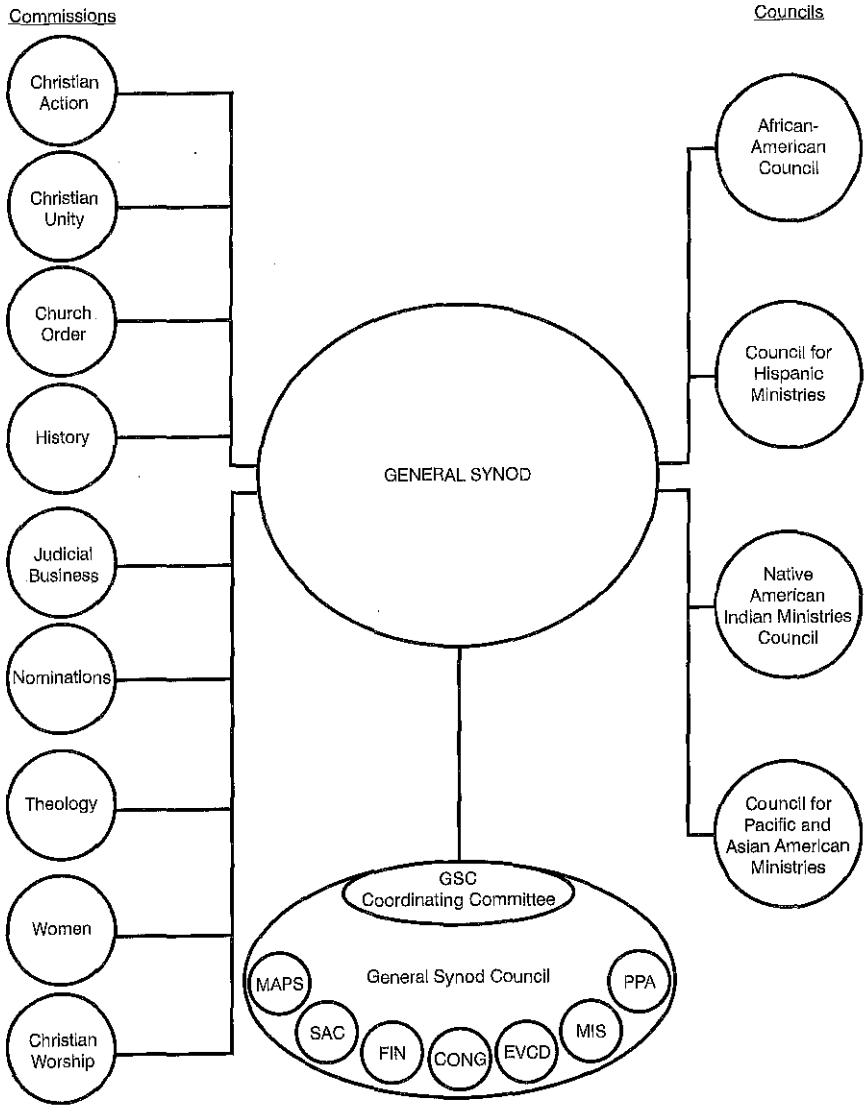
4. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the Reformed Church in America's progress in achieving its multiracial and multiethnic objectives. (ADOPTED)

R-18.
To direct the racial/ethnic councils of the General Synod to revise their bylaws and other governing documents to indicate clearly that they are racial/ethnic councils of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America; and further,

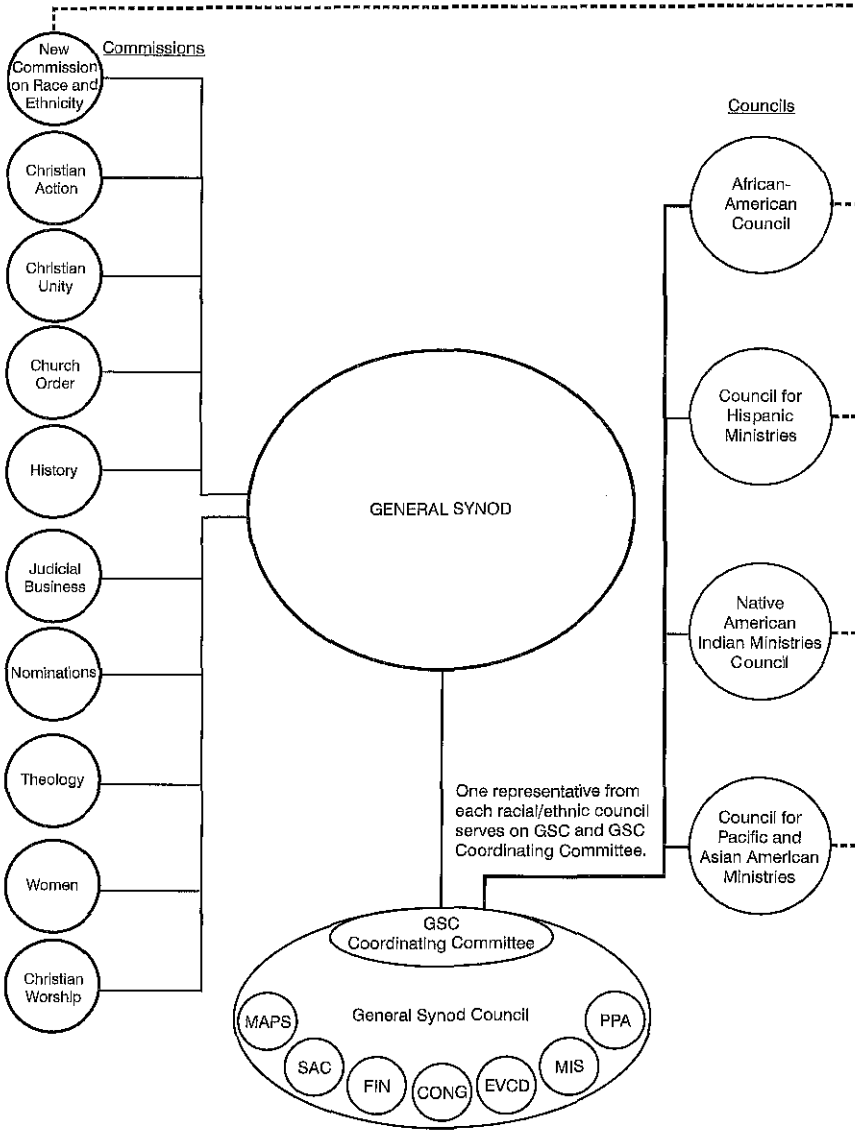
to present these revised bylaws to the General Synod Council, at its fall 1999 meeting, for approval. (ADOPTED)

Appendix I

Present Structural Relationship of the General Synod and the Racial/Ethnic Councils



Appendix II
Proposed Structural Relationship of the General Synod, the General Synod Council and the Racial/Ethnic Councils



(ADOPTED)

From the Report of the Board of Directors

BIENNIAL GENERAL SYNOD MEETINGS

Within its responsibility "to submit to the General Synod any recommendation considered useful for the development, effectiveness, and efficiency of the life, work, and organization of the Reformed Church" (*Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6b) and in keeping with the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80), GSC believes it is time for General Synod to consider a significant change in its own meeting style. GSC believes that the governance of the Reformed Church in America can be accomplished more effectively and efficiently in the future with a General Synod that convenes biennially (every other year).

A biennial General Synod would provide sufficient time for General Synod commissions, task forces, ad hoc committees, etc. to carry out their assignments with more thoroughness. A biennial General Synod would significantly reduce the amount of administrative time currently consumed in developing reports and managing the work of annual meetings of General Synod by RCA staff. A reduction in administrative work could immediately release RCA staff and financial resources to better serve the primary mission of the RCA: "to equip congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God" (RCA Statement of Mission, *MGS 1997*, p. 78).

It is important to note that the cost of the 1998 General Synod meeting will exceed $325,000. This amount does not include RCA staff costs involved in planning, developing, writing, and editing reports, and managing the work before and following the General Synod meeting. The amount of $325,000 does include the cost of producing the *Minutes of the General Synod*, financial reports, and the RCA *Directory* ("Orange Books").

In suggesting this change to biennial General Synod meetings, GSC recognizes that one of the most important functions of the General Synod is the annual gathering of delegates from a widely dispersed RCA in which understanding is built and relationships are formed and strengthened through worship, prayer, and fellowship. In addition, the annual meeting of General Synod has become a time for other constituent groups in the denomination to gather for business, fellowship, spiritual enrichment, and continuing education. The discontinuation of an annual "business meeting" does not necessarily mean the elimination of an annual RCA gathering that could be focused on matters of spiritual renewal, continuing education, worship, and fellowship. In fact, without business to conduct, the RCA may find a biennial gathering for a broad constituency of church leaders (ministers, elders, deacons, nonordained congregation-based staff, etc.) for spiritual renewal, learning, and worship to be a far more effective means of renewing and revitalizing the missional zeal of the RCA than the current RCA way of meeting.

➢The advisory committee recommended to not adopt R-19:

> **R-19.**
> **To request the president of General Synod, in consultation with the general secretary and the moderator of the General Synod Council, to appoint an ad hoc committee to examine alternative ways and schedules for conducting the business of General Synod as well as to consider the feasibility of General Synod meeting biennially; and further,**

to consider the feasibility of a "between-year" invitational biennial church-wide event for ordained and unordained church leaders for the purposes of spiritual renewal, learning, worship, fellowship, and prayer; and further,

to instruct the ad hoc committee present a report to the 1999 General Synod. (NOT ADOPTED)

ATTENDANCE AND REPRESENTATION OF GSC MEMBERS AT GENERAL SYNOD MEETINGS

The General Synod Council recognized during this past year that as part of its responsibility to "identify, manage, and prioritize the resources necessary to implement the vision" (*MGS 1997*, R-3, p. 428) it needed to engage in a process of reviewing the way in which it carries out its responsibilities as both the program agency and the board of directors for the Reformed Church in America. In fact, these discussions within GSC about its own organizational life, structure, style, and number of meetings, and its relationship to the General Synod began in April 1997 but became focused in light of the Statement of Mission and Vision in October 1997 and in January 1998.

At its January 1998 meeting GSC directed its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, in consultation with its Steering Committee for Long-Range Planning, to begin a review of GSC functions, structure, process, and design. While this process is an ongoing assignment, GSC has reached two conclusions: 1) the tasks of missional and church program planning and oversight, policy formation, and general governance assigned to GSC continue to require GSC to meet three times per year as specified in the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 5a; and 2) GSC notes a disconnected relationship, or information chasm, between itself and General Synod. GSC believes this is a serious structural weakness, since GSC is responsible to administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod, to serve as the program agent of the General Synod, and to serve as the Board of Directors of the General Synod (*Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Sections 6a, 6c, and 6g).

GSC believes its ability to carry out its responsibilities will be significantly enhanced if GSC members attend General Synod meetings. GSC, at its April 1998 meeting, voted to revise its 1999 meeting schedule so that one of its three meetings coincides with the annual meeting of General Synod. GSC also voted, at its April 1998 meeting, to discontinue its January meeting (to meet in June 1999 instead) and to meet earlier in April 1999 and later in October 1999 than previously scheduled. Further, GSC believes that because of its ongoing responsibility for, and long-term familiarity with, the life and mission of the RCA, the deliberations and decision- making of the General Synod is enhanced if GSC members are able to participate in the meeting of the General Synod as corresponding delegates. (Corresponding delegates have privilege of the floor but cannot vote.)

➢The advisory committee recommended to not adopt R-20:

R-20.
To adopt in first reading the following amendments to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (deletions are stricken out):

(Existing sections 1-14 to be renumbered 2-13)

Sec. ~~7~~ 1. General Synod Council ~~Coordinating Committee~~

The members of the General Synod Council ~~Coordinating Committee~~ shall be corresponding delegates.

~~*Sec. 14. Personnel and Evaluation Committee Chair or Member*~~

~~**The chair of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, or another of its members designated by the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, shall be a corresponding delegate.**~~
(NOT ADOPTED)

Overtures

General Synod Council Members be Corresponding Delegates at General Synod

1. **The Classis of Lake Erie overtures General Synod to provide for members of the General Synod Council to attend the regular session meeting of General Synod as official nonvoting corresponding delegates; and further,**

   to adopt in first reading the following amendment to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (deletions are stricken out):

   (Existing Sections 1-14 to be renumbered 2-13)

   Sec. ~~7~~ 1. General Synod Council ~~Coordinating Committee~~

   The members of the General Synod Council ~~Coordinating Committee~~ shall be corresponding delegates.

   ~~*Sec. 14. Personnel and Evaluation Chair or Member*~~

   ~~**The chair of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, or another of its members designated by the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, shall be a corresponding delegate.**~~

Reasons:

1. The responsibilities of the General Synod Council, among others, are to administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of General Synod, to be the program agent of the General Synod, and to serve as the board of directors of the corporation (*Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Sections 6a, 6c, and 6g). Currently there is an information chasm between General Synod and General Synod Council members. Information comes to the members of General Synod Council only through RCA staff members present at General Synod or through the *Minutes of the General Synod*. This serves to mitigate General Synod Council's ability to implement the actions and decisions and to effectively administer the programs of General Synod.

2. It is appropriate that the board of directors of a corporation be present at the corporation's annual meeting.

3. There would be no increased cost for the General Synod meeting, since the General Synod Council would adjust one of its required three meeting dates per year to be coterminous with General Synod.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-21.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of this overture was addressed in R-20.➢

2. The Classis of Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to provide for members of the General Synod Council to attend the regular session meeting of General Synod as official voting delegates; and further,

to adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the *Bylaws of the General Synod*; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods; <u>members of the General Synod Council;</u> two General Synod professor of theology delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; and corresponding delegates provided for in the *Bylaws of the General Synod*.

and further,

to adopt in first reading the following amendment to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Section 7, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (deletion is stricken out):

Delete Section 7 (existing sections 8-14 to be renumbered 7-13)

~~***Sec. 7. General Synod Council Coordinating Committee***~~

~~**The members of the General Synod Council Coordinating Committee shall be corresponding delegates.**~~

Reasons:

1. The responsibilities of the General Synod Council, among others, are to administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of General Synod, to be the program agent of the General Synod, and to serve as the board of directors of the corporation (*Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Sections 6a,

6c, and 6g). Currently there is an information chasm between General Synod and General Synod Council members. Information comes to the members of General Synod Council only through RCA staff members present at General Synod or through the *Minutes of the General Synod.* This serves to mitigate General Synod Council's ability to implement the actions and decisions and to effectively administer the programs of General Synod.

2. It is appropriate that the board of directors of a corporation be present at the corporation's annual meeting.

3. There would be no increased cost for the General Synod meeting since the General Synod Council would adjust one of its required three meeting dates per year to be coterminous with General Synod.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-22.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This would significantly change the voting body of the General Synod, creating a repeating voting block.

2. It is possible to be a member of the General Synod Council without holding church office, opening up the possibility of a conflict in polity.≺

Co-Pastors

3. The Regional Synod the Mid-Atlantics overtures General Synod to undertake a study of the issue of co-pastors by the Commission on Church Order, for report to the 1999 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. Some ministers are serving in the capacity of co-pastors, for which there is no provision in the *Book of Church Order.*

2. The lack of a *Book of Church Order* provision for co-pastors can lead to a confusion of roles if there is no provision for such a relationship.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-23.
To refer overture 3 to the Commission on Church Order for study and report to the General Synod, with the instruction that the Commission on Church Order consult with current co-pastors. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Some ministers are serving in the capacity of co-pastors, for which there is no provision in the *Book of Church Order.*

2. The lack of a *Book of Church Order* provision for co-pastors can lead to a confusion of roles if there is no provision for such a relationship.≺

INTRODUCTION

CHURCH VOCATIONS: PROVIDING FOR THE CHURCH'S PROFESSIONAL MINISTRY

> *"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"* (Rom. 10:14-15).

The best leaders are talented, trained, and, most important, called. CHURCH VOCATIONS coordinates programs and services for those who work professionally for the church. It involves their recruitment, selection, preparation, employment, support, development, personnel services, and eventual retirement. It is concerned with such questions as:

- What human resources are needed to fulfill the mission of the RCA?
- How can the RCA make most effective use of the human resources that have been committed to the service of Christ throughout the church?
- What kind of support is necessary to help those who serve to do so effectively, and how can that support best be made available?

The RCA's two seminaries, Western and New Brunswick, train individuals for the broad spectrum of ministry that today's churches require. In order to better guide and assist students preparing for RCA ministry who attend seminaries other than New Brunswick and Western, the 1984 General Synod authorized the establishment of the Theological Education Agency (TEA).

All the ordained ministers of the RCA, as well as others who work for the RCA or one of its institutions (congregations, conference centers, regional or denominational offices, etc.) are served by the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services (MAPS). This office defines itself as "a personnel support unit for professional church workers, RCA."

Its clients include parish ministers, non-parish ministers (church-related and non-church-related), retired ministers, active and retired missionaries, directors of Christian education, and lay employees.

Support for professional church workers also includes the services of the Board of Pensions, which offers group insurance and an annuity plan for active workers, as well as a program of financial support and pastoral care for more than five hundred who are now retired from the service of the RCA.

Major responsibility for CHURCH VOCATIONS is assigned to New Brunswick and Western Theological Seminaries and the Theological Education Agency; the General Synod Council's Ministry and Personnel Services Committee; and the Board of Pensions.

REPORTS ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

> "Bind up the broken-hearted...Ancient ruins shall be rebuilt and sites long desolate restored; They shall repair the ruined cities and restore what has long lain desolate" (Isa. 61:1, 4, NEB).

New Brunswick Theological Seminary is a teaching institution of the Reformed Church in America called by God to be a servant of the whole church of Jesus Christ. The Seminary's mission is to continue the ministry of Jesus in our time and place by enabling persons to translate their calling and gifts into faithful Christian ministry (Mission Statement of New Brunswick Theological Seminary in *Constitution and Bylaws* for New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Article II, Section 1).

The prayer of New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) is the vision of Isaiah, which is the theme text for the 1998 General Synod. As New Brunswick Theological Seminary lives out its mission statement, the results that are hoped for include the binding up of the broken-hearted and the repair and restoration of the cities.

Binding Up the Broken-Hearted

Binding up the broken-hearted is a particularly fitting ministry for those in the Reformed tradition. It is not that we who are Reformed are any more compassionate than others. It is the understanding of the Word that makes the difference. When someone in our culture is described as broken-hearted, the image is of a person who is sad, perhaps lonely, who has suffered the fracture of a relationship. Often romantic themes are involved. In this context, the heart is a metaphor for the emotions. Were we to take Isaiah's word simply as it sounds in our time, we might propose education for ministry that emphasizes the skills of compassion and caring.

Being Reformed requires that we look at Isaiah's words through Hebrew eyes as well as our own. Then a whole new world opens. For the Hebrews, the heart was the seat of the mind and will, not of the emotions. And so the broken-hearted are not the sad and the lonely. The broken-hearted are those whose minds are in pieces. The broken-hearted are those whose will is scattered, ineffectual, and fragmented. God the Creator intended humanity to be whole minded, with strong will, choosing life given by God and perceiving creation and the relationships between God and creation accurately.

Binding up the broken-hearted, in Isaiah's sense, is an educational task. We are to teach the realities of being God's children, living in right relationship with God and one another, and to enable those who are taught to teach others. Binding up the broken-hearted is part and parcel of the mission of New Brunswick Seminary.

Repair and Restoration of Cities

New Brunswick Theological Seminary is also much engaged with cities. Isaiah's metaphor of ancient ruins fits the situation for many of those who come to study at NBTS. And it is descriptive for many congregations of many denominations. All of our cities, large and small, throughout the United States and Canada, have places that appear to have been abandoned both by God and by people. Ancient sanctuaries built to seat 1,500 loom darkly over congregations of forty persons. Desolation is not too strong a word for scenes that are played out on streets in Los Angeles, Grand Rapids, and New York.

Again, Isaiah's word is the vision and work of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Because the Spirit of the creating and loving God is upon us, what appears as ruin and desolation will be restored. Placed in an urban context, the seminary not only hears and shares the good news proclaimed by Isaiah; it teaches the practice of sharing the vision with those who have not heard, as well as teaching some techniques for working in congregations to bring the vision into reality.

New Brunswick Theological Seminary sees and gives form to God's Spirit upon us in the life it lives educating over two hundred students from over twenty denominations at two locations—New Brunswick, New Jersey, and Jamaica, Queens, New York City. In the seminary's daily life it strives to see, hear, and act on the Word found in the words. The words are different all the time. What follows are reports of some of the words of the last twelve months. In each of these some folks have met the Word and made another small step toward the vision granted to Isaiah.

ATS ACCREDITATION

The seminary had its decennial review by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) during 1997. ATS is the body that sets the standards for theological education. To be a recognized and accredited seminary it is necessary to both belong to the ATS and meet its standards. While some professional certifying organizations have basic and easily met standards, ATS is not one of them. The accreditation visits are thorough, and passing is not a foregone conclusion. When the accrediting team finds variance from ATS standards, the school may well be accredited but the accreditation will bear notations that describe the ways in which that school does not measure up to the standards. In addition, a deficient school may receive accreditation for a shorter period than the normative ten years.

At the present time 233 seminaries are members of ATS. In the current directory of ATS schools only 140, a little better than half the total, are fully accredited without notations. Based on the 1997 ATS accreditation visit, New Brunswick Theological Seminary received accreditation for the full normative ten years without notations. Concurrently with ATS, the State of New Jersey conducted its triennial review for relicensure and renewed the seminary's license as a degree-granting institution.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

During the process of accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools, the seminary was required to produce four plans. Three of them, a strategic plan for enrollment, a strategic plan for development, and a financial plan for 1997-2000, were submitted to ATS on November 15, 1997. The fourth is an overall strategic plan for the seminary. That plan is due for submission to ATS on November 15, 1998.

During the past year a Strategic Planning Commission was established to bring together the departmental plans already in place and to form an overall strategic plan for New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Right now the plan is very much in process. A highlight that can be reported to this 1998 General Synod, however, is the formulation of the seminary's shared core values. As a part of the process, the seminary has been asking itself what is most important. The Shared Core Institutional Values Statement will encapsulate what NBTS is about. The current draft identifies the following fourteen shared core institutional values:

1. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values the Bible as the only rule for faith and practice, the authoritative witness to God's self-revelation.

2. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values being an institution of the Reformed Church in America.

3. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values the privilege of serving a spectrum of denominations and being trusted by them to provide theological education for their candidates for ministry.

4. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values education.

5. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values spiritual formation.

6. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values the Reformed Church in America's Office of General Synod Professor of Theology—both as presence and as symbol.

7. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values preparing persons for ministries that are both pastoral and prophetic.

8. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values community.

9. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values diversity; diversity of context—rural, suburban, and urban; diversity of origin—racial, ethnic, and cultural; diversity of class; and diversity of faith.

10. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values providing theological education for persons to whom theological education may not otherwise be available.

11. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values theological research and publication as a form of ministry that adds to the fund of knowledge that serves the church, the academic community, and society at large.

12. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values its location in the northeastern region of the United States and understands itself to be shaped by the resources and challenges of the northeastern regional church and community.

13. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values excellence in all facets of its community and corporate life.

14. New Brunswick Theological Seminary values stewardship—the wise and responsible use of human, material, and financial resources.

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE IN METRO-URBAN MINISTRY

As noted above, New Brunswick Theological Seminary values its context in urban America and is committed to preparing people for ministry in the cities. The seminary began to take the cities seriously when it established the Evening Theological Education Program in 1978. President Howard Hageman and the faculty at that time saw clearly that urban congregations were often served by pastors who, from financial necessity, were "tent-makers." These pastors knew well their need for theological education but did not have the option of quitting their secular job and going to seminary during the day for three years. So NBTS began offering classes at night in two locations, New Brunswick and Jamaica, Queens. Over the twenty years, that experimental program has become a way of life. Most seminary classes are now offered in the evening, and most NBTS students are working on their degrees while continuing ministry and/or secular employment.

In 1992 the Rev. Warren Dennis became the first professor of metro-urban ministry at NBTS. In 1997 both Dennis and the seminary achieved doctoral status. Dennis received his doctoral degree from United Theological Seminary in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. New Brunswick Theological Seminary was accredited by ATS and licensed by the State of New Jersey to offer the Doctor of Metro-Urban Ministry (D.Min.) degree. This degree program will begin in the fall of 1998. Well over one hundred preliminary applications have been received. Because resources are limited and the program is new, the initial class is limited to sixteen. The seminary received several generous donations to begin an endowment for the urban ministry professorate, and as these resources grow, NBTS will expand the program to meet a clear and pressing need of the church.

JOHN SUYDAM CONFERENCE ON THE ETHICS OF HEALTH CARE DELIVERY

In October 1997 the seminary sponsored the first John Suydam Conference on the Ethics of Health Care Delivery. The conference attracted national attention and was attended by over two hundred health care, social work, and pastoral care professionals. Participants came from several surrounding states, with a few who found the conference attractive enough to purchase an airplane ticket to travel from some more distant states. The conference, Valuing the Patient—An Open Dialogue, dealt with end-of-life and everyday care issues. Major presentations were made by Dr. Joanne Lynn on care of the dying, Dr. Pat Murphy on improving communication and serving the needs of the dying patient, and the Rev. Dr. Allen Verhey on the ethical issues that arise in everyday health care. The conference was underwritten by the seminary's John Suydam Endowment for Ethics. The Honorable John Kuhlthau and Dr. Carol Kuhlthau established this endowment. John Kuhlthau is the grandson of John Suydam.

LILLY GRANT FOR TECHNOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

In December 1997 the seminary was awarded a $210,000 grant by the Eli Lilly Foundation to develop the interface between technology and theological education. What happens as a result of this grant will make some permanent changes in the way NBTS does theological education.

One goal for the program is:

> To develop models within the seminary of computerized instructional modules to be used for the teaching of course "information" which would increase the amount of time available in class for skill development and discussion (Quote from the grant proposal application prepared by NBTS to the Eli Lilly Foundation).

While the seminary does not yet know just what these modules will look like, they will probably create significant changes in how class hours are used. There could be fewer lectures with students taking notes to gather information and more interaction between people who already possess a level of accurate information. If the seminary does end up having fewer lectures, the computer modules will need to be designed to cover all the facets of the educational process that a lecture covers. The computer module will need to be interactive as the lecture environment is interactive.

A class lecture is different from a reading assignment. The lecture method requires a nimbleness of mind and an attentiveness of body that is not necessary in reading a book. The book text does not change. The inflection given by a text is created by the mind of the reader. The living lecturer can modulate the voice, back up and repeat, respond to questioning looks, and expand a point that the body language of the hearers proclaims unclear. To provide the "information" of a course on computer module will mean much more than simply providing a text online. There will need to be a living interaction.

In addition to changing classroom experience, the project will also provide each student with some tools. Computer workstations will be available, connected to the internet. Each student will have an e-mail mailbox. There will be course-specific discussion groups online. All in all, the education for ministry will become much more congruent with the milieu in which our students will be required to practice ministry.

STANDING SEMINAR ON RCA STATEMENT OF MISSION AND VISION

Each year the seminary sponsors the Standing Seminar on Reformed Church History. The sessions focus on a particular aspect of the history of the Reformed Church in America. Recent past topics included "John Henry Livingston" and "Women in the RCA." The seminar is held each spring and runs for six to ten weeks. A light supper is served at 5:00 p.m., followed by the presentation and a question-and-answer session. The program ends at 6:15 p.m. to enable students to get to class by 6:20. The seminar is advertised to congregations, so NBTS normally has a nice mix of folk from both congregations and the seminary community. For 1998 the theme was "The RCA Mission Statement and the Future of the Reformed Church." The presenters and topics for this seminar were:

Monday, February 2. "The Origin and Development of the Mission Statement: Why a Mission Statement? Why This Mission Statement?" the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson and the Rev. Shari Brink, presenters.

Monday, February 16. "The *Apostolaat* and the *Missio Christi*: Incorporating Mission into the Government and Organization of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk," Allan Janssen, presenter.

Monday, February 23. "The New Mission Statement and Organizing for Mission," the Rev. Marvin D. Hoff, presenter.

Monday, March 2. "The Mission Statement in the Light of Major Themes in Church History," the Rev. Dr. John Beardslee, presenter.

Monday, March 9. "The Mission Statement and the Laity: Catechesis and the Church's Teaching Mission," the Rev. Renee House, presenter.

Monday, March 23. "The Relationship of the Mission Statement to the Church's Confessions," the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries, presenter.

THANKS TO RETIRING NBTS BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBERS

The following six persons complete on June 30, 1998, their terms of service on the NBTS board of trustees: the Rev. Dr. John Collier, Roland Euwema, Ann Hesselink, Sei Chang Jhoung, John Stokes, and Dr. Fred Wezeman. The seminary is deeply grateful for the commitment, dedication, and hard work of each of these trustees. Being a trustee requires a great deal more than simply attending three meetings a year. Each of these six has, in his or her own way, changed the life of the seminary for the better.

NBTS SEMINARIAN ELECTED BY WARC

During their careers a number of graduates of NBTS have served in denominational, national, and global organizations. The seminary is particularly honored that one of its current students, Anna Melissa James, has begun such service before graduation. At the assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) meeting at Debrecen, Hungary, in August 1997, James was elected to the WARC executive committee. WARC, of which the Reformed Church in America is a founding member, is a worldwide organization whose members are churches of the Reformed tradition.

NBTS SEMINARY ADMINISTRATOR CALLED TO SERVE IN BOSNIA

The Rev. James Seawood, NBTS dean of students and a major in the Chaplain Corps of the U.S. Army Reserves, was called to active duty to serve in Bosnia as a chaplain for at least six months. He is part of the United Nations peacekeeping efforts in that area.

Seawood departed Fort Dix, New Jersey, on December 1, 1997. In addition to traditional chaplaincy duties, Seawood serves as a U.S. military liaison to nongovernmental organizations, including international groups such as UNICEF and Church World Service, and local institutions such as orphanages and schools. In this role he worked to coordinate participation of U.S. military personnel and their NATO counterparts in efforts to assist Bosnian civilians to begin the healing and rebuilding of their war-torn country.

During Dean Seawood's absence the seminary was fortunate to engage the services of the Rev. Barbara Alexander and Niell Tolboom to maintain recruiting efforts in the states of New York and New Jersey.

COMPREHENSIVE CAMPUS PLAN

In late 1996 an anonymous donor made two gifts to NBTS. The first gift was $100,000 to provide for a comprehensive campus plan. The seminary is rejoicing in the blessing of increased enrollment. But as the seminary looks toward the future, the seminary is asking whether the current campus has the potential to accommodate a permanently larger institution. The donor was aware of these discussions and provided the grant to help answer the question. In October 1997 the architectural firm of WBTL Inc. provided a resounding "yes." The firm conducted a thorough investigation and produced a design for reworking the campus that not only allows space for an increased program but provides opportunity for an additional building that could be available for wider church use.

The second gift of the anonymous donor was a promise to provide a gift of $1 million plus to implement a portion of the comprehensive campus plan. Just which portion will be implemented and when it will be implemented are currently being discussed.

DISPENSATION FOR DAE HEYONG CHO

The Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary received a petition from the Classis of Queens for a dispensation from the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Dae Heyong Cho. Cho earned the M.Div. degree at Seoul Theological Seminary in Korea. To qualify for dispensation as a candidate from other than an RCA seminary, degrees from schools other than New Brunswick Theological Seminary or Western Theological Seminary must be from a school accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada or another agency approved by the General Synod Council (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 2b). Seoul Theological Seminary by virtue of location is not eligible for ATS accreditation. The General Synod Council has taken no action to approve an accrediting agency other than ATS.

The Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, upon recommendation of the faculty of NBTS, presents a request for dispensation from the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry on behalf of Dae Heyong Cho. Cho has done post-M.Div. work at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and has taken specific RCA coursework, including RCA polity and the writing of a credo.

R-1.
To grant Dae Heyong Cho a dispensation from the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

RETIREMENT

Robert J. Hoeksema

Since 1990 the Rev. Dr. Robert J. Hoeksema has been director of supervised ministries at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. He concludes his service to the seminary, retiring on June 30, 1998.

R-2.
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS Robert J. Hoeksema has given his entire life in service to the Reformed Church in America—pastor of Schoharie Reformed Church in Schoharie, New York, from 1957 to 1962; pastor of First Reformed Church of Bethlehem in Selkirk, New York, from 1962 to 1971; pastor of Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, from 1971 to 1978; pastor of Addisville Reformed Church in Richboro, Pennsylvania, from 1978 to 1990; and director of supervised ministries and assistant professor of practical theology at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey, from 1990 to 1998; and

WHEREAS Robert J. Hoeksema has been a pastor of consummate competence, who throughout his ministry lived deeply with those he served and engaged in constant continuing education to serve them better; and

WHEREAS Robert J. Hoeksema has been a colleague and friend, known and trusted by people in every region of the Reformed Church in America; and

WHEREAS Robert J. Hoeksema has given in all his ministry focused and detailed care and attention to the nurture of congregations and individual members, and for the past eight years has given such care to students in preparation for ministry at New Brunswick Theological Seminary;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, declares its thanks to God for the faithful life and ministry of Robert J. Hoeksema and wishes both him and his wife, Lucille Tysse Hoeksema, the blessings and joys of a fruitful retirement. (ADOPTED)

Report of Western Theological Seminary

"For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations" (Ps. 100:5).

These familiar words of the psalmist provide a fitting theme as we reflect upon the past year at Western Theological Seminary. By God's grace, the seminary is strong—steady in vision and purpose and hard at work translating that vision into the courses, technology, and disciplines that are already beginning to transform the preparation for ministry at Western. While change is never easy, times of change can sometimes make the long view clearer. Whether one looks back all the way to the seminary's beginning or as far as one can imagine into the future, the story is one of God's faithfulness to every succeeding generation.

Following are some of the highlights, concerns, and works-in-progress of the past year. They include many signs of change—retiring faculty and expectations of new faces, growth in enrollment, and a carefully constructed new M.Div. curriculum that is set to be launched in the fall. This report also reflects the regular rhythms of seminary life, which go on unabated. God's faithful presence has been apparent in those things that continue as well as in those things that begin and end, and for all of them the seminary gives thanks. Indeed the Lord is good!

ENROLLMENT

For the second consecutive year Western has welcomed a class of entering juniors that is both larger and younger than in recent years. Thirty-two full-time, matriculated M. Div. students began seminary study in September 1997, with an additional dozen part-time or returning first-year students completing the junior class. These students bring Western's total enrollment to approximately 150.

Approximately 75 percent of the new students come from RCA churches, and over half are recent graduates of the three RCA colleges—Hope, Central, and Northwestern. A current student, Joshua Blunt, was hired to assist the church vocations staff in building relationships with college students who have expressed an interest in seminary training.

To relieve the housing shortage brought about by increased enrollment, a new six-unit townhouse building was erected during the summer of 1997. The new building completes the existing townhouse residence plan. In addition, an existing triplex near the campus was purchased to expand student housing options.

FACULTY AND STAFF

In September 1997 Western welcomed to campus the Rev. Dr. Vernon and Carla Sterk as visiting professors of missiology and missionaries-in-residence. The Sterks returned to their post as RCA missionaries in Chiapas, Mexico, in February 1998, but they will continue to share their time between Mexico and Michigan, teaching at Western during the first semester and continuing their work in Chiapas the rest of the year.

Several faculty members saw books published in 1997-98. They include: *Glimpses of Glory: Daily Reflections on the Bible* (Westminster John Knox), by the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, associate professor of Old Testament; *On Being Reformed* (Korean edition) and *Calvin's First Catechism* (Westminster John Knox), by the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, professor of systematic theology; *Creational Theology and the History of Physical Science: The*

Creationist Tradition from Basil to Bohr (Brill), by the Rev. Dr. Christopher Kaiser, professor of historical and systematic theology; and *Missional Church* (Wm. B. Eerdmans), by the Rev. Dr. George Hunsberger, professor of missiology, and others.

Three professors carry continuing publishing responsibilities. The Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink, professor of historical theology, is general editor of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, which published four volumes this year. The Rev. Dr. Thomas Boogaart, professor of Old Testament, serves as coeditor of the journal, *Perspectives*. The Rev. Dr. James I. Cook, emeritus professor of New Testament, serves as editor of *Reformed Review*.

Hunsberger and Bechtel enjoyed sabbatical leaves during the year to work on writing and scholarly projects.

RETIREMENTS

One faculty member and one staff member retired at the end of the academic year. They are the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink and Dorothy Boer.

I. John Hesselink

The Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and raised in Leighton and Pella, Iowa. He graduated from Central College in 1950 (B.A.), Western Theological Seminary in 1953 (B.D.), and Basel University in 1961 (Th.D.). He has received honorary doctorates from both Central and Hope colleges. He pursued postdoctoral studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School, the Free University in Amsterdam, and Oxford University. He also studied under two of this century's leading theologians: Emil Brunner at the International Christian University in Tokyo and Karl Barth at the University of Basel.

Hesselink served, with his wife, Etta Ter Louw Hesselink, as a missionary in Japan for twenty years, beginning as an evangelist to students in Fukuoka, Kyushu. After receiving his doctorate in 1961, he taught historical theology and ecclesiastical Latin at Tokyo Union Seminary and courses in Christian doctrine at Meiji Gakuin University and the Reformed/ Presbyterian Seminary in Tokyo. In 1973 he returned to the United States to take up the presidency of Western Theological Seminary, a position he held until 1985, when he returned to full-time teaching as the Albertus C. Van Raalte Professor of Systematic Theology at Western. He was elected vice-president of General Synod in 1994 and president in 1995.

Hesselink's ministry as teacher, scholar, administrator, and missionary has been long and distinguished. Through his teaching ministry at Tokyo Union Seminary, he nurtured the gospel ministry of the Christian church in Japan. He established abiding relationships with hundreds of Japanese Christians, many of whom later studied with him at Western Theological Seminary. John and Etta Hesselink are highly respected and deeply loved by those who were touched by their ministry in Japan.

As a scholar, Hesselink has been one of the primary interpreters of the Reformed tradition in North America, particularly the thought of John Calvin. At Western Theological Seminary he is affectionately regarded as the personification of Calvin for our age. He is also known as one of the foremost interpreters of his teachers, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

As a teacher, Hesselink engendered in his students an appreciation for Reformed theology and the confessions of the church. Never an ivory tower scholar, he also revealed to his students his love of classical music (especially Brahms) and team sports (especially Detroit Tigers baseball). His students regard him with great appreciation and affection.

As president, Hesselink guided Western Theological Seminary through a time of growth and consolidation. During his presidency a new position in theology and history was established and a Doctor of Ministry degree program inaugurated. He raised funds to construct the Cook Center for Theological Research, completed in 1981, as well as to redesign and refurbish much of the present seminary complex. He strengthened ties with churches, set high standards for academic training, and helped restructure the seminary's administration.

Hesselink is the author of *On Being Reformed* (now published in both Japanese and Korean editions), *Calvin's Concept of the Law,* and *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary.* His Osterhaven Lectures, "Sovereign Grace and Human Freedom," are scheduled for publication in 1999. He has also published essays and articles in a variety of periodicals, books, and theological dictionaries.

R-3.
To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, on the ninth day of June 1998, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to Western Theological Seminary and to the Reformed Church in America by the Reverend Doctor I. John Hesselink, whose gifts of teaching, scholarship, and ministry have blessed the lives of students, colleagues, and congregations and strengthened the work of theological studies and pastoral education in the United States and Japan, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, express to John and Etta Hesselink its gratitude, admiration, and affection and offer its prayers for years of health, love, and joy in continuing service to Christ and his church. (ADOPTED)

R-4.
To declare the Rev. I. John Hesselink professor emeritus of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Dorothy Boer

Dorothy Boer is known with affection and appreciation by hundreds of pastors, Christian educators, and lay leaders for her service in the Christian Ministry Field at Western Theological Seminary over the past twenty-two years. For many, inside and outside of the seminary, she has been a welcoming presence. She always viewed her work as a member of the seminary staff as a calling, not just as a job. Personnel have come and gone in the Christian Ministry Field, while Boer remained as a valued and experienced member of the team.

Boer, whose origins were in Hull, Iowa, was widowed in 1960 through a tragic construction accident, and she was left with two small boys to raise. In 1965 she moved to Holland, Michigan, where she was employed for ten years at Hope College as a secretary in the music library, the speech department, and the history department. In 1976 she was called to the seminary to work under the leadership of professor Gary Wilterdink. She soon moved to the position of administrative assistant, giving support to five faculty and four programs: M.Div., M.R.E., Formation for Ministry, and D.Min. She made special contributions in Formation for

Ministry, as program assistant in the D.Min. program, and as coordinator of student preaching assignments. Churches, pastors, and elders have come to know and trust her leadership. Boer also organized and participated in the trips to the Robert Schuller Institute for Successful Church Leadership in Garden Grove, California, for seniors and Th.M. students and spouses.

As the "front-line" person for the director of counseling, Boer was particularly sensitive to student needs. This dimension of pastoral care was expressed in many ways, one being her lectures on the grief process every year for the past twenty years in the Rev. Dr. Stanley Rock's required counseling class. As the seminary has moved through many changes and periods of new leadership, Dorothy Boer has been consistent and faithful in meeting the challenges and complexities of preparing men and women for the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ.

R-5.
To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, on the ninth day of June 1998, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to Western Theological Seminary and to the Reformed Church in America by Dorothy Boer, whose competent and careful work as secretary blessed the lives of students and colleagues; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, expresses to Dorothy Boer its gratitude, admiration, and affection, and offers its prayers for years of health, love, and joy in continuing service to Christ and the church. (ADOPTED)

The retirements of the Rev. Drs. I. John Hesselink and James Cook (in 1995—*MGS 1995*, R-8 and R-9, pp. 259-60) have occasioned a search for new faculty to teach in the areas of Reformed theology and New Testament. The search committee is working actively to engage new faculty members by the summer of 1998.

NOMINATION TO THE OFFICE OF GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY (FOURTH OFFICE)

The Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel joined the Western Theological Seminary faculty in 1994 after serving on the faculty of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia. She is currently associate professor of Old Testament at Western Theological Seminary. As part of Bechtel's most recent review, the Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees affirmed her desire to serve as a professor of theology of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and is placing her in nomination to that office as provided for in the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 3.

The president called in the Rev. Anthony Vis, a member of the Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees. Rev. Vis presented the Board's nomination of the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology.

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel has shown herself to be an exceptional teacher who brings unique gifts for effectiveness in teaching to the seminary classroom; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel has shown herself to be a competent and respected Old Testament scholar with a significant ministry of writing, in addition to an extensive ministry of speaking and teaching; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel is an energetic community builder among students, a servant of the whole church of Jesus Christ, and a gracious colleague;

THEREFORE, it is fitting and proper that the Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary nominates the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel to the Office of Professor of Theology of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

R-6.
To elect the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, associate professor of Old Testament, to the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology in the Reformed Church in America, as provided for in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 3. (ADOPTED)

The president introduced the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel to the synod. The president read the "Appointment of a General Synod Professor of Theology" from the *Book of Church Order* and proceeded to conduct a service of installation into the office of General Synod Professor of Theology for the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel. The Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel read the "Declaration for General Synod Professors of Theology" from the *Book of Church Order* during the service of installation.

NEW MASTER OF DIVINITY CURRICULUM

Beginning in the fall of 1998 Western will initiate a new curriculum for the Master of Divinity degree program. The seminary will switch from quarters to semesters in order to provide more opportunity for integrating coursework and to reduce the amount of administration, grading, and testing required. A dramatically new approach to formation for ministry will integrate field experience, work with mentors, peer group support, and classroom experience into "learning webs." These learning webs will require students to develop learning covenants to give shape to their own learning. The new curriculum carries increased emphases on leadership, on spiritual formation, and on developing a missional vision for the church, while maintaining a solid core of biblical, historical, and theological studies.

INTERCULTURAL IMMERSION

In January 1998 a group of students traveled to sites in Israel and Palestine to experience another culture, to learn about the worldwide church, and to experience the gospel from other points of view. They visited ancient biblical sites and also learned about the cultural, political, and economic realities of today's Israel and Palestine from the people who live there. Dr. Sonja Stewart, professor of Christian education, led the trip. An intercultural immersion experience is a required component of the new master of divinity curriculum, and such trips will be a major focus of a new January term, between the first and second semesters. In January 1999 the immersion experience will be held in Chiapas, Mexico.

STUDENT LIFE

The annual all-seminary retreat was held at Geneva Camp and Retreat Center in Holland, Michigan, September 5, 1997. Student council president Trygve Johnson led the opening worship, and songwriter Michael Kelly Blanchard was the featured retreat leader.

The student council provided a number of social activities, including monthly parents' nights out, community meals, and the annual spring banquet.

CONnECTS

The Continuing Education for Christian Training and Service (CONnECTS) in 1997-98 included lectures and workshops on topics ranging from drama in worship and preaching to the Heidelberg Catechism, from relearning Christian education and youth ministry in a newly diverse context to learning how to use one's life story to connect with others. Among the guest lecturers and workshop leaders were the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, the Rev. Dr. Leanne Van Dyk, Jeff and Karen Barker, the Rev. Dr. James E. Davison, and Virginia Stem Owens. The annual M.E. Osterhaven Lectures in Reformed theology were given in March 1998 by the Rev. Dr. Bruce McCormack of Princeton Theological Seminary, and the first Ridder Leadership Conference was held in October 1997 with the Rev. Dr. Lyle Schaller.

Summer of 1997 continuing education events included a Children and Worship training conference led by Dr. Sonja Stewart and a travel seminar to Rome led by the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink.

TECHNOLOGY

A number of improvements were made to Western's technological support system during the year. The seminary purchased twenty-five new computers and upgraded software to provide adequate hardware and a consistent software package to all faculty and staff. One classroom was outfitted for multimedia learning, with projection equipment suitable for computer-generated presentations, and every classroom was equipped with a large-screen television, videocassette recorder, and compact disk player. The library computers were also updated, and fiber-optic cable was installed for high-speed Internet access. A plan to set aside funds for future upgrades was also instituted.

FINANCES

Western Theological Seminary enjoyed strong financial growth this past year. The Campaign for Western officially concluded June 30, 1997, with a total in gifts and pledges of $13.5 million. Gifts to the campaign will benefit the seminary in perpetuity as endowments were created to meet salaries, provide financial aid for students, support programs, and upgrade automation and technological needs.

In addition to the campaign, Western also experienced strong financial growth because of a larger student body and through generous support from churches, individuals, and businesses for general fund purposes. A significant number of new student scholarships and an increase in financial aid endowments played an important role in helping the seminary provide affordable education to the expanding student body.

Western continues to work diligently at being a good steward of the resources God so graciously provides. The faithful support shown by many RCA congregations and members is truly gratifying.

PETITION TO SUBSTITUTE PERIOD OF MINISTRY FOR THE TWENTY-SEVEN MONTH REQUIREMENT

A Master of Divinity (M.Div.) candidate seeking ordination in the Reformed Church in America must be enrolled as a candidate for ministry in an RCA classis. Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3, of the *Book of Church Order* states:

> Immediately following the enrollment of a candidate for the ministry, the classis shall petition...on behalf of the candidate for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. Such a petition must be received a minimum of twenty-seven months prior to the time it is to be given final disposition by the General Synod through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary... However, in instances where completion of theological training takes place prior to the required period of twenty-seven months, the classis may petition...to substitute a period of ministry supervised by the General Synod through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary... for all or part of its twenty-seven month requirement.

The Classis of Zeeland petitioned General Synod through Western Theological Seminary to substitute a period of ministry (five months) for part of the twenty-seven month requirement for Todd Krygsheld.

Krygsheld was enrolled as a candidate for ministry in the Classis of Zeeland on May 20, 1997. When Krygsheld graduated in May 1998 he had been enrolled in the classis for only twelve of the twenty-seven months required by the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3. This means that he will not be eligible to receive the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry until August 20, 1999. Granting the petition would mean that Krygsheld could be ordained after March 20, 1999, rather than after August 20, 1999.

Krygsheld has met the spirit of the twenty-seven-month requirement. He enrolled in courses at Western Theological Seminary for four years and worked at Ottawa Reformed Church in West Olive, Michigan, for more than four years.

R-7.
To approve five months of ministry at Ottawa Reformed Church in West Olive, Michigan, as a substitute period of ministry for Todd Krygsheld; and further,

to approve the petition from the Classis of Zeeland to substitute a five-month period of ministry for Todd Krygsheld, for part of the twenty-seven month requirement under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3 of the *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

CONCLUSION

The board of trustees, staff, faculty, and students of Western Theological Seminary give thanks to God for the privilege of learning and serving the church of Jesus Christ during the year 1997-98. The seminary thanks God for the many prayers offered during the past year on its behalf. To God be the glory!

Report of the Theological Education Agency (TEA)

The Theological Education Agency (TEA) was established by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America in 1984 and began its service to the RCA in 1985. This year represents thirteen years of TEA ministry, the initial six years under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Van Wyk and the past seven years under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Cornelis Kors. Kors continues to serve TEA with the help of administrative assistant Kelly Talsma.

The office of the Theological Education Agency moved in 1997 from Cerritos, California, to the Reformed Church in America Ministries Center in Bellflower, California. TEA shares this new office location with the Classis of California. The TEA ministry also operates on the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

The TEA Board of Trustees continues to govern TEA with an eye on future needs for leadership in the RCA. It does this by means of advocacy on behalf of candidates who require flexibility as they respond to God's call in their life, and by doing its utmost to provide ministerial formation programs and preparation that fit the unique situations of individuals. The board is maintaining normal operations even though the future appears to have changes in store for the TEA board and its members (see Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency section which follows).

This year two TEA board members are completing their first three-year terms of faithful service: 1) the Rev. Barbara Nauta, at-large representative, and 2) the Rev. Sherwin Broersma, Regional Synod of New York representative. Both Nauta and Broersma are being nominated for second three-year terms.

The TEA Board of Trustees, upon the recommendation of the TEA Certification Committee, awarded the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry this past year to the following individuals:

Greg Alderman	Classis of California
James Alley	Classis of Mid-Hudson
Jeanette Beagley	Classis of California
Michael Blankers	Classis of California
Anthon Bouw	Classis of the Canadian Prairies
Carson Culp	Classis of Ontario
Robert DeBoer	Classis of East Sioux
E.J. deWaard	Classis of the Canadian Prairies
Linda Hodson	Classis of Zeeland
Timothy King	Classis of Central Iowa
Brad Kruithof	Classis of Southwest Michigan
David Lantz	Classis of Illiana
Jeffrey Levine	Classis of California
Benjamin Lin	Classis of Queens
Steven McNary	Classis of Illiana
Lisa VanderWal	Classis of Southwest Michigan

During 1997 five candidates withdrew from the TEA program. The TEA program process functioned as it is designed to do in assisting these individuals to identify and clarify their call to become minister of Word and sacrament.

TRANSITION TO THE MINISTERIAL FORMATION COORDINATING AGENCY (MFCA)

The TEA Board of Trustees, at its March 1998 meeting, received a report that the Task Force to Implement the Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament is recommending an amalgamation of the Theological Education Agency with the new

Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA). The task force is recommending to this 1998 General Synod that it approve the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency as an agency of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (See the report of the Task Force to Implement the Standards in this Church Vocations section.)

The TEA board members consider the recommendation of the task force to be a positive one, since the crucial and unique functions of TEA are not to be lost in the transition to MFCA. The TEA board members also consider it essential that the denomination not lose the western regional RCA representation and location for this new proposed agency. The conviction of the TEA board is that the RCA needs an identifiable resource for theological education and ministerial formation in the West, and the TEA board does not want to forego this aspect for which TEA was originally designed.

The TEA board is also concerned about maintaining the ministry priorities of TEA. The priorities of TEA have included flexibility in theological education, summer intensives for the purposes of academic preparation and denominational connection, teaching church or ministry programs, and candidate care committees—all important to the ministerial formation process in the RCA. The TEA board emphasizes that these priorities should be maintained and developed to higher levels by the new proposed MFCA.

Of special interest to TEA board members is the new role defined for MFCA in guiding ministerial candidates through an "alternate route." The TEA board affirms this alternate route because this route adds both flexibility and new paradigms to the ministerial formation process in the RCA. This is crucial if the RCA is going to be true to the call for strong leadership in an increasingly multicultural and diverse society.

The TEA board members recognize that there are many responsibilities, over and above what TEA currently does, for the new proposed MFCA. Included among these responsibilities are:

1. Coordinating with seminaries the review and implementation of standards for the preparation of those called to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

2. Coordinating, in cooperation with the RCA seminary faculties and General Synod professors of theology, the creation of annual examinations.

3. Administering the annual examinations for the completion of the certification process.

4. Record keeping for all RCA candidates in the certification process.

5. Coordinating teaching church and ministry programs, candidate care committees, and alternate route programs.

6. Educating classes about the ministerial formation and ordination process.

The above responsibilities require more staff and funds. Anticipating that the proposed MFCA will require additional staff and funds, the TEA board recommended a 1999 budget to include current TEA resources for use by the proposed new MFCA. The new 1999 budget totals $338,000.

Believing that the TEA functions can be maintained effectively in the proposed new MFCA, the TEA board strongly encourages 1998 General Synod delegates to give wholehearted support to the creation of MFCA as an agency of the General Synod.

ENROLLMENT STATISTICS

The enrollment statistics for TEA, as of March 1, 1998, are:

Registered candidates	58
Inactive and special	4
Supervision of licensed candidates	0
Applicants	6
TOTAL	68

FINANCES

TEA was pleased to exceed its 1997 budget for the sixth year in a row. Special gratitude is expressed to those congregations and classes who came through with extra gifts when things did not look so good. TEA budgets, revenues, and expenses over the past five years are listed below:

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Budget	$180,000	$185,000	$193,500	$200,500	$215,000
Revenues	$186,174	$218,313	$199,885	$217,968	$228,733
Expenses	$183,648	$195,897	$193,958	$201,253	$214,826

The above excess income has been invested with the RCA cash program. Plans are being made to add excess income to the TEA Endowment Fund established in 1991 with PPIM funds. The TEA Endowment Fund was established for the purpose of giving financial assistance to TEA candidates to participate in the summer intensive courses. The fund continues to provide financial assistance for this purpose.

The TEA budget for 1998 is $215,000. This 1998 TEA budget amount is the same as the budget amount was for 1997.

PROGRAM

Summer Intensives

The summer intensive programs continue to play a significant role in the mission of TEA. In 1997, Summer Intensive I was held at the Milwaukee campus of the University of Wisconsin. The RCA Standards segment was taught by the Rev. Wesley Kiel of Western Theological Seminary, and the RCA Polity segment was taught by the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Summer Intensive II (RCA history and missions) and Summer Intensive III (RCA worship) were held at Southern California College in Costa Mesa, California, and were taught by the Rev. Dr. Daniel Meeter of New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

In 1998, Summer Intensive I and Summer Intensive II will be offered at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, June 11-26. The instructors will be the Rev. Dr. Robert Hoeksema of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, teaching RCA polity; the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink of Western Theological Seminary, teaching RCA standards, and the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil of Western Theological Seminary, teaching RCA history and missions.

Summer Intensive III will be offered at Fuqua School for Christian Communication at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, August 10-15, 1998. This course on RCA worship will be taught by the Rev. Timothy Brown of Western Theological Seminary.

TEA Certification Committee

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To adopt the following amendment to the *Constitution and Bylaws* for the Theological Education Agency, Article X, Section 1 (additions are underlined; deletion is stricken out):
>
> Article X
>
> *The Certification Committee*
>
> *Sec. 1* a. The certification committee shall consist of ~~six~~ seven persons elected by the Board of Trustees. Two shall be professors or associate professors, one of whom shall hold the Fourth Office, nominated by and from within the faculty of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Two shall be professors or associate professors, one of whom shall hold the Fourth Office, nominated by and from within the faculty of Western Theological Seminary. One shall be a professor or associate professor teaching at a non-Reformed Church in America seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Two shall be persons nominated by and from the Board of Trustees of the Theological Education Agency. All nominees shall be members of the Reformed Church in America (*MGS 1997*, R-8, p. 274 and *MGS 1997*, R-2, p. 427).

In response to R-2 and R-8, the TEA Board of Trustees nominated and appointed a seventh member to the TEA Certification Committee—the Rev. Dr. Lyle Vander Broek, member of the Classis of Pleasant Prairie and a faculty member at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa.

DISPENSATION

The TEA Certification Committee and the TEA Board of Trustees present a request for a dispensation from the biblical language requirement on behalf of Daniel Sewell. Initially the Classis of Lake Erie requested this dispensation under the provision of the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1.

Several factors were cited for the request:

1. Sewell does not live a near a seminary to complete the biblical languages.

2. A severe financial strain would be placed on Sewell and his family if he were forced to take the biblical languages.

3. Sewell has had an eye ailment for years that has prolonged his studies.

4. Sewell has been in the process of completing the requirements for ministry for many years, and the classis is more than satisfied with his ability, gifts, knowledge, faithfulness, and commitment to ministry.

R-8.
To grant Daniel Sewell a dispensation from the biblical language requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

RECRUITMENT OF HISPANICS FOR SEMINARY TRAINING

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To urge the RCA seminaries, in consultation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries, to find ways to increase recruitment of Hispanics and to provide increased financial assistance for Hispanics and other racial/ethnic people desiring to obtain a seminary education *(MGS 1997*, R-11, p. 314).

The secretary for Hispanic Ministries is in communication with Western Theological Seminary and New Brunswick Theological Seminary on possible options to fulfill R-11 above.

Report of the Board of Pensions

The president called the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, president of the Board of Pensions, and Mr. Gerald Verbridge, vice-president of the Board of Pensions to present the report of the Board of Pensions to synod and to bring additional information about the work of the Board of Pensions to the synod.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Board of Pensions is "to provide retirement income, annuities, supplemental pensions, assistance grants, insurance benefits, and certain specified investment and personnel support services for all ordained ministers and their families, and for lay workers of the Reformed Church in accordance with the rules prescribed in the two major divisions of the Board of Pensions and its departments as outlined herein; namely, (i) The Reformed Church Annuity Fund and (ii) The General Fund (*Constitution Rules* of the Board of Pensions, *Forward*).

RECIPIENTS

In carrying out this responsibility on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, the Board of Pensions currently serves retired ministers, missionaries, their spouses, and lay workers who have served the RCA through its congregations and agencies. Of this number, 915 are directly benefiting from the provisions made in past years for them in retirement. Of these, 179 also receive benefits through the General Fund of the Board of Pensions, which supplements inadequate retirement incomes and provides special assistance in cases of need.

As can be seen from the board's financial report, the Reformed Church Annuity Fund continues to grow and at the end of 1997 stood at $240,103,995. However, the assets of the General Fund, which provides for those older retirees for whom inadequate provision was made in years past, has remained constant and in 1997 showed a slight decline to $1,880,092. Clearly, the continued support of the church at large through its per-member assessments, contributions, and special gifts, (mainly from current retirees who allocate a portion of their accumulation to their older colleagues at the time of their final designation of a retirement

option at age seventy) will be necessary for some time in order to meet the needs of a shrinking but nonetheless needy group of persons. During 1997, $671,453.47 was allocated in regular or special assistance grants to this class of persons.

SENIOR PASTORS

The ministry of the Board of Pensions is far more than financial statistics and numbers of persons. It is a ministry individualized through the ongoing work of a network of senior pastors, who make visits and keep contact in other ways with retirees on behalf of the board and the Reformed Church in America. The senior pastors have many stories to tell. At an annual meeting each year in January, senior pastors meet with the Board of Pensions and share their experiences of visits with retired RCA ministers, missionaries, spouses, and layworkers throughout their often vast parishes. Their reports give immediacy and faces to the continuing work of the board and its staff.

The stated purpose of the ministry of the senior pastors is to express the continuing concern and interest of the Reformed Church in America to persons who are often separated from their previous church relationships by reasons of geography and health; and to determine when and if financial need exists that can be alleviated by assistance from the General Fund. Their ministry, however, includes a much broader range of caring.

Currently those serving as senior pastors are the Rev. and Mrs. Eric Schulze (Far West, western Canada); the Rev. and Mrs. Cornie Keunen (Midwest Plains, Minnesota to Texas); the Rev. and Mrs. Henry Mouw (Great Lakes); the Rev. and Mrs. Russell Pater (Regional Synod of Albany); the Rev. Roger Leonard (Regional Synod of New York, New England); the Rev. and Mrs. Edwin Mulder, (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics); the Rev. and Mrs. Bruce Penn (Southeast Carolinas, Kentucky to Florida); and the Rev. and Mrs. John Ver Hoog (Eastern Canada).

RATE OF RETURN

During a period of soaring equity markets, it is a matter of concern to some that assets of the annuity fund are conservatively invested in fixed income investments. The return credited to individual accounts in 1997 was 8 percent, which in normal years is regarded as a respectable rate of return, particularly in an era of low inflation. However, current market conditions generated pressure to have greater exposure to equity investments.

The Board of Pensions investment policies are somewhat restricted by its supervision by the New York State Insurance Department, a relationship which was voluntarily entered into more than sixty years ago and which is not easily changed. However, plans were developed which will permit individuals to have greater equity exposure without impeding the ability of the fund to pass the scrutiny of state inspectors. It is anticipated that a full description of this new program will be communicated during the next few months and that it will be operative by January 1, 1999.

RCA INSURANCE PROGRAM

An important part of the board's ministry is its insurance programs. Medical insurance is an ever-changing issue for people across the United States, and this is true for participants in the RCA medical program. Every year the RCA medical insurance program is examined in an effort to control the cost of rising claims and provide increased quality care. Over the past two years, with the establishment of an RCA network, great strides were made in cost control. The 1997 network savings of $1,009,056 were more than double the savings of 1996. As a result of the cost containment measures, the RCA medical insurance program was able to add to its benefit package a yearly vision benefit and was able to offer medical coverage to active

employees at the same premium rate for the third year in a row. Due to federal law changes, pre-existing conditions are no longer considered for enrollees who provide a health certificate from their previous health insurance carrier showing no more than a sixty-day lapse between coverage.

Other changes in the RCA insurance program for 1998 include doubling the benefit for orthodontic care and raising the value of the employee life insurance policy from $125,000 to $175,000. To control the cost of the employee life insurance policy, the Accidental Death and Dismemberment (AD&D) portion of the policy was dropped. A voluntary AD&D policy was added to the RCA insurance program for a nominal fee and is now offered with continuous open enrollment.

The Board of Pensions has always shown deep concern and care for retired ministers as they go though the aging process. Grants are provided to help with medical costs for those who cannot meet the rising expenses on their fixed budgets. It has become apparent that provisions for long-term care (nursing home and/or homecare) is a concern for many ministers today, both active and retired. A survey completed by the RCA Office of Insurance favored the establishment of a long-term care insurance policy. One of the goals for 1998 is to establish long-term care coverage as part of the disability program.

It is the intention of the self-funded RCA insurance program to provide quality care that is administered with concern and compassion to RCA employees and retirees in a fast-changing and challenging society.

RETIRED CLERGY

During 1997 thirty-eight RCA ministers retired from active service. Those who retired are recognized by a display of their pictures and service records as well as by General Synod's endorsement of an appropriate certificate of appreciation for their years of faithful and dedicated ministry in the church.

R-9.
To adopt the following resolution:

These have loved Christ and fed his sheep.
They have devoted themselves
to spreading the Word
and equipping the saints
for the work of ministry.

Their contribution to a needy world
is rich beyond measure;
their record is on high.

The Reformed Church in America,
with admiration,
deep affection,
and overflowing thanks to God
celebrates their lifelong service.

Byung Ho Ahn
Astoria, New York

Louis Benes
Holland, Michigan

Joseph Bliss
Columbus, Ohio

Don Bloemendaal
Sheldon, Iowa

John Brouwer
Osseo, Wisconsin

Malcolm Brown
Schuylerville, New York

Theodore Chandler
Elmsford, New York

Robert Dykstra
Forked River, New Jersey

Bernard Ekema
Pawpaw, Michigan

John Ekema
Pella, Iowa

Neva Evenhouse
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Floyd Goulooze
Scottsdale, Arizona

Herman Gruis
Austin, Minnesota

Robert Henninges
South China, Maine

Hugh Koops
Piscataway, New Jersey

David Hondorp
Poughquag, New York

Donald Jansma
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Richard Lake
Afton, New York

Robert Langenberg
Muskegon, Michigan

Edwin Martin
Vicksburg, Michigan

Donald Maxam
Pella, Iowa

Joseph Muyskens
Homewood, Illinois

John Nordstrom
Holland, Michigan

Ronald LaRose
Maplewood, New Jersey

Bill Lee
Flushing, New York

Benjamin Lefevre
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Roger Leonard
Woodstock, New York

Thurman Rynbrandt
Caledonia, Michigan

Norman Schouten
Pella, Iowa

Marvin Schultz
Canton, South Dakota

Larry Suntken
Montclair, New Jersey

Adrian Tenhor
Staten Island, New York

Merwin Van Doornik
Holland, Michigan

Harris Verkaik
Hudsonville, Michigan

Melvin Voss
Belmond, Iowa

Marvin Wassink
Muskegon, Michigan

E. R. Weeks
Somerset, New Jersey

Arvin Wester
Ontario, California

(ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission for Women

The Commission for Women met October 17-18, 1997, at the Cenacle House in Highland Park, New Jersey, and February 26-28, 1998, at the Rutgers University Continuing Education Conference Center in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

The commission's responsibilities include providing resources for developing awareness and raising consciousness concerning human liberation; providing information for appointments that will facilitate the partnership of women and men in professional and decision-making leadership of the denomination; assisting the church toward ensuring inclusive attitudes, images, and language in all published materials; working for systematic change to enable the full participation of women in church and society; and collaborating with RCA agencies, commissions, and ecumenical agencies on issues affecting women.

JOINT MEETING WITH REFORMED CHURCH WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To strongly urge the Reformed Church Women's Ministries executive board and the Commission for Women to meet jointly in 1998 to explore means for fostering future contact and cooperation (*MGS 1997*, R-5, p. 133).

A joint session of the Commission for Women and representatives of Reformed Church Women's Ministries (RCWM) took place on February 27-28, 1998. This meeting led to a clarification of roles, with mutual agreement that gifts and abilities of all ordained and lay women in the Reformed Church in America be recognized and affirmed. Common goals identified include continuing to encourage mentoring, networking, and nurturing women in leadership positions, as well as continuing to communicate with the RCA seminaries and the Theological Education Agency concerning women students.

An area of mutual concern was that many of the significant contributions of women who pioneered with integrity and courage throughout the history of the RCA are not recognized in the educational materials of the RCA.

The commission therefore recommends:

> **R-10.**
> **To instruct the General Synod Council through its Office of Congregational Services to explore ways to include the significant contributions of women throughout the history of the RCA in resources developed for Christian education for all age groups; and further,**
>
> **to urge New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary, when planning their survey of RCA history courses, to include the important contributions made by women; and further,**
>
> **to urge all classes to include questions pertaining to the history of women in leadership in the RCA in the examinations of students under care. (ADOPTED)**

ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN

Because the commission endeavors to advocate for the use of the gifts of all women, the commission, with the assistance of the stated clerks of classes, initiated contact with the unordained women under the care of each classis. The commission felt the need to hear these women's stories. Many of the women under care of classis are women in second careers. They bring a multitude of gifts and experiences to their ministries. Several mentioned the burdens that the Lord's call brings. For one who is a single mother, the financial burden of sending not only her children to college, but also herself, has caused severe financial problems. Another woman, from a racial/ethnic background different from most members of the Reformed Church in America, worries whether there will be a place for her in the RCA. Due to family situations many women would have difficulty pursuing the Lord's call in a different geographic locale. Many women expressed the need for women mentors as they pursue their call. One woman said:

> I find that many people are supportive of my goals, but so many in leadership will not take the next step: the risk of asking a woman to preach in their churches. I think you can imagine the courage this would take for some of these leaders. Unfortunately, the classis does little to support students beyond testing and some financial help. It would be nice to see them advocating for me.

RETREAT FOR THEOLOGICALLY TRAINED WOMEN

The 1978 General Synod instructed the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) to:

> convene a meeting of...more than fifty Reformed Church women who have received their theological education in seminaries...for the purpose of affirming them in their Christian ministry and offering them our encouragement, support, and counsel (*MGS 1978*, R-9, p. 31).

The 1995 General Synod voted:

> To designate $6,960 annually in the General Synod Operational Budget for funding national and regional gatherings of theologically trained women in the Reformed Church in America, beginning in 1996 (*MGS 1996*, R-28, p. 282).

The commission continues to take seriously this mandate to provide a retreat for theologically trained women. The opinions and ideas of theologically trained women were solicited by a subcommittee of the commission, and plans are now being made for a January 1999 retreat.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY SUNDAY

The commission continues to strongly encourage participation in Women in Ministry Sunday, designated as the first Sunday in November or whenever so designated by an RCA congregation. Specially designed bulletin covers and worship resource materials are available through the RCA Distribution Center. Original and new resources appropriate for Women in Ministry Sunday are welcome. The commission reviews all resources submitted; resources may be submitted to the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services.

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

Commission member Anna James attended the twenty-third World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General Council meeting, August 8-20, 1997, in Debrecen, Hungary, as a delegate representative from the RCA. At the conclusion of the meeting, James was elected

to serve a seven-year term on the WARC executive committee. The commission celebrates her election and continues to recognize the worldwide responsibility that comes by being part of the worldwide body of Christ.

SURVEY

The 1997 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to send a letter to all clerks of RCA consistories, requesting a report of the male/female ratio of their current consistory membership; and further...,

to instruct the Commission for Women to submit a report on this survey of the male/female ratio of current RCA consistory membership to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS* 1997, R-15, p. 319).

Similar reports were prepared in 1979 and 1988. A comparison of all three reports follows:

	Total # of Churches	Percent Reporting	Total # on Consistories	Total # of Women	Percentage of Women on Consistory
1979	917	95.2	10,560	1,286	12.1
1988	957	75.4	10,928	1,694	15.5
1998	943	74.7	8,244	1,031	26.5

The commission thanks the RCA congregations who responded to the survey. The data leads to various observations concerning consistories:

1. Even though only 75 percent of RCA congregations responded in 1988 compared to 95 percent in 1979, the total number of consistory members reported in 1988 increased in actual numbers, from an average percentage of 12.1 percent to 15.1 percent per consistory.

2. In 1998 about 75 percent of RCA congregations again responded. The 1998 reports, which reflected significantly smaller consistories on average (11.6), revealed that a larger percentage of women are serving as elders and deacons.

The current 1998 survey of RCA congregations shows that in one-fourth of the forty-six RCA classes, the percentage of women as elders and deacons ranges between 2 percent and 10 percent. In the next 25 percent of classes, the percentage of women as elders and deacons ranges between 11 percent and 25 percent. In the final 50 percent of classes, the percentage of women as elders and deacons ranges between 26 percent and 62 percent. Regionally, the eastern three regional synods (Albany, New York, and the Mid-Atlantics) are significantly higher than the total RCA average of 26.5 percent. The regional synods of the Far West and Canada are at the RCA average of 26.5 percent. The three midwestern regional synods (Great Lakes, Mid-America, and the Heartland) are significantly below the RCA average of 26.5 percent.

SEMINARY ACCOUNTABILITY

The 1994 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the Commission for Women to develop questions and/or guidelines for RCA seminaries to use to evaluate the treatment of women students; and further,

> to instruct the RCA seminaries, in consultation and dialogue with women students, to prepare an annual report for five years on the treatment of women on RCA seminary campuses and to indicate specific steps taken and systems established (with attached examples) to secure just and fair treatment (*MGS 1994*, R-13, p. 276).

Since that time various Commission for Women meetings have been held on the RCA seminary campuses, and communications continue with the RCA seminaries.

In October 1997 commission members enjoyed dinner and dialogue with the women students at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. The discussion included an assessment of the problems and opportunities for women during and after seminary training. Commission members were challenged to ponder ways to provide encouragement and support.

In December 1997 an informal visit to Western Theological Seminary provided opportunity for the commission to speak with faculty and students about issues concerning women. Those conversations and additional data are still being evaluated as to how the commission may best advocate for the needs of all students.

Report of the General Synod Council's Ministry and Personnel Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF MINISTRY AND PERSONNEL SERVICES

The mission of Ministry and Personnel Services (MAPS) is stated in the *General Synod Council Handbook*, V-1., as follows:

> The Ministry and Personnel Services Committee shall ensure that those who are engaged in all the ministries of the Reformed Church in America as their primary vocation are prepared for competent ministry, cared for spiritually, emotionally, and physically in order to faithfully fulfill their call and be motivated to grow in competency to minister in the service of Jesus Christ.

There are many ways in which this mission statement is implemented in the daily course of activities by MAPS staff and others who support the ministry of those who work in and through the Reformed Church in America. During 1997 the broad description of the resources provided by the MAPS office was distributed under the title, *Resources for Ministers and Consistories of the Reformed Church in America*. A copy was sent to each pastor engaged in active ministry, and since the resource is in the form of a loose-leaf notebook, items can be added and subtracted as necessary.

Parish-Based Clinical Pastoral Education

The 1996 General Synod directed the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services "to take the necessary steps which lead to the establishment of two parish-based Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) programs within the Reformed Church in America by the year 1999" (*MGS* 1996, R-14, p. 316). Significant progress has been made toward this goal, and particular attention has been paid to an already existing program in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. This program is under the leadership of the Rev. Dean Meeter, CPE acting supervisor and an RCA

pastor. This program makes parish-based CPE experience available to RCA ministers as well as to ministers from other denominations in southeastern South Dakota, southwestern Minnesota, and northwestern Iowa.

Continuing Education

Continuing education for professional church workers moved toward sabbaticals this year. Following the distribution of the *Resources for Ministers and Consistories* many ministers and consistories requested information about sabbaticals, i.e., how to plan them, how to work together in the planning process, suggestions for content, and networking suggestions with ministers who have taken sabbaticals.

MAPS also continues to facilitate continuing education by conversations with ministers and by seeking out opportunities in seminaries and agencies. The Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry (SACEM) has been in existence since the late 1960s, and the RCA is a member of this society. This society continues to be a rich source of information and education for the MAPS office and RCA ministers. A great deal of the facilitation of continuing education is accomplished on the telephone both proactively and reactively. Clergy groups are also encouraged to make use of the limited funds available for continuing education from MAPS. A number of such clergy groups have put together classis events which have been partially funded by the Leadership Development Fund managed by the MAPS office.

The personnel functions of MAPS include filling staff positions, advertising and screening, personal consultations, counseling, conflict management, professional development, and adhering to the required legalities of human resources administration, including maintenance of forms, records, and personnel files for all denominational staff.

MAPS also administers and monitors the Student Loan Revolving Fund and the New Jersey Beneficiary Funds. The purpose of the Student Loan Revolving Fund is to provide financial assistance to RCA members preparing for work of highly strategic importance to the mission of the Christian church. The New Jersey Beneficiary Funds are available to students enrolled at Rutgers University who are preparing for ministry in the RCA. The Student Loan Revolving Fund is completely loaned out at this time, but every effort is made to recover loans due and to add to this fund.

Specialized Ministries

As an examination of "Supplement B" (specialized ministries) in the *Directory of the General Synod* indicates, fully one-third of the ministers of the Reformed Church in America are active in ministries other than serving an RCA congregation. The largest group of these specialized ministers falls into the category of chaplains, serving hospitals, prisons, schools, and the different branches of the armed forces.

MAPS staff make every effort to visit with institutional chaplains on site when travel schedules permit. Each year, immediately prior to General Synod, there is a Chaplains' Conference that draws these persons and many of their spouses into a mutually supportive community. These conferences give chaplains the basis for a network that functions throughout the year. These conferences are intentionally located at the site of General Synod in order to make possible the informal contact with General Synod delegates that is especially important for those who often serve far from any RCA context.

The prison chaplains have been ably served by the Rev. Donald Jiskoot, who retired after twenty years of service with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. He is the RCA endorsing agent for prison chaplaincy and also visits and maintains a pastoral relationship with RCA prison chaplains.

Another area of ministry opportunity is perhaps more surprising, given the constant attention to federal budget constraints and their effect on the armed services. All areas of the armed services are in need of new chaplains. The RCA is represented and well-served by fourteen military chaplains. Specifically, there is an urgent need for qualified women to serve as chaplains. The director of MAPS serves as the RCA's endorsing agent for military chaplains and is eager to discuss possibilities with potential chaplain candidates.

MAPS is intentionally visiting with institutional chaplains when travel schedules place MAPS staff in close proximity.

RCA Clergy/Spouse Retreats

The 1996 General Synod voted:

> To direct the General Synod Council to make provision for a denominational Spring Sabbath to be held again in 1998 (*MGS 1996,* R-12, p. 314).

The 1998 Spring Sabbath design team members were:

Philip Doeschot
Douglas Estella
Carolyn Holloway
Gloria McCanna (co-chair)
Peter Semeyn (co-chair)
Ken Eriks
Amy Jo Hawley
Rong Lu
Ross Rettig
Gordon Wiersma

Ellen Mers served as coordinator for this event.

Using the theme, "The Lord's Shalom," the event occurred the first weekend after Easter, April 17-19, 1998, at the Adam's Mark Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri. The keynote speaker was Walter Wangerin, Jr., who teaches literature and creative writing at Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana; is a regular columnist for *The Lutheran*; and is a speaker for Lutheran Vespers, an international radio program. Jeff and Karen Barker, associate professors of theater and speech at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, presented a program on Saturday evening. The Rev. Renee House, dean and librarian at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, preached at the Sunday morning worship and communion service. More than five hundred ministers and their spouses attended the gathering.

The annual January Freedom in Ministry event, which draws ministers and their spouses from the regional synods of Albany, New York, and the Mid-Atlantics to the Warwick Center in Warwick, New York, for a Friday night through Sunday noon time of restoration and recreation, was again a satisfying event. Worship leader this year was the Rev. Allan Janssen, pastor of Bethlehem Reformed Church in Selkirk, New York. The presenter was the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, General Synod president and associate professor of theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. The event is scheduled to include a Sunday away from the pulpit and is subsidized by grants from classes, regional synods, and the denomination. Freedom in Ministry provides the context for a ministry of mutual encouragement to ministers and their spouses.

The MAPS office continues to provide support for clergy spouses through annual letters, assistance, and funding for clergy spouse gatherings. The clergy spouse task force in the Regional Synod of Albany has organized an impressive model of support to give voice to the needs and concerns of clergy spouses. In the coming year MAPS staff will consider how this model can be shared with other classes and regional synods for consideration.

MAPS Values

This particular report of the Ministry and Personnel Services ought not conclude without an observation as to some of the values that have guided the formation and work of MAPS during the past years. One of these values is the belief that the church, including the Reformed Church in America, is best served by pastors who are genuinely cared for, in hope and expectation they will then be more free to care for others.

Achieving this value is an ongoing and ever-incomplete task, but it involves attention to the Reformed Church in America as a "system" that can either facilitate or impede the fulfillment of one's vocational direction. There is a profound sense that what is genuinely good for the minister will also be good for the church; that whatever promotes the health and wholeness of those who serve the church as its leaders will directly affect the health and wholeness of the entire system. Although unusual individuals can often rise above even unhealthy and destructive systems, for the system itself to promote wholeness is far more consistent with the gospel of Christ.

A second value is that it is important to view those who serve the church as their primary vocation as ends themselves and not as a means to an end, even one so highly exalted as the mission of Christ. In earlier nomenclature of the RCA organization, prior to the most recent restructure, MAPS was known as "Human Resources." The concept of "Human Resources," as distinct from the resources of money and property, always rested a bit uneasily within the souls of those who worked within it. Persons served through this office are not simply resources to be used, even when they themselves are committed to be used in the service of Christ. While that commitment is their calling and vocation, the commitment, calling, and vocation of MAPS is to see them as persons who are valued simply for who they are.

A third value that has guided this office is the presumption that those who are engaged in ministry are really trying to do their very best and are deeply bound by the vows they took at ordination. Thus, any organization that supports their ministry must seek to maximize their efforts, enable their commitment, and encourage them in every way possible.

Finally, a calling to ministry does not exempt anyone from human needs and limitations, temptations, mistakes, and failures. Because the Reformed Church in America expects so much of its ministers, there are sometimes moments of disappointment which are all the more devastating because of the ideals to which they fall short. Emphasis on clergy self-care, training in sexual ethics, guidance in the proper and improper use of money, and the necessity of providing adequate worldly maintenance for those who serve in ministry has been an ongoing concern.

Leadership

Much has been made in recent years about the church's need for excellent leadership. No one can dispute the crucial importance of this factor in the well-being, health, and growth of any religious institution. However, too much emphasis on what leadership is expected to produce can result in its own forms of perversion. When all is said and done, ministry is not a product, not even an intangible product. It is rather the re-presentation of Jesus Christ in relationship to other human beings, standing beside, walking with, seeking to follow Christ together; not just what someone does or does not do, but most profoundly being <u>there</u>, in a fullest incarnational sense.

Eugene Petersen observes that it is easy to get both ecclesiastical and community support by conducting a ministry that may be visibly successful, yet inattentive to God and thus without foundations. Instead, Petersen points to the "professional minister" in the best sense as one who is committed to standards of integrity and performance that will not be altered to suit people's taste or what they are willing to pay for. He observes:

> Professionalism is in decline these days on all fronts—in medicine, in law, in politics, as well as among pastors—but it has not yet been repudiated. There are still a considerable number of professionals in all areas of life who do the hard work of staying true to what they were called to do, stubbornly refusing to do the easy work that the age asks of them" (Eugene H. Petersen, *Living the Message.* San Francisco: Harper, 1996, pp. 84-85).

It is the goal of the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to model and to respect that kind of professionalism within the ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

Report of the Task Force to Implement the Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament

BACKGROUND

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To approve the Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament; and further,
>
> To refer the Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament to the Commission on Church Order for necessary revisions of the *Book of Church Order*; and further,
>
> To instruct the Commission on Church Order to present proposed revisions of the *Book of Church Order* to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-19, p. 352).
>
> To direct the moderator of the General Synod Council to appoint a task force of six members to consult with the Commission on Church Order and to prepare the appropriate steps to carry out the intent of the Report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-20, p. 352).

The moderator of GSC appointed a task force to work on R-20. The task force members were:

Cornelis Kors
Dennis Voskuil
Ronald Gray
*Allan Janssen
Norman Kansfield
Barbara Alexander
Vernon L. Hoffs

*At the request of the Commission on Church Order, the General Synod Council, at its October 1997 meeting, increased the size of the task force to seven members to allow for a member of the Commission on Church Order to serve as a task force member. Following the October 1997 GSC meeting, the GSC moderator appointed Allan Janssen to the task force.

The Rev. David Schutt, moderator of the TEA Board of Trustees, and the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, 1997-98 General Synod president, served as resource persons.

The Rev. Alvin Poppen served as the staff resource person for the task force.

The task force met in Chicago, Illinois, on December 16-17, 1997; February 12-13, 1998; and March 5-6, 1998.

THE ASSIGNMENT OF THE TASK FORCE

At its first meeting in December 1997 the task force focused upon the word "intent" in R-20 above. The consensus of the task force was that the purpose of R-20 was to develop a practical, concrete structure by which the policies and procedures envisioned in the Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament report (*MGS 1997*, pp. 330-52) would be actually implemented and put to work within the life of the denomination as General Synod exercised its oversight of ministerial formation (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 6).

THE MINISTERIAL FORMATION COORDINATING AGENCY

A structure entitled the "Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency" was proposed and described in the Report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church In America (*MGS 1997*, pp. 339-40). During the past year, the task force worked on the development and structure of a Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA). A full description of MFCA and its role, purposes, and functions is described in the below proposed MFCA *Constitution and Bylaws*. Following this report of the task force is a report from the Commission on Church Order that presents necessary revisions to the *Book of Church Order*.

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-11:

R-11.
To approve the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency as an Agency of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America; and further;

To adopt the following *Constitution and Bylaws* of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, as amended, effective July 1, 1998.

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS
FOR THE
MINISTERIAL FORMATION COORDINATING AGENCY

Preamble

The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) is designed to respond to the following three needs:

1. **The need for an organizational structure for theological education which provides quality standards that recognize the tradition of the Reformed Church in America as well as the challenges facing the new leaders who are to become ministers of Word and sacrament in the future.**

2. **The need to develop a strategy to identify and recruit pastoral leadership for the church of the future.**

3. The need for a flexible alternate route that culminates in an ordination of minister of Word and sacrament for those who are gifted for ministry but are not able to meet the traditional requirements.

A Historical Note

In the development of MFCA it was recognized that an existing agency, the Theological Education Agency (TEA), was similar in purpose, function, and mission to MFCA.

From 1984 to 1998 the Reformed Church in America was served by TEA in overseeing the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process for candidates at non-RCA seminaries. MFCA, in addition to its new and unique responsibilities, continues the ministry of TEA. MFCA performs the appropriate functions through the work of a director, staff, and the evaluation and approval process of a Certification Committee.

Article I

Name

Sec. 1 The name of this agency shall be the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) of the Reformed Church in America, hereinafter referred to as the Agency.

Article II

Members

Sec. 1 The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America shall be the sole member of the Agency for all purposes.

Article III

Function and Responsibilities

Sec. 1 The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America shall exercise its oversight over theological education and ministerial formation by way of overseeing the standards for the preparation for the ordained ministry of Word and sacrament.

Sec. 2 The board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, in consultation with the General Synod Professors of Theology, shall provide the standards for the basis on which the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry in the Reformed Church in America is awarded by the agencies of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency.

Reasons:

1. The board of trustees already has many responsibilities. Setting these standards requires careful reflection. The board will be helped by the reflection and expertise of the General Synod Professors of Theology.

2. General Synod Professors of Theology are already assigned to the certification committee and have the task of creating the written exams. It is consistent with their responsibilities to collaborate with setting the standards for the Certificate for Ministry.

Sec. 3 **The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency shall have the following central purposes and responsibilities:**

a. To provide a uniform framework by which classes will care for and nurture candidates in preparation for the ministry of Word and sacrament.

b. To coordinate the roles of the congregation, classis, and seminary in the overall process of ministerial calling and formation, and to facilitate their respective responsibilities.

c. To review and monitor the implementation of the General Synod's standards for ministerial formation.

d. To award the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry upon the recommendation of the Certification Committee for candidates at non-RCA seminaries.

e. To guide and assist candidates attending non-RCA seminaries.

Sec. 4 **Specific responsibilities of the Agency shall include:**

a. To study and evaluate the overall process of ministerial formation and make recommendations, as necessary, to the General Synod, the General Synod Council, the RCA seminaries, the Certification Committee, and the classes.

b. To establish and monitor standards for the continuing education and development of ministers of Word and sacrament.

c. To provide oversight in the implementation of the alternative route for ordination.

d. To offer resources and tools to classes, and to facilitate the sharing of experiences among classes, that may support their tasks of identifying, caring for, examining, ordaining, and mentoring those called to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

e. To provide guidance, resources, and support to classis committees supervising candidates under their care.

f. To provide flexible guidelines for, and to monitor the implementation of, Candidate Care Committees (CCC) in the process of ministerial leadership and formation.

g. To provide annually a standard examination as the written component for the evaluation of candidates for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. This examination shall be prepared by a team of RCA seminary faculty members selected by the Agency. The examination shall include sections on biblical knowledge and exegesis, Reformed theology, church history and government, pastoral ministry, leadership, ethics, church and society, mission, and such areas as the Agency may determine.

h. To provide flexible guidelines for, and to monitor the implementation of, Teaching Churches and Ministries in the process of ministerial formation.

i. To compile and recommend assessment instruments and procedures for persons received under the care of classis and enrolled as candidates for ministry.

j. To guide and assist candidates at non-RCA seminaries in academic preparation, spiritual formation, ministerial development, personal wholeness, and denominational identity.

k. To maintain a census of all candidates in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process, in cooperation with seminaries and the Certification Committee.

l. To coordinate the work of the Certification Committee in its responsibilities for candidates at non-RCA seminaries.

m. To coordinate the summer intensives which offer RCA courses on confessions, polity, history, missions, and worship.

Sec. 5 The Agency shall make an annual report to General Synod and regular reports to the General Synod Council. A regular liaison with the General Synod Council shall be established.

Article IV

Membership of the Board of Trustees

Sec. 1 The board of trustees shall consist of nine members who shall be elected for a term of three years, beginning the first day of July following their election by General Synod and continuing until their successors shall be elected and qualified.

Sec. 2 **No trustee who has served two full terms shall be eligible for re-election until at least one year has elapsed.**

Sec. 3 **The director of Ministry and Personnel Services of the General Synod ~~Council~~, the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, and the presidents of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary or their representatives shall be *ex officio* members, without vote, of the board of trustees.**

Reason: Since the general secretary is named further on in the proposed changes it seemed important to identify this officer here. The general secretary, like the presidents, may name a representative to serve on the board in his or her place.

Sec. 4 **The director of the Agency shall be an *ex officio* member, without vote, of the board of trustees.**

Article V

Nomination and Election

Sec. 1 **All trustees shall be elected by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.**

Sec. 2 **Three trustees shall be elected annually from nominees submitted by the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency Board of Trustees. The Commission on Nominations shall ensure that the membership of the Board of trustees includes four laypersons, three parish pastors, one specialized minister, and one General Synod professor of theology. The trustees shall reflect the diversity of the Reformed Church in America and demonstrate an understanding and knowledge of theological education and ministry formation.**

Sec. 3 **In its first rotation, four members of the Board of trustees shall be nominations from the former Theological Education Agency Board of Trustees.**

Article VI

Meetings

Sec. 1 **The board of trustees shall meet at least three times a year. The annual meeting shall be in the spring.**

Sec. 2 **The moderator shall call special meetings whenever special business requires it or on written request of any five members of the board of trustees. Written notice of special meetings, stating the nature of the business to be considered, shall be given to the members of the board of trustees not less than ten days prior to each meeting. No other business shall be considered at such special meetings.**

Sec. 3 A majority of the membership of the board of trustees shall constitute a quorum.

Sec. 4 The agenda shall be mailed to the trustees at least ten days prior to the meeting of the board of trustees.

Sec. 5 Each meeting of the board of trustees shall be opened and closed with prayer.

Sec. 6 The Agency trustees may elect to meet in executive session for a portion of its business meeting, at which time only voting trustees shall be present unless the trustees, while in executive session, shall vote to invite other persons to be present. No recommendation shall be acted on.

Article VII

Officers

Sec. 1 The elected officers of the board of trustees shall consist of a moderator, vice moderator, and clerk.

Article VIII

Election of Officers

Sec. 1 In the election of the moderator, vice moderator, and clerk, a written nomination ballot shall be considered in nomination. The trustees shall then proceed to a written electing ballot. A majority of the total votes cast shall be necessary for election. If there is no majority on the first electing ballot, the voting shall be confined to the two persons receiving the greatest number of votes. If a person receives a majority of votes on the nominating ballot, the trustees may vote to declare the nominating ballot an electing ballot.

Sec. 2 Each of the officers shall be elected at the annual meeting of the board of trustees for a term of one year, not serving more than three terms.

Sec. 3 The term of each office shall begin July 1, and the person shall serve until his or her successor has been elected and has qualified for the office. A vacancy in any office shall be filled at the next regular or special meeting of the board of trustees.

Sec. 4 The Agency shall employ a director. The director of the Agency shall be appointed by the ~~general secretary~~ board of trustees, in consultation with the ~~board of trustees~~ general secretary, with approval by the General Synod. Other employed staff required for the operation of the Agency shall be hired by the director after approval by the board of trustees.

Sec. 5 **The ~~general secretary~~ board of trustees is responsible for the performance of the director of the Agency, with the right to terminate, ~~with the approval of the board of trustees~~ after consulting with the general secretary. The director shall supervise other Agency staff and shall have the authority to terminate, following consultation with the board of trustees.**

Reasons:

1. It is important to identify the director as the employee of the board of trustees and to clarify that additional personnel, as needed by the Agency, are employed by the director, who has full authority for their performance. To state this another way, if there is a performance problem with an employee other than the director, the board's responsibility is to inform and/or work with the director, not to intervene directly in the operation of the Agency or its staff.

2. It is appropriate that the board hires the director.

3. The maintains congruence with previous TEA procedures.

Article IX

Duties of Officers

Sec. 1 **The moderator shall call and preside at all regular and special meetings of the board of trustees, shall be an *ex officio* member of all committees of the board of trustees, and shall perform such other duties and exercise such other powers as usually pertain to the office. The moderator shall be entitled to vote on all matters coming before the board of trustees for decision.**

Sec. 2 **The vice-moderator shall act as moderator when the moderator is not able or available to serve.**

Sec. 3 **The clerk shall keep a true and accurate record of all proceedings of the board of trustees and perform such other duties as usually pertain to the office.**

Sec. 4 **The duties of the director of the Agency are defined by the position description as adopted by the board of trustees and the provisions of the contract at the time of employment.**

Article X

Committees

Sec. 1 **The board of trustees shall establish a Certification Committee (see Appendix I) and may establish such other committees as it deems necessary to carry out its work.**

Sec. 2 **The establishment of such other committees, their duties and responsibilities, shall be described in written form by the board of trustees.**

Article XI

Amendment of the Constitution and Bylaws

Sec. 1 This *Constitution and Bylaws* may be amended by a majority vote of the General Synod at any regular meeting upon recommendation of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency.

Appendix I

The Certification Committee

Sec. 1 The Certification Committee shall consist of seven persons elected by the board of trustees. Two shall be professors or associate professors, one of whom shall hold the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology, nominated by and from within the faculty of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Two shall be professors or associate professors, one of whom shall hold the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology, nominated by and from within the faculty of Western Theological Seminary. One shall be a professor or associate professor teaching at a non-Reformed Church in America seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Two shall be ordained ministers of Word and sacrament nominated by the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency Board of Trustees. All nominees shall be members of the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 2 The Certification Committee members shall be elected for a term of three years beginning the first day of July following their election by the board of trustees.

Sec. 3 No member who has served two full terms shall be eligible for re-election until at least one year has elapsed.

Sec. 4 The Certification Committee shall exercise supervision of the certification procedure for candidates enrolled in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process who do not attend New Brunswick Theological Seminary or Western Theological Seminary. The Certification Committee shall serve a function parallel to the faculties of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary in matters pertaining to the recommendation of candidates for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.

Sec. 5 The director of the Agency shall attend all meetings of the Certification Committee unless otherwise requested and shall serve as the moderator of the Certification Committee without vote.

Sec. 6 Regular meetings of the Certification Committee may be held without notice at such time and place as the Certification Committee may fix from time to time by resolution. Special

meetings of the Certification Committee may be called by the director of the agency and shall be called by the director on written request of any two members of the Certification Committee upon one day's oral or five day's written notice stating the place, date, and hour of the meeting. Any member of the Certification Committee may waive in writing notice of any meeting, and no notice of any meeting need be given to any member thereof who attends in person. The notice of a meeting of the Certification Committee need not state the business proposed to be transacted at the meeting.

Sec. 7 A majority of the members of the Certification Committee shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at any meeting thereof, and an action of the Certification Committee shall be authorized by the affirmative vote of a majority of the members present at a meeting at which there is a quorum.

Sec. 8 Any action that may be taken by the Certification Committee at a meeting may be taken without a meeting if a consent in writing, setting forth the action to be taken, shall be signed before such action by all of the members of the Certification Committee.

Sec. 9 Any member of the Certification Committee may be removed at any time with or without cause by a resolution adopted by a majority of the full membership of the board of trustees. Any member of the Certification Committee may resign from the Certification Committee at any time by giving written notice to the moderator or secretary of the board of trustees, and unless otherwise specified therein, the acceptance of such resignation shall not be necessary to make it effective.

Sec. 10 A vacancy in the Certification Committee shall be filled by an election according to the usual manner at a regular or special meeting of the board of trustees.

Sec. 11 The Certification Committee shall work within the power granted to the members of the board of trustees by the *Book of Church Order* of the Reformed Church in America and the *Constitution and Bylaws* of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)⋖

From the Report of the Commission on Church Order

REVISIONS OF THE *BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER* FOR STANDARDS FOR THE PREPARATION OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

Introduction

The 1997 General Synod approved "Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament" and referred the standards to the Commission on Church Order (CCO) to prepare necessary revisions of the *Book of Church Order* for presentation to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-19, p. 352). The 1997 General Synod also directed the moderator of the General Synod Council to appoint a task force (Task Force to Implement Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament) to prepare appropriate steps to carry out the intent of the Report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America (*MGS 1997*, R-20, p. 352).

To facilitate the preparation of changes in the church order, CCO, at its September 1997 meeting, requested that one of its members be placed on the Task Force to Implement Standards. The General Synod Council (GSC), at its October 1997 meeting, approved increasing the size of the task force from six members to seven members. The moderator of GSC then appointed CCO member the Rev. Allan Janssen to the task force.

Background Information

For additional background information on the following proposed *Book of Church Order* revisions, see *MGS 1997*, pp. 330-52 for the full report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America and the above Report of the Task Force to Implement Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament.

Also, the *Book of Church Order* revisions recommended below are presented as one recommendation. The commentary that precedes various sections is not in bold and is not part of the recommendation presented below.

Placement of a New Agency and Its Responsibilities in the *Book of Church Order*.

The above Report of the Task Force to Implement Standards recommends that this General Synod create a new agency, the "Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency" (MFCA). Recommendations to approve MFCA and its constitution are in the above Report of the Task Force to Implement Standards.

The formation of an agency does not require a change in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*). However, since the new agency (MFCA) will execute the responsibilities that currently are done by the Theological Education Agency (TEA), and since TEA will no longer function under that name, the following revisions of the *Book of Church Order* are necessary:

R-12.
To adopt the following revisions of the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8. ***Supervision of Students of Theology***

Sec. 3. Immediately following the enrollment of a candidate for the ministry, the classis shall petition the General Synod on behalf of the candidate for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. Such a petition must be received a minimum of twenty-seven months prior to the time it is to be given final disposition by the General Synod through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the ~~Theological Education Agency~~ Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency. However, in instances where completion of theological training takes place prior to the required period of twenty-seven months, the classis may petition the General Synod to substitute a period of ministry supervised by the General Synod through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the ~~Theological Education Agency~~ Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency for all or part of its twenty-seven-month requirement.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9. *Certificates of Fitness for Ministry*

Sec. 2. Candidates at Other Seminaries

a. A candidate for the ministry who has received the degree of Master of Divinity or its academic equivalent from a seminary not officially related to the Reformed Church in America upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies, is found to be qualified, and is adjudged to be a fit candidate for the gospel ministry, shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees of the ~~Theological Education Agency~~ Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which is entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination.

b. The General Synod through the board of trustees of ~~the~~ ~~Theological Education Agency~~ Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency shall require the applicant to furnish, at the conclusion of seminary studies, the following: a master of divinity degree or its equivalent from a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the ~~General Synod Council~~ Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency; a transcript of the applicant's academic record at this seminary; and evidence of confessing membership in a Reformed church of the classis making the petition.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12. *Reception of Ministers and Licensed Candidates from Other Denominations*

Sec. 5. A licensed candidate from another denomination shall not be ordained as a minister before serving in a supervised ministry for a period of up to twenty-four months. The classis shall petition the General Synod to provide this superintendence through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the

~~Theological Education Agency~~ Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, which will determine the length of period of supervision.

The creation of a new agency that has as its primary responsibility the oversight of standards for the preparation of candidates for ministry necessitates the elimination of the *BCO* section that currently places that responsibility with the General Synod Council and requires placement instead with the General Synod.

Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7. ***Committees, Boards, and Agencies of the General Synod***

~~*Sec. 6.* The General Synod shall exercise its responsibility for overseeing the standards for the preparation for the professional ministry through the General Synod Council.~~

Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2. ***Responsibilities of the General Synod***

* *Sec. 8.* The General Synod shall exercise responsibility in the oversight of standards for the preparation of candidates for the ministry of Word and sacrament.

*See proposed deletion of existing Section 8 in the "Elimination of Need for Dispensations" section below.

The Candidate Care Committee

The 1997 General Synod Report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America describes the formation of "candidate care committees" (*MGS 1997*, p. 338). The *Book of Church Order* currently requires classes to "care" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 2) and to "show continuing sympathetic interest" (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 4) for candidates for ministry. Provision for appropriate committees is made in the following proposed amendment.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8. ***Supervision of Students of Theology***

Sec. 4. **The candidate shall be under the supervision of the classis while in seminary, but shall remain subject to the ecclesiastical discipline of the board of elders of the church in which membership is held. The classis shall show a continuing sympathetic interest by ~~giving guidance in~~ appointing a committee for each candidate to guide the candidate's study program and practical training.**

An Approved Alternate Route

The 1997 General Synod Report of the Task Force on Standards for Preparation for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America proposes an "alternate route" leading toward ordination (*MGS 1997*, pp. 346ff.). This path does not necessarily include attending a seminary. Furthermore, it perforce eliminates the necessity of dispensations by General Synod.

In this manner, a classis may petition the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency for permission for a candidate to begin preparation for ministry by an alternate route. The classis, in coordination with MFCA, proposes a course of study for the candidate. At the completion of the program, the candidate is examined by MFCA, which, upon its satisfaction, grants the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.

The following proposed new Section 3 revision accommodates the "alternate route."

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9. ***Certificates of Fitness for Ministry***

Sec. 3. Other Candidates

A candidate for the ministry who has not received the degree of Master of Divinity or a degree that is its equivalent from a seminary that is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or by a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency may qualify for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry provided the following conditions are met:

a. **A consistory shall assess the candidate's call, gifts, and experience in accordance with the standards requisite for the ministry of Word and sacrament. The consistory shall apply to the classis on the candidate's behalf.**

b. **The classis shall determine: (1) the candidate has at least five years' experience in leadership in the church; (2) the consistory has demonstrated compelling need for the candidate's ministry; (3) the candidate gives evidence of the call, gifts, and experience for the ministry of Word and sacrament, and (4) it is not feasible for the candidate to complete a Master of Divinity degree at an accredited seminary.**

c. **The classis shall apply to the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency for permission to pursue a special course of ministerial formation. If that agency rejects the application, it shall clearly state its reasons. The classis may reapply.**

d. **The classis shall form a committee to care for and to guide the candidate through his or her program.**

e. **The classis shall propose to the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency an appropriate program of ministerial formation.**

f. **When the candidate has completed the course of study, the candidate shall be examined for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry by the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency. The method of assessment shall be culturally and linguistically appropriate.**

g. When the candidate passes the examination, the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency may award the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.

Elimination of Need for Dispensations

With the approved above "alternate route," the Task Force to Implement Standards judged that the old dispensation route no longer applies. At first glance, this appears to be a loss for both General Synod and classes. The loss is only apparent, however. Under the current system, applications for dispensation for those not enrolled in a Master of Divinity program must be processed by either TEA or an RCA seminary. Under the proposed change, these applications will be handled by the new MFCA. In fact, the proposed alternate route makes for greater flexibility in designing a program that is appropriate for the candidate's circumstance, and it further assures General Synod and classes that the candidate will demonstrate the appropriate character, education, and skills to fulfill the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament.

The elimination of Section 1 of Article 10 on dispensations may give reason for pause. If a classis desires that a candidate be granted dispensation from part of the academic program, how is it to be handled? The new MFCA, as the agency overseeing standards for ministry, can "process" requests much as they are handled currently. However, the elimination of dispensations offers a decided gain. If, for example, a student is unable to pass a seminary course in a biblical language, MFCA, in conjunction with a seminary, may propose an alternative that assists the candidate in gaining appropriate skills in biblical interpretation and sensitivity to the biblical record.

The following proposed revisions to delete provisions for dispensations were prepared by the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Task Force to Implement Standards.

Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2. ***Responsibilities of the General Synod***

~~* *Sec. 8.* The General Synod may grant to a candidate for the ministry a dispensation from a required course of study in a theological seminary, or from the professorial certificate, when a classis shall recommend such dispensation.~~

*See proposed new Section 8 addition in the "Placement and Responsibilities of a New Agency in the Order" section above.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10. ***Dispensations***

Article 10. Dispensations

~~*Sec. 1. Master of Divinity Degree Candidates at Theological Seminaries*~~

~~A candidate for the ministry who is a student enrolled in a Master of Divinity degree program at a theological seminary, but because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, or other sufficient reason, finds it too difficult to meet the full requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, shall make application to the classis for a dispensation.~~

a. If the classis finds the reason sufficient, it shall petition the General Synod of behalf of the applicant for a dispensation from any part of the seminary's academic requirements (Article 8, Section 6a). The petition with the reasons for seeking the dispensation shall be made by January 15 of the year in which it is to be given final disposition by the Synod.

b. The General Synod, through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Theological Education Agency, shall inquire carefully into the reasons submitted by the classis as to why the applicant is unable to meet the full constitutional requirements for a candidate's preparation.

c. Upon recommendation of the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Theological Education Agency, the General Synod may grant the requested dispensation.

Sec. 2. Persons Not Enrolled in a Master of Divinity Degree Program

A confessing member of a congregation in the Reformed Church in America who has received special gifts for the office of minister, but is unable to take the regular course of seminary instruction in a Master of Divinity degree program because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, language differences, or other sufficient reason, may seek a dispensation from the requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry by making application to the classis.

a. If the classis is satisfied that the applicant is qualified to serve acceptably as a minister of the Reformed Church in America and finds the reasons for the dispensation sufficient, it shall petition the General Synod on behalf of the applicant for a dispensation from the requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The petition with the reasons for seeking the dispensation shall be made at least fifteen months prior to the time it is to be given final disposition by the Synod. After the petition is received, any inquiry into the applicant's qualifications deemed necessary may be undertaken under the auspices of the Synod or the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Theological Education Agency.

b. The board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Theological Education Agency shall examine the applicant concerning gifts for the office of minister, inquire into the reasons why the applicant is unable to pursue a course of seminary instruction, examine the applicant in the areas of knowledge which the Reformed Church in America has designated as indispensable for the proper exercise of the ministerial office, and assign and supervise until completion such studies as it shall deem necessary and useful.

~~c. After completion of the above and upon recommendation of the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Theological Education Agency, the General Synod may grant the requested dispensation.~~ (ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-12 by adding to the end of the motion the following paragraphs:

"A candidate for the ministry who is a student enrolled in a Master of Divinity Degree program at a theological seminary, but because of a sufficient reason, finds it too difficult to meet the full requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry may make application to the classis for a dispensation.

If the classis finds the reason sufficient, it shall petition the General Synod on behalf of the applicant for a dispensation from any part of the seminary's academic requirements." The motion LOST.)

(A motion was made and supported to divide R-12 and that synod vote separately on changes to the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, *Dispensations*. The motion LOST.)

(A motion was made and supported to divide R-12 and that synod vote separately on changes to the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, *Dispensations*. The motion LOST.)

➢Upon a motion from the floor, synod

VOTED: R-13
To request the Commission on Church Order to propose changes to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* which will allow classes to request dispensations on behalf of ministerial candidates who have been or will be granted the M.Div.Degree from an ATS accredited seminary, but who are not able to meet the full requirements of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)≺

REVISIONS OF THE *BYLAWS OF THE GENERAL SYNOD* FOR STANDARDS FOR THE PREPARATION OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

Background Information

The *Bylaws of the General Synod* revisions recommended below are presented as one recommendation. The commentary that precedes the two sections is not in bold and is not part of the recommendation presented below.

Transfer of Responsibility for Overseeing Standards

The creation of a new agency that has as its primary responsibility the oversight of standards for the preparation of candidates for ministry necessitates the elimination of the *Bylaws of the General Synod* section that currently places that responsibility with the General Synod Council. (See the above *BCO* amendments of Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7 and Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 8 that transfer responsibility from the General Synod Council to the General Synod).

The transfer of responsibility from the General Synod Council requires the following revision in the *Bylaws of the General Synod.*

R-14.
To adopt in first reading the following amendments to the *Bylaws of the General Synod* in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod for approval (addition is underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Article 3. General Synod Council

Sec 6. Responsibilities **(Deletion. Existing sections f-k will be relettered e-j.)**

~~e. To oversee the standards for the preparation for the professional ministry in the Reformed Church in America.~~

MFCA Corresponding Delegates to General Synod

Since the functions of the current TEA will be assumed by the new MFCA, a further change is necessary in the *Bylaws of the General Synod* for MFCA corresponding delegates to General Synod.

Article 8. Corresponding Delegates

Sec. 4. Seminary Students

The students of each RCA seminary shall appoint two of their members as corresponding delegates.

~~**The Theological Education Agency (TEA) director, in consultation with the TEA Executive Committee, shall appoint two of the students enrolled in the TEA program as corresponding delegates.**~~

The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency shall appoint two students not enrolled in an RCA seminary as corresponding delegates. (ADOPTED)

STANDARDS FOR CLASSICAL EXAMINATIONS

In consultation with the Task Force to Implement Standards, CCO has begun a study and review of the classical examinations as prescribed in *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6. Recommended amendments for Section 6 will be prepared by CCO for report to the 1999 General Synod.

Overtures

RCA Medical Insurance Coverage for Prenatal/Postnatal Expenses

1. **The Classis of Illinois overtures General Synod to direct the Board of Pensions to include in the RCA medical insurance program coverage of prenatal and postnatal expenses for RCA medical insurance participants who are adopting.**

Reasons:

1. Under current coverage the RCA medical insurance program does not pay the prenatal and postnatal expenses in adoption cases. These expenses must often be paid by the adopting parents.

2. Most corporations have an adoption assistance plan to help cover costs of adoption.

3. Since the RCA medical insurance program does pay prenatal and postnatal expenses for the biological parents, it is only fair that adoptive parents have the same equal benefits.

4. The RCA should encourage adoptions as a biblical model for families.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-15.
To refer the overture to the Board of Pensions for study and report to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED) ≺

Ten-Year Term Limit for Denominational Staff

2. **The Classis of Florida overtures General Synod to implement, effective June 30, 1999, a policy in perpetuity requiring all ministers of Word and sacrament who have served in a denominational staff position for ten consecutive years or longer to leave their denominational staff position; and further,**

   to require these denominational staff persons to not be eligible to apply for any denominational staff position again until these persons complete a fresh term of no less than five years in full-time ministry as a pastor of a local congregation.

Reasons:

1. The very term "Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament" points to the normative character of the function of parish ministry to the office. Denominational staff who have spent decades not pastoring a local congregation or who have never pastored or have pastored ineffectively a local congregation are at risk of losing the heart of his or her own calling and are jeopardizing his or her opportunity to lead other ministers and elders.

2. The current practice of denominational staff spending decades in the same position and then often immediately moving to another denominational staff position has often resulted in stagnation, loss of vision, and loss of renewal and positive change of denominational structures.

3. Given the long-term state of plateau and decline of the denomination as a whole, those denominational staff who have served extended terms have never known a period in which their role was not primarily a maintenance one. Their return to a local congregation and the challenge of renewal on a smaller scale may help them regain vision.

4. Those denominational staff with a heart for the calling of minister of Word and sacrament will rejoice in the opportunity to exercise those gifts afresh in a local congregation. Such leaders will likely be welcomed back to denominational staff positions in the future, since the policy of term limits provides for regular denominational staff openings.

5. The policy of term limits for denominational staff helps "new blood and new ideas" enter into the RCA denominational staff.

6. The delay in implementation of this policy of term limits for denominational staff until June 30, 1999, allows ample opportunity for denominational staff to find local congregations to serve.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-16.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This overture denies the concept of call to long-term specialized ministry and giftedness for that ministry to be in denominational staff positions. We are not convinced that denominational staff are at greater risk of losing their call to their ministries than pastors who serve longer than ten years in a parish setting, and there is no such stipulation for parish ministers. We are of the belief that persons are called to a denominational staff position, as evidenced by installation into specialized ministry when taking such an office.

2. All members of the denominational staff are members of local congregations, keeping the vision of the church before them on a continuous basis.

3. The relationship between denominational staff and congregations is further enhanced by their relationship with the General Synod Council, exposing the staff to great diversity of congregations and a plethora of needs and celebrations.

4. The Personnel and Evaluation Committee of GSC, composed of both clergy and laity, annually evaluates and reviews performance of denominational staff.

5. Those in long-term service keep the story of our denomination alive. Knowing the past effects the present and planning for the future.➢

Interim Minister

3. **The Classis of Schenectady overtures General Synod to request the Commission on Church Order to clarify, regulate, and further define the position of interim minister in the *Book of Church Order,* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 6, for report to the 1999 General Synod.**

Reasons:

1. The title "interim" should be used only by those ministers who receive specialized interim minister training and by those who are endorsed as qualified by General Synod or its designated agent. Unfortunately, the term "interim" is used freely by many who are untrained for this demanding type of specialized ministry. Classes should be urged to use this designation of interim carefully.

2. Interim ministers have a specialized function to assist vacant congregations by helping to heal their past hurts and/or anger or work through the grief of the leaving of a long-term pastor and to prepare congregations for the next full-time installed minister. Those "interim" ministers who simply conduct preaching services and provide hospital calling are not interim in the technical sense of the word. Other designations are available for those who wish to serve congregations without interim training, e.g., ministers under contract.

3. The *Book of Church Order* needs to address the interim minister serving in a congregation outside his or her own classis of membership. Interim ministers need to be accountable to the classis where they are doing interim work. Interim ministers should become members of the classis where they are serving, even if it is for a very limited period of time.

4. The *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 4 states:

   > The minister under contract . . . shall report to classis whenever that body shall require it.

   The above Section 4 is inadequate, as it pertains to specialized interim ministers.

5. The *Book of Church Order* needs to stipulate the anticipated period of time and the method and number of extensions that a specialized interim minister may work in a given congregation in order to avoid the specialized interim minister serving in perpetuity in a given congregation.

6. The *Book of Church Order* needs to address the impropriety of the specialized interim minister being called to the position in which he or she is serving as a specialized interim minister. Not to be called to the position in which the specialized minister is serving is already an unwritten rule in many classes. This rule needs to be clearly stated.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-17.
To refer the overture to the Commission on Church Order for report to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED)➢

From the Report of the President

P-2 (p. 41) was referred to the advisory committee on Church Vocations.

In response to P-2 (p. 41) the advisory committee on Church Vocations recommended:

> **R-18.**
> **To covenant together as the Reformed Church in America that all of us together as a body will do everything in our power to foster, develop, and encourage the ministry and leadership of women at all levels of church life—including as elders and deacons, as ministers of Word and sacrament, as professors of theology and as leaders in classes, regional synods, and General Synod Council staff; and further,**
>
> **to instruct the General Synod Council to examine the historical, cultural, and structural barriers to the leadership of women in the mission of the church, and to develop an intentional and long-range plan that includes concrete ways in which women's and men's gifts in ministry and leadership may be equally represented during the next decade at all levels of church life, for report to the General Synod of 2000. (ADOPTED)**

Reason: The office of professor of theology was unintentionally left out of the president's proposal. The recommendation from the advisory committee corrects this omission.

New Business

Amendment 5 (p. 63) was referred to the advisory committee on Church Vocations for consideration of concerns raised by synod delegates and for its advice.

In response to amendment 5 (p. 63), the advisory committee on Church Vocations recommended:

> **R-19.**
> **To declare amendment 5 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 1998 edition of the *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)**

Reasons:

1. The committee affirms the commendation to the Commission on Theology for its fine work on the paper, "The Commissioning of Preaching Elders" and reaffirms the gifts of members of the entire church.

2. The paper does not limit the office of elder, but seeks to create a standard for the preaching ministers of the church.

3. The *Book of Church Order* preserves the report of the consistory to "authorize, in occasional or special circumstances, other persons to preach" (*BCO*, Part 1, Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 7e, p.13).

INTRODUCTION

EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING THE CHURCH

"When they [Paul and Barnabas] arrived [in Antioch], they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27).

From homes to rented gyms to elaborate structures whose architecture is a statement of praise, Christians and seekers need physical places to gather for worship. EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT administers the RCA's outreach to the unchurched and administers the planning, development, growth, and funding of new RCA congregations. It is concerned with such questions as:

- How does the Reformed Church in America faithfully and effectively bear witness to Jesus Christ?
- How may the RCA continually be refreshed and nurtured for a life of service?
- What types of ministries are needed?
- How can buildings best be located, planned, and funded?

In its work, there is a three-part strategy:

1. Extension—the establishing of churches in unchurched areas.
2. Membership conservation—the establishing of churches in areas to which RCA members have moved.
3. Retention—the maintaining of churches in areas of shifting populations.

As Christians in the Reformed tradition, holding to the Scriptures as the Word of God, we joyfully confess our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and our unity with all Christians in the world mission of his church. We share the newly expressed concern of believers everywhere to understand the nature of evangelism and its place in our total task. We deplore our own tendencies in thought and action to separate gospel proclamation from compassionate ministry. We believe that both are rightly understood only in the light of the Bible's pervasive theme—the kingdom of God:

- The Proclamation of the Kingdom. We affirm that to evangelize is to proclaim the good news of God's reign.

- The Signs of the Kingdom. The proclamation of God's kingly rule brings with it the reality proclaimed.
- The Imperative of the Kingdom. Christ sends his church to make disciples of all nations.

Major responsibility for EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT is assigned to the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee. It is supported in part through loans made by the Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund.

REPORTS ON EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH GROWTH

Report of the Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund, Inc.

The Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund, Inc. (RCABEF) is a New York not-for-profit corporation. It functions under the ecclesiastical authority of the Reformed Church of America through the General Synod Council (GSC). Its purpose is to support the work of the General Synod Council of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America by rendering financial assistance in the erection of church buildings. In fulfillment of this purpose, it maintains and operates two separate loan funds. One is the Church Building Fund (CBF). The other is the Extension Foundation Fund (EFF).

The primary sources of funds for CBF are gifts, bequests, and grants from members, agencies, and instrumentalities of the RCA. The primary source of funds for EFF is the sale of promissory notes. Such notes are offered in fixed maturities of approximately two, five, and ten years. The notes are securities, and therefore are offered for sale through an offering circular pursuant to registration requirements, exemptions, or other qualifications under applicable regulatory procedures. Currently RCABEF offers its notes for sale in fifteen states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The rates of interest paid on EFF notes are established quarterly by a subcommittee of the RCABEF board.

At the end of 1997 the corporation had assets of over $32.26 million. Of this amount, over $21.75 million was in the form of loans outstanding to RCA congregations, and $2,708,000 was committed but not yet funded. At the end of 1997 ninety-seven CBF loans and fifty-five EFF loans were outstanding or committed but not yet funded to local RCA congregations. Following this report is a list of all churches who currently are borrowers from RCABEF.

During 1997 seventeen loans were paid off (compared to seven in 1996). The number of loan commitments issued in 1997, as well as the total dollar amount committed, was lower than in 1996. Specifically, eight commitments for loans were issued to RCA congregations in 1997 (compared to ten in 1996), and the total dollar amount committed was $1,658,000 (compared to $2,035,000 in 1996). RCABEF rejoices with the congregations whose loan applications have been approved, and prays that the facilities that are built or remodeled will glorify God and help these congregations fulfill their call to ministry in their communities.

As it looks back on 1997, RCABEF has much for which to be thankful. Delinquency rates remain at the lower level achieved in 1995 and maintained in 1996. Investments in EFF investment notes remain relatively steady. CBF continues to grow in part due to interest received on outstanding loans and investments of idle cash, and in part due to the generosity of donors (including those who contributed generously to the $9.8 by '98 campaign).

As RCABEF board looks ahead, it sees much work to do. This is because the RCA (whose work RCABEF supports) has countless opportunities before it. The 1997 General Synod declared the RCA a missionary denomination for the twenty-first century; encouraged every congregation to think of itself as a mission station and its members as missionaries; and instructed all staff, units, agencies, task forces, commissions, and committees of the General Synod to vision, plan, strategize, prioritize, and act in ways consistent with these declarations (MGS 1997, R-4, p. 422). Similarly, the 1997 General Synod adopted a Statement of Mission and Vision that emphasizes this mission orientation (MGS 1997, pp. 78-80). That General Synod also instructed the General Synod Council to audit all of its present programs and commitments in light of the Statement of Mission and Vision and to identify, manage, and

prioritize the resources necessary to implement this vision (MGS 1997, R-3, p. 428).

RCABEF commenced such a process by calling together an ad hoc committee comprised of representatives from the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee/Unit, other GSC committees/units, the RCA's Urban Ministries Team, and the Council of Field Secretaries (COFS). The representatives from GSC are pastors of local churches. The goal of this group is to recommend to RCABEF appropriate revisions to its current policies and programs so that the resources of RCABEF (and in particular the growing resources of CBF) are used as effectively as possible to support the RCA's church development endeavors. A series of meetings of this ad hoc committee is planned for 1998. It is hoped that preliminary recommendations will be made to the RCABEF in the fall of 1998, and that final recommendations will be made and approved in the summer of 1999.

These times of reevaluation, redirection, and change are both exciting and unsettling, and almost certainly will result in more work to be done by RCABEF. As RCABEF continues with its work, it asks for your support and prayers.

Canada

Bethel Reformed Church, Fort MacLeod, Alberta
Christ Community Church, St. Albert, Alberta
Bethel Reformed Church, Abbotsford, British Columbia
New Life Community Church, Burnaby, British Columbia
Grace Community Church, Surrey, British Columbia
Elmwood Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Bethel Reformed Church, Brantford, Ontario
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock, Ontario
Faith Reformed Church, Stevensville, Ontario

United States

New Hope Community Church, Gilbert, Arizona
Christ's Community Church, Glendale, Arizona
Prescott Community Church, Prescott, Arizona
Hope Community Church, Scottsdale, Arizona
Eden Korean Church, Buena Park, California
Canyon Lake Community Church, Canyon Lake, California
Corona Community Church, Corona, California
Crossroads Community Church, Elk Grove, California
Cross Winds Community Church, Hesperia, California
New Hope Community Church, Fremont, California
New Hope Community Church, Glendora, California
Calvary Community Church, Hemet, California
Palm Canyon Community Church, Moreno Valley, California
Church of the Chimes, San Jose, California
Rancho Community Reformed Church, Temecula, California
New Hope Community Church, Aurora, Colorado
The Springs Community Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado
Church of the Rockies, Denver, Colorado
Our Saviour's Church, Lakewood, Colorado
Faith Community Church, Littleton, Colorado
West Broward Community Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
First Reformed Church, Tampa, Florida
North Atlanta Community Church, Roswell, Georgia
The Adventure Life Reformed Church, Altoona, Iowa

Christ's Family Reformed Church, Davenport, Iowa
Bethany Reformed Church, Des Moines, Iowa
Calvary Reformed Church, Des Moines, Iowa
Heartland Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa
First Reformed Church of Prairie City, Prairie City, Iowa
New Life Reformed Church, Sioux Center, Iowa
Twin Falls Reformed Church, Twin Falls, Idaho
Downers Grove Community Church, Downers Grove, Illinois
Peace Community Church, Frankfort, Illinois
Peace Reformed Church, Mt. Prospect, Illinois
Faith Community Church, West Chicago, Illinois
Christ's Community Church, Fishers, Indiana
Christ's Community Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana
Crossroads Church, Overland Park, Kansas
Harvest Community Church, Wichita, Kansas
Boston Taiwanese Christian Church, Framingham, Massachusetts
Reformed Church of Corinth, Byron Center, Michigan
Christ Community Church of Canton, Canton, Michigan
Church of the Saviour, Coopersville, Michigan
Open Door Reformed Church, Dorr, Michigan
University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan
Resurrection Reformed Church, Flint, Michigan
Thornapple Community Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Glen Lake Community Reformed Church, Glen Arbor, Michigan
Trinity Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Covenant Community Church, Hudsonville, Michigan
Church of the Savior, Niles, Michigan
Fourth Reformed Church, Oshtemo, Michigan
Gun Lake Community Church, Wayland, Michigan
Riverside Reformed Church, Bloomington, Minnesota
Peace Reformed Church, Eagan, Minnesota
Minnesota Valley Community Church, Prior Lake, Minnesota
Christ Community Church, Blue Springs, Missouri
Christ's Church, St. Peter's, Missouri
Westwood Church, Omaha, Nebraska
First Reformed Church, Lincoln Park, New Jersey
Ocean Reformed Church, Manahawkin, New Jersey
Pinelands Reformed Church, Toms River, New Jersey
Community Church of Colonie, Albany, New York
Shin Kwang Church of New York, Bayside, New York
United Reformed Church of Williamsbridge Road, Bronx, New York
New Lots Community Church, Brooklyn, New York
First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of the Town of Princetown, Duanesburg, New York
Helderberg Reformed Church, Guilderland Center, New York
Nakwon Reformed Church, Sunnyside, Long Island, New York
Siloam Church, Flushing, New York
Choongsyn Korean Church, Flushing, New York
Pitcher Hill Community Church, North Syracuse, New York
New Life Community Church, Sayville, New York
Grace Christian Church, Staten Island, New York
Reformed Church of Syracuse, Syracuse, New York
Clarkstown Reformed Church, West Nyack, New York
Pultneyville Reformed Church, Williamson, New York
First Reformed Church, Wynantskill, New York

First Reformed Church of Cary, Cary, North Carolina
Red River Reformed Church, West Fargo, North Dakota
New Hope Reformed Church, Powell, Ohio
Newtown Reformed Church, Newtown, Pennsylvania
The Reformed Church, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania
Good News Reformed Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Franklin Fellowship Church, Franklin, Tennessee
Christ Community Church, Dallas, Texas
St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas, U. S. Virgin Islands
Fourth Corner Community Church, Bellingham, Washington
Servants of Christ, Federal Way, Washington
Trinity Reformed Church, Kent, Washington
Church of the Good Shepherd, Lynnwood, Washington
East Valley Reformed Church, Yakima, Washington
Trinty Community Reformed Church, Brown Deer, Wisconsin
New Life Community Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Clinton, Wisconsin

Report of the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF EVANGELISM AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

OUTREACH AND RENEWAL

In his president's report to the Classis of Zeeland, the Rev. Stephen Simon said:

> Two broad areas in which many of us are struggling are **outreach** and **congregational renewal.** These are not new issues, nor are they ones that will be solved once we find "the right program." These are deep issues that reach to the very core of what it means for us to be the church.

Evangelism and Church Development Services has invested much of its time and energy on the issues of outreach and congregational renewal in the past two years. A report on outreach, "Vision and Implementation Plan for New Congregations," and a report on congregational renewal, "Study of Revitalized Congregations," follow. For those who worked on these reports, it is their hope that these reports will provide a context for fruitful discussions of these two issues at every level of our life as a denomination, and that these discussions will result in actions bearing fruit in the lives of people touched in the name of Christ by RCA congregations.

Vision and Implementation Plan for New Congregations from 1998 to 2005

The 1996 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee and Mission Services Committee, in cooperation with the racial/

ethnic Councils and the Council of Field Secretaries, to develop a vision and implementation plan for new congregations from 1998 to 2005, with special attention to urban areas; and further,

to develop a variety of models for these new congregations in different economic, cultural, and ethnic settings (*MGS 1996*, R-10, P. 369).

The 1997 General Synod voted:

To declare the Reformed Church in America a "missionary denomination" for the twenty-first century; and further,

to declare Canada and the United States (including the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico) a primary mission field for the Reformed Church in America in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, not neglecting the Reformed Church in America's continuing obligation to bring the gospel to all nations and peoples; and further,

to encourage every congregation of the RCA to think of itself as a "mission station" and to think of its members as missionaries called to bear witness to the good news of God in Jesus Christ in the midst of a disbelieving culture (*MGS, 1997*, R-4, p. 422).

In response to the above R-10 and R-4, Evangelism and Church Development Services notes its vision and implementation plan presented below as "Faithful Witnesses." The report on "A Revitalized Church for a Renewed Future" is based on Matthew 25:14-30 and Acts 1:8.

Matthew 25:14-30 is commonly known as the parable of the talents. In this Scripture passage it becomes clear that:

1. God gave his stewards and servants gifts and talents.

2. God expected his servants to "invest" what they received from God, not merely keep it safe. When the person who was given five talents returned five additional talents the response was, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave" (Matt. 14:21). The same response was given to the servant given two talents, when the servant returned the two talents plus another two (Matt. 14:23).

However, a different response occurred when the person given one talent returned the same one talent. The master said, "You wicked and lazy slave!...take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents" (Matt. 14: 26, 28).

Acts 1:8 states: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

FAITHFUL WITNESSES

GOAL

The people of the Reformed Church in America will be faithful witnesses of faith using and developing the resources and gifts God has given them. This will manifest itself in spiritual renewal that leads congregations and people to launch out in faith, following Jesus Christ, serving one another and the world.

STRATEGIES

Evangelism and Church Development Services will work together with Mission Services, Congregational Services, and the racial/ethnic councils on the following three strategies to accomplish the above goal. The strategies are:

1. EVANGELISM

Definition:

Evangelism is winsomely and effectively sharing in word and deed the good news: that God, in Christ, has come to deliver his people from their sins. Through the proclamation of the gospel, God's sons and daughters are called to repentance from sin, to faith in Jesus Christ, to membership in the church, and to service in God's world. Evangelism is "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread" (D.T. Niles).

Goals:

1. **To assist** RCA congregations and classes to evangelize in word and deed.
2. **To remind** the RCA that evangelization includes seeking justice and peace.
3. **To encourage** RCA congregations to develop specific, contextual evangelization strategies.
4. **To train** RCA members to become effective, winsome witnesses.
5. **To make available** resources to assist RCA congregations to reach out to the unchurched.
6. **To assist** RCA congregations to view themselves as mission outposts.
7. **To develop** new paradigms for doing ministry.
8. **To work cooperatively** with sister denominations to evangelize the world.

Objectives (by the year 2003):

1. **To provide** two hundred RCA congregations with specific tools to do ministry and mission more effectively.
2. **To develop** a mission focus to provide all RCA congregations with resources for older persons—especially to those fifty-five years of age and older.
3. **To assist** RCA congregations to examine themselves and their systems for the purpose of viewing themselves as mission outposts.
4. **To develop** the model of an intentionally small, highly discipled, mission-centered church as an example of a new paradigm for doing ministry based on the Church of the Saviour, Washington, D.C.
5. **To encourage** RCA regional synods, classes, and congregations to use the ministry of regional evangelism trainers.

6. **To assist** RCA congregations as members are trained to become effective, winsome witnesses.

7. **To continue** the "Evangelism Connections" partnership with sister denominations.

2. REVITALIZATION

Definition:

To give new life or vigor to RCA congregations so they thrive in their mission to be the salt and light of Christ in their communities.

Goal:

To provide opportunities and to initiate processes by which RCA congregations may experience revitalization through the formation and re-formation of effective leadership.

Objectives:

1. Encourage RCA seminaries, regional synods and classes to consider using "assessment centers" at strategic points of a pastor's development and ministry, such as early in seminary training, following first pastorates, and in mid-career.

2. Request RCA congregations, through their consistories, to place priority on identifying, encouraging, and supporting persons within their congregations who have shown they possess spiritual gifts essential for leadership in the church.

3. Provide, in cooperation with Congregational Services and Ministry and Personnel Services, regular periodic training events that further equip pastors, elders, deacons, and other church leaders to fulfill their ministries effectively and fruitfully.

4. Urge each classis of the RCA to reflect upon, discuss, and develop a strategy for revitalization by the year 2003; and to encourage each of its congregations within its bounds to annually review how each congregation is a vital center of witness in its community (see document, "Vital Centers of Witness," available from the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services)

5. Work to transform consistories into communities of spiritual leaders.

3. NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Definition:

New churches are communities of people who have the following characteristics:

1. Know Christ and seek to be his disciples.

2. Worship together regularly.

3. Live and serve in community.

4. Grow in following Jesus Christ as Lord.

5. Grow numerically (reaching out to those who do not know Christ).

6. Strive to be financially self-sufficient within an agreed-upon time frame.

7. Strive to reproduce themselves as a Christian community.

Goal:

Each regional synod and the majority of classes and congregations of the RCA become involved in new church starts that use a diversity of models and locations; and include Hispanic, Pacific and Asian American, African-American, Native American, and Anglo populations.

Objectives:

1. To encourage and enable each RCA racial/ethnic council to be actively involved in starting new multicultural churches.

2. To resource and work collaboratively with each RCA regional synod to establish specific goals for beginning new churches in their regions.

3. To develop processes by which resources (i.e. money and volunteers) may cross regional boundaries to areas of great opportunity and need for a new RCA congregation.

4. To improve the procedures for identifying qualified candidates for new church developments.

5. To improve the networking and training of pastors for new church developments.

6. Work with the coordinator for urban ministries to develop new churches in the urban frontiers of the North American mission field.

7. Add a new category to New Church Development called "Restart." Restart is defined as an established church with ministry opportunities, but which requires outside intervention and additional resources to reach its potential. Work with RCA regional synods and classes to identify potential churches to "restart," utilizing learnings from new church development.

8. Collaborate with RCA ecumenical partners in strategies, resources, and new models for establishing new RCA congregations that effectively reach their communities with the gospel of Christ.

INTENDED RESULTS

Evangelism and Church Development Services believes and trusts these strategies will result in the following:

1. A 10 percent increase in the total membership of the Reformed Church in America by the close of the year 2005 (310,648 in 1997 to 341,712 by 2005).

2. Eighty new RCA churches started between January 1, 1999, and December 31, 2005.

3. Two hundred RCA congregations voluntarily participating in strategic church revitalization networks by the year 2003. These networks would be affinity groups (a

safe place) where personal transformation of leaders takes place through reflection, prayer, discussion, and mutual accountability within an atmosphere of trust and mutual encouragement.

➢The advisory committee recommended R-1:

R-1.
To endorse the report of the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services entitled, "Faithful Witnesses" (pp. 379-383), inclusive of the strategies and intended results outlined therein.

Reason: The church needs to affirm the direction outlined in the report.➢

➢Upon a motion from the floor, synod:

VOTED: To substitute for R-1

To receive the report of the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services entitled, "Faithful Witnesses" (pp. 379-383); and further,

to direct said office to examine ways to bring each classis to develop a strategic plan for developing new churches; and further,

to direct said office to propose models for operation of churches in communities that are too poor for those churches to be self-sufficient; and further,

to director said office to report on these matters to the General Synod of 1999.➢

A REVITALIZED CHURCH FOR A RENEWED FUTURE

Stategies for Revitalizing RCA Churches

BACKGROUND

The 1996 General Synod voted:

To instruct the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee, in cooperation with the Council of Field Secretaries and the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, to engage in a study of revitalized congregations; and further,

to propose, using that study as a basis, specific plans and strategies for such revitalization that can be implemented through the General Synod Council in cooperation with regional synods, classes, and consistories; and further,

to make this study a priority during 1997 and 1998, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, R-11, p. 369).

A Revitalization Summit Team was created to conduct a study on revitalization. Members of the team are:

Anthony Vis
Charles Van Engen
Kevin Korver
Peter Semeyn
Jhonny Alicea-Baez
Charles Morris
Thomas De Vries
Bill Lee
Arthur Hudak
Stanley Perea
Karl Overbeek
Barbara Alexander
Vicki Menning

The Revs. Bruce Laverman and Richard Welscott serve as staff resource persons for the team, GSC member Helen Monsees served as facilitator.

For a growing number of North American churches today the issue of survival is the foremost focus in their minds and actions. It is not an issue of persecution or martyrdom, but the result of a slow process of decline and ineffectiveness in ministry. As the number of churches that close their doors each year increases, and the attendance rolls of neighborhood churches decrease, the level of concern is on the rise.

For the Reformed Church in America, poised on the edge of the twenty-first century, declining, plateaued, and stagnant churches are of significant interest and great concern. With a vision for revitalization, the 1996 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee, in cooperation with the Council of Field Secretaries and the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, to engage in a study of revitalized congregations; and further,
>
> to propose, using that study as a basis, specific plans and strategies for such revitalization that can be implemented through the General Synod Council in cooperation with regional synods, classes, and consistories; and further,
>
> to make this study a priority during 1997 and 1998, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-11, p. 396).

With a foundational perspective of not just studying the issue, but developing strategies for real change and the commitment to offer help and hope to RCA congregations needing and desiring revitalization, this response to R-11 is undertaken. It is a frontal assault on "business as usual" in bringing a re-formed and renewed vision to the people and congregations of the Reformed Church in America.

INTRODUCTION

He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matt. 15:3).

"Neither is new wine put into old wineskins" (Matt. 9:17).

In January 1997 the members of the Revitalization Summit Team first came together. They were from diverse backgrounds, churches, ethnicities, genders, and regions of the United States. Very few of them knew one another prior to this first meeting. Yet they shared a similar vision and passion that bound them together tightly over the next nine months.

God had used each person on this summit team in the process of revitalizing a congregation in the Reformed Church in America.

Out of the divergent experiences within this summit team came an understanding of the working of God in the life of the church. In sharing stories and giving testimonies to God's faithfulness and goodness, a similarity of divine direction and destiny began to emerge. From their emergent ministries came a leading of the Spirit of God in giving guidance for spiritual vitality in the ministries of the congregations of the Reformed Church in America.

And as the summit team members came from different directions, God worked in a different direction than any would have articulated or determined in advance.

Ultimately it was from the experience of sharing life together that a strategy for revitalization emerged. The hope, the desire, and the prayer of this summit team is that each pastor in the RCA will be able to experience the transforming power of being with a similar group of pastors living lives of growth and cultivation that lead to corporate renewal.

The foundational elements determined for revitalization were experienced by each revitalization pastor on this summit team. The barriers identified were also impediments with which each had to deal. But it was out of the experience of community that a commonality of commitment to revitalization emerged.

This report to the General Synod is the result of a leading of the Spirit of God that could not be manipulated or manufactured. If each RCA pastor could experience the joy of mutual ministry, the encouragement of co-laboring, and the strength of the presence of God as it was enjoyed by the participants of the Revitalization Summit Team, personal transformation would grow for individual pastoral leaders, bringing with it a corporate transformation and renewal.

The proposal of the summit team is a break from traditional responses to renewing churches, and the desire of the summit team is to fill new wineskins with the new wine that God has for us as the church of Jesus Christ, ready to move forward in faith into the twenty-first century. It is not business as usual.

The conviction and commitment of this summit team is for revitalization and renewal to be facilitated within the congregations of the Reformed Church in America by the power of the Holy Spirit. The summit team pledges its involvement as God's agents of change, whether it be formal or informal.*

To God be the glory!

*See recommendation R-3, p. 402

Identifying the Critical Issue

Vitality is a quality of life. It is the element that distinguishes the living from the nonliving. Organisms that possess vitality have the capacity to live, grow, develop, and reproduce. The church of Jesus Christ is more an organism than it is an organization. The apostle Paul uses metaphors like the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12: 12-27) and the "bride of Christ" (Eph. 5: 22-32) to convey a sense of life and being in describing the church. It is reflecting the reality of a living God in the life of God's covenant people.

A vital church is one where there is a passionate love for God which overflows into love for one another. Life in the church is drawn from the power of the gospel, given to the church through the precious and purposeful life of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is a vitality that comes from experiencing new life through redemption and salvation provided by the grace of God.

As the church lives out its ministry as the body of Christ, the church is to bring new life to homes, neighborhoods, communities, cities, and the world in response to its commission; bringing people to relationship with Jesus Christ, building them into disciples, and equipping them to reach others through their words and their actions of justice and mercy.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Question and Answer 54 communicates the sense of life and vibrancy that is a part of the church in bringing definition to it and one's participation in it:

Q: What do you believe concerning "the holy catholic Church"?

A: I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. Moreover, I believe that I am and forever will remain a living member of it.

The church is alive and empowered by the Spirit of God, and members of this community are to be living out their true faith in Jesus Christ as he has gathered and called them to himself and to his church.

But while vitality is presently available to the church through the life of Christ and the ministry of an active and living Holy Spirit, in many local congregations this vitality currently appears to be absent. The hope for the church today remains in a refreshing by God's Spirit in breathing life into portions of the body of Christ that need to experience revivalization and revitalization. The prayerful result is that the living church can once again become the hope for a dying world.

Assessing the Need

The Reformed tradition is not a narrow street, but a superhighway on which Christians are prompted by the Spirit to risk the continued reshaping of the church to be effective in the context of a post-modern world. As Christians exegete their culture, they discover daily pressures in life that beg for ministry that is life-giving rather than Spirit-quenching. In society today there is a spiritual hunger for the vitality of life empowered by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church is to bring that message to an age which faces living with:

Data saturation
Designed isolationism
Frenetic lifestyles
Relational poverty
Institutional disillusionment
Competing value systems
Ethical bankruptcy
Future uncertainties

The response to these life pressures produce individuals who are seeking spiritual meaning, relational intimacy, ethical clarity, and practical answers to life's problems. The result for the church is ministry that is exceedingly complex, demanding, and ever-changing. Yet, the church is able to provide a biblical response to societal needs that can only be met through Jesus Christ.

George Barna, in defining the current cultural crisis, stated:

> In view of social trends, the United States faces one of two scenarios in the next five to ten years: moral anarchy or spiritual revival (Quoted in *Church Resource Ministries,* Anaheim, California, 1997).

The signs of the times are prevalent all around us:

1. Only 37 percent of the United States population is in a church on any given Sunday morning.

2. Christianity on the North American continent is stagnant . . . in the past decade there has been no net gain in the number of people becoming Christians.

3. Only 28 percent of United States residents believe churches in their own area of residence are relevant.

4. Not one county in the entire United States has a higher percentage of church people today than it had a decade ago (Anaheim, California: *Church Resource Ministries,* 1997).

The need for churches to be vital centers of witness to the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ has never been greater than it is today. But will churches rise to the need of the hour?

Currently, 3,500 to 4,000 churches in the United States close their doors every year (Robert L. Ransom, "The Challenge of the Unchurched Missionary Church." Fort Wayne, Indiana: Missionary Church Inc., 1997, p. 3). During the next twelve years, 100,000 churches will close in North America (Anaheim, California: *Church Resource Ministries,* 1997).

What reason is there for church closure? Some churches lose their passion for their mission. The commitment to evangelism and discipleship dissipates and eventually evaporates. Some churches fail to pass along the covenantal promises of God in ministering to the younger generations, and they eventually die. Demographic changes and population shifts affect churches adversely, especially those in urban and rural communities. And others fall victim to internal disease, where apathy, contentment with the status quo, conflict, and unresolved moral issues eventually lead to terminal illness.

While the people of Canada and the United States cry out for the church to rise up in response to the need of the moment, the church is shrinking in its ability to impact and is shirking its God-given responsibility. Healthy, vital churches are needed to bring transformation and reformation.

Churches change. In Revelation 2, God confronts the church at Ephesus for neglecting its first love and rebukes the church at Thyatira for tolerating sin. In Revelation 3 it is the church at Laodicea that is exhorted because of its lukewarm response to God. These are examples of churches that started well but over time lost sight of their reason for existence and became ineffective. These were churches in need of revitalization.

Underlying the vision for revitalization are two assumptions:

1. The church at one time had vitality.

   To revitalize is to restore to a former vitality, to bring to new life. In turning around a congregation it is assumed that once it was strong and full of life. Otherwise, it could not be re-vitalized.

2. A church in need of revitalization is not currently experiencing the vitality of ministry that is described and demonstrated through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

   These churches may or may not know the degree to which illness or disease is prevalent, or how close to death and closure they may be, but the issue of survival has probably been thought about and even articulated. Ministry effectiveness is not what it once was, and the loss of a sense of direction is becoming more of a reality.

God has sent the church to be the salt of the earth and light to the world. The church must be salt that is not tasteless and light that is not hidden. The church is vital to God's plan of bringing redemption and salvation to a lifeless and eternally dying world.

Discovering Strategies for Revitalization

Revitalization cannot be created. There is nothing on a human level that can be done to create vitality. God is the source of life, and revitalization is God's business. The apostle Paul validated the primacy of the action of God in 1 Cor. 3:7 when describing the influence upon God's field: "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

Life is only available from the life-giver. Health and vitality are God's gifts.

But while revitalization cannot be created, it can be cultivated. Planting, watering, weeding, and harvesting are the responsibilities given to Christians as God's "fellow-workers." Great energy and effort need to be given to build up the church to its place of natural growth and development. Human endeavors are for the purpose of releasing God's desires for God's field.

Foundational Elements

In attempting to discover ways to help and assist congregations in revitalization, it is valuable to examine churches that have experienced the moving and blessing of the Spirit of God in becoming revitalized. The committee asked the question: "What have been some of the foundational and underlying elements that consistently appear in churches that are turning around?" Here are some of the answers.

1. **Spiritual Renewal**

   Because revitalization is God's business, it begins with a movement toward once again seeking and focusing on the person and power of God to begin bringing a rekindling of a passion for God. Intercessory prayer has been a key ingredient in seeing spiritual renewal spread within a discouraged or declining congregation. RCA pastor the Rev. David Dethmers stated:

   > Prayer is one of the critical elements in creating an environment conducive to the mighty working of God's Spirit. If your church is stuck, stagnant, or sterile—if you hunger for revitalization and renewal, talk to God about it. Introduce others in your congregation to this great gift God gives to each of his children. Without it neither you nor your congregation have a prayer! (David Dethmers, *Revive Us Again.* Reformed Church Press, 1994, p. 80).

   With a refocusing on intentional prayer for the church by the people asking God to breathe life into fresh wineskins, the vitality of a church is given new life as God responds to the requests of God's people.

   Worship is another significant element in spiritual renewal. Worship that connects God and people, that challenges Christ's followers to grow deeper in their Christian life and allows participants to experience God's power and presence, is prevalent in churches experiencing revitalization.

   Revitalized churches have members who have personally experienced a spiritual renaissance. They have a passionate spirituality that is reflected in the personal time they spend with God in Bible study and prayer, a hunger and thirst for the righteousness

of God, and a living out of their faith with contagious enthusiasm, willingly sharing it with others.

Key Question: Does the worship experience bring people into the presence of God? Are the spiritual lives of the church members reflective of a deep commitment to Christ and characterized by an intensive prayer life, by enthusiasm and joy?

2. Positive Leadership

Revitalized congregations have pastoral leadership that knows where the church should be going. The pastor does not need to personally have all the skills required, but must know how to find people to be actively involved in the work of ministry. It is leadership that possesses a vision for the church and empowers the church and its leaders to be visionaries.

German researcher and theologian Christian Schwarz writes:

> Leaders of growing churches concentrate on empowering other Christians for ministry. They do not use lay workers as "helpers" in attaining their own goals and fulfilling their own visions. Rather, they invert the pyramid of authority so that the leader assists Christians to attain the spiritual potential God has for them. These pastors equip, support, motivate, and mentor individuals, enabling them to become all that God wants them to be (Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*. Carol Stream, Illinois: ChurchSmart Releases, 1996, p. 22).

Leadership remains a primary distinctive in revitalized churches. Pastors who are able to model a deep spiritual life, provide vision, be an encourager, and possess a commitment to do what God has called them to do are an integral component of churches that are able to move from ineffective and discouraged in their ministries to effective and enthusiastic in their ministries for Jesus Christ.

Key Question: Do the pastor and church leaders have a God-influenced visionary direction for the church, and do they empower others to fulfill it for God's glory?

3. Clarity of Purpose

Why does the church exist? Revitalized churches have embarked on a process of determining God's unique call for them and their ministries. They have a profound sense of the reason for their church's existence and are able to articulate it. Ministry decisions flow out of their clarity of purpose, and this clarity helps these churches to do ministry on purpose.

Worship, biblical instruction and discipleship, and caring fellowship are all elements of why the church exists. But a transition happens in the life of revitalized congregations when they are able to build their understanding of mission upon the Great Commission (Matt. 28: 19-20). When the focus of the church moves outward to the needs of the lost (Luke 15), and those of the community and the world (Matt. 9: 35-38), from being inward and self-focused, committed only to respond to their own needs, the church begins to experience the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ promised his followers (Acts 1:8).

George Barna concludes from his research of thirty churches that turned around and were revitalized:

> A church will remain in its weakened condition until it becomes outreach-oriented. So many churches become ingrown, wailing constantly about their poor state of affairs, promising to worry about the needs of others outside the church once the church itself becomes healthy again. One of the primary lessons Jesus taught His disciples, though, was that health is a result of demonstrating love for one's neighbor. When a congregation cannot shift its eye off its own needs and onto the needs of others, it is fatally diseased and of limited use to God. (George Barna, *Turnaround Churches.* Ventura, California, Regal Books, 1993, p. 98.)

Revitalized congregations live out purposeful ministry, understanding they are to carry out the Lord's commitment as the functioning body of Christ: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10: 45).

Key Question: Do the people of the church know the reason for their church's existence, and do they see as their starting point the needs of the people whom God has called them to reach?

4. Sense of Community

Unfeigned, practical love has a divinely generated magnetic power far more effective than evangelistic programs which depend almost entirely on verbal communication. People do not want to hear us talk about love, they want to experience how Christian love really works. (Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development.* Carol Stream, Illinois: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996, p. 36.)

Churches experiencing renewal are committed to living out the love of Christ in biblical community. These churches celebrate their life in Christ and engage in activities that build greater relationships. These relationships are characterized by a relatively high degree of love and caring and are established with other Christians within the local covenant community and also those outside the church. But wherever there is a lack of love, further church development is severely hampered.

Key Question: Is the church characterized by a high degree of love for each other and for outsiders?

5. Effective Management

Churches who desire revitalization are willing to look at each program and ministry and are willing to assess, evaluate, and even change or delete ministries that are no longer effective. Ministry is founded and formulated around the purpose of the church. There is a willingness to identify, access, and use external resources, and church leaders are open to ask others for help. Leaders are identified, trained, empowered, and mentored in each significant ministry area. The skills needed to effectively develop ministry structure and lead and manage crisis are sought by the leadership. There is a belief that as new ministries begin, God's Spirit will breathe into this formless clay, and both life and form will spring forth.

Key Question: Is the ministry of the church planned and organized to effectively move the church in the direction of its mission and purpose?

Barriers to Revitalization

While vitality is the natural outgrowth of a congregation of believers experiencing the life given to them by Jesus Christ, there are often obstacles and barriers that lead a church into decline and block it from renewal and revitalization. These significant barriers to revitalization include:

1. **Demonic Divisions**

   The apostle Paul stated that Christians struggle not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil (Eph. 6:12). Jesus Christ himself recognized in the building of his church that the gates of hell would attempt to prevail against it (Matt. 16: 18). The Bible is clear regarding the spiritual struggle and demonic dimension to the realization of the mission of the church.

   Unfortunately, the evil one continues to thwart the church in its effort to be a living witness for Jesus Christ. Through the development of unhealthy relationships among believers, the tolerance of known sin within a congregation, lies and deception, selfish and petty activities that cause factions and schisms, and a myriad of other methods, the adversary continues to seek out opportunities to destroy Christ's church. These demonic actions and activities provide a real barrier to the abundant life and ministry that God desires the church to enjoy.

2. **Leadership Challenged**

   The importance of leadership cannot be overstated. Already identified as a foundational element of revitalization, the demand for leadership is imperative if a church is to experience a turnaround. The reality in ministry today is that many churches are "leadership challenged." They are devoid of leaders who are able to influence others.

   From inadequate pastoral training models which have not produced ministers capable of leading the church, to laity who have not been equipped or encouraged to use their leadership gifts, the declining church faces a leadership challenge that is a significant barrier to a process of renewal and revitalization. The development of leaders is required for the church that is leadership challenged.

3. **No Passion for God**

   Churches that are stuck and needing to start over must return to the ultimate starting point: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matt. 22: 37). Like the church at Ephesus, a return to the first love is required (Rev. 2: 4-5). Often in churches that are struggling, there is a human dimension that overshadows the divine. Solutions are attempted on one's own strength rather than relying on the power of the Almighty.

   When there is no passion, no hunger or thirst for God, new life is illusive. Renewal may need to be preceded by repentance. Corporate transformation can only be experienced as the successor to personal transformation. This barrier can only be broken down through the power of the Holy Spirit who is able to bring conviction and empowering.

4. **Not Mission-Driven**

   Are we, as Christians, on a mission for good or for God? Do we do many things that are good and make us feel positive about ourselves and our church, but are not God's

intentional and eternal call upon us as the church? The apostle Paul stated that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1: 16). The good news is good because it is founded on the goodness of God, who graciously gave Jesus Christ to us in order to provide us with redemption and salvation.

One of the greatest barriers to church revitalization is a congregation's unwillingness or inability to communicate the gospel, to search out its biblical purpose and live it out accordingly. Being a witness for Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to live out the blessed experience of the early church where the Lord was adding daily to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

5. People Not Using Their Gifts

Revitalization in a church is blocked by the limiting of lay participation. Pastors and people who view ministry as the pastor's responsibility prohibit the fulfillment of the church's functioning effectively as the body of Christ as graphically described in 1 Corinthians 12. The body is only able to work when all of its parts are properly engaged. Ephesians 4 shares the design of pastoral leadership equipping Spirit-gifted people as ministers in Christ's church. The ministry must be entrusted to God's people, God's building made with living stones who can minister for God's glory.

6. Internal Focus

"This church exists for me and my family, and to meet our needs." How often that statement is made by well-intentioned Christians who view the purpose of the church as being for them. While that is a significant part of why a church exists, it is still only a part. It is fallacious to believe that Jesus Christ came only to establish communities of faith that would minister only to the faithful. It is a perspective that leads a church to have an internal focus. Programs for ministry flow out of the commitment to meet only the needs of the families in the church, and these programs become a form of ecclesiastical navel-gazing.

Jesus Christ had an external focus. His ministry was a commitment to seek and to save those who were lost (Luke 19: 10). The parables of Jesus shared in Luke 15 of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son are for the express understanding that lost people matter to God. And if these people matter to God, they should matter to God's people. When God's people care only about themselves and their own needs it becomes selfishness, and selfishness is desperately sinful. The compassion of Jesus led him to pray for workers to be sent out into the Lord's harvest (Matt. 9: 35-38). A major barrier to a church's revitalization efforts is the maintaining of a self-centered, internal focus that cares not for the people for whom God cares and for whom Jesus died on a cross.

7. Pastors and Lay Leaders Lack Christ-like Authenticity

Authentic Christianity is living out a faith that is genuine. Too often pastors and other church leaders talk a good game, when reality shows actions that are inconsistent with one's words. A revitalization barrier is leaders who claim to be one thing, then prove to be something else.

A part of the election of God's covenant people is the conforming of them into the image of Christ and the working of sanctification in their lives through the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit. It is experiencing the changes that God desires to produce in their lives as they grow in a deeper, more genuine, and authentic relationship with God. But in churches that need revitalization there is often a lukewarm subsistence in the

Christian life similar to the church at Thyatira that was reproved by God in Revelation 2 for its inconsistency. And lukewarm inconsistency is influenced by the leaders. Unless pastors and lay leaders are willing to grow in their walk with God to a place of being living examples of the transforming power of Jesus Christ, they will be both stumbling blocks and barriers to the work of revitalization that God desires to do in the church.

Vital Leadership

Everything rises and falls on leadership. Leadership continues to be a key and indispensable ingredient for revitalization. In examining this irreplaceable factor, George Barna notes:

> As our studies consistently note, **there is no substitute for strong leadership.** I am absolutely convinced that, had lesser individuals been placed in charge of the ministry of these dying congregations, they would not have become focal points for our study. These churches were enabled to recover from their past and present traumas because they had individuals with strong, visionary leadership skills committed to using every ounce of strength and every shred of intellect to help the church regain its spiritual health. (George Barna, *Turnaround Churches.* Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1993, p. 114).

A wide range of leadership skills is necessary to overcome the barriers to revitalization. Character formation and ministry skills are vital if vitality is once again going to grow within a church. In examining and identifying the revitalization barriers, it is discovered that for each barrier there is its leadership counterpart. A specific leadership quality needs to be developed and implemented if the impediment to revitalization is to be minimized.

1. **Spiritually Prevailing Leadership**

When Jesus' disciples had a demonic encounter in Mark 9, they discovered they were incapable of spiritual victory over the adversary. They questioned Jesus about their ineffectiveness, and Jesus said to them: "This kind can come out only through prayer" (Mark 9:29). (Matthew's parallel account in 17:14-20 has some manuscripts adding vs. 21: "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.") It was one of their first experiences with personal spiritual engagement.

There continues to be a spiritual struggle inside the church today, a struggle against demonic divisions that can only be defeated through prayer and fasting. Spiritually prevailing leadership is called for in engaging the forces of the evil one.

Christians in the Reformed tradition are often uninformed about the spiritual aspect of the conflict that the apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 6. The passage begins with an understanding that the process of engagement comes with being filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The result is that Christians are able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6: 11, 13, 14). Yet, as Christians are involved in this spiritual struggle, it is God's battle, not exclusively that of God's people. Therefore it does not call for aggressiveness on a Christian's part, but submission to the working and will of God. Christians seek the Lord's intervention through prayer and fasting so that the Lord might enter in and minister through us.

Martin Luther understood the ability to prevail in the spiritual arena when he wrote the third verse of the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God":

> And though this world, with devils filled,
> should threaten to undo us,
> we will not fear, for God hath willed

his truth to triumph through us;
the Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

With this foundational understanding, spiritually prevailing leadership confronts the sinful and demonic divisions within a church that draw the vital life from it.

A strategy for spiritually prevailing leadership must include:

1. Identification and acknowledgement that there is a spiritual struggle in which we are engaged.

2. A willingness to confront the principalities and powers and engage the enemy through prayer, fasting, confrontation, and conflict management.

Spiritually prevailing leaders must lead the way in prayer, fasting, and seeking the Lord for His presence and power in overcoming the selfish, sinful, and spiritual divisions that take life from a church. They must lead the way as they follow God's Spirit in having a fresh encounter with God that brings revival and spiritual awakening.

As C. Peter Wagner writes in his book, *Churches That Pray*:

> As Christian people tune in more accurately to the nature of prayer, as they move in the power of prayer and as they adhere to the rules of prayer, we will see many of our churches turned around and our communities opened to the gospel (Peter C. Wagner, *Churches That Pray.* Carol Stream, Illinois: Regal Books, 1993, p. 55).

Prayer is not preparation for the battle; prayer is the battle, as E. M. Bounds was famous for saying. It takes leaders who lead the way in prayer, fasting, and confronting the enemy as deadly and demonic divisions try to defeat the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ. Churches that prevail, that experience both "revivalization" and "revitalization," are led by leaders who both willingly and reluctantly engage themselves in the battle, strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, praying at all times.

2. Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is required in churches attempting to overcome the barrier of being "leadership challenged." In Christianity in general, and in local churches in particular, the question is continually asked: "Where are the leaders?" It appears that leadership is lacking—either nonexistent or at least unexercised. The need is to rise to the leadership challenge and develop leaders who can make a difference for Jesus Christ.

Leadership is influence, and influencers must be identified, trained, and released as leaders within a congregation. The root of leadership is servanthood; the giving of oneself for the benefit of another (Phil. 2: 1-8). As Christians live out their lives modeled after Jesus Christ, they are able to influence others to follow and lead in the same way. Leaders in revitalized churches are developed to perpetuate the ministry of Christ.

As servant leadership is expressed and exercised, the church is able to begin to make an impact—in people's lives and in a church's community. Dr. Robert Saucy described this aspect of leadership well:

> Some talk of a new style of leadership today as involving servanthood. More collegial, less domineering. Yet there is still a radical difference. This alternate leadership is used as a strategy to lead to gain the goal of the leader which is the good of the business or himself. Jesus is not talking about the role of a servant or a servant leadership style. He is talking about the role of being a servant. The radical difference is that the servant leads totally for the good of other people. The people he leads are his ultimate goal, they are not means to another end (Quoted in Paul Cedar, *Strength in Servant Leadership*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987, p. 85).

In Mark 10:45 Jesus states: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Jesus identified his coming as being a servant, and he ministered effectively as a servant leader. Jesus not only talked about it, but modeled it (John 13:14-15). Pastors and key leaders who seek turnaround in their churches must take the example of Christ and willingly lead as servant leaders, overcoming the impediment of being leadership-challenged and rising to the challenge of leadership.

3. Spiritual Leadership

Leadership in the church must above all be spiritual. It must have at its root a deep-seated passion for God. Natural leadership may show the importance of force of personality, motivational skills, and strategic planning abilities, but spiritual leadership flows out of the Spirit of God in order to influence for the things of God.

J. Oswald Sanders in his book, *Spiritual Leadership*, writes:

> Effective spiritual leadership does not come as a result of theological training or a seminary degree, as important as education is. Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you" (John 15: 16). The sovereign selection of God gives great confidence to Christian workers. We can truly say, "I am here neither by selection of an individual nor election of a group, but by the almighty appointment of God."

Spiritual leaders have been sovereignly identified to carry out God's will and work. They walk with God in order to bring the fulfillment of God's heart for a particular church. Rather than looking for revitalization by the dynamics of human effort, they rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. The lives of spiritual leaders reflect a love for and dependence on God, and they delight in obedience.

Because of their personal passion for God, these spiritual leaders are able to help a church discover the importance of prayer, revival, renewal, and mission. Devotion to God and to the ministry of God's people allows key leaders to walk by the Spirit in all aspects of leadership and ministry. Spiritual leadership is perceived in the seeking of God's will in decision-making, a biblical selection process for confirming God's call of elders and deacons, submission to God's Spirit in problem-solving and conflict resolution, and being in tune with the heart of Christ in reproducing additional leaders. In revitalized churches, one discovers an unusual commitment to seek an intimate relationship with God on a regular basis, often precipitated by the severity of circumstances that often push a leader to deeper submission and dependence on God.

4. Strategic Leadership

Proverbs 24:3-4 states: "By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches." The strategic leader understands that God has a plan and purpose for each individual

church. The key element in strategic leadership is identifying and implementing God's plan for the church, finding how and where God is working and joining in it.

Strategic leaders are visionaries. They are able to seek the Lord and determine God's desires for the church. With a sense of God's leading, they can accurately articulate the preferable future that happens when the revitalization process occurs. They can describe with vivid detail what new life looks and feels like as God's Spirit brings a turnaround to a declining or plateaued congregation. Key leaders who understand strategic leadership believe the words of the Lord: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer. 29: 11).

Strategic leadership gives energy and effort to the realization of purpose, planning, and process in the fulfillment of bringing a turnaround and helping a church prevail, renew, and revitalize.

5. Supportive Leadership

The design of God for the development of the church includes the discovery and deployment of spiritual gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. Supportive leadership is integrally involved in the identification and implementation of believers using their gifts in ministry for the benefit of Christ's church. Supportive leaders are equippers who know that church membership means involvement in a ministry which positively impacts the life of the body of Christ as the church.

Ephesians 4:11-13 states the apostle Paul's definition of supportive leadership:

> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

The commitment of supportive leaders in revitalized churches is to participate in a new reformation of God's people that empowers the priesthood of all believers in doing significant ministry for the kingdom of God. They view themselves as equippers and enablers who help in the facilitation of ministry for the church's benefit and God's glory.

6. Selfless Leadership

In the culture of consumerism at the end of the twentieth century, and in the waning of denominational affiliation as a means for church membership, the prominent question of church shoppers, attenders, and members today is: "What's in it for me?" This narcissistic view of life has indeed infiltrated the church. Selfless leadership seeks to confront this sinful, self-centered approach to the church by helping congregations view ministry as not for one's own personal benefit, but for the glory of God and the fulfillment of God's purposes for them.

Selfless leaders realize that greatness in the kingdom of God does not come with a position on the Lord's right or left hand, but by submitting themselves to the least among them. It is leadership committed to moving the focus off one's self and one's own needs, and bringing awareness and response to the needs of others. Selfless leaders minister not for their own kingdom, but for Christ and his kingdom.

7. Self-Leadership

Character, integrity, and authenticity as integral ingredients of leadership are becoming less and less prominent both in society and in the church. Yet self-leadership is predicated on these qualities. The ability to manage one's self must be a precursor to leading and managing the church.

Issues of humility, spiritual growth, faith, and personal holiness are lived out in the life of a leader as a model for the followers. Titus 2:7-8 states:

> Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

As leaders are able to manage themselves, walking in the Spirit of God, striving to learn, and becoming more Christ-like, God is able to use them in developing churches that corporately are authentic, biblically functioning communities of faith.

Pastoral and church leaders need to be committed to raising the standard of leadership in their local congregations, and they need to be committed to growing and developing into the leaders God created them to be. They must discover the multidimensional aspects of leadership that are required to overcome the significant barriers that prohibit churches from becoming all that God desires for them to do and be as centers of worship and witness. It is vital, Spirit-enriched leadership that is able to bring Spirit-empowered vitality to local congregations.

Call to Commitment

"A Revitalized Church for a Renewed Future" is more that a catchy phrase or a slick slogan. It is a call to commitment. Revitalization is work. It is the work of God and the hard work of God's people to see new life breathed into new wineskins.

Three areas identified follow that call for a new perspective with a renewed commitment:

1. Change

Change is inevitable, and change needs to be addressed if churches are to be revitalized. Members of the RCA Revitalization Summit Team were able to describe their churches both before and after going through a process of revitalization.

Prior to revitalization their churches were described as:

Having flat worship
Inwardly focused
Directionless
Having a climate of fear
Spiritually stuck
Having some potential
Lacking leadership
Lacking vision
Segmented
In decline
Stagnant
Predictable

The changes that came with the experience of revitalization brought a new series of descriptions. The churches, following a process of revitalization, were described as having:

Challenging ministry
Unpredictability
Relevance
Vulnerable leadership
Koinonia
Purposeful direction
Vision
Team leadership
Spiritually alive worship
An inviting atmosphere
Growth in many ways
Acceptance
Diversity
An equipping environment
A willingness to try change
Expectancy
A focus on prayer

Change is a definite result of revitalization. It is not change for the sake of change, but for the sake of the church. Each church that enters a process of revitalization must be willing to make a commitment to change—to move into intentional mission ministry into a new future of God's purpose for the church and congregation.

2. Paying the Price

In revitalized churches there is always a price to be paid. Revitalization is costly and painful. Five areas of cost and pain are:

a. Loss

Often in the process of revitalization there is a sense of loss: loss of relationships and a lost sense of a "family feeling" (not knowing all the names of every attender of the church), loss of comfortability with both the style and direction of the ministry, loss of familiarity with the worship environment, and loss from people leaving because they no longer agree with the changes.

b. Messiness

Church revitalization is not always clean and orderly. There can come with the process of revitalization a lack of structure and a sense of disorder in the church. Long-time members may feel alienated, and some leaders may sense a loss of authority. Energy is depleted because of these confrontations and because of the huge effort required by the process of revitalization.

c. Stress

With the pain often comes a greater degree of stress: congregational stress and stress on the pastor. There is the loss of respect by congregants, a scapegoat mentality, and sometimes the need to let staff go. One summit participant went so far as to confess, "It never ends! In fact, it gets worse. The unsigned letters, the time requirements. The stress makes you wonder if it is really worth it."

d. Conflict over the Building

While the church is a body, not a building, it often takes a sacred position in the life of a congregation. The church building serves as a symbol of change. Remodeling, additions, moves are all symbols of new life, but they also mean leaving the familiar, comfortable, and historical behind. People cannot always identify the negative emotions that accompany change, but the building can become a place of identification.

e. Spiritual Warfare

Revitalization Summit Team member and pastor of the Reformed Church of Palos Heights, Illinois, the Rev. Peter Semeyn said:

> Revitalization always brings spiritual warfare. Satan doesn't want to see churches come alive. Tension, disunity, alienation, and disrespect are signs of Satan's work. Satan also works on the families of leaders with tension, time issues, and priorities. Satan brings distractions to leaders that seem good on the surface but which distract from the purpose of the church and the making of disciples.

The church and pastor interested in revitalization will benefit greatly from knowing about the cost of revitalization. Without exception, churches served by the Revitalization Summit Team members went through a phase of humbling, pain, or difficulty that led to a decision to change. Every one of these churches identified this phase as Spirit-led. God mysteriously asked them to grapple with their situation, brought them to their knees (sometimes literally), and forced them to decide to change. As one pastor observed: "Like alcoholics who frequently must reach the bottom before asking for help, the churches had to do the same." But the change did not end the painful realities, it often led to a new direction with an even greater cost.

3. Moving Forward in Faith

The call of the church is ultimately one of faith. It was the faith of the biblical saints in Hebrews 11 that model an openness to step out in faith in responding to God's leading. The revitalization process in a church is one that is carried out "by faith." The faithful commitment of leaders is a willingness to lose all for the sake of the gospel.

A community of faith lives out its commitment.

For churches in the Reformed Church in America, revitalization will come when one's devotion to the gospel of Jesus Christ is of greatest importance. It will occur when we Christians can echo the words of Philippians 4:7: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

The RCA may revel in a tradition of over 350 years of continuous history. The RCA may find joy in a covenantal lineage stretching back generations. The strength of the RCA Reformed tradition and heritage may give the RCA reason for encouragement. But can the RCA consider it all a loss for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Moving forward in faith must happen in all areas of ministry in the Reformed Church in America. From denominational offices to wooden pews, from General Synod to urban and rural churches, a faith renewed must become evident. This is the meaning of doing away with business as usual. It is the foundational understanding of moving forward in faith. The RCA must be open to dream, prepared to lead, and willing to risk.

> The call to revitalization is a call to commitment that acknowledges that pain and cost are part of the process. It is knowing that change is necessary. It is believing the RCA must move forward in faith anyway.

A Strategy for Revitalization

Imagine . . .

> A denomination, locally oriented, globally connected, that prays in many languages and beholds the face of Christ in every face; a denomination renewed and renewing, raising up leaders, always directing its resources toward the front lines of ministry (RCA Statement of Mission and Vision, *MGS 1997*, p. 79).

A passion for renewed ministry is being birthed in the vision of the Reformed Church in America. It is coming as leaders are raised up and developed and as ministry is moved to the front lines. The summit team acknowledges that the front lines are where ministry happens. It is the purpose of denominations to help in the equipping of pastors and key leaders, directing their resources to the fulfillment of their God-given mission.

The focus must begin with a caring commitment to pastors and the development of pastoral leadership. A primary reason for the need to revitalize churches is the crisis of leadership. According to the Fuller Institute of Church Growth (*Clergy Survey*, Quoted in *Church Resource Ministries,* Anaheim, California, 1997):

> Nine out of ten pastors believe they were inadequately trained to cope with ministry.
>
> At any given time, 75 percent of pastors say they want to quit.
>
> Eighty percent believe pastoral ministry has affected their families negatively, and 33 percent say it is an outright hazard to their family.
>
> Fifty percent feel unable to meet the job demands.
>
> A declining self-image plagues 70 percent of pastors in ministry.
>
> Sexual infidelity after ordination has affected 37 percent of American clergy.
>
> Seventy percent do not have someone they consider a close friend.
>
> Less than 5 percent of seminary graduates plant a new church; the majority of those who plant new churches are inadequately prepared.

Godly leaders are the critical need for the ongoing health and expansion of Christ's church. With the approach of the twenty-first century, the Reformed Church in America is entering a new and challenging era. As God continues to build the church, pastors must be helped and churches must be revitalized.

In response to seeking the Lord's direction for the revitalization of churches in the RCA, the prayer of the members of the Revitalization Summit Team is for:

> **The creation of strategic networks that provide environments where personal transformation can be born and sustained in the lives of pastors and other church leaders in order that corporate transformation can be developed and cultivated in the ministries of congregations.**

Underlying Assumptions:

1. Congregations desire healthy pastors.

2. Pastors need opportunities to develop intentional networks of relationships that keep them healthy. This will not come through workshops, seminars, or more conferences, but through safe and supportive environments for growth and change.

3. Congregational revitalization seldom happens apart from leadership revitalization. Personal transformation precedes corporate transformation.

Implementation—Church Revitalization Team

In order to implement the recommended strategy for revitalization, a Church Revitalization Team will be established by Evangelism and Church Development Services. The Church Revitalization Team will be comprised of individuals with the following qualities:

1. Are able to cultivate the discipline of being

   They are individuals who are led by the Spirit, have a passion for God and the church, and are described as "persons of spiritual discipline."

2. Possess leadership skills

   They are able to influence others and possess leadership gifts.

3. Have good relational skills

   They are able to work effectively with people.

4. Have led a congregation through revitalization

   General Synod past-president Anthony Vis describes a Church Revitalization Team member as one who has "Been there! Done that!" They are individuals who have taken a church through a process of revitalization.

5. Have a passionate commitment to the revitalization of congregations

   They have passion for revitalization, for seeing churches experience the vitality that God desires for them.

6. Possess administrative and managerial effectiveness

   They have the ability to bring networks together.

The task given to this team is:

1. Build a prayer force.

2. Identify, recruit, train, and provide resources for network leaders.

3. Personally lead a network.

4. Articulate and promote revitalization strategies and intentional intervention strategies.

5. Celebrate success.

6. Articulate, sustain, and evaluate the vision.

In order to provide the best resources possible for the purpose of revitalization and renewal, the Church Revitalization Team will have the responsibility of relating to other groups working with the revitalization of congregations. Because vision is dynamic, this team will be challenged with providing ongoing assessment and evaluation for the process of revitalization within the Reformed Church in America.

CONCLUSION

Continuing with a Church Revitalization Team provides the necessary follow-up and direction articulated in this report. Models are currently being explored and further strategies will to be developed to continue the awesome task of bringing renewal and revitalization in the RCA.

As general secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson said as he addressed General Synod in 1997:

> Statements of vision are compelling only when we covenant to go where the words send us—to claim the challenge and to accept the risks—to pray for and with each other along the way—to sacrifice ourselves and our resources. We don't need just words. We need clear direction. We need to mobilize ourselves for faithful action (Report of the General Secretary, *MGS 1997*, p. 47).

➢The advisory committee recommended R-2:

R-2.
To endorse the report of the General Synod Council's Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services entitled, "A Revitalized Church for a Renewed Future" (pp. 383-402), recommending its study by the churches of the RCA; and further,

to authorize the General Synod Council, through its Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee, to constitute the revitalization summit team as the membership of the Church Revitalization Team, as detailed in the report; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee to report progress toward implementation of the strategy for revitalization as detailed in the report to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The church needs to affirm the direction outlined in the report.➢

➢The advisory committee recommended R-3:

R-3.
To edit the current report entitled, "A Revitalized Church for a Renewed Future" *prior* to its distribution for study by the churches, by deleting the phrase "informal, or even subversive" (p. 385) and inserting in its place the phrase "or informal." (ADOPTED)

Reason: The word "subversive" could be interpreted in such a way as to invite distrust of the Revitalization Summit Team, which was not the summit team's intent. A representation of the Revitalization Summit Team concurs with this proposed editing change.◄

OTHER PROJECTS AND WORK

Evangelism Connections

The RCA is involved in a cooperative alliance of mainline Protestant denominations to plan major evangelism events in the U.S. for the years 1998 and 2000. Three events are scheduled in 1998: April 17-18 in Atlanta, Georgia; July 17-18 in Los Angeles, California; and November 6-7 in Cincinnati, Ohio. The Rev. Mark Lemmenes, pastor of North Atlanta Community Church of Roswell, Georgia, served as co-chair for the Atlanta event this past April. Four events are scheduled in 2000.

The "evangelism connections" (participating denominations) are: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, and Reformed Church in America.

Explore Racial/Ethnic Models of Evangelism

The 1996 General Synod voted:

> To instruct the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services to explore effective models of evangelism which are arising out of racial/ethnic communities as it plans evangelism emphases for the Reformed Church in America; and further,
>
> to explore evangelism and church plant models which encourage the development of multi-ethnic congregations (*MGS 1996*, p. 107).

The Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services regularly monitors evangelism strategies throughout the RCA, including urban, racial/ethnic, and multicultural congregations. This is clearly articulated in the above reports on a vision and implementation plan for new congregations and on church revitalization.

Custom Church/Orientation Videos

Work on a project to produce custom church/orientation videos for local congregations continues with field testing by five pilot RCA congregations. Results of this field testing will determine the effectiveness of this video project and the design to adopt in the future.

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To instruct Evangelism and Church Development Services, in consultation with Congregational Services and the racial/ethnic councils, to explore the creation of an orientation video about the Reformed Church in America, including its history, doctrine, organization, worship, mission philosophy, and evangelical and ecumenical nature; and further,
>
> to consider producing this RCA orientation video in various languages (*MGS 1997*, R-8, p. 370).

The intention of Evangelism and Church Development Services is to provide the same church/orientation video service to congregations in languages other than English, as requested. It may not be possible to include all of the components requested by these congregations in an effective video format. A complementary print resource may need to accompany the video to accomplish this objective. Exploration of funding this custom church/orientation video project as a $9.8 by '98 project continues.

Religion in American Life (RIAL) Invite a Friend Campaign

Pastors in congregations of many denominations across the United States report excellent results using the Invite-A-Friend campaign sponsored by Religion in American Life. The key variable in terms of effectiveness seems to be whether or not congregations use the congregational workshops recommended in the *Invite A Friend Action Guide*. Those using the guide reported renewed spiritual vitality, commitment, and affirmations of faith. Those using the "Invite a Friend Day" workshop reported an average attendance increase of 15.8 percent just one month after doing the workshop. All of the congregations who used the workshop say they plan to conduct the workshop again next year.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF CONGREGATIONAL EVANGELISM

On the Way 2

Two hundred four RCA congregations are enrolled in On the Way 2, a five-year evangelization emphasis. The enrollment, while significant, is below expectations. (The first On the Way program enrolled 370 RCA congregations.)

An On the Way 2 evangelism resource packet was sent in November 1997 to enrolled RCA congregations. The packet contained a book, *Faith-Sharing,* by H. Eddie Fox and George E. Morris; a booklet, *Being a Welcoming Congregation;* a series of four *NetResults* articles on effective church newsletters; three additional magazine articles; and information about evangelism workshops, seminars, and other resources.

Regional Evangelism Trainers

Seventeen regional evangelism trainers (RETS) are now currently certified and active. They are:

Regional Synod of Albany	Sandy Dambof
Regional Synod of Canada	John Kapteyn Ronald Sikkema
Regional Synod of the Far West	Thomas DeVries Richard Koerselman Jeffrey and Heather Kreiser Stanley Perea
Regional Synod of the Great Lakes	Daryl Vetter
Regional Synod of the Heartland	Randy Blumer Stephen Hielkema Stanley Vandersall Wayne Van Regenmorter
Regional Synod of Mid-America	John Huff

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics	Taylor Holbrook Nancy Ryan
Regional Synod of New York	Paul Ruter

RETs are now located in each regional synod. (In addition to the above, two certified RETs requested placement on inactive status.)

RETs are prepared to lead evangelism workshops for congregational leaders and to lead witnessing seminars for church members. There is no cost to the local congregation. A workshop or seminar may be scheduled by contacting the Rev. Donald Baird, associate for congregational evangelism; a regional synod executive; or any of the above RETs.

RETs are not volunteers. They receive a stipend (plus necessary transportation, room, and board) from the RCA Office of Congregational Evangelism for each workshop or seminar conducted. This is a program funded by Evangelism and Church Development Services.

R-4.
To encourage RCA regional synods, classes, and congregations to use the services of a regional evangelism trainer or the associate for congregational evangelism to conduct evangelism workshops and faithful witnessing seminars. (ADOPTED)

A training gathering of RETs was held in St. Louis, Missouri, immediately following the April 1998 Spring Sabbath event. The special guest addressing the RETs was the Rev. Thomas Bandy, author of the book, *Kicking Habits: Welcome Relief for Addicted Churches.* Also addressing the RETs was the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, president of General Synod. Eight RETs attended this training event.

Evangelism Workshops and Seminars

During the 1997-98 year, nine RETs conducted twenty-six evangelism workshops and seminars. In addition, several workshops and seminars were led by the associate for congregational evangelism. The conducting of these workshops and seminars by RETs reflects what the RET program is designed to accomplish.

A new workshop, "Envisioning the Future," has been designed by the associate for congregational evangelism. This workshop enables congregations to determine the vision God has for the church. Part of the workshop is designed to help congregations write a mission statement. Congregations are asked to determine the differences between "vision" and "mission" and to ask who determines the vision and mission of a local congregation.

A Personal Word

During January and February 1997 the associate for congregational evangelism underwent radiation to successfully treat prostate cancer and is grateful to God and thankful to the RCA for all the prayers and cards received during this time of treatment and recovery.

After seven years of employment in this position, the associate for congregational evangelism, was granted a three-month sabbatical during June, July, and August 1997. He spent that time researching the life and ministry of the Rev. Robert McDowall, pioneer missionary of the Reformed Dutch Church. In 1790 McDowall was sent by the Classis of Albany to minister to the Loyalists (Tories) who had fled during the Revolutionary War to Upper Canada (Ontario) and settled on the north shore of Lake Ontario. McDowall is considered by many to be the founder of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. During this sabbatical, the associate

for congregational evangelism wrote a history of McDowall, his father, and his son. The paper, "The McDowall Saga," was published and is available at this General Synod meeting. In addition to the McDowall story, several questions are addressed in the paper, including, "Why did McDowall leave the Reformed Church and cast his lot with the Presbyterians?" and "Can any denomination that uses the presbyterian form of church government effectively do evangelism and/or new church development?" The associate for congregational evangelism is deeply appreciative to the RCA for providing this sabbatical time.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

The New Church Development (NCD) section of Evangelism and Church Development Services is responsible for the following areas:

1. Evaluations

Evaluating the strengths and abilities of a potential new church development pastor is useful both to the new church development candidate and to the search committee. The following two methods for evaluation of NCD candidates were developed:

a. Assessment Clinic. This is an intensive, four-day evaluation of NCD candidates. The next assessment clinic is scheduled for August 1998.

b. Gallup Interview. During this interview, candidates interested in new church development receive feedback on their qualifications (gifts) for this ministry. Interested persons should contact their regional synod executives or the NCD office for information.

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-5:

R-5.
To encourage Reformed Church in America congregations ~~and pastors~~ , seminaries, pastors, chaplains, and colleges to identify all persons who have the gifts and skills to begin new RCA congregations and to assist those persons in pursuing the option of beginning a new congregation. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. To broaden the resource pool for recommending gifted persons.

2. To clarify that the church should be identifying all persons with gifts appropriate to begin new RCA congregations.➢

2. Consultations

The coordinator for new church development is available to the regional synods as a resource person. In that capacity, the coordinator for new church development contacted each regional synod executive in the past year and gave assistance when requested. Several church evaluations were completed and various possibilities for new churches were explored.

3. Denominational Plan

An application to be placed in the denominational plan, which all new RCA congregations must complete, requests information dealing with the purpose of the

ministry, supervision of the ministry, and the financial plan to support the ministry. Once completed, the application must be submitted to the classis, the regional synod, and the Council of Field Secretaries for approval before submission for final approval to the General Synod Council.

The following churches were approved for placement in the denominational plan during the past year:

Living Springs Community Reformed Church, Saratoga Springs, New York
Oak Springs Community Church, Murrieta, California

R-3.
To pause for a time of prayer to support the following two ministries that have been entered into the denominational plan from June 1997 to June 1998:

Living Springs Community Reformed Church, Saratoga Springs, New York
Oak Springs Community Church, Murrieta, California (ADOPTED)

The Rev. Terry Maassen led the General Synod in prayer for the Living Springs Community Reformed Church, Saratoga Springs, New York and Oak Springs Community Church, Murrieta, California

4. Reception of New Congregations

The following congregations celebrated their organization between June 1997 and June 1998:

Crossroads Chapel, Holland, Michigan
Valley Ridge Community Church, Colleyville, Texas
The New Church of (Greater) New York, Roslyn Heights, New York
Valley Life Community Church, Boise, Idaho

R-7.
To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred and ninety-second session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting on the campus of Hope College in Holland, Michigan, on the eighth day of June 1998, gives recognition and heartily celebrates the organization of the following congregations:

Crossroads Chapel, Holland, Michigan
Valley Ridge Community Church, Colleyville, Texas
The New Church of (Greater) New York, Roslyn Heights, New York
Valley Life Community Church, Boise, Idaho (ADOPTED)

5. 98 by '98

The 98 by '98 (ninety-eight new churches by 1998) program began January 1, 1989, and will end December 31, 1998. As of the writing of this report in March 1998, ninety-five churches were started as part of the 98 by '98 program. It is anticipated that by the

end of December 1998 at least three more sites for new RCA churches will be identified. Included as an addendum to this report is a chart showing the status and location of all churches participating in the 98 by '98 program. The official end of the 98 by '98 program is December 31, 1998.

ADDENDUM

98 BY '98
NEW CHURCH STARTS
1989 - 1998

NAME/CHURCH City, State/Province	PASTOR	DATE OF DENOM PLAN	DATE OF FIRST WORSHIP	DATE OF ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY				
~~New Life Church~~ ~~Rochester, New York~~		~~11/91~~ 10-96		
Living Springs Community Saratoga Springs, New York	(P)	6-97	11-96	
REGIONAL SYNOD OF CANADA				
Highland Grv/Gooderham Tory Hill, Ontario	()	11-91	11-11-90	11-11-90
Springford Reformed Springford, Ontario	(P)	11-91	10-28-90	5-24-92
~~Ebenezer Reformed~~ ~~Norwich, Ontario~~		~~11-91~~ 2-94	5-15-88	6-6-91
Powell River Reformed Powell River, British Columbia	(P)	11-92	2-3-91	2-1-91
Forestview Community Grimsby, Ontario	(P)	3-90	11-5-89	11-27-92
Christ the King Kamloops, British Columbia	(P)	11-90	11-18-89	11-89
Woodgrove Christian Nanaimo, British Columbia	(P)	11-90	5-6-89	5-6-89
Grace Community (Central Saanich) Brentwood Bay, British Columbia	(P)	11-90	10-1-89	11-18-96
Cedar Grove Reformed Port Alberni, British Columbia	(P)	11-90	7-16-89	9-24-89

NAME/CHURCH City, State/Province	PASTOR	DATE OF DENOM PLAN	DATE OF FIRST WORSHIP	DATE OF ORGANIZATION
Arbutus Grove Parksville, British Columbia	(P)	4-91	7-5-89	9-24-89
~~New Life Community~~ ~~Surrey, B.C~~		~~11-91~~ 4-94	3-11-89	1-12-92
~~Abundant Life~~ ~~Red Deer, AB~~		11-91 11-93	9-11-91	
Agape Hispanic Toronto, Ontario	(P)	11-91	1986	
Christ the King (Don Mills) North York, Ontario	(P)	11-91	1991	1991
Grace Reformed Thorold, Ontario	(P)	11-91	1990	12-5-97
Faith Reformed Stevensville, Ontario	(P)	11-91		12-6-91
~~Heritage Community~~ ~~Burlington, Ontario~~		~~11-91~~ 1-94		
~~Faith Reformed~~ ~~Hamilton, Ontario~~		~~11-91~~ 11-92		
~~Emmaus Reformed~~ ~~Peterborough, Ontario~~		~~11-91~~ 1-94		
United Reformed/Athabasca Athabasca, Alberta	(P)	to be filed		9-8-91
LaSenda Reformed, Downsview, Ontario	(P)	1-94		5-01-96
~~L'eglise reformee de.~~ ~~Bishopton, Quebec~~		~~1-94~~ '94		
Sheffield Reformed, Sheffield, Ontario	()	1-94	1993	5-05-95
Bethel Reformed * Ft. Macleod, Alberta	(P)	4-89	5-1-88	5-16-88
Emmaus Christian Fellowship Langley, British Columbia	(P)			3/8/96

NAME/CHURCH City, State/Province	PASTOR	DENOM PLAN	DATE OF FIRST WORSHIP	DATE OF DATE OF ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST				
Korean Eden Buena Park, California	(P)	11-90	1-19-86	10-2-90
Palm Canyon Moreno Valley, California	(P)			1-8-89
Desert Winds Community Palmdale, California	(P)	11-90	3-24-91	1-30-94
Fourth Corner Community Bellingham, Washington	(P)	11-90	3-24-91	3-96
Iglesia de la Redencion El Monte, California	(P)	4-91	1-6-91	Mission Status
Living Faith Community East Modesto, California	(P)	11-91	1-96	3/16/97
Living Water Community Rio Rancho, New Mexico	(P)	3-93	Not Known	
Doulos Korean Denver, COlorado	(P)	1-94	April 1992	Mission Status
~~Kirk of the Valley~~ ~~Indian Wells, California~~	()	Pending		
CrossWinds Community* Hesperia, California	(P)	3-92	10-3-88	1-6-91
Harvest Christian Community Denver, CO	(P)			
Celebration Life Ministries Elk Grove, California	()	10-96		
Oak Springs Community Murrieta, California	()	2-98		
Valley Life Community Boise, Idaho	(P)	11-94	3-5-95	3-22-98
REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES				
~~Columbus House Church~~ ~~Columbus, Ohio~~		~~4-89~~ 1-91		
Franklin Fellowship Church Franklin, Tennessee	(P)	4-89	10-18-87	1-12-92

NAME/CHURCH City, State/Province	PASTOR	DENOM PLAN	DATE OF FIRST WORSHIP	DATE OF DATE OF ORGANIZATION
Christ's Community Ft. Wayne, Indiana	(P)	11-89	9-16-90	3-21-93
~~Kalamazoo Community~~ ~~Kalamazoo, Michigan~~		~~11-89~~ 9-91		
Indianapolis House Church Indianapolis, Indiana	(P)	3-90		
Community of Joy Traverse City, Michigan	(P)	1-94	9-18-94	
Vietnamese Reformed* Grand Rapids, Michigan	(P)	1-94	1986	
Haven Shores Community North Holland, Michigan	(P)	11/94	4/16/95	
Crossroads Chapel Holland, Michigan	(P)			11-23-97
New Life Community Shelby, Michigan	(P)	3/96		
REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND				
Heartland Reformed Pella, Iowa	(P)	11-90	2-11-90	4-17-91
New Life Reformed Sioux Center, Iowa	(P)	11-90	9-19-90	1-12-91
Harvest Community Wichita, Kansas	(P)	11-90	11-17-91	1-14-96
Westview West Des Moines, Iowa	(P)	3-92	9-12-93	11-17-96
~~Road Home*~~ ~~Eden Prairie, Minnesota~~		10-88	10-1-89	10-16-94
Valley Ridge Community Colleyville, Texas	(P)	3-95	10-23-94	10-19-97
~~Grace Reformed~~ ~~Stillwater, Oklahoma~~		~~11-94~~ 12-95		
New Song Community Cedar Rapids, Iowa	(P)	11-94	10-16-94	10-20-96

NAME/CHURCH City, State/Province	PASTOR	DATE OF DENOM PLAN	DATE OF FIRST WORSHIP	DATE OF ORGANIZATION
New Life Community (Iowa City, Iowa) Coralville, Iowa	(P)	11-94	3-12-95	
~~New Creations~~ ~~Grand Forks, North Dakota~~		11-94		
Good News Community Spirit Lake, Iowa	(P)	3-97	4-6-97	
Prarie Ridge Church Ankeny, Iowa	()	3-97		
Reformed Korean Presbyterian Carrollton,Texas	(P)	3-97	10-95	
REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA				
Chinese Reformed Miami, Florida	(P)	3-92		5-19-91
~~Church in the Vine~~ ~~Oviedo, Florida~~		~~4-89~~ 2-94	1-12-92	
~~New Life Community~~ ~~Dolton, Illinois~~		~~4-91~~ 6-94	9-8-91	
Community Oaks Crown Point, Indiana	(P)	4-91	11-19-95	
Christ's Church St. Peters, Missouri	(P)	3-92		6-95
La Iglesia de la Trinidad Milwaukee, Wisconsin	(P)	3-93		
The Cornerstone Church Bourbonnais, Illinois	(P)	3-96	6-5-95	8-22-95
Daybreak Community Chesterfield, Missouri	(P)	3-97	~~9-7-97~~ 12-14-97	
REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS				
Faith Chapel Reformed Paterson, New Jersey	(P)			11-25-90
~~LaCapilla Reformada~~ ~~Hackensack, New Jersey~~		~~3-90~~ 10-91		

NAME/CHURCH City, State/Province	PASTOR	DATE OF DENOM PLAN	DATE OF FIRST WORSHIP	DATE OF ORGANIZATION
Willow Grove Korean Willow Grove, Pennsylvania	(P)	11-90		6-2-91
Peace Korean Fairlawn, New Jersey	()	11-90		
Faith & Work Korean, New Brunswick, New Jersey	(P)	3-93		
Highland Lakes Highland Lakes, New Jersey	(P)	3-93		6-7-92
Church at Hemlock Farms * Hawley, Pennsylvania	(P)	11-94		
Monocacy Valley * Frederick, Maryland	(P)	2-88		6-23-96
Primera Igesia Reformada Clifon, New Jersey	0	3/96		
REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK				
Trinity Christian Church Fresh Meadows, New York	(P)	11-89	4-22-90	11-90
Taiwanese American Flushing, New York	()	3-90	1-6-91	5-12-92
Union Japanese Church Westchester, New York	(P)	11-90	9-17-89	
Manorville Community Manorville, New York	(P)	3-92	9-17-89	6-7-92
St. Croix Reformed St. Croix, Virgin Islands	(P)	3-92	4-1-89	4-12-92
New Hope Yonkers, New York	(P)	11-92	2-92	
Chour-Thai, Yonkers, New York	(P)	3-93	11-92	
Iglesia Christiana Emmanuel Bronx, New York	(P)	3-93	3-91	
Asian/American Community Syossett, New York	(P)	3-93	11-91	

NAME/CHURCH City, State/Province	PASTOR	DATE OF DENOM PLAN	DATE OF FIRST WORSHIP	DATE OF ORGANIZATION
Indonesian Christian Queens, New York	(P)	1-94	10-92	
Choongsyn Korean Reformed Queens, New York	(P)	1-94	9-92	6-4-95
Chuk Bok Presbyterian * Astoria, New York	(P)	3-93	1987	10-25-92
Iglesia de Cristo La Roca * Queens Village, New York	(P)	3-93	1985	12-1-92
~~Chapel Hill Reformed~~ ~~Chapel Hill, North Carolina~~		~~9-81~~		
New Church of Greater New York Roslyn Heights, New York	(P)			9-22-96 Celebrated 2-8-98

LEGEND:

A church listed with an asterisk * indicates the church organized or filed a denominational plan prior to January 1, 1989.

Not all denominational plans were recorded in the time line.

The dates for denominational plan which are in parentheses await approval at a future GSC meeting.

A full description of the Denominational Plan for Church Development is in the GSC *Handbook*, Evangelism and Church Development Services section.

A strike out is an indication that the church has gone independent or closed.

The parentheses opposite the church name contain the letter (P) if a pastor is on the field. If no pastor is on the field the parentheses are left blank ().

The date of first worship may not be recorded.

➢The advisory committee recommended R-8.

R-8.
To adopt the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the 192nd regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America celebrates with great joy the gracious work of God in guiding the effort of the 98 by '98 new church starts venture of the Reformed Church in America and prays for God's hand to continue to be upon this venture in mission. (ADOPTED)

Reason This recommendation celebrates the successful completion of the 98 by '98 campaign.

R-9.
To pause for a time of prayer for God's gracious care for all who have given of themselves to new RCA church starts, both as leaders and as participants, including those whose pain is deep because their ministries did not reach their objectives. (ADOPTED)

The general secretary led the General Synod in prayer.

From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

HISPANIC POPULATION AND HISPANIC CHURCH STARTS

The Council for Hispanic Ministries is an agency of the General Synod. This relationship has allowed the Council for Hispanic Ministries, through its twenty-one-year history, to serve Christ and the church in advocacy for Hispanic concerns throughout North America and around the world. The fast-growing patterns of Latinos in the United States, Canada, and abroad continue to affect the present and future of North America. This growth affects all aspects of society from science and technology, music and arts, religion and theology, to national and international political policy. Consequently, the role of the Council for Hispanic Ministries becomes increasingly vital in planning, staffing, implementing, and evaluating future RCA evangelism and mission work. The following facts are worthy of attention:

> A recent U.S. Census Bureau update estimated 28.4 million persons of Hispanic origin resided in the United States in 1996, representing 10.8 percent of the total population.[1] The vast majority of Hispanics reside in metropolitan urban areas in the southwestern United States, such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, Denver, Phoenix, Dallas, and Houston. Although Latinos reside in most areas of the country, large sectors of the American Latino community also take up residence in the Metro/Miami, Florida, area, New York City, New Jersey, and Chicago, Illinois. Every year from now to 2050, the race/ethnic group adding the largest number of people to the population will be the Hispanic-origin population. In fact, after 2020 the Hispanic population is projected to add more people to the United States every year than all other race/ethnic groups combined. By 2010 the Hispanic-origin population may become the second-largest race/ethnic group.[2]

As the RCA faces the future, planning in evangelism and church growth needs a more focused mission and vision view toward Hispanic communities. Most Hispanic congregations in the RCA were initiated by the Council for Hispanic Ministries. Regional synods and classes have shown support, interest, and care, but lack the "cultural experience and knowledge" required to be successful. The council can continue to play the lead role in church starts by identifying and recommending models and methods. Church starts that apply proven Hispanic methods will result in better planning and greater productivity.

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-10:

R-10.
To instruct the Office of New Church Development, in consultation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries to develop a Hispanic church start plan for the Reformed Church in America that includes various models and methods applicable for Hispanics, and to report back to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. This should be examined by the church
2. To clarify accountability.➢

ORIENTATION VIDEO

The 1997 General Synod voted:

> To instruct Evangelism and Church Development Services, in consultation with Congregational Services and the racial/ethnic councils, to explore the creation of an orientation video about the Reformed Church in America, including its history, doctrine, organization, worship, mission philosophy, and evangelical and ecumenical nature; and further,
>
> to consider producing the RCA orientation video in various languages (*MGS 1997*, R-8, p. 370).

Field pilot runs of an orientation video are planned and further exploratory work will continue during 1998.

MERGER OF TWO HISPANIC CONGREGATIONS IN TORONTO

The Council for Hispanic Ministries celebrates the victory of the Classis of Ontario in merging two vision- and ministry-minded strong congregations, La Senda and Agape, into one congregation, La Senda del Amor, in Toronto, Ontario. The merger was initiated when the pastor of La Senda accepted a call to an RCA congregation in the Los Angeles, California, area. The merger shows that when congregations are willing to work together they can accomplish great goals. The gains obtained by the merger greatly outnumbered the losses. Ministry is improved by using the gifts of two vibrant congregations. At the same time, the cost of ministry is greatly reduced.

ANNUAL 1997 MEETING OF THE COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES

The Council for Hispanic Ministries meets annually in October. The annual meeting is an opportunity for each Hispanic congregation to send its pastor, pastor's spouse, an elder, and a deacon for a time of learning, fellowship, and discussion on issues faced by Hispanics in ministry. The October 1997 annual meeting of the council was particularly important. The meeting's focus was "Intercessory Prayer." The meeting was engulfed with prayers led by the president of General Synod, the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, and the president of the Council for Hispanic Ministries, the Rev. Jhonny Alicea-Báez. Van Engen also presented several seminars dealing with prayer and mission.

[1] Current Population Reports, U.S. Department of Commerce, P20-502, December 1997.

[2] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, P25-1130, February 1996.

Agency Report

REPORT OF WORDS OF HOPE

Words of Hope's International Broadcasts Bear Fruit

Words of Hope broadcasts gospel radio programs in over forty languages worldwide—especially among many of the world's least evangelized peoples. During 1997 and early 1998, reports point to significant impact in a number of mission fields:

Indian Subcontinent

Words of Hope broadcasts over thirty-five programs every week to this spiritually needy region in the languages of Hindi, Telugu, Dogri, Bhojpuri, Garhwali, Nepali, Dzongkha, Kashmiri, and Banjara. In March 1998 Hindi producer Stephen Paul retired from his government job to become Words of Hope's full-time India coordinator. In his new role Paul assists Words of Hope's other regional producers in their program preparations. Highlighting Words of Hope's regional ministry during 1997 were:

Garhwali. India's Garhwal region is home to many of Hinduism's most visited holy places—even attracting some noted Western celebrities who seek spiritual enlightenment through transcendental meditation, yoga, and contacts with myriad swamis and other professional "holy men." But many of this mountainous region's three million inhabitants are now discovering divine truth by listening to Words of Hope's radio programs in the Garhwali language.

After a series of arduous treks to numerous hard-to-reach Garhwali villages in northern Uttar Pradesh, producer Kailash Mani reports: "In the many villages I've visited, 75 percent of the people I've met are listening regularly to our radio program....Garhwali people are really hungry for the Word of God."

Dogri and Kashmiri. For many years, India's northernmost state of Jammu-Kashmir has been plagued by rampant violence triggered by an active secessionist movement. Few outsiders have dared to visit the state which is home to Kashmiri people in the north and Dogras in the south. In partnership with Trans World Radio, Words of Hope broadcasts to both groups in their respective languages of Kashmiri and Dogri.

In 1997 Words of Hope vice president Lee De Young traveled to Jammu to meet with scores of enthusiastic Dogri listeners. Among the many listeners who offered personal testimonies was the leader of a formally organized seventy-eight-member listeners' club, from a dangerous area where Christian missionaries have been martyred. This leader testified that the Dogri broadcasts "are uplifting us and leading us toward God in this world."

South Asia

Dzongkha. The isolated Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is one of the world's least evangelized countries. This officially Buddhist nation does not permit the construction of any mosques, Hindu temples, or churches. Since other practicing religions are officially discouraged, some of Bhutan's non-Buddhist devotees feel an urgent need to hide their beliefs and activities. If discovered, non-Buddhists risk deportation and/or the loss of government jobs.

Nevertheless, in recent years thousands of Bhutanese are hearing the good news of Jesus Christ for the first time through Words of Hope's radio broadcasts in their native Dzongkha language. These programs are transmitted five nights each week from a powerful Russian station operated by Trans World Radio. Trekking through several Bhutanese villages, Dzongkha broadcaster Nado Drukpa met hundreds of faithful listeners, adding that "even some Buddhist monks have begun to confess Jesus as the only true Savior."

Tibetan. Tibet is one of the world's most difficult mission fields. Some have described Tibet, staunchly Buddhist, as a "graveyard for missions." That discouraging situation has begun to change in recent years—due largely to the availability of Christian broadcasts in the Tibetan language.

Words of Hope played a leading role in launching Tibetan broadcasts back in the late 1980s. Today, Words of Hope is a partner in Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC) Radio's very successful "Gaweylon" program that airs thirty minutes every day from the Seychelles. Despite many barriers to correspondence, these Tibetan broadcasts attracted an average of seven hundred listener letters during 1995 and 1996 and exceeded two thousand listener letters during 1997. In addition, the Lord appears to be using recent political developments to weaken the unquestioned authority of Tibetan-Buddhism's spiritual leaders.

Southeast Asia

Khmer. Cambodians are again suffering the effects of violent upheaval. On July 5, 1997, bombs, gunfire, and looting rocked Phnom Penh as Second Prime Minister Hun Sen attempted to seize control of the country. The ensuing violence led to the temporary closure of the Phnom Penh office of broadcast partner, FEBC, where Words of Hope's Khmer programs are produced. After a three-week evacuation, FEBC's Cambodian staff returned to the Phnom Penh office and studio in late July 1997. They were relieved to discover that the facilities had been spared from destruction, and they were able to resume program production. This latest upheaval triggers painful memories of Cambodia's incalculable suffering during the Khmer Rouge's genocidal reign of terror in the 1970s when approximately three million of Cambodia's seven million citizens were sadistically slaughtered by their own government.

Central Asia

Mongolian. Words of Hope's Mongolian broadcasting coordinator Holger Grimme recently visited the capital of Inner Mongolia and was very encouraged by signs of the gospel's explosive growth in that "autonomous" region of China:

> Our visit to Hohhot brought new encouragement for the work we do. On Sunday we attended a 9:30 a.m. service packed with over 1,500 worshipers. [That congregation's first service begins at 7:00 a.m to accommodate the many

> Chinese who must work on Sundays.] Participants usually need to arrive thirty minutes early in order to find a seat. Hohhot now has more than forty large churches and over 330 home fellowships, according to the leaders there. The number of Christians totals 150,000 in the Inner Mongolian capital—a huge increase from just 2,000 in 1985! Hohhot's total population is 800,000.

Words of Hope estimates its average Mongolian audience is 150,000 per program. Give thanks to the Lord of the Harvest!

Arab World

Arabic. Words of Hope's Arabic broadcasts are now on the air seven times every week. These involve four very powerful radio stations—two AM transmitters of Radio Monte Carlo (one transmits from Cyprus to the Middle East and the other transmits from France to North Africa) as well as two short-wave transmitters (one is directed from the Seychelles to the Arabian Peninsula and Northeast Africa and the other directed from South Africa to North and West Africa). It is encouraging to receive mail response from countries as far away as Senegal, Nigeria, and Pakistan. The mail response reflects a steadily growing interest in the gospel among young Muslim men and women.

In May 1997 Words of Hope's Arabic broadcasting partner dedicated a new multipurpose training and production facility in Larnaca, Cyprus. The new John Calvin Centre enables Middle East Reformed Fellowship to offer resident training to groups of fifty per study term. In October 1997 Words of Hope vice president Lee De Young helped lead a study group of thirty-eight elders from Egypt and Sudan. In June 1998 Words of Hope president the Rev. David Bast plans to lead a comparable study term.

Europe

Romani. In October 1996 Words of Hope and Trans World Radio began first-ever broadcasts in the Balkan Romani language. During its first year this radio outreach to one of the world's most ostracized and unevangelized peoples has borne tangible fruit—four new churches among the Gypsies. Radio is proving to be an effective way of reaching the Gypsies. Although they are accustomed to hostile treatment by nearly all other peoples, Gypsies seem overwhelmed with joy when they hear that God graciously loves them and even sent his only Son to die for them. To Gypsies, who are used to rejection from other ethnic groups, this revelation of God's saving love is radical good news!

Africa

Lomwe and Makhuwa. Hundreds of churches have been started by listeners to Words of Hope's Lomwe and Makhuwa broadcasts to Mozambique. Trans World Radio's Richard Ball reports on a recent trip he made to the target area:

> It was the most exciting trip I've ever made. What Words of Hope has done to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ is beyond words! We conducted seven services, and at every one we had more than seven hundred people. On Sunday, October 5, we had a crowd of over 1,700, and what a service that was! Seven choirs representing churches from all denominations sang like you could not imagine possible! Praise after praise about the Words of Hope programs...They can listen to sound teaching and music [over the radio]. It's a big encouragement to them!

Benin (Bariba Language). Centuries ago the West African country of Benin was the birthplace of Voodoo, which is still widely practiced as the national religion in Benin. Christianity has been growing rapidly throughout Benin during this decade, aided by gospel broadcasts launched by Words of Hope and SIM (Sudan Interior Mission) in 1990. These programs in the Bariba language are broadcast over a government station in Parakou. Many churches have been planted through the broadcasts. Due to geographic isolation and a severe shortage of pastors, radio is helping to fill a serious void in the rapidly growing evangelical churches of Benin *Union des Eglises Evangeleliques du Benin.* According to SIM linguist and program producer Pierre Barassounon:

> We know of villages where the elder has the people gather around the radio for their church service. Though they have no pastor, they can still listen to sound teaching and music. It's a big encouragement to them!

Global Partnerships

World by 2000. Words of Hope is an active participant on the steering committee of the cooperative World by 2000 initiative to extend the reach of missionary radio to every people group of at least one million persons. Words of Hope has been directly involved in launching one-third of the eighty-six megalanguages that have been added for broadcast since the World by 2000 project was launched in 1985. There is a definite need to add at least sixty more languages and a probable need for an additional forty-nine languages. More than one billion people speak these languages.

Interestingly, three of the seven current members of the World by 2000 Steering Committee have Reformed Church in America roots. They include HCJB (call letters for a radio station in Quito, Ecuador) World Radio's Roger Stubbe (originally from George, Iowa), Words of Hope's Lee De Young (Jenison, Michigan), and Trans World Radio's Arnie Remtema (originally from Grand Rapids, Michigan).

AD2000 and Beyond Movement. During each day of October 1997 approximately fifty million believers around the world diligently prayed for 125 groups of unreached peoples of the "10/40 Window." Organized by the AD2000 Movement's United Prayer Track, earlier "Praying through the Window" efforts focused on the least evangelized countries (1993) and the "gateway cities" (1995) of the geographic area that extends from West Africa to East Asia between 10° and 40° north of the equator. The October 1997 Words of Hope devotional guide highlighted the official list of unreached peoples for each day. Words of Hope also produced a special thirty-one-day series of two-minute radio programs based on these devotional meditations. Numerous domestic and international stations aired these daily radio programs.

Two Staff Retirements

Heartland Field Representative. After nearly twenty years of service as Words of Hope's field representative for the western heartland region of the U.S., Gerald Vermeer has retired. Succeeding him is Donald Broek, an experienced broadcaster and an elder at First Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Devotional Editor. Having ably served as the editor of Words of Hope's Daily Meditations devotional booklet from 1975 to 1997, the Rev. Harry Buis has also retired. Succeeding him in the editor's post is the Rev. Paul Hostetter—a former pastor, missionary, and professor at Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Literature

Internet Worldwide Web Site. Access to Words of Hope's worldwide web site remained fairly steady throughout most of 1997. From February through December 1997 Words of Hope consistently averaged 170,000 "hits" per month. ("Hit" is an Internet term that refers to a single computer file accessed by a web user.) User activity rose sharply in January 1998 and topped 200,000 "hits" for the first time ever. Audio is one of Words of Hope's enhanced web site features. In January 1997 Words of Hope began featuring online RealAudio recordings of each weekly English radio program with the Rev. David Bast. In October 1997 Words of Hope added a RealAudio reading of each day's devotional meditation and related Scripture passage. The popularity of these audio features is growing steadily. Words of Hope's *Update* newsletter is also available online.

Grateful Thanks

Words of Hope is very grateful to RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, and members who have faithfully supported the ministry through their prayers and gifts. During 1997 RCA congregations contributed a total of $858,411, including $727,703 in regular giving and $130,708 in specially designated gifts. Words of Hope praises God for his goodness!

From the Report of the President

P-3, (p. 42) was referred to the advisory committee on Evangelism and Church Growth

➢In response to P-3 (p. 42) the advisory committee recommended:

R-11.
To declare that a goal of the Reformed Church in America is to see that by the year 2005 every congregation of the RCA will have participated actively, personally, and directly in parenting another congregation in partnership with their classes, regional synods, and appropriate General Synod Council units. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The vision to be engaged in helping to start new churches is key to every church's vitality.≺

INTRODUCTION

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: FUNDING THE CHURCH'S LIFE AND MISSION

> *"And the Lord said, 'Who then is the faithful and prudent manager, whom his master will put in charge of the household, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possession'"* (Luke 12:42-44).

Financial resources, their regular contribution and prayerful use, enable the RCA to reach out. FINANCIAL SUPPORT deals with the exercise of stewardship as it relates to the financial support of the RCA's life and mission. It is concerned with such questions as:

- What are the biblical and theological bases for the financial support of the church?
- What funding procedures can best support the RCA's life and work?
- Are the RCA's funds being used wisely and well?

Financial questions move the RCA not only to the heart of how to live together as a people, but also to how the denomination understands its mutual life in Christ. In its overall stewardship of RCA resources, FINANCIAL SUPPORT administers the finances of the RCA, including investments and administration of all contributions and assessments received.

At General Synod, a gathering of the lower assemblies (primarily the classes), the classes together determine the direction and the funding of the larger church by assessments and mission contributions. Assessments are the share of what each classis (and, in turn, each congregation) contributes to the greater life of the RCA. (See *MGS 1995*, pp. 342-51, for a study on assessment issues and denominational funding.) The annual amount for General Synod assessments is approved each year by General Synod. A budget for mission contributions is approved by the General Synod Council at its spring or fall meeting.

Major responsibility for FINANCIAL SUPPORT is assigned to the General Synod Council Finance Services Committee, the RCA Foundation, and the General Synod Council's Stewardship and Communication Services Committee, which promotes spiritual growth through stewardship education and provides financial resources for the ministry of the RCA through fundraising, gift planning, and stewardship education.

REPORTS ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Report of the General Synod Council's Finance Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF FINANCE

Overview

As with any organization, the Reformed Church in America depends heavily on the services provided by its financial and accounting offices to keep operations running efficiently and on track. The Office of Finance is committed to providing quality accounting and financial services to support the operations of the General Synod Council, Reformed Church Women's Ministries, the Board of Pensions, the RCA Building and Extension Fund, and the RCA Foundation. Selected financial and advisory services are also offered to other denominational agencies and institutions, including regional synods, classes, RCA seminaries, and RCA congregations.

Dedicated personnel carry out the daily tasks that are so essential in assisting the Reformed Church in America to further the work of mission and ministry. The Director of Financial Services who serves as the church's chief financial officer and treasurer is charged with primary responsibility for the oversight of all activities related to the Office of Finance.

Within the Office of Finance, staff members handle a wide range of tasks, including: 1) proper recording of contributions and other income; 2) payment of all bills, including the program expenditures that make up the RCA's total mission worldwide; 3) exercising of necessary budget and cash controls; 4) preparation of payroll for RCA staff and missionaries; and 5) other activities essential to the day-to-day functioning of the RCA. Finance staff are also responsible for interfacing with legal counsel, independent auditors, state regulators, the Internal Revenue Service, and corporate insurance providers.

The Office of Finance was able to reach only a few of its long-term goals and objectives during 1997. Time constraints and staffing limitations restricted what was accomplished in 1997. Projects still requiring attention focus on the need to improve the existing system of controls. These improvements include, but are not limited to: 1) producing an accounting manual, 2) strengthening budget controls, 3) implementing a new contribution receipt software system, and 4) making improvements to the investment monitoring and reporting systems.

The Office of Finance gives God the glory for the opportunity to be a servant of the RCA. The report that follows is a concentrated overview of the areas of responsibility for Finance Services.

Financial Summary—1997

To provide some idea of the annual activity by the various agencies serviced by the Office of Finance, here is a summary of the total revenue and expenses for the calendar year 1997.

	1997 Revenue	1997 Expenses
General Synod Council		
Operating Fund	$ 13,161,954	$13,070,966
RCWS Disaster Relief Fund	284,752	245,573
RCA "If-raised" Fund	419,062	299,300
RCA Distribution Center Fund	1,624,977	1,623,915
Leadership Development Fund	21,270	4,250
Audiovisual Fund	310,107	312,062
$9.8 by '98 Fund Drive	1,695,203	192,875
	$ 17,517,325	$ 15,748,941
Reformed Church Women's Ministries		
General Fund	$ 328,025	$ 319,426
Assembly Fund	2,974	59,403
Beth Marcus Scholarship Fund	4,646	3,000
	$ 335,645	$ 381,829
Board of Pensions		
General Fund	$ 1,750,507	$ 1,820,028
Annuity Fund	23,048,783	18,271,582
Insurance Fund	8,505,187	8,673,854
	$ 33,304,477	$28,765,464
RCA Foundation		
General Fund	$ 126,863	$ 558,810
Endowment and Trust Fund	2,488,417	1,116,506
New Jersey Fund	161,552	24,619
Philanthropic Fund	166,114	55,501
Gift Annuity Fund	84,338	117,817
Revocable Gift Fund	9,414	10,197
	$ 3,036,698	$ 1,883,450
RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc.		
Extension Foundation Fund	$ 886,851	$ 870,993
Church Building Fund	1,869,034	259,013
	$ 2,755,885	$ 1,130,006
RCA Cash Program	$ 2,167,426	$ 2,167,426
Grand Totals	$ 59,122,151	$49,031,303

RCA Cash Program

The Trustees of the General Program Council designed the RCA Cash Program in 1979, primarily as a means for providing capital for the RCA Extension Foundation. In addition to raising new capital for the building of churches, the program makes it possible for congregations, classes, agencies, and regional synods to receive an attractive yield for the short-term investment of surplus funds.

Up to 40 percent of the monies received by the RCA Cash Program may be deposited with the Extension Foundation Fund (EFF). The actual percentage varies, based on the immediate cash needs of the EFF. Because EFF finances most of its capital needs through the sale of its investment notes, the percentage of RCA Cash Program funds deposited with EFF was only 5 percent at year's end.

The balance of monies on deposit with the RCA Cash Program (95 percent) is invested in outside markets. These investments are restricted to debt securities, money market funds, certificates of deposit, U.S. Government obligations, prime commercial paper/bonds of high quality, and options and futures.

The amount of outside deposits in the fund increased slightly in 1997 from $17.6 million to $17.7 million. The net return for outside investors during 1997 was as follows:

First Quarter	5.79 percent	Third Quarter	6.16 percent
Second Quarter	6.04 percent	Fourth Quarter	6.52 percent

All investments in the RCA Cash Program totaling $36 million are placed under direct management of the RCA's managing director of investments. During the past year a conservative approach was taken in continuing to build a $730,000 reserve to allow for asset value fluctuation. Although this reserve does not encompass the entire difference created by a market-to-cost comparison at December 31, 1997, it is believed by both the managing director of investments and the independent auditors that the assets were not permanently impaired.

Overall, the RCA Cash Program continues to provide the cash needs of the Extension Foundation while at the same time providing an attractive rate of return for its participants.

Reformed Church Investment Program

In 1994 the Reformed Church in America integrated the management of its permanent investment funds (endowment funds) into the newly formed RCA Foundation. Participation in the Reformed Church Investment Program is limited to organizations or groups affiliated with the RCA. Investments in, or withdrawals from, the program can be made at the end of each calendar quarter. Each participating organization must agree to the principles and practices of the program.

Three investment advisors are currently serving the Reformed Church Investment Program. They are Old Kent Bank and Trust Company in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Scudder, Stevens and Clark in New York City; and Fleet Bank in Jersey City, New Jersey. The portfolio managed by Old Kent Bank is largely comprised of fixed-income securities. Scudder, Stevens and Clark, on the other hand, manage a balanced portfolio consisting of both equity and debt securities. Fleet Bank holds a small portfolio for endowments that are legally restricted to remain in a New Jersey banking institution. Total market value of assets at December 31, 1997, are listed below.

Old Kent Bank and Trust Co.	$ 2,951,129
Scudder, Stevens and Clark	8,990,175
Fleet Bank	733,913
Interchurch Center Bonds	265,000
Mortgages	105,818
Security National Bank	153,572
RCA Cash Program	551,264
Total	$ 13,750,871

During 1997 additional subscriptions to the Reformed Church Investment Program totaled $352,324. The market value of the portfolio increased slightly during 1997 from $12,187,638 to $13,750,871. This increase was attributed to increased subscriptions and the 15.83 percent gross rate of return in 1997.

The RCA Foundation annually establishes a rate of payout to be used for the following year. For 1997 the established rate of payout was 8.00 percent (of market value), which was paid in four equal quarterly installments.

Security National Bank in Sioux City, Iowa, provides accounting and custodial services for the securities held in the Reformed Church's various endowment accounts. Appointed investment advisors execute trades through Security National, which also was the recipient of all dividends and interest earnings from endowment fund portfolios.

Board of Pensions—Investments

At December 31, 1997, the Board of Pensions asset base totaled over $267 million. These assets represent four separate funds within the Board of Pensions. The first and largest of the four funds is the Contributory Annuity Fund (CAF). CAF has a broad range of fixed-income holdings, such as U.S.Treasuries, government-backed obligations, Guaranteed Investment Contracts (GICs), and corporate bonds.

The Canadian portion of CAF operated until December of 1996 under a group annuity contract with Imperial Life Insurance Company in Toronto, Ontario. In January of 1997, however, the funds were withdrawn from Imperial Life and given over to the Regional Synod of Canada for management. The Regional Synod of Canada has obtained the services of RBC Dominion Securities to manage these funds.

The second fund within the Board of Pensions is the Annuity Bond Fund (ABF). This fund was established in 1981 (BOP 81-16) and was designed to provide a member of CAF with an alternative to purchase an annuity with the accumulation in his or her account at the time of retirement. In the 1980s the relatively high interest rates available made it possible for a retiree, during the period between retirement and the time when he or she reached the age of seventy, to invest his or her funds in a fixed-return security, such as a treasury note, at a much higher yield than could be realized at that time from an annuity purchased from an insurance company. At age seventy, when the security matured, the principal was then to be used to purchase an annuity, which because of the individual's shorter life expectancy, would provide a greater monthly income than one purchased at age sixty-five.

Recent changes in federal regulations and interest rates have led to a decrease in the number of those investing in ABF. The more popular choice is to remain in CAF until mandatory requirements force participants reaching the age of seventy and one-half to purchase an instrument of annuitized value.

An additional adaptation came into effect when the Board of Pensions and the General Synod approved the inauguration of the Support/Investment Plan in 1986 (*MGS 1986*, p. 182). This action created both the third and fourth fund within the Board of Pensions. Under the terms of the plan, the retiree, upon reaching the age of seventy and one-half, has the option of leaving his or her money in an RCA managed fund rather than automatically using the account balance to purchase an annuity contract with an outside firm.

The Pension Support Fund (PSF) is one component of the Support/Investment Plan. Amounts in this fund accumulate earnings, and payments to participants are paid in equal installments for a period determined by his or her actuarially determined life expectancy utilizing an average interest rate of 8 percent. Both the interest and principal are amortized over the

actuarial life span of the participant so as to achieve equal quarterly payments. In other words, this instrument is similar to the purchase of an annuity contract. The advantage to investing in PSF instead of purchasing an annuity in the outside market is that upon death the residual book value of the annuity is paid to the estate, not consumed by the issuer of the annuity.

The Pension Investment Fund (PIF) is the other component of the Support/Investment Plan. Amounts in this fund also accumulate earnings, but payments to participants are based on the actual earnings in the fund. These funds are typically invested in "growth" type investments, while at the same time a conservative distribution is made to the retirees on a quarterly basis. In 1997 distribution payments were made with a 7.75 percent rate of return. Similar to the Pension Support Fund, the value of the investment (original book value in this case) is paid to the estate of the retiree at the time of death, thus leaving behind a financial legacy.

Mission Investments

In 1970 the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) established a mission investment policy that directed the General Program Council (GPC) to make "available for mission investment purposes 10 percent of the appropriated and unappropriated operating reserve" (GSEC 70-50). The main operating criteria for this policy was to assist projects owned and/or controlled by "minority" individuals, groups, or local organizations whose goal was to assist in building economic participation or growth in the community. Maximum returns on investments are not the main objective of mission investments.

At present, mission investments in thirteen banks, credit unions, and other organizations total $297,396. Mission investment monies are placed with firms such as South Shore Bank located in an African-American section of Chicago, Illinois; the NCCC Minority Bail Bond Fund; the Shared Interest Group, which is investing in South Africa's democratic development; the Leviticus Alternative Fund, which is investing in community-based development projects in the impoverished communities of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut; and the RCA's most recent investment, the Nicaraguan Community Development Loan Fund (NCDLF), which provides capital and assistance to the poor in Nicaragua through the Nicaragua Council of Protestant Churches.

Because of certain maturities in recent years, the total funds invested are far below the 10 percent allowance established in 1970. A committee of five meets regularly to analyze the portfolio and is currently seeking additional opportunities for mission investing.

Assessments

One hundred percent of the assessment giving for 1997 was collected by the due date of December 1997. The total assessment for 1997 was $26.55 per confessing member. Of this amount, $21.91 was designated for the General Synod operational budget, $1.50 was designated for the Board of Pensions General Fund, and $3.14 was designated for administration of theological education. A verbal report will be given at General Synod on classes payments of 1997 and 1998 General Synod assessments.

IRS Group Tax Exemption

As the denomination's parent organization, the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America was granted a group tax exemption by the Internal Revenue Services (IRS) on January 17, 1986. The exemption covers all participating congregations, agencies, and educational institutions within the RCA that have asked to be included.

As one if its conditions, the IRS commissioner requires the RCA to file an annual update listing churches and/or agencies that fall under the 501(c)(3) designation of the IRS code. A

complete listing is supplied to the IRS incorporating any revisions under the RCA group exemption umbrella. The twelfth such report, filed with the commission in August 1997, listed three newly formed churches to be added, two name/address changes, two merging churches, and six churches/agencies to be removed from the list.

During recent years the IRS has directed increased attention to its review of church activities and related filing requirements. As a result, the Office of Finance has experienced steadily growing requests, not only for advisory assistance in dealing with tax-related matters, but also for documentary evidence attesting to a church's/agency's tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

Annual Audit

The 1997 financial statements of the Reformed Church in America are examined and certified by Lambrides, Lamos, Moulthrop and Co., certified public accountants, and are presented in person by the auditors at the spring meeting of the General Synod Council. Copies of the annual audit are reprinted in the *Minutes of the General Synod* and are also available to members of the Reformed Church in America by calling the Office of Finance in New York City at (800) 722-9977 or (212) 870-2754.

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Stewardship and Communication Services Committee and Report of the RCA Foundation

STEWARDSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Stewardship and Communication Services Unit (SAC) is responsible for the program areas of stewardship and communications. The Rev. E. Wayne Antworth serves as the director and is responsible for the administration, coordination, and supervision of the SAC staff.

The mission of the stewardship program is:

> To provide financial resources and promote personal and spiritual growth for the ministry of the RCA through fundraising, gift planning, and stewardship education programs.

The stewardship program area of SAC experienced another year of growth. Establishing the RCA Foundation (*MGS 1995*, R-9, pp. 232-36) redefined the work of SAC.

This RCA Foundation report highlights the services the foundation provides to RCA congregations and individuals. During 1997 the foundation saw significant changes in its work and received a record number of gifts.

The RCA Foundation report also summarizes the work of the foundation as it seeks to be faithful to its mission statement (see below). The mission statement was adopted by the RCA Foundation in 1996 and clearly states the purpose of the foundation.

RCA FOUNDATION
Mission Statement

The mission of the RCA Foundation is to serve congregations by securing financial resources for the ministries of the church through:

Teaching biblical stewardship.
Encouraging people to give.
Acquiring resources for ministry.
Managing RCA Foundation resources.

This mission is to be carried out:

With respect for individuals and families.
With integrity and professionalism.
Informed by Scripture.
As a grateful response to God's grace.

TEACHING BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP

The RCA Foundation staff teaches biblical stewardship as it works with congregations and individuals. The RCA Foundation staff also provides other stewardship resources and assistance to congregations.

Stewardship Education and Annual Giving

The RCA Foundation has identified stewardship education, including the support of annual giving programs in congregations, as one important aspect of its mission. Jane Richardson and Dian Little are both part-time contracted staff in the area of stewardship education. Richardson's primary responsibility this past year was the review and evaluation of stewardship education resources and the promotion of annual giving programs in RCA congregations. Dian Little developed an in-depth stewardship education model and used this model in several congregations. The model consists of a series of five workshops and involves a broad group of leaders from within the congregation.

Two programs—Consecrating Stewards and Consecration Sunday—continue to be the most popular and effective annual giving programs used in the RCA. Most stewardship education in RCA congregations is done in conjunction with an annual giving program. Consecrating Stewards and Consecration Sunday are very similar in theology and educational approach and are appropriate and effective annual giving programs.

A primary strategy for the support, strengthening, and enhancing of these programs has been the orientation and deployment of "guest stewards" throughout the RCA. Both programs rely heavily on the guest steward, who assists the congregation with planning, supports and encourages the leaders of the congregation to be fully involved, and leads and preaches the consecration service on the designated Consecration Sunday. Guest stewards have been recruited and trained in the regional synods of Albany, the Heartland, the Great Lakes, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York.

A broad array of additional annual giving and stewardship education resources, both print and audiovisual, are available from the RCA Distribution Center.

Whole-Life Stewardship Education is a program developed and led by Dian Little. Biblical stewardship principles form the core of this stewardship education program. Congregation members are recruited to represent and advocate specific stewardship concerns and to focus

the stewardship lens on all aspects of church life and ministry (evangelism, worship, mission, community life, discipleship, and service).

The Whole-Life Stewardship Education program also requires participating congregations to gather information about financial giving, time and talent contributions, leadership activities, and giving to mission by the members of the congregation over the previous twelve months. This information provides a "baseline" for measuring the program's effectiveness. By monitoring these baseline numbers with statistics gathered over the next one-, two-, and three-year time periods, the general effectiveness of stewardship in the congregation is measured. Twelve RCA congregations have used the program to date and report significant growth in all areas of stewardship. There is a minimal charge to congregations for this program. A brochure is available by calling (800) 595-2348.

Two new resources developed for RCA congregations will be introduced in 1998. All God's Children Need to Give is an annual giving program written by Una Ratmeyer. All God's Children Need to Give is built on the same theological and educational foundations as the Consecrating Stewards and Consecration Sunday models, and it uses small group meetings to implement the program. All God's Children Need to Give will be piloted in six to twelve congregations that previously used either the Consecrating Stewards or Consecration Sunday program.

Faithful Generations is the working title for a new stewardship education program on planned giving. It is designed to be used in conjunction with a special anniversaries or other celebrations in the life of a congregation. It provides a way for congregations to tell individual stories of faith from its members and to encourage members to make a planned gift.

Staff responsibilities for stewardship education within the RCA are being shifted. This will make it easier for congregations to access services available for stewardship education and planned gifts. It will also maximize good stewardship in terms of travel budgets and staff time away from home. Dian Little will carry primary responsibility for all aspects of stewardship education and annual giving programs, including Consecrating Stewards and Consecration Sunday. She will recommend resources for stewardship education and leadership development for RCA congregations in the regional synods of the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, and Mid-America, as well as western Canada. Jane Richardson will carry the same responsibilities for RCA congregations in the regional synods of Albany, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York, as well as eastern Canada.

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO GIVE

RCA Foundation staff are also engaged in encouraging people to give—to contribute gifts for current and future programs. Stewardship education leads to an increased desire to give. Encouragement to give also occurs as people are assisted with estate and financial planning.

Gift Planning

The RCA Foundation's Office of Gift Planning is charged with promoting various methods of making a gift to the church.

In 1997 the Office of Gift Planning had one full-time staff person, the coordinator for gift planning, the Rev. Norman Tellier; and one half-time staff person, the Rev. Walter Pickup. Both Tellier and Pickup conduct presentations on estate planning and/or financial planning to groups in congregations and other organizations. These presentations explain the need for estate planning, share something of the intricacies of estate taxation, and explain how charitable giving may reduce estate taxes.

Also, presentations on endowments were made to deacons, consistories, and other decision-making bodies. These presentations recommend that churches establish endowment funds and guidelines for the use of gifts or bequests prior to the receipt of contributed funds.

Both Tellier and Pickup are available to members and friends of the RCA for assistance in estate and financial planning. Tellier, is a CFP® licensee, and Pickup is working toward certification. (CFP® and CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER® are federally registered marks of the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc.)

The Office of Gift Planning uses several methods to communicate the benefits of gift planning to members and friends of the RCA. The office publishes a newsletter called *Options for the Future*. Each issue features a member of the RCA who has made a planned gift and explains how similar gifts may be made. Each issue includes a tear-off response form, which is used extensively by those who receive the newsletter.

The office keeps on hand a large supply of literature on the value of having a will and how gifts can be made in other ways. These materials are sent upon request and are distributed at workshops and displays.

The Office of Gift Planning has a partnership program with several organizations who pay the foundation to encourage gifts through gift planning. At the current time the following organizations are members of the partnership:

New Brunswick Theological Seminary
Western Theological Seminary
Regional Synod of Albany
Regional Synod of the Far West
Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
Regional Synod of the Heartland
Regional Synod of Mid-America
Bethany Home, Ripon, California
Elim Christian School, Palos Heights, Illinois
Geneva Camp and Retreat Center, Holland, Michigan
Hope Haven Inc., Rock Valley, Iowa
Jackson County Ministries, Annville, Kentucky
Manitoqua Ministries, Frankfort, Illinois
Reformed Bible College, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Rest Haven Christian Services, South Holland, Illinois
Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois
Words of Hope, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Marble Collegiate Church, New York City

The Office of Gift Planning is an affiliate member of the Council of Reformed Charities.

The major work of the Office of Gift Planning is to promote giving through bequests and to generate life income gifts. These gifts include gift annuities, a pooled income fund, charitable trusts, and other instruments. In 1997 the RCA Foundation continued working toward registration of its gift annuity program in those states that require registration and in which it is expected the foundation staff will generate annuities.

Van Bunschooten Society

In 1814 Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten made the first planned gift to the RCA. His gift continues to provide scholarship funds to this day. In honor of that gift the RCA formed the Van Bunschooten Society. This society recognizes and honors those who have made a

planned gift. The planned gift may be in the form of a designation in a will, a life income gift, or some other means. Any part of the RCA, except the RCA colleges and seminaries, may be the beneficiary of the gift. The society has over 250 members. In 1997 a series of luncheons were held across the United States to express the church's gratitude to members of the society. This series of luncheons continues in 1998.

The General Synod Council, at its October 1993 meeting, voted to have the following summary of the Van Bunschooten Bequest (adopted by the 1937 General Synod) read at the General Synod meeting as part of the report of the Advisory Committee on Financial Support:

THE VAN BUNSCHOOTEN BEQUEST
Summary for Voluntary Use in Classes

At a meeting of General Synod in New York City, June 9, 1814, Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten, one of the advisory members, walked up the aisle and laid down on the table ten bonds amounting to $13,800 and $800 in cash and asked Synod to accept the gift for the education of young men for the ministry. On January 10, 1815, in his seventy-seventh year, Dominie Van Bunschooten went home to his reward and was buried in the churchyard of First Reformed Church of New Brunswick, New Jersey. In his last will and testament he added over $3,000 to his former donation, making a total of more than $17,000—a princely gift for those days. (Additions of income have increased the principal to $20,000.) Dominie Van Bunschooten thus had the honor of making the first substantial contribution for assisting young students of theology. His example has been followed from time to time by others, thus realizing his desire as expressed in the bequest "that he might be an humble pattern for others to copy after." It would be impossible to catalogue all the results that have flowed from these donations. For more than a century they have made possible the education of candidates for the ministry, for the work both at home and abroad. All honor to him and the other liberal donors who have followed his example (*MGS 1937*, pp. 8-9).

Direct Mail

The RCA Foundation continues to strengthen its funding sources through the solicitation of gifts from individuals. This work is carried out in part through the development of special mailings to RCA members.

The RCA Foundation used the services of Stratmark, a direct mail consulting firm, for part of 1997. Stratmark assisted SAC staff in developing a direct mail marketing strategy and in the development of a newsletter to facilitate communication with individual donors. The contract with Stratmark was discontinued in August 1997. SAC production staff continues to develop, write, edit, and mail all direct mail appeals.

In 1997 the direct mail program did six mailings. The following is a list of the direct mail appeals for 1997:

Lenten Appeal. This appeal was mailed in March 1997 to approximately twenty-eight thousand RCA households and was designated for underfunded missionaries. The total number of donors responding to this appeal was 428, and a total income of $22,362 was received.

Urban Ministry Appeal. The appeal was mailed in May 1997 to approximately twenty-eight thousand RCA households and was designated for the work of urban ministry. The total number of donors responding to this appeal was 454, and a total income of $15,040 was received.

***Mission is One* Newsletter** (RCA worldwide mission appeal). A new publication, the *Mission is One* newsletter, was mailed in June 1997 to approximately twenty-eight thousand RCA households. This newsletter highlighted ways in which mission contributions are used throughout RCA worldwide ministries. The total number of donors responding to this appeal was 236, and a total income of $10,196 was received.

Hunger Appeal. This appeal was mailed in September 1997 to approximately twenty-eight thousand RCA households and was designated for hunger relief throughout the world. The total number of donors responding to this appeal was 385, and a total income of $49,589 was received.

Holiday Special Appeal. This appeal was mailed to thirty-eight thousand RCA households and was designated for the RCA volunteer services program. The total number of donors responding to this appeal was 706, and a total income of $47,706 was received.

Year-End Direct Giving Appeal. This appeal was mailed to approximately five thousand RCA households who had previously contributed to the RCA through direct mail or other funding appeals. The 1998 mission calendar was included in this mailing. The total number of donors responding to this appeal was 328, and a total income of $33,770 was received.

In 1998 there were four other special mailings. The following is a list of these special mailings:

Advent Packet. Each year Congregational Services produces a special Advent packet that includes a Sunday school Christmas offering.

Children's Christmas Fund. The Board of Pensions sends a special appeal each year at Christmas to benefit the dependent children of deceased RCA ministers.

Special Thanksgiving Offering. The General Fund of the Board of Pensions gives assistance grants to ministers, missionaries, and their spouses who retired before the RCA Annuity Fund could be of much financial help.

Special Project Appeal. Mission Services annually asks congregations to consider extra year-end benevolence contributions for RCA mission projects and programs.

Special Gifts

Since 1996 the Office of Special Gifts has been a part of the RCA Foundation. The Office of Special Gifts identifies and solicits funding from individual donors for special programs or projects. The coordinator for special gifts, Larryl Humme, is responsible to identify, cultivate, and solicit RCA individuals who may be interested in making gifts to various RCA ministries. The RCA programs or projects identified as needing funding are items that either the General Synod Council or the RCA's Leadership Advisory Team (formerly known as the Administrative Council) have approved.

In funding these approved programs or projects, the coordinator for special gifts looks at a variety of potential funding sources. The coordinator for special gifts works with individuals who contributed to previous RCA appeals and/or fund drives and then works toward transferring their support to new RCA programs. Additionally, the coordinator for special gifts works with current donors to RCA programs and continues to identify and solicit new donors to contribute to RCA programs.

In 1997 the coordinator for special gifts raised $440,000 in cash and pledges for the following programs or projects:

Volunteer Services Matching Gift. This was a 1997 year-end project that raised over $70,000.

"God's People Transformed." This was a 1997 General Synod Theme project that raised over $50,000.

Spring Sabbath 1998. This was a project to underwrite expenses for the 1998 Spring Sabbath event that raised over $80,000. Additional funding of approximately $30,000 is still sought.

Undesignated Gifts. This category received $105,000.

Designated Gifts. This category received $135,000.

The coordinator for special gifts is currently working on funding for the following programs or projects:

"Our Future Depends on the City." This is a commitment of the RCA to urban ministries. The project seeks to raise $5,000,000. Solicitation of funds is scheduled to begin in the in the late summer of 1998.

"Imagine The Possibilities." This project seeks to raise $100,000 to support the expansion of the RCA web site.

New Church Development RCA Staff Position. This project seeks to raise $100,000 to fund on a short-term basis the new church development RCA staff position. Funds to endow this position are also to be raised.

Several other special programs or projects are currently being discussed as fundraising possibilities, but they have not yet been approved by either the General Synod Council or the RCA's Leadership Advisory Team.

The Office of Special Gifts personally acknowledges and sends receipts to all individual donors. In 1997 alone over 4,200 personal letters and receipts were mailed to individual donors.

The Office of Special Gifts is developing and maintaining a database of all current and potential donors to RCA programs and projects.

Capital Campaigns

The RCA Foundation coordinates Financial Campaign Services for capital campaigns. Financial Campaign Services provides consultation and support for RCA congregations and institutions undertaking a capital campaign. The Rev. Wayne Antworth, Milton Nieuwsma, and Harold Ritsema provided the following consultation services during 1997:

St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands	Milton Nieuwsma
Bethany Reformed Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin	Wayne Antworth
Reformed Church in Plano, Plano, Texas	Wayne Antworth
Manitoqua Ministries, Frankfort, Illinois	Milton Nieuwsma
Fair Haven Ministries, Hudsonville, Michigan	Milton Nieuwsma Harold Ritsema

Martin Reformed Church, Martin, Michigan	Harold Ritsema
Chinese Community Church, Sacramento, California	Wayne Antworth
First Reformed Church, Zeeland, Michigan	Milton Nieuwsma

The RCA Financial Campaign Services consultants charge a fee for their consulting services. The minimum on-site consulting fee is $3,000 for congregations with two hundred members or less, plus travel and other related campaign costs. For congregations of over two hundred members there is an additional charge of $10 for each member over the two-hundred-member base. The consultation services include preparing the campaign, organizing the campaign, identifying leadership, training volunteers, and preparing campaign materials.

$9.8 by '98 Fund Drive

The 1990 General Synod approved plans for the 98 by '98 church growth plan (*MGS 1990*, pp. 313-20) and challenged the RCA to establish ninety-eight new congregations by 1998. This plan was an outgrowth of the On the Way program, which called for a ten-year emphasis on evangelism and growth within the Reformed Church in America and was presented to the 1986 General Synod (*MSG 1986,* pp. 246-55). The RCA embarked upon this renewal program because new congregations offer unique opportunities to reach people for Christ.

The $9.8 by '98 fundraising campaign is one of several components of the 98 by '98 church growth plan. Originally, the $9.8 by '98 campaign had one goal, which was to raise money to increase the capital of the Church Building Fund (CBF). CBF makes low-interest loans to new congregations ready to construct their first worship facilities. The 1990 General Synod, however, expanded the focus of the campaign (*MSG 1990*, p. 320) by adding the following two goals: 1) support for the recruitment and training of new church development pastors and other resource support for new church start congregations (10 percent), and 2) support for revitalizing urban, rural, and small membership churches (15 percent).

The allocations for the $9.8 by '98 campaign are:

> Seventy-five percent of the campaign proceeds for RCA Church Building Fund loans to new congregations seeking to finance their first worship facilities.
>
> Ten percent of the campaign proceeds for the training and recruitment of new church development pastors and for resources to enhance the ministry of new congregations.
>
> Fifteen percent of the campaign proceeds for revitalizing urban, rural, and small membership churches.

As of March 1, 1998, over $7.7 million had been raised in gifts and pledges toward the campaign goal of $9.8 million. Over 570 RCA congregations have participated in the $9.8 by '98 fund drive. Many of these congregations gave sacrificially to the fund drive because, at one time, they were recipients of a low-interest loan from the RCA's Church Building Fund. Additionally, over twelve hundred RCA members made individual contributions to the $9.8 by '98 fund drive.

Although 1998 is the last year of the $9.8 by '98 fund drive, efforts are still being made to recruit additional congregations to participate in the fund drive. It is not too late for a congregation to become involved in this important effort of reaching people for Christ. Congregations interested in assisting the fund drive are encouraged to call the Office of Special Gifts at (708) 895-4030.

Disbursement of the $9.8 by '98 grants began in the spring of 1996. The Disbursement Committee for the grants meets twice annually. For individual congregations, the application

process begins at the classis level. Once an application is approved by the classis and is reviewed and approved by the regional synod, the application is then sent to the coordinator of new church development. Grants are approved by a committee made up of representatives from each regional synod.

The committee disburses available funds in April and October. As of March 1, 1998, thirty-three churches have shared $237,370 of $9.8 by '98 monies for the revitalization of their ministries. Twelve churches have shared $37,552 of $9.8 by '98 monies to train and recruit new church development pastors or for resources to enhance their ministry. The grant process continues through 2006. For more information on the application process for grants, individuals and congregations may contact the Rev. Richard Welscott, coordinator for new church development, at (616) 698-7071.

The application process for a CBF loan begins at the classis level and proceeds to the regional synod level. Pending regional synod approval, the application is then forwarded to the Council of Field Secretaries and to representatives of the General Synod Council for their review. The application is then sent to the RCABEF (Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund) board for final approval or disapproval. Under the 98 by '98 evangelism and church growth plan, CBF has made loans to twenty-five new church starts, totaling $5,989,228. For more information on CBF loans, contact Paul Karssen, fund executive, at (712) 737-4958.

The Reformed Church in America is grateful to all those who participated in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ by contributing to the $9.8 by '98 fund drive.

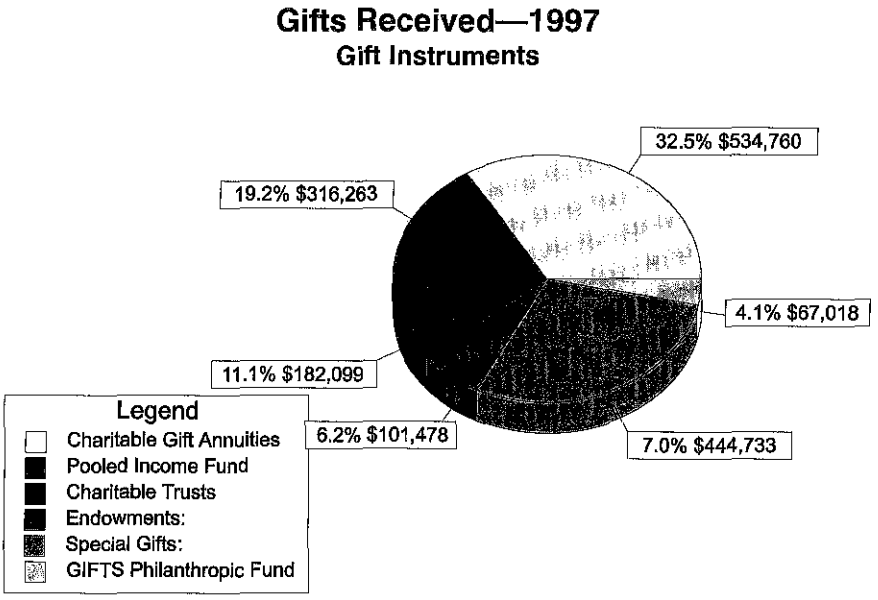
The $9.8 by '98 campaign office will continue to work with individuals and congregations until the completion of the fund drive. The staff, consisting of Larryl Humme, coordinator for special gifts; Joan Suda; and Diane Mrakovich, will oversee the campaign until its conclusion.

Continued prayers and support by RCA members are requested as the $9.8 by '98 campaign moves toward its conclusion this year. A sincere word of thanks is sent to all who helped this fund accomplish its major objective—to reach people for Jesus Christ by developing new churches and revitalizing existing congregations.

ACQUIRING RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY

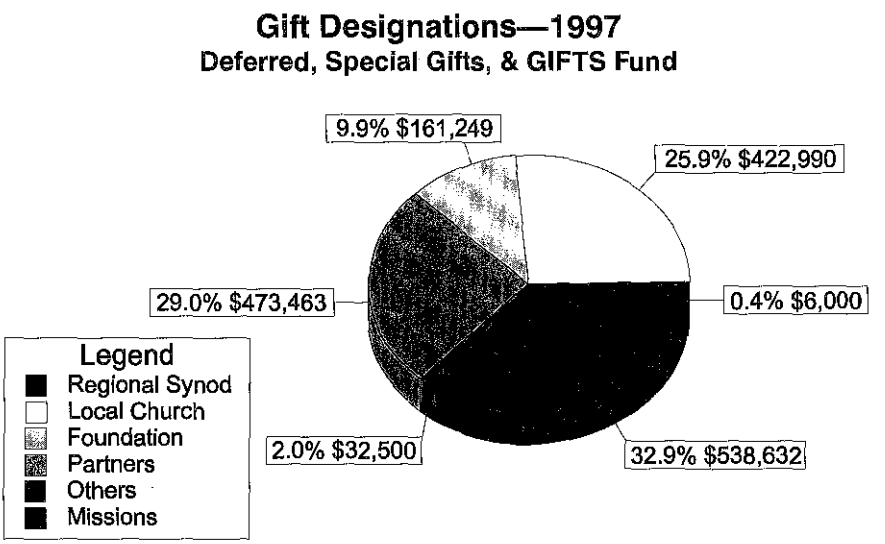
Acquiring resources for ministry is directly associated with encouraging people to give. The gifts reported below are a result of teaching biblical stewardship and encouraging people to give. These gifts are given through the Office of Gift Planning and the Office of Special Gifts.

The work of these two offices resulted in gifts totalling $1,646,351 during 1997. These gifts were received in the following forms:



The GIFTS Philanthropic Fund allows donors to make a gift to the foundation, and the gift is distributed to charitable organizations at a later date. This is especially helpful for donors who wish to make a gift in the current year but have not yet decided how they want it distributed. In 1997 $67,018 was received in this fund, and $55,501 was distributed to charities. The foundation received one-half of the interest earned on GIFTS Philanthropic Fund accounts. In 1997 this was $2,206.

During 1997 the gifts received by the foundation in all funds were designated as follows:

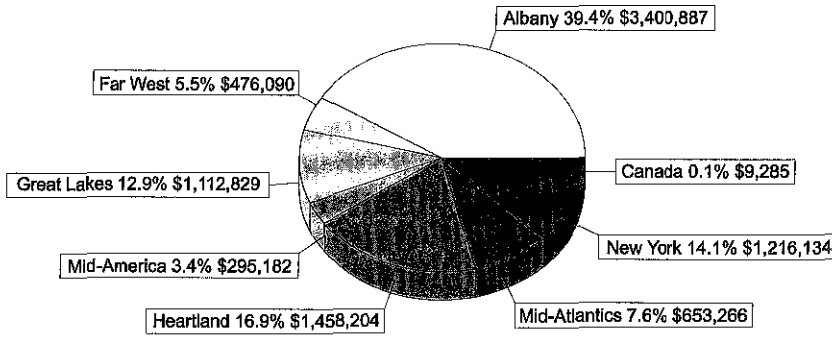


The amounts on the above chart do not equal those of the previous chart since gifts to the GIFTS Philanthropic Fund are carried over into following years.

One of the benefits to RCA congregations is that while the RCA Foundation promotes giving through wills and other means, persons often act on suggestions made by RCA Foundation staff without notifying the foundation of the gift. These gifts then come to RCA congregations at a later time.

In order to judge the effectiveness of the RCA Foundation program, RCA congregations are asked on the consistorial report form the number and amount of bequests and planned gifts received by them each year. In 1996 RCA congregations reported receiving 291 bequests totaling $8,392,836 and nineteen planned gifts totaling $229,042. The planned gifts came in the form of trust distributions, matured annuities, and life insurance. Total bequests and planned gifts reported by RCA congregations amounted to $8,621,878. The distribution of these gifts by regional synods is as follows:

1996 Bequests and Planned Gifts
Distribution by Regional Synod



The Office of Gift Planning also promotes the RCA Building and Extension Fund (RCABEF) investment notes. Investments in RCABEF are used for the construction of church buildings. Promotion is done by *Church Herald* ads, publicity material, and personal contacts. The Office of Gift Planning is also responsible for obtaining state registrations and issuing new and rollover notes.

MANAGING FOUNDATION RESOURCES

The RCA Foundation is also responsible for managing the RCA Endowment Fund and other funds that receive life income gifts. The services of the Office of Finance and of the managing director of investments are used in order to accomplish this management. It is also possible for the foundation to manage endowment funds of RCA congregations and other assemblies and organizations.

A financial advisory committee (Subcommittee on Investments) was formed to monitor the investments of the foundation. The members of the committee are Richard Doll, Harry De Bruyn, and Thomas Putnam. The committee has completed an investment policy for the foundation and monitors the appropriateness and performance of invested funds. Complete financial reports for 1997, as well as the foundation's annual printed report, are available from the Office of Finance or the RCA Foundation office.

The RCA Foundation and its staff seek to be faithful to the mission of the foundation. The results reported above indicate the success of the foundation. Stewardship education is going forward, gifts are being received, and funds are being managed appropriately. The work of the RCA Foundation is proceeding and is a blessing to the Reformed Church in America.

From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

WORK WITH CLASSES AND REGIONAL SYNODS

The Council for Hispanic Ministries has been working with regional synod executives in the regional synods of New York and Mid-Atlantics in the development of a program to help Hispanic congregations focus on stewardship issues from the perspective of a metropolitan urban congregation. Recently the Council for Hispanic Ministries has been dedicating much time to helping Hispanic congregations with issues of structure, finances, and the training of new pastors and consistories. The results of the program with metropolitan New York area congregations are models for others to use in the future. The design process needs the participation of classes and others to offer direction and support.

MEETING WITH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST ON STEWARDSHIP

Through Stewardship and Communications Services, several pastors of the Council for Hispanic Ministries gathered with pastors of the United Church of Christ (UCC) January 10-13, 1998, to discuss both theologically and practically the needs in Hispanic congregations concerning stewardship from a biblical, theological, and contextual point of view. A wealth of information was shared. The Council for Hispanic Ministries continues to work with the United Church of Christ to determine how the RCA and the UCC can plan something that is definitive and effective for use by RCA Hispanic congregations. The ideal approach would be to translate *Consecrating Stewards,* written by Earl Miller of the UCC, into Spanish. The alternative approach is to use present training guides, written in Spanish, and to also use the English language version of *Consecrating Stewards* in leadership training events.

Overtures

Reduce General Synod Assessments

1. **The Classis of Queens overtures General Synod to reduce General Synod assessments by a minimum of 2 percent each year for the next three years, beginning with the 1999 General Synod operational budget, 1999 funding for the administration of theological education, and 1999 Board of Pensions General Fund.**

Reasons:

1. General Synod assessments impose a burden on RCA congregations. Many RCA congregations are trying to send a tithe to denominational missions as well as maintain their own local ministries.

2. The number of mailings from the denomination and the number of meetings at the denominational level tend to confuse rather than clarify the mission of the RCA.

3. The Classis of Queens reduced its 1998 assessment by 5 percent. This was achieved by reducing operating expenses. The classis believes the General Synod can reduce its operating expenses as well.

4. The classis respectfully suggests consideration be given to the following methods for reducing operating expenses at the General Synod level:

   a. Reduce the number of mailings and mailing expenses by requiring all written communications to more than twenty persons from any RCA agency, commission, committee, council, or office be mailed through the *Church Herald.*

   b. Reduce the number of meetings of the General Synod Council from three meetings per year to two meetings per year.

   c. Reduce the operating expenses of each RCA agency, committee, commission, council, and office funded by General Synod assessments by 2 percent each year for the next three years.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-1.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The overture is not consistent with the Statement of Mission and Vision of the Reformed Church in America.

2. The areas of concern identified in the overture are being examined and are being addressed as indicated by the smallest percentage increase in ten years.

3. Assessment relief is available in hardship cases.➢

Board of Pensions—Outsourcing

2. The Regional Synod of New York overtures General Synod to direct its Board of Pensions, and its Subcommittee on Investments to:

1. Engage a quality benefit consulting firm[1] to advise the Board of Pensions on all options of outsourcing *beyond* the planned outsourcing of reporting investment results, including:

   a. Determination of risk tolerance profiles of plan members.

   b. Setting of: 1) future investment objectives, 2) asset allocation, and 3) investment criteria.

   c. Assessing the extent to which investible funds should be pooled and be managed actively by outside professional investment managers.

   d. Determining how many, and which kind of, investment options to offer.

2. Examine in depth the available options for restructuring the RCA managing of its Annuity Fund and other financial assets.2

3. Report the results of these actions and examinations not later than the 1999 General Synod, or earlier—if possible—to the General Synod Council.

Reasons:

1. Appropriate restructuring of how the RCA manages its pension and other financial assets is necessary in order to:

   a. Achieve a more productive relationship to money in general and to investing in particular.

   b. Concentrate fund management on the concept of "more resources, more possibilities," and thus on available opportunity to achieve better performance than is possible up to now.

2. Positive change in the future management of RCA pension assets is in the making. This overture bolsters the newly appointed RCA treasurer as chief financial officer in efforts to:

   a. Uphold the Board of Pensions in its obligation to seek the best possible investment return from the assets under its control. Closer supervision and enforcement of established goals will likely lead to higher investment returns, and hence to higher real pensions and/or to lower congregational contributions. Even relatively small additional percentage points of investment returns earned over current returns make a substantial difference to beneficiaries.

   b. Lead to asset allocation in correlation with a member's age.

   c. Respect individual risk tolerance by providing choices to growth-oriented, moderate, or conservative members of the plan, thereby conforming to the new "prudent man" rule, which unwittingly perhaps, is a full application of the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30).

   d. Link the total return objective set by the Board of Pensions with the skills and experience of outside professional investment managers (plural). Given the stress on corporate identity and the concept of the "priesthood of all believers," a way has to be found to relieve a single investment manager from the unfair and un-Reformed burden of making all decisions.

[1] *Firms such as Evaluation Associates, Hewitt Associates, or others.*

[2] *This should include a study of a proposal submitted tot he Board of Pensions by the Classis of Rockland-Westchester on December 4, 1997, and its earlier memorandum dated October 29, 1997, which was a response to the plan of the Board of Pensions for increased equity participation of plan members. (Documents are available from officers of the Board of Pensions.)*

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-2.
To request that the Board of Pensions consider for its continued review the engagement of a quality benefit consulting firm to advise the Board of Pensions on all options of outsourcing beyond the planned outsourcing of reporting investment results, including:

a. Determination of risk tolerance profiles of plan members.

b. Setting of: (1) future investment objectives, (2) asset allocation, and (3) investment criteria.

c. Assessing the extent to which investible funds should be pooled and be managed actively by outside professional investment managers.

d. Determining how many, and which kind of, investment options to offer.

and further, to request the Board of Pensions to examine in depth the available options for restructuring the RCA managing of its annuity fund and other financial assets.

and further, to request the Board of Pensions to report the results of these actions and examinations not later than the 1999 General Synod, or earlier—if possible—to the General Synod Council. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Because the Board of Pensions is an independent legal entity (corporation) with its own unique fiduciary, legal, moral, and ethical responsibilities, the General Synod requests it to take this action.

2. The Board of Pensions has considered, is in the midst of considering, and will continue to be considering these matters.

INTRODUCTION

THEOLOGY: CONFESSING CHRIST TODAY

> *"But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."* (1 Pet. 3:15-16a).

Let us say what we believe. THEOLOGY deals with the meaning of the Reformed Church in America's life and work. It is concerned with such questions as:

- What theological issues are a part of the RCA's ministry?
- How do the Standards of Unity relate to the life and work of the RCA today?

The Commission on Theology produces studies on current issues of theological significance in the life and work of the church. It usually presents at least one major paper to each session of General Synod.

Papers submitted in recent years to General Synod include:

- "Children at the Lord's Table"
- "Christian Witness to Muslims"
- "The Role and Authority of Women in Ministry"
- "The Use of Scripture in Making Moral Decisions"
- "The Church and Homosexuality"
- "The Commissioning of Preaching Elders"

Major responsibility for THEOLOGY is assigned to the Commission on Theology and the General Synod professors of theology teaching at RCA seminaries.

Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology met on three occasions during the past year. The commission met for two days immediately following the 1997 General Synod in June 1997, on October 3-4, 1997, and on January 30-31, 1998.

CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

The 1996 General Synod directed the Commission on Theology to prepare a study on "Christian Witness to the Uniqueness of Christ among People of Other Faiths," which would "both interpret the nature and character of Christian claims regarding the uniqueness of Christ and also guide Christians in understanding and assessing the religious experience and claims of those outside the Christian faith" (*MGS 1996*, R-3, p. 403). The commission presents the following study in response to this mandate.

"THE CRUCIFIED ONE IS LORD": CONFESSING THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST IN A PLURALIST SOCIETY

The earliest and most basic of all Christian confessions is the acclamation, "Jesus is Lord" (e.g. Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5). To confess "Jesus is Lord" expresses a number of important understandings and commitments. It is first of all a recognition of God's unique activity and presence in Jesus of Nazareth. The term Lord, although it is used in many different ways in the Bible, is used throughout the Bible in distinctive ways to refer to God's own being. The Hebrew equivalent *adon,* "Lord," is the regular word used in normal speech to speak of God in the Old Testament. When the full scope of New Testament usages is carefully analyzed, it becomes clear that to say that Jesus is Lord is to attribute to Jesus the same sovereign power and authority that we attribute to God.[1] Therefore to say "Jesus is Lord" is to point to what we believe about who Jesus is, that he is not only "fully human," but also "fully divine," to use the more developed language of the later creeds.

But to say that Jesus is Lord is not merely to affirm his deity; it is also to make the claim that every human authority is finally subject to Jesus. Every governing official, every religious leader, indeed every human claim to authority must finally acknowledge the authority of Christ (Phil. 2:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 11:15, 19:16). This confession has throughout the ages been the backbone of Christian resistance to evil, and the hope that has sustained the church through its darkest hours.

This means that the statement "Jesus is Lord" not only conveys certain information about Jesus; it also expresses a whole range of commitments, values, and intentions of the community that gathers under this confession. To make this statement is like reciting a pledge of allegiance. It acknowledges Jesus as *our* Lord and expresses the hope that Christians will see Jesus' lordship extend and be acknowledged over the whole earth.

Finally, the confession "Jesus is Lord" is the response evoked from us when we experience the power of God made available to us in the name of Jesus. As we experience healing, forgiveness, release from the power of evil, and new life breaking into our lives, our hearts cry out in praise and adoration, "Jesus is Lord!" For Christians, the confession "Jesus is Lord" is an expression of the Spirit's work in our lives, as the power of God awakens in us the awareness of where our help really comes from. This is why the Bible declares that no one can say "Jesus is Lord" apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3).

Yet this confession has become a point of controversy among some churches today. For a variety of reasons, the confession has elicited unease, or even outright criticism, even among

Christians themselves. There are a variety of reasons for this unease. Changes in our culture have called into question whether anyone can claim to know any truths which transcend one's own context and experience. The long history of past abuses committed by the church ostensibly in the name of the lordship of Jesus, from the crusades to the Inquisition to slavery to the Holocaust, have given many Christians pause about this confession. In addition, Christians find themselves encountering adherents of other religions with increasing frequency in North America. Such contacts often raise questions about the uniqueness of Jesus and the exclusive claims made by Christians.

This paper explores some of those reasons for discomfort and attempts to explore how the church can constructively address them, opening up fresh perspectives on this ancient confession which may enable the church to confess it with new conviction, sensitivity, and clarity. In this exploration, the paper pays particular attention to the *function* of confessing "Jesus is Lord" in addition to the *content* of that confession. That is, this paper is concerned with those assumptions and practices that surround our confession and bring its implications into engagement with the world around us. We want to concern ourselves with the concrete differences it makes in our lives and in our culture when we rightly confess that Jesus is Lord.

Objections to Confessing "Jesus is Lord": The Use and Abuse of Authority

People from a variety of theological perspectives have questioned the language of lordship and authority in its application to God or to Christ. It has been argued that such terms are outmoded, reflecting a patriarchal and hierarchical society very different from the democratic egalitarianism of contemporary life. Indeed, this language has at times been used, even in the church, to condone oppressive relationships that reflect nothing of the Spirit of Christ. Yet to reject this language entirely on the basis of these abuses is to fail to understand the distinctive way in which the confession of the lordship of Jesus functioned in the ancient church.

Far from being used to legitimatize human hierarchies and patriarchies, the confession of Jesus' lordship was used to relativize and critique all such human structures of authority. For example, Matthew 23:9 says, "call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven." In Acts 5:29, when the disciples are ordered by the religious authorities to be silent, Peter responds, "We must obey God rather than any human authority." In both these examples, God's authority supersedes and relativizes all human authority.[2] The same is true in the book of Revelation, where the lordship of Jesus is the starting point for resistance to a cruel and oppressive Roman Empire claiming power and lordship for itself. To confess that Jesus is Lord is not to give sanction to human authority, but to subject it to a penetrating critique that challenges any claim to authority apart from or different from the authority of the Christ who gave himself for the life of the world. Jesus turns the authoritarian and patriarchal world of his day on its head by declaring, "The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted" (Matt. 23:11-12). To confess the lordship of Jesus is to redefine radically what lordship and authority mean in the first place! It is to embrace as our rule and guide the distinctive way in which Jesus embodies authority.

At the core of the Bible's understanding of authority is its affirmation of divine grace. Even the creation itself is expressive of God's gracious authority. God speaks, and even the things which are not must respond and come into existence (Rom. 4:17). The world is sustained by the gracious decrees that proceed from the throne of God (Isa. 55:10-11). Yet this authority never expresses itself in domination, but rather in service (Luke 22:25-27). It is difficult to underestimate the significance of the graciousness of divine authority. God's authority gives life, it forgives and renews, it encourages diversity while binding people to each other.

Throughout human history, authority and power has usually been won by shedding the blood of others. But Jesus is acclaimed as Lord precisely because he has shed his own blood on behalf of the world. When Christians sing "The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now," they sing not of some Horatio Alger "rags to riches" story. They sing instead of a quality of glory that shines only in those who give themselves for others. This is the essential quality of Jesus' lordship. To say that Jesus is Lord without recognizing this distinctive understanding of gracious divine lordship is gravely to misunderstand the Christian confession.

When we recognize this distinctive *function* of the confession "Jesus is Lord" in the early church, it raises some important issues surrounding how we make our confession of the lordship of Jesus. It is possible for us today to be entirely "orthodox," saying all the right words, but to do so in a way which attempts to establish the privilege and superiority of the church rather than to call the church and the world to discipleship in Jesus' way. It is not enough to be clear on *what* we should say; we need also to be clear on *how* we should make use of that confession in the life of the church.

Objections to Confessing "Jesus is Lord": The Problem of Religious Pluralism

This leads to another challenge that is often heard today to the confession "Jesus is Lord." Some have argued that to confess that Jesus is Lord is arrogantly to presume that Christians have a monopoly on the truth. Here the complaint centers not on the notion of lordship or authority; it focuses on the way in which Christians attribute final authority *only* to Jesus of Nazareth, not just for themselves, but for the whole world. The same complaint is heard in many variations: "It's OK for you to believe in Jesus, but you have no right to impose your beliefs upon others." "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere." "Every religion has important truth in it, and you can't say one is better than another." "There are many paths up the same mountain, but they all reach the same top. "There are many religions, but they all are saying basically the same thing." "How can you claim to know more about God than anyone else?"

All these comments, diverse as they are, share a common resistance to the confession "Jesus is Lord." In each case, the final and public allegiance to Jesus' lordship grates against the pluralism and individualism so deeply embedded in North American religious consciousness. Most people prefer that religion be kept private—out of the public sphere, and that it be kept humble and subservient—never claiming access to any truth or authority that might impinge upon others.

In one sense, the resistance of the dominant culture to the confession "Jesus is Lord" is as old as Christian faith itself. The early Christian martyrs were not put to death simply for believing in Jesus; they were put to death because they would not take part in the imperial cult of Rome. That is, they were not willing to regard their own religious beliefs and practices as part of an eclectic smorgasbord in the way most religions did. Rome was remarkably tolerant of a wide range of religions—as long as they made no claims to ultimate authority nor demanded final allegiance. But the early Christians wouldn't go along with that. For them, to say that Jesus is Lord was to say that Jesus represented both the rule by which all other religions should be assessed (including the imperial cult), and the allegiance that superseded every other loyalty (including loyalty to the emperor). That allegiance cost many of them their lives.

Although resistance to the claim that Jesus is Lord is not new, our own culture has distinctive reasons for resisting this confession—reasons that we must try to understand. To do so, we must first go back to the period following the Reformation, when the so-called "wars of religion" tore Europe apart in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. By the time the Peace of Westphalia was concluded and these wars were brought to a close in 1648, much of Europe was physically, economically, and culturally devastated. This anguish over

religious conflict paved the way in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for approaches to the relationship between religion and government that increasingly moved religion out of the public sphere and into the realm of subjectivity and private life. The implicit assumption driving much of this change was the belief that religion, when it acquires too much power, becomes explosive and divisive. Europe had come to that conclusion through the hard knocks of experience.

This disenchantment with a public role for religion was furthered by developments in the Enlightenment during the eighteenth century. Not only did political thought during the Enlightenment increasingly separate the role of church and state, but the empiricism and rationalism of the Enlightenment drew an increasingly sharp opposition between religion and science. Because religion could not be empirically and rationally proven, it was relegated even more decisively to the realm of private opinion and feeling, rather than public truth. In this context, to say that Jesus is Lord might be meaningful as an expression of one's own feeling or belief. Yet since such a statement could not be empirically or rationally proven, it would be meaningless as an affirmation of public, objective truth that might make a claim on others or on the world as a whole. Ironically, the intensely inward and subjective character of the pietistic heritage of much American Christianity has often played directly into the hands of this public-private split in the function of religion.

The twentieth century, however, brought about a weakening in the Enlightenment's confidence in empiricism and rationality. The most scientifically advanced societies in the world almost brought themselves to extinction in two world wars, horrible beyond belief. In the late twentieth century our own post-modern context is suspicious, not only of religion, but of reason as well. More and more our culture is coming to the belief that *all* knowledge, both religious and scientific, is partial and provisional. We have come to recognize the ways in which reason itself is often merely a tool driven by the deeper and darker forces of ethnocentrism, greed, and the will to power.

And so in our own culture, we are beginning to extend the same suspicions toward other social institutions that have long been directed toward the church. Our culture increasingly is suspicious of *all* claims to objective truth and all final allegiances. On almost any subject, people are encouraged to keep their opinions to themselves and to avoid the mortal sin of imposing their beliefs on anyone else. We are a deeply suspicious people.

This emphasis on the provisional and tentative character of our knowledge is further intensified by our increasingly pluralistic society. Economic developments, immigration, and changes in communication and travel technologies cause us to be exposed to many different kinds of people, more so than ever before. We work and go to school with Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and adherents of many other religions. We are confronted almost daily by people who believe differently from us, and these people are often decent and respectable. Sometimes they may even strike us as admirable, embracing societal values we share, or even religious ideals to which we may also aspire.

This loss of a public role for the church, combined with increasing contact with adherents of other religions, places the church in a new social position that often feels uncomfortable for us. In the past, Christian faith appeared to have influence in the society as a whole. We still have long-established memories of a European Christendom where the church played a central role in society. Now North American Christians ironically are finding themselves increasingly in the same position as Christians in many other parts of the world: they are a minority faith, often with little respect or status in the dominant culture, competing in a wide-open marketplace of diverse religions. Christendom is dead.

These changes in our world and in our own experience pose fresh challenges to the church. The deepest challenge, however, is not from outside, but from within. These social and cultural changes have affected us as Christians. We are not always as confident as we once were. Our privileged place in society as religious leaders is increasingly questioned. Our own patterns of thinking have been deeply influenced by the culture around us. There are many who are willing to acknowledge Jesus as their "personal Lord and Savior" but are not sure whether this confession has public significance for their neighbors and the world as a whole as well. They are hesitant to "impose" their beliefs on others. They are reluctant to suggest that their own beliefs might be superior to or more true than the beliefs of others, especially when they suspect that their own moral behavior and that of their fellow Christians is not always superior to the morality of adherents of other religions.

Yet the rise of religious pluralism and the peripheral position of the church in our culture as a whole need not be seen only as a failure and a loss. In many respects it is a fresh opportunity for the church. We may be in a situation today that is closer to that of the New Testament church than ever before. As we are freed from the false security of being an established religion and are forced to compete in a wide-open marketplace of ideas and perspectives, the Holy Spirit may be opening an opportunity for renewal and transformation in the church—leading us into a fresh and deeper witness to the world, a witness undergirded not by the status and prestige of the institutional church but by the quality and character of our lives.

Do All Religions Lead to the Same Goal?

The challenges of religious pluralism come to a particular focus when the question of salvation is raised. In the context of a pluralistic culture in which the provisionality of all knowledge is assumed, it becomes harder for many Christians to affirm that Jesus is Lord of the whole world and that salvation is found in Jesus alone. In our time it is becoming increasingly popular to adopt a general approval of all religions, a view that assumes that all religions are expressions of the same basic human quest for God. By this view, all religions that are sincerely followed are capable of mediating salvation to their adherents.

Yet such a perspective, as gracious and magnanimous as it may appear, is both highly questionable on its own grounds and incompatible with the central affirmations of Christian faith. It must first be asked, "How do we *know* that all religions are capable of mediating salvation to their adherents? What kind of evidence or arguments might be advanced to support such a position?"

When pressed, it becomes clear that this position is in reality little more than wishful assertion and has little, if any, clear evidence or argumentation to support it. When examined closely, it is not at all clear that all religions are trying to achieve the same sort of salvation at all. Indeed, many careful scholars of comparative religion have emphasized the degree to which different religions conceive of salvation itself in very different ways. Only by the most reductionistic and simplistic analysis can it be said that all religions express the same quest for God or offer the same salvation. It is by no means certain that all religions are even attempting to mediate salvation in the way that Christians think of the concept.

But from a Christian perspective, there is an even deeper problem. It is almost impossible to reconcile such a general approval of all religions with the message of Jesus. Jesus came proclaiming, "the Reign (or Kingdom) of God is at hand."[3] In so doing, Jesus was not simply stating that something interesting or unusual was in the offing. That phrase "the Reign of God" evokes all the hopes and dreams of the people of God for God's final redemption of Israel and the whole world. When Jesus declared that the Reign of God was coming in his ministry, he meant that all of God's saving purposes for the whole world were coming to their

climax and fruition in his ministry. Jesus never claimed to be opening one new path to God amidst many others; he claimed that in his ministry, God's saving purpose for the whole world was coming to its culmination (cf. Matt. 24:14).

This emphasis on the Reign of God points to an even more fundamental challenge to the assumption that all religions lead to the same goal. The most basic metaphor for the popular view of religions is the image of paths up the mountain. This view assumes that there are many paths to God, and that each of us must find the path that is best for us. But note two important features of this metaphor. First, God is passive, waiting to be found at the top of the mountain. Secondly, human beings are the active ones, climbing up the mountain, struggling as best they can to find God, in an enterprise that requires a great expenditure of effort. The great drama of history, in this view, is this: how and when will humans ever make it to the top of the mountain to find God?

The biblical view, summarized in the message of Jesus, is quite the opposite. The great drama of history is not how humans will find God; it is rather when and how an active, seeking God will finally get through to a resistant humanity. When Jesus declared that the Reign of God was at hand, he was not claiming to open a new path to God; he was claiming that God was blazing a new path to us in Jesus. Christian faith is, in the final analysis, not about our going to God, but about God's coming to us in Christ. Christian faith is not about discovering God; it is the experience of having been found, despite our resistance and rebellion, by a God who is in search of all of humanity: "The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Christian faith is incompatible with a general affirmation of all religions because of a fundamental difference in understanding what religion is.[4] For Christians, it is not our quest for God, but our response to God's quest for us in Christ.

Consequently, Christians do not so much claim to have discovered the truth as to have been apprehended by the truth. They do not claim greater wisdom, higher morality, or a deeper knowledge of the truth for themselves. They expect to learn from others, including adherents of other religions. They acknowledge every week their own sinfulness, limitations, and shortcomings before God and the world in the confession of their sins in public worship. But what Christians also vigorously claim is that God has come to us decisively, fully, and uniquely in Jesus Christ. They make this claim, not because of their own superior wisdom, but simply because this is the claim that Jesus makes for himself in announcing the Reign of God and identifying his own ministry decisively with the coming of that Reign.

Christianity and Other Religions

Does this mean that Christians regard other religions as entirely false? Not at all! Reformed theology has always acknowledged that something of God's truth can be known through the natural world. Article II of the Belgic Confession states:

> We know [God] by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to *see clearly the invisible things of God*, even *his everlasting power and divinity*, as the apostle Paul says (Rom 1:20). All which things are sufficient to convince men and leave them without excuse.

Reformed theology denies that the knowledge of God available in creation is sufficient to bring us to salvation, because Reformed theology takes seriously the depths of human resistance to God. We do not make appropriate use of the knowledge of God that is available to us in creation. We often twist and distort it to our own idolatrous purposes. But the knowledge of God is nonetheless available in the natural world, and this knowledge is reflected in many religious traditions, partial and incomplete though it may be.

A good example of this is found in Acts 17:16ff., where Paul identifies the altar "to an unknown god" as a groping after God, and says, "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (vs. 23). Paul goes on to cite several Greek poets as pointers to the truth found in the gospel. Of course, Paul never suggested that the religious perspectives he found in Athens were sufficient to bring about the true and complete knowledge of God, but he nonetheless regarded them as pointers to the truth and suggested that they hinted at the reality attested in the gospel.

The same understanding has repeated itself frequently in the history of the church. Many cherished Christian practices were originally borrowed from non-Christian religions; from Christmas trees to the seasons of the church year, many practices and customs have pagan origins. Rather than denying such realities, the church saw them as early pointers to the gospel and incorporated them under the banner of the lordship of Christ. Christians don't deny that there is truth in other religions or that God works through other cultures; indeed, Isaiah declares that Cyrus of Persia is God's anointed who has been raised up to do God's will (Isa. 45:1). Christian faith simply declares that *all* religions (including the Christian church in a continual way) must respond to what God has done in sending his Son into the world and in calling all to respond in faith to him.

This means that Christians should always expect not only to teach, but also to learn in their encounters with adherents of other religions. We have a wonderful gift to offer in the life-giving power of the gospel. But we can also learn from the serenity of the Buddhist, the moral rigor of the devout Muslim, the celebrative affirmation of the law in Judaism, and the sensitivity of Native American religions to the spiritual world. These perspectives may challenge our own syncretistic dilution of Christian faith with modernity, and in so doing may deepen our own ability to understand and to live out the gospel we proclaim.

It is also important to realize that religions are not merely sets of beliefs; a religion is a complex cultural system in which many dimensions of people's experience are integrated and given meaning. Our own Christian faith is integrated into a much wider cultural system in ways that are complex and impossible to disentangle. In the past the church has failed to realize how much its faith and its culture have been intertwined, and it has therefore mistakenly imposed its own culture on others rather than inviting them to respond, in their own ways, to the truth of the gospel. For example, western missionaries in the nineteenth century missions movement encouraged the building of churches modeled on western architectural forms throughout the world. This imposition of western culture in the name of Christianity has resulted in the loss of identity and cultural depth in some parts of the world. We must become much more sensitive to the difference between proclaiming Jesus as Lord and proclaiming western Christianity as superior.

One implication of this is the realization that, when people from other religions become Christians, they should not be expected to express their faith in exactly the same way we do. It may well be that important elements in their own religious background can be brought under the lordship of Christ and sanctified by the Spirit of God, to be offered up in gratitude to Christ. The Christian church has much to learn and much to gain when other religious perspectives encounter the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This brings us again to the importance of not identifying the lordship of Christ with an assumed cultural superiority of the Christian church. If the church says that Jesus is Lord, it must learn to welcome all those whom its Lord welcomes as brothers and sisters in Christ, even if they may be quite different from us.

Salvation and Other Religions: Preliminary Comments

But what of salvation? Should Christians claim that there is no salvation apart from those who explicitly confess Jesus as Lord and Savior? In order fully to answer that question, a number of preliminary comments are necessary. First, Reformed theology has always taught that salvation is ultimately in God's hands, beyond the pale of human understanding. Calvin states, "We must leave to God alone the knowledge of his church, whose foundation is his secret election" (*Institutes*, IV.1.2).

A basic posture of humility should characterize all discussions of the scope of salvation. Christians claim not to have mastered the truth, but to have been mastered by it, and thus should be cautious about claiming to know too much of God's saving ways. God is greater than we, and we ought not to claim to know all of God's saving plan. While the Scriptures call us to discern between good and evil and between truth and falsehood, they also repeatedly caution against judging, that is against attempting to determine the ultimate destiny of any person (Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37; Rom. 2:1, 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; James 4:12). It is sufficient for us to be guided by the Scriptures which led us to Christ, affirming what seems clear and remaining silent where Scripture itself speaks with less clarity or finality. To probe too deeply into these matters is to subject oneself to grave spiritual danger, assuming knowledge and authority that rightly belong to God alone.

Secondly, it is important to think of salvation in the broad biblical sense and not simply as a ticket to heaven. According to the Bible, salvation is, in the deepest sense, our response to God's initiative. God comes to us to restore our relationship with God and with the creation, beginning here and now and extending into eternity (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Hence, for Christians it is meaningless to suggest that all people will be saved, unless this salvation actually begins to be experienced concretely in people's lives in the present. To speak of salvation without also speaking of the freedom of the Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, participation in the redeemed community, and the transformation toward a new and holy life is to speak of a meaningless salvation, abstract and devoid of content. To claim that salvation is present where these realities are not experienced is to strip salvation of most of its content for Christians. One wonders whether Christians' discussions of salvation become so otherworldly at times because of losing a firm grip on what it means to be a redeemed community in the here and now.

Thirdly, it is important to remember that the Bible always links salvation (in its full scope, present and future, personal and corporate) with faith. Without faith, there is no knowledge of God and no salvation (Heb. 11:6; Eph. 2:8). But faith must not be construed as a "work," as something we do that wins God's favor. Faith is not a precondition for God's grace; it is a work of God's grace. The whole process by which faith emerges is under God's gracious providence.[5] Faith is the other side of the coin of salvation. It is not only the grateful receiving of God's salvation, but also the fruit of that salvation. To discover God's surprising mercy in Christ and to place one's trust in that mercy which reconciles us to God and to one another *is*, in itself, the experience of salvation (cf. Luke 19:9). Christians say that there is no salvation apart from faith because faith is itself our grateful receiving of salvation and our joyful entry into the redeemed community. A salvation that is not so received is no salvation at all.

Salvation in the Name of Jesus

With these preliminary considerations, we turn to the question of the place of Jesus Christ in salvation. Is explicit faith in Jesus as Lord necessary for salvation, or is it possible that adherents of other religions will also be saved? What does the Bible say about this, and can the Bible's perspective make sense for us today?

The Bible makes some very strong statements about the centrality of faith in Christ for salvation. Jesus declares in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In Acts 4:12, Peter says, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." In Romans 10:9, Paul affirms, "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Clearly, the central affirmation of the New Testament is that God extends his salvation to the world through Christ. The Bible does not say that God comes to us in many ways to save; it affirms that God's salvation has come to us "in the fullness of time" in Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 speaks of how God long ago spoke "in many and various ways," but that "in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds." One can scarcely imagine a more central role for Jesus in God's saving purpose for the world. Christian faith is absolutely clear: Jesus is God's last, best, word—the only savior.

But what if the name of Jesus is not known? Must Jesus be explicitly named in order for salvation to be experienced? On this subject the Bible speaks with a clear central message, but also with a significant qualifier. The central message and emphasis of Scripture falls upon the centrality and significance of the name of Jesus and the hearing of the gospel. Paul summarizes this theme in Romans 10:14:

> But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

Paul bears witness here to the passion that drives the whole New Testament church: the passion to make Christ known. Such passion is incomprehensible apart from the conviction that the name of Jesus is critical to the experience of salvation. Paul believed that God intends people to find salvation through the name of Jesus. He believed that Jesus was God's Messiah, the one appointed to bring salvation to the world. Along with the entire New Testament church, Paul believed that the means by which God has chosen to bring salvation to the world is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And yet there is good reason to believe that the New Testament church did not claim to have a monopoly on the dispensing of God's salvation. The book of Hebrews, for example, makes it clear that the people of God in the Old Covenant were saved through the sacrifice of Christ, though they did not know the name of Jesus. They participated in the sacrifices and ceremonies that looked forward to the sacrifice of Christ; and their faith, expressed through these practices, found its final object in Jesus himself, whom they never knew. Similarly, the Bible envisions the salvation of infants and small children who are part of the families of believers, even though they are not yet able to name the name of Christ for themselves (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14). The Canons of Dort speak powerfully and beautifully of this theme in Scripture:

> Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy (Article 17).

Here as well, salvation is envisioned for some who do not explicitly name the name of Jesus themselves, though in both these cases, recipients of salvation were part of the covenant community.

In Romans 2:14-16 a third example further stretches our understanding of the scope of salvation. Paul considers the case of Gentiles who have never heard the gospel, yet who without possessing the law, "do instinctively what the law requires" and who thereby show "that what the law requires is written on their hearts." He goes on to speak of how their consciences will "accuse, or perhaps excuse them" on the Day of Judgment. While Paul certainly expresses no clear confidence that they will be saved, neither does he categorically rule out the possibility that God might "write the law on the heart" of one who has not yet heard the gospel or the law.

The reference to having the law "written on their hearts" recalls the great promise of Jeremiah 31:33, which looks forward to a new covenant when the law will be "written on their hearts." Paul seems to envision the possibility of God's direct action to save here, within the context of the new covenant, even before the preaching of Christ is heard. The cryptic reference to Christ's "proclamation to the spirits in prison" in 1 Peter 3:18-20 may also point to Christ's direct action to save, apart from the preaching of the church, though this text is not easy to interpret (cf. also Eph. 4:9-10). Paul's language is allusive, suggestive, and somewhat speculative at this point, and Peter's lacks sufficient context to interpret with confidence. Paul goes on in Romans 3 to affirm the complete sinfulness of the entire human race and the radical need for the grace of God given us in Christ. There is no basis in these texts for the development of a theology in which the proclamation of Christ is unnecessary.

Yet these examples in Scripture where salvation is given apart from the explicit naming of Jesus suggest to us that though Jesus is the only Savior, and though God's means for saving the world is the proclamation of the name of Jesus, God's action to save at times precedes the witness of the church and at times may go beyond its proclamation. The church always carries out its mission with the awareness of Jesus' words in John 10:16: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." As we proclaim the name of Jesus throughout the world, we do so in the confidence that Christ has gone out before us. We *expect* to find others who do not "belong to this fold" who will listen to the voice of Jesus, and whom Jesus will gather in to form one flock with one shepherd.

Wrapped up in these qualifying examples is the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in God's saving purpose for the world. To be a Christian is to be entrusted with the gospel, with the commission of bringing God's light to the whole world. And yet it is finally God's gospel and God's mission, not ours. As a saint once quipped, we are to preach as if everything depended on our proclamation, and to pray as if everything depended upon God. To follow that advice is to preserve the Bible's emphasis on the necessity and centrality of the proclamation of the name of Jesus, while also recognizing that salvation is finally in God's hands and not in ours.

Paul's recognition of God's freedom to save in no way diminished his passion for the absolute urgency of the proclamation of the gospel. We would do well to imitate his example. And in any case, whether salvation comes through the proclamation of the name of Jesus, or through God's mysterious direct working, it is always Jesus who is the savior. He is God's Messiah; it is his sacrifice that has atoned for the sins of the world and reconciled us to God. Even in the Old Covenant when his name was not known, salvation was still found through him and received by faith. And that is no less true today. Christ is the Savior, and in God's good time, "every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11).

The Ongoing Challenge

But simply knowing this truth and believing it is not enough. In our society the Christian claims regarding the uniqueness of Christ and the necessity of salvation in Christ will immediately raise suspicions of arrogance and a fear of domination. In other parts of the

world they raise painful memories of colonialism, forced conversion, and oppression. The church's history of confessing the lordship of Christ has not been without its failures. One only needs to recall the Crusades, when the church terribly confused the lordship of Christ with the political power and prestige of the church and thereby compromised its message and its integrity, or the silent acquiescence of far too many Christians to the horror of the Holocaust. The church is still paying the price for these errors in its struggles for authenticity in former colonies, in its long and difficult mission in Islamic countries, and in its tense relations with Judaism. In subtle and powerful ways the church can be tempted to want to reign with Christ without following the path of Christ, the path of humble service. There is simply no place for self-congratulatory superiority in our pointing to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

But there is a world of difference between efforts to impose or coerce Christian faith, and the gracious commending of Christian faith by words and lives that are empowered by the Spirit. The church will be able to point credibly to Jesus as the only savior of the whole world only if it makes that claim as a community that assumes a posture of humble service, if it seeks out the lowest places of service and loves where no one else is willing to love. Only then will Christians be able to persuade the world that Jesus comes, not to destroy our cultures, but to renew them; not to reinforce patterns of domination, but to give life to all; not to negate our religious searching, but to show us the reality for which we have been longing; not to impose uniformity, but to bring many diverse gifts to full expression. If this is the Savior whom we have come to follow, we will indeed have good news not just for ourselves, but for the whole world.

➢As R-1 was put before the synod, a request from the floor resulted in editorial changes in R-1 (noted by crossout) to delete words "a" and "witness" in the first paragraph.

The advisory committee recommended R-1 with editorial changes as follows:

> **To declare that the paper, "The Crucified One is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society," is a faithful ~~witness~~ to the teaching of Scripture and the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*; and further,**
>
> **to direct the Office of Christian Education and Discipleship to prepare study resources based upon this paper; and further,**
>
> **to commend this paper to the congregations, classes, regional synods, commissions, agencies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America for instruction and study.**

On Tuesday, June 9, Synod voted to reconsider R-1. See p. 457.➢

➢(A motion was made and supported to substitute the following for R-1:

> **To direct the Office of Christian Education and discipleship to prepare study resources based upon the paper "The Crucified One is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society"; and further,**
>
> **to commend this paper to the congregations, classes, regional synods, commissions, agencies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America for provisional use, study and critique; and further,**
>
> **that the Commission on Theology take any feedback on this paper into account and represent this paper with any refinements to the 1999 General Synod for its approval as a faithful witness to the teaching of scripture and the standards of the RCA.**

A division of the house was called. The motion LOST.)◄

►VOTED: To adopt R-1 (p. 456)◄

►During the session on Tuesday evening, June 9, upon a motion from the floor, synod:

VOTED: To reconsider R-1 (p. 456)◄

►Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-1, synod:

VOTED: To amend R-1 as follows:

To declare the paper, "The Crucified One is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society," to be provisionally recognized as faithful to the teaching of Scripture and the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*; and further,

~~**to direct the office of Christian Education and Discipleship to prepare study resources based upon this paper; and further,**~~

to ~~commend~~ distribute this paper to the congregations, classes, regional synods, commissions, agencies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America for provisional use for instruction and study; and further,

responses to this paper are to be received by the Commission on Theology by April 1, 1999 in order to take such input into account in presenting this paper for information to a future General Synod.◄

MORAL STANDARDS FOR HOLDERS OF CHURCH OFFICES

Introduction and Background

The 1997 General Synod instructed the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, to prepare revisions to the *Book of Church Order* that address moral behavior, including sexual purity as it relates to qualifications for all four offices of the church, for report to the 1998 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, R-5, p. 405).

The commission believes there is merit in R-5. Currently, the *Liturgy* and the *Book of Church Order* say a great deal about theological faithfulness and commitment to the good order of the church for officeholders (professors of theology, ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, and deacons). But they say much less about faithfulness in behavior. In a time and context where the esteem with which church leaders are regarded continues to decline in the culture as a whole, and when confusion over moral standards is pervasive, the commission believes the church's life and witness may be strengthened by a greater attentiveness to these issues.

It is interesting that the 1987 "Order for Ordination and Installation of a Minister of the Word" makes no references to behavior, apart from ministerial and ecclesiastical functions, in its interrogation of the candidate prior to ordination. Currently, however, the Commission on Christian Worship is proposing a new order for ordination that includes the question, "Will you pray for God's people and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?" The Commission on Christian Worship notes in its comments on this section, "This question contains important personal disciplines (adapted from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and recovers the attention to godly/holy living found in the *Liturgy* of 1968, 1908, and 1882."

It is certainly true that the liturgical tradition of the Reformed Church in America includes a concern with godly or holy living on the part of officeholders. The 1968 form for ordination inquired of the candidate, "Do you promise to discharge your office faithfully according to this doctrine and to adorn it with a godly life?" The 1908 form used similar language, as did the 1882 *Liturgy*. Moreover the 1882 form, in the charge to the minister, urged the candidate to exercise ministry "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" and offered the following exhortation: "Be an example of believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." The concern for moral behavior and sexual purity has a long history in the Reformed Church in America, a history that should not be forgotten or lost.

At least some of the concern behind the above R-5, however, arises from the perception that the Reformed Church in America needs to be more explicit in the moral standards it establishes for officeholders in the church. In a time of moral relativism and confusion, officeholders in the church need to have a clear standard to which they may aspire and by which their behavior can be measured.

Christ the Standard

At the most basic and important level, this standard is Jesus Christ himself. Officeholders represent the various ministries of Christ to and for the church, and in so doing they must live lives in conformity with Jesus Christ. Conformity with Christ involves receiving Christ's righteousness, a righteousness imputed by faith and expressed in our lives through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. As recipients of Christ's righteousness, Christians are called to live out their identity in Christ through lives patterned after Jesus' example. This focus on Christ as the center and standard must never be forgotten or eclipsed. Nor should the church ever fall into the trap of believing that Christ alone is insufficient as the standard to govern life and ministry. Paul declares that no foundation can be laid other than the foundation of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). Any attempt to make more explicit the ethical norms of behavior that should guide and govern officeholders in the Reformed Church in America should begin and end with Jesus Christ, the living Lord whom we are called to follow.[6]

This is the pattern of Scripture itself. Paul, for example, frequently offers explicit and focused ethical exhortation to his readers, but these exhortations are always grounded in the believer's relationship to Jesus Christ. In the same way, while it is appropriate for the church to spell out more specific ethical norms for officeholders, such norms should always be guided by Scripture that is drawn from Christ's life and leads us into deeper union with Christ. This is entirely in keeping with the distinctively Calvinist emphasis on a positive role for the law of God: the law is a guide for how we are to live out our new life *in Christ*.

Money, Sex, and Power

But it is not enough merely to assert that Christ is our standard; we also must describe how that standard actually shapes the way we live. What difference does it make for us, in our everyday lives, when our lives are grounded in Christ? The commission believes that both our present context and the ancient history of the church point to three central areas of life where we need to describe the moral implications of our life in Christ. Those areas are money, sex, and power.

In the early periods of the church's history, the church spelled out the ethical implications of the gospel—especially its approach to money, sex, and power—under three headings: poverty, chastity, and obedience. Thomas Aquinas describes these as the three virtues intended to counteract the threefold description of the world found in 1 John 2:16: "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches." The same threefold concern appears repeatedly throughout the history of the church. Calvin speaks in similar terms of the danger of the longing for money, sex, and power:

> Now our blockishness arises from the fact that our minds, stunned by the empty dazzlement of riches, power, and honors, become so deadened that they can see no farther. The heart also, occupied with avarice, ambition, and lust, is so weighed down that it cannot rise up higher.[7]

The ancient virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience focused attention on the need to control three driving appetites that can dominate our lives and lead us away from faithfulness to Christ: the love of money, which Scripture places at the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10, c.f. Luke 16:13-15); the drive for sexual satisfaction, which if left out of submission to God can result in terrible pain and impurity (c.f. the extensive instruction on sexual ethics throughout Scripture), and the hunger for power, status and prestige (e.g. Matt. 18:1-4). Scripture repeats in countless ways the basic warning that our longings for money, sex, and power can be our undoing as we seek to follow Jesus Christ.

Between Asceticism and Laxity

This is not to say that there is anything inherently wrong with money, sex, and power. These are good gifts of God, and they are unavoidably part of our lives; everything we do and are is touched by them. They enrich all our joy, health, and strength. Too often in the past, the church pursued an impossible attempt to flee from these realities entirely, resulting in the formation of reclusive and repressive enclaves rather than active mission. The churches of the Reformation resisted the tendency of earlier times to emphasize asceticism—the complete abstinence from money, sex, and worldly power. Rather, Calvin emphasized the importance of moderation, gratitude for God's gifts, generous stewardship, and trust in God.[8] But Calvin also points out that mistaken strictness is not the only danger. We can also fail through mistaken laxity. Precisely because money, sexuality, and power are so deeply woven into our lives, and because our longings for money, sex, and power can be so strong, the pursuit of these desires can all too easily displace the lordship of Jesus Christ and dominate our lives, to our own destruction. That is why the church has always called Christians to special vigilance in these areas.

The challenge for church leaders to handle responsibly the desire for money, sex, and power is no less formidable today. Faithfulness to Christ demands of us today, not that we seek to avoid these realities altogether, but that we cultivate a vigilance and discipline over our hearts in these areas, with a deep awareness of our frailty and of the powerful ways in which our culture tries to persuade us to turn these good aspects of creation into false gods that dominate and control our lives. The commission believes that explicit attention to these challenges, and the cultivation of specific virtues to counteract the seductive allure of money, sex, and power, is essential to healthy leadership in our time and place.

Of course, it is not only officeholders in the church who need to be vigilant over the temptations of money, sex, and power. These are concerns to which all Christians must attend. Yet it is particularly incumbent upon officeholders to live as "examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). Effective leadership in the church is primarily a matter of actions and behavior, and only secondarily a matter of words. Therefore, it is particularly appropriate to invite leaders to consider the moral standards that should guide their behavior—behavior which, in turn, will help to guide the church as a whole.

A Proposal for the Reformed Church in America

How can such goals be attained within the context of the polity of the Reformed Church in America? The commission suggests that a sentence be added to the declarations for licensed candidates, ministers, and professors of theology which are part of the formularies of the *Book of Church Order.* The commission is also proposing that a similar promise be added to the orders for the ordination for elders and deacons. In all these cases, the sentence would

read, "I promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the *Standards* of the Reformed Church in America, in generosity, chastity, and humility." Each of the words or phrases in this promise needs at least a brief commentary.

The promise to live a "holy and exemplary life" recalls first of all the consistent summons of all of Scripture to holiness. While many people think of holiness only as purity, the biblical meaning originates with the notion of being "set apart" to God. The purity associated with holiness flows first from a Christian's special relatedness to God in Christ that stands at the center of holiness. All Christians share in this holiness because of their union with Christ by faith. Church leaders are called not to greater holiness than other Christians, but rather to live out the holiness that is theirs in Christ and to base their ministries on the power of God that accompanies such holiness. The reference to an "exemplary" life arises from the fact that church offices are at their very heart offices of leadership. The pastoral epistles urge that church leaders live their lives as examples to the flock, "in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Ordained officeholders in the RCA should aspire to nothing less.

The next phrase, "guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*," identifies the Bible as our only rule of faith and practice. At the same time, it affirms that the interpretation of Scripture is not a private matter but an exercise of discernment in which the church engages corporately (2 Pet. 1:20). In this phrase, the candidate promises to be guided by the whole church in interpreting the Scriptures and applying them to his or her life.

The next three words, "generosity, chastity, and humility," attempt to give positive expression to the need for vigilance and restraint over the fundamental appetites that so often threaten to lead us away from discipleship to Christ. The central thrust here is not the attempt to avoid money, sex, or power. This is not a new asceticism. Rather, it is the voluntary commitment to moderation, self-restraint, and faithfulness in these areas, so that they will not dominate or control our lives.

"Generosity" entails a basic posture in which giving to others, rather than acquiring for oneself, is the goal of life. As such, it is a posture of resistance to consumerism and the pursuit of affluence that is so intoxicating and pervasive in our culture. It turns the acquisitiveness of our culture on its head and seeks to imitate, in the handling of money and resources, the very graciousness of God. A commitment of officeholders to generosity is a commitment to a lifestyle of contentment, simplicity, compassion, and service.

"Chastity" is not merely, or even primarily, the avoidance of sex. The first definition of the word in all the major English dictionaries refers to abstention from unlawful or religiously proscribed sexual intercourse. For Christians, chastity is the commitment to place one's sexuality under the authority of Scripture and to direct one's sexuality toward faithful, committed, love and toward the good of the other. At the most basic level, it is the exercise of restraint over one's impulses in order to give space for love, commitment, and concern for the other to grow. Chastity is thus just as important in marriage as it is in singleness. For leaders in the church, the cultivation of chastity is a necessary antidote to the pervasiveness of sexual misconduct and sexual impurity in our culture.

"Humility" means neither excessive deference nor low self-esteem. It is rather the exercise of restraint on our natural desire for power, control, and prestige. In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus bases his invitation, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens," on the fact that he is "gentle and humble in heart." Paul speaks of boasting only in his weaknesses. Moses is described as "very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Officeholders need humility, both to submit to the discipline and guidance of their peers and to avoid the tendencies toward the abuse of power that are rampant in our culture.

By including this promise in the ordination vows, the Reformed Church in America affirms an explicit moral framework for officeholders while avoiding the problems of legalistic interpretation that might accompany definitional language placed elsewhere in the *Book of Church Order.*

The Commission on Theology therefore will recommend to a future General Synod that it adopt the following revisions to the *Book of Church Order, Formularies of the Reformed Church in America,* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

1. Declaration for Licensed Candidates

I, _____, in becoming a licensed candidate for the ministry in the Reformed Church in America sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America.* I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the *Standards* as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America,* in generosity, chastity, and humility. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the classis, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and according to the *Liturgy* and the *Book of Church Order.*

3. Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

I, _____, in becoming a minister of the Word of God in the Reformed Church in America sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America.* I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the *Standards* as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America,* in generosity, chastity, and humility. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the classis, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and according to the *Liturgy* and the *Book of Church Order.*

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge my life to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up

and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God.

I ask God, and you His servants, to help me so to live until that glorious day when, with joy and gratitude, we stand before our great God and King.

7. Declaration for General Synod Professors of Theology

I, _____, in becoming a Professor of Theology of the Reformed Church in America sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the *Standards* as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*, in generosity, chastity, and humility. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the General Synod, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and according to the *Liturgy* and the *Book of Church Order*.

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge my life to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God.

I ask God, and you His servants, to help me so to live until that glorious day when, with joy and gratitude, we stand before our great God and King.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-2:

R-2.
To distribute the study, "Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices," to congregations, classes, regional synods, commissions, agencies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America for study and comment to the Commission on Theology before ~~January 31~~ April 1, 1999, if possible; and further,

to direct the Commission on Theology to present a final report, with recommendations, to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: This change in date allows more complete response from classes to the General Synod.

The Commission on Theology has communicated to the Commission on Christian Worship and requested insertion into the *Liturgy* for the ordination of elders and deacons (in the presentation and interrogation section), the following question:

Do you promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*, in generosity, chastity, and humility?

The above insertion requires presentation at a future General Synod for adoption with recommendation to the classes for two-thirds approval.

BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER CONSCIENCE CLAUSES

The 1996 General Synod asked the Commission on Theology to study the *Book of Church Order* conscience clauses in light of Reformed theology and report its findings to the General Synod (*MGS 1996*, R-11, p. 313).

BACKGROUND

The 1980 General Synod discussed and approved "A Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity in the RCA Concerning Women as Church Officers" (*MGS 1980*, p. 276). The 1980 General Synod adopted with recommendation for approval by classes four amendments to the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 3; *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7; *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 14; and *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h). The 1980 General Synod voted on these four amendments together in one vote and submitted them to the classes for approval—also by one vote on the four amendments together (*MGS 1980*, R-23, pp. 286-87). Classes approved these four *BCO* amendments by the required two-thirds majority, and the 1981 General Synod declared incorporation of these amendments into the 1981 edition of the *Book of Church Order* (*MGS 1981*, R-4, p. 42).

The above four *BCO* sections amended in 1980 state:

1. Ministers are those men and women who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 2).

2. If individual members of the classis find that their consciences, as illuminated by Scripture, would not permit them to participate in the licensure, ordination, or installation of women as ministers, they shall not be required to participate in decisions or actions contrary to their consciences, but may not obstruct the classis in fulfilling its responsibility to arrange for the care, ordination, and installation of women candidates and ministers by means mutually agreed on by such women and the classis (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7).

3. Ministers shall not be pressured in such a way as to lead either one who supports or one who opposes, on scriptural grounds, the ordination of women to church offices to offend against one's conscience; nor shall any minister be penalized for conscientious objection to or support of the ordination of women to church offices; nor shall any minister obstruct by unconstitutional means the election, ordination, or installation of a woman to church offices (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 14).

4. It [board of elders] shall not permit or penalize any member for conscientious objection to or support of the ordination of women to church offices; nor shall it permit any member to obstruct by unconstitutional means the election, ordination, or installation of a woman to church offices (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h).

Numbers 2-4 above are commonly known in the RCA as the "conscience clauses."

ANALYSIS OF THE CONSCIENCE CLAUSES

1. The understanding of conscience in the clauses is a Reformed one.

On two occasions the Reformed Church in America dealt with the role of conscience in its belief and polity:

1. The Commission on Theology submitted to the 1976 General Synod a report, "Authority and Conscience in the Church" (*MGS 1976,* pp. 231-35). This report was submitted in response to the 1974 "Report of the Special Committee to Review RCA Participation in the NCC" (*MGS 1974*, R-2, p. 135).

2. The Commission on Theology submitted to the 1984 General Synod a report, "The Role of Conscience in the Belief, Practice, and Polity of the Reformed Church in America" (*MGS 1984*, p. 256). This report was submitted in response to an overture from the Classis of New Brunswick, requesting the commission to study the role of conscience in the belief, practice, and polity of the RCA (*MGS 1981*, pp. 122-23).

Both of the above reports and the conscience clauses themselves are clear that Scripture must inform the individual conscience. Conscience is not a pure or privileged source of moral and religious authority. A person's conscience is shaped by many forces in the course of living, and without the influence of the Scriptures and the authority of the church, the conscience can and does err. Of course, sorting out the many forces, both good and evil, that shape a person's conscience in the case of women's ordination is difficult—especially difficult in an American culture that is saturated with pornography and that encourages men to view women merely as objects of sexual desire.

2. The conscience clauses strictly limit the nature and scope of objection, and this limit is necessary to preserve the Reformed understanding of the authority of officeholders.

The conscience clauses limit objection to "the licensure, ordination, or installation of women as ministers" and to "the election, ordination, or installation of a woman to church offices." The conscience clauses do not allow for objection to women officeholders once they are ordained and installed. Once ordained and installed, women officeholders exercise the authority of the Lord of the church as described in the Preamble of the *Book of Church Order*.

The conscience clauses also limit the nature and scope of objection. Objectors may not obstruct. The assumption here is that they remain loyal to the RCA, respect its decision to ordain women, and in no way seek to undermine them.

3. The conscience clauses assume a process for determining whether an objector's conscience has been biblically informed, but the conscience clauses do not provide such a process.

Given the fact that an individual conscience may or may not be biblically informed, the appeal to conscience in the Reformed tradition requires a process of discernment. The conscientious objector needs to appear before the church body to whom he or she is accountable. In some form, the objector needs to share his or her process of spiritual formation, to explain his or her understanding of Scripture, and to explain why participation in the process of ordaining women will do him or her spiritual harm.

In the present arrangement for dissent on women's ordination, there is no accountability in dissent and therefore little possibility for people within the RCA to constructively engage one another and to grow together spiritually. The failure to delineate a process of dissent is one of the reasons for the high degree of anger and tension surrounding the conscience clauses. It is also one of the reasons why the hope of the original framers of "A Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity in the RCA Concerning Women as Church Officers" has not been fully realized.

4. The conscience clauses are closely tied to a particular moment in the life and history of the RCA.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the RCA was threatening to split over the issue of women officeholders. The conscience clauses were formulated "to bring peace in diversity in the RCA over the issue of women in church offices" (*MGS 1980*, p. 275). The main reason for the writing of conscience clause *BCO* amendments in the early 1980s was the ordination of women, and appeals to conscience were entirely focused on the ordination process. Also, in the early 1980s, there were very few RCA ordained women ministers and it was not anticipated that there would be significant numbers of ordained RCA women ministers in the future. The conscience clauses approved in the 1980s do not address what conscientious objection to women officeholders means when there are a substantial number of RCA women ministers.

This failure to address the longer-term issues reflects a more fundamental problem with the historical particularity of the conscience clauses. These conscience clauses did not anticipate what the long-term consequences are of bringing the concerns of a particular situation into the *Book of Church Order* when the *Book of Church Order* is a book of general rules and procedures. The conscience clauses set a precedent of settling specific theological disputes by amending the *Book of Church Order*. If this precedent were followed consistently, it threatens undermining the *Book of Church Order* as a constitution. The commission believes that particular theological issues of this sort should not be legislated in the rules of governance but should instead be addressed through more appropriate processes of confession, discernment, and mutual accountability.

DEEPER THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

The struggle, tension, and anxiety around the conscience clauses are a sign of theological ferment in the life of the RCA. At the same time these struggles call the RCA to a process of self-examination and theological reflection. Behind the ferment are at least three issues.

1. The authority of officeholders

The Preamble of the *Book of Church Order* lays the groundwork for a Reformed understanding of office. In the Preamble section, "The Nature of the Church's Authority," the authority of officeholders is defined as follows:

> The authority exercised by those holding office in the church is delegated authority. Their appointment to their special tasks is by the Spirit of the Lord, and they are responsible first of all to the Lord of the church. Their authority is of three kinds: ministerial, declarative, and spiritual. Ministerial authority is the right to act as Christ's servants. Declarative authority is the right to speak in his name within the limits set by Scripture. The church shall declare what is in the Word and act upon it, and may not properly go beyond this. Spiritual authority is the right to govern the life and activity of the church and administer its affairs.

In the Preamble section, "The Equality of the Ministry," the issue of authority is expanded on as follows:

> The principle of the equality of the ministry, conceived now in its broadest sense as including the functions of the elder and the deacon, is based upon the fact that the entire ministerial or pastoral office is summed up in Jesus Christ himself in such a way that he is, in a sense, the only one holding that office. Every ministerial function is found preeminently in him. By his Holy Spirit he distributes these functions among those whom he calls to serve in his name.

Jesus Christ, through the Spirit, calls people to office and delegates authority. Respect for this authority is essential for unity and good order in the church. Respect for this authority is one way Christ is honored as the only source of salvation. The Reformed understanding of the authority of officeholders makes no distinction between men and women officeholders. The RCA needs to face honestly and forthrightly the question whether the conscientious objection to "the licensure, ordination, or installation of women as ministers" undermines the historic, Reformed understanding of Christ's delegated authority and respect for officeholders functioning in the name of Christ. Is it possible to object, based on a biblically informed conscience, to the licensure, ordination, and installation of women as ministers of Word and sacrament, and still to recognize and accept the authority that Christ has delegated to them? The commission finds it hard to imagine how such a position is possible. And if it is not possible, is not such a failure to accept this authority consequently a failure to accept the authority of Christ himself? More and more in the RCA, the central problem is not the ordination of women but the recognition of the authority that Christ delegates to women officeholders. This is an issue the conscience clauses do not address.

Consequently, the commission concludes that the conscience clauses are internally contradictory. The two essential phrases in the conscience clauses stipulate that objectors "shall not be required to participate in" and yet "may not obstruct" the ordination of women. But the refusal to participate in the ordination of a woman is a refusal to recognize the authority that Christ delegates to a woman in that office. Such refusal, however passive, must itself be construed as a form of obstruction to the mutual recognition and respect that is essential among officeholders if they are to be effective servants and representatives of Christ. It is shortsighted and inadequate for the *Book of Church Order* to address only the obstruction of the ordination service without ever considering how objectors to the ordination of women must almost inevitably be forced to obstruct women officeholders in the exercise of their ministry. An unpublished study of the experience of women officeholders in the Reformed Church in America recently completed by the Commission for Women contains a disturbingly large number of cases where such obstruction has indeed taken place.

2. The role of dissent in the church

The commission believes that the conscience clauses as currently written in the *BCO* place both women and objectors to the ordination of women in contradictory positions. Yet this does not mean that the RCA can ignore the issue of conscientious objection; rather, the RCA needs to address the problem more holistically. In the course of its history, the RCA has faced a number of difficult situations in which a minority dissented from the majority on a given issue. The issue of women officeholders is just a recent example. The minority made an appeal to the right of conscience, and the majority recognized this right. How the RCA handles dissent is crucial to the health of the body. The dissent of the minority can lead to anxiety and divisiveness in the church, but it can also keep important issues before the church and contribute to its theological development and health.

The RCA needs to build on the Reformed understanding of conscience and devise a process of dissent whereby the right of conscience is legitimately exercised on a given issue and leads

to the upbuilding of the church. The present conscience clauses lack the breadth and clarity adequately to address even the question of women officeholders, and the conscience clauses provide no guidance for dealing with other issues of conscience. Broader guidance and more general principles are needed in the *Book of Church Order*.

3. The nature of the *Book of Church Order*

This need for broader guidance and more general principles raises a third basic problem. The *Book of Church Order* contains the "rules of church government." In 1566 the Reformed Church in the Netherlands was formally organized and formulated some preliminary rules. These rules were revised numerous times over the years, which led to the current *Book of Church Order*. "Rules" by definition are "a prescribed guide for conduct and action." Such a guide functions best when it establishes general regulations and procedures that are applied to many different situations over time. The *Book of Church Order* cannot be encumbered with the particulars of every specific situation. The historical particularity of the conscience clauses is inconsistent with the spirit of the *Book of Church Order*.

CONCLUSION

The commission recognizes that there are sectors in the RCA who do not believe it is the right time to delete the conscience clauses from the *Book of Church Order*. But the commission also believes that the present wording of these conscience clauses in the *Book of Church Order* is very problematic and that their interpretation requires clarification.

➢The advisory committee recommended to vote against R-4:

R-3.
To request the Commission on Church Order to clarify if and how the understanding of the authority of officeholders implicit in the conscience clauses (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h; *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II Article 2, Section 7; and *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 14) is consistent with the understanding of the authority of officeholders in the Preamble of the *Book of Church Order*. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reason: This action is premature in light of R-5. R-5 should be completed before the concern of R-4 is addressed.➢

R-4.
To request the Commission on Church Order to formulate a more general process of dissent for inclusion in the *Book of Church Order*, for report to a future General Synod. (ADOPTED)

WORK IN PROGRESS

In addition to the reports presented to the 1998 General Synod, the commission has several other projects underway for report to future General Synods. The commission has formulated a draft of the brief statement of faith requested by the 1996 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, R-7, p. 405) and is developing a process for seeking response, critique, and review of the statement prior to bringing it to the 1999 General Synod. The commission is also requesting to work with the Office of Social Witness and Worship to develop a study resource for the Belhar Confession. The commission has also entered into consultation with the Commission on Christian Unity to consider recommending to General Synod the creation of a category of "received confessions" that are appropriate for liturgical use and study in the RCA but do not have constitutional status.

ENDNOTES:

[1] For example, Philippians 2:10-11 states, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." When compared with Isaiah 45:23, where God is speaking, the similarity of the language is striking: "By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'"

[2] Cf. Calvin's *Institutes*, IV:XX:30-31, and the contemporary discussion in Richard Mouw's study, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

[3] Biblical scholars have recognized for some time that the Kingdom of God is not conceived in the New Testament primarily in spatial terms, but in terms of divine *activity*. The Kingdom of God is pre-eminently associated with God's royal action to save and to restore. Hence the translation "Reign of God."

[4] Cf. the technical discussion of the idea that different religions envision the nature of religion in dramatically different terms in S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Orbis: Maryknoll, NY, 1995).

[5] The Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 61 states, "It is not because of any value my faith has that God is pleased with me. Only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me right with God." Q&A 65 goes on to state, "Where does faith come from? The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it through the use of the holy sacraments." Ephesians 2:8 makes it clear that the entire process of being saved by grace through faith is *all* "the gift of God."

[6] Calvin writes, "But Scripture draws its exhortation from the true fountain. It not only enjoins us to refer our life to God, its author, to whom it is bound; but after it has taught that we have degenerated from the true origin and condition of our creation, it also adds that Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life. What more effective thing can you require than this one thing? Nay, what can you require beyond this one thing? For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption" (*Institutes*, III.VI.3).

[7] *Institutes* III.IX.1.

[8] See, *e.g.*, *Institutes*, III.X.

Overtures

Revision to the Constitutional Inquiries

1. **The Classis of Central California overtures General Synod to adopt the following addition to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1a, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):**

Sec. 1. **The president of classis, at the same meeting at which delegates to the synods are appointed, shall address the following inquiries to the ministers and elder delegates of each church. The answers shall be entered in the minutes of the classis for the information of the synods.**

a. Are the doctrines of the gospel preached in your church in their purity in conformity with

i. the Word of God with its supreme emphasis on the truth that divine redemption from sin is by grace through faith in the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, the only mediator between God and humankind?

ii. the *Standards* of the Reformed Church in America?

Reason: The above amendment presents a much more powerful statement of faith and clearly ties together the Word of God with this central statement of faith.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The General Synod has made a strong statement on the church's teaching regarding the uniqueness of Christ as recently as 1996 (*MGS 1996*, pp. 402-403) and in a paper of this 1998 General Synod, "The Crucified One is Lord."

2. Overture 2 addresses a larger issue about constitutional questions that should be addressed before more changes are made.≺

2. The Classis of Illinois overtures General Synod to direct the Commission on Theology to study and prepare recommendations concerning the purpose, appropriateness, and wording of the "constitutional inquiry" questions in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1a-j, for report to General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The purpose of the "constitutional inquiry" questions is not clear.

   a. Is the purpose to bring problems to light?

   b. Is the purpose to remind church leaders of their responsibilities?

   c. Do these questions fulfill their intended purpose?

2. The controversy over the proposed addition to the Section 1a question at the 1996 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, R-2, p. 401) and 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 63-64, 401-02) had more to do with the purpose of Section 1a than with the content of the proposed addition for Section 1a.

3. These "constitutional inquiry" questions are in danger of becoming a tool to push whatever happens to be the "hot" new topic, i.e., salvation only through Christ, the latest management technique for use of performance reviews, etc. The RCA needs to determine what type of questions actually belong in Section 1.

4. There is no uniformity in how the "constitutional inquiry" questions are asked. In particular, the legal terminology of the "constitutional inquiry" question in Section 1f seems out of place.

5. There is no obvious course of action to take if any of these "constitutional inquiry" questions are answered in the negative.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-6.
To instruct the Commission on Theology to study the purpose, appropriateness, and wording of the "constitutional inquiry" questions in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1A-J, for report to General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The purpose of the "constitutional inquiry" questions is not clear.

   a. Is the purpose to bring problems to light?

   b. Is the purpose to remind church leaders of their responsibilities?

   c. Do these questions fulfill their intended purpose?

2. The controversy over the proposed addition to the Section 1a question at the 1996 General Synod (*MGS 1996*, R-2, p. 401) and 1997 General Synod (*MGS 1997*, pp. 63-64, 401-02) had more to do with the purpose of Section 1a than with the content of the proposed addition for Section 1a.

3. These "constitutional inquiry" questions are in danger of becoming a tool to push whatever happens to be the "hot" new topic; i.e., salvation only through Christ, the latest management technique for use of performance reviews, etc. The RCA needs to determine what type of questions actually belong in Section 1.

4. There is no uniformity in how the "constitutional inquiry" questions are asked. In particular, the legal terminology of the "constitutional inquiry" question in Section 1f seems out of place.

5. There is no obvious course of action to take if any of these "constitutional inquiry" questions are answered in the negative.➢

Scripture and RCA Ecumenical Practices

3. The Classis of Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Theology to determine whether Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 5:11 ("But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one.") should inform RCA ecumenical practices.

Reasons:

1. God's Word clearly instruct us to avoid contact with individuals who identify themselves as believers but who persist in any of the specified godless behaviors in 1 Corinthians 5:11.

2. Does this scriptural principle extend to groups of people, including denominations? In other words, is the RCA as a denomination obligated to sever full communion ties with denominations that promote any of the behaviors that Paul here condemns?

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-7.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Transfer of Ministers into RCA from Other Denominations with Ethical Practices and Standards Opposed to RCA Ethical Practices and Standards

4. **The Classis of the Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 3 (new), for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):**

New Section 3 (existing sections 3-5 to be renumbered 4-6)

Sec. 3. **A classis shall not receive any licensed candidate or minister under its care from any body of professing Christians that maintains ethical practices or standards, sexual or otherwise, opposed to the teachings of Scripture, especially in matters where the Reformed Church in America has taken an official position through the General Synod, unless that licensed candidate or minister shall make a complete and explicit declaration in writing denouncing such practices or standards.**

Reasons:

1. In the Reformed Church in America, the classis is responsible for maintaining the integrity and purity of the preaching ministry within its bounds (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1a). However, the entire denomination, through the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, sets the parameters within which this responsibility is carried out (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Articles 8-13).

2. The *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Sections 2-4, considers doctrinal beliefs; and the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 4 considers educational standards, etc., but Article 12 does not specifically address the area of ethics. The Word of God, on the other hand, pays much and specific attention precisely to such matters (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9).

3. Ethical practices must always be considered seriously whenever a classis deliberates on whether or not to accept under its care someone from another denomination. This ought especially to be the case with regard to issues concerning which the RCA, through its General Synod, has taken official positions.

4. Because these official General Synod positions reflect what the RCA believes to be the teachings of the Bible, and because the Bible is the RCA's "only rule of faith and practice" (Preamble to the *BCO*), and because the RCA has deemed such matters important enough to address them officially through General Synod, it follows that licensed candidates or ministers from other denominations who are to come under care of an RCA classis must agree to such positions.≺

➢The advisory committee recommended:

***R-8.**
To adopt on the first reading an amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 2 for recommendation to the classes (additions are underlined):

A classis shall not receive any licensed candidate or minister under its care from any body of professing Christians which maintains doctrines or ethical positions opposed to the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*, unless that licensed candidate or minister shall make a complete and explicit declaration in writing renouncing such doctrines or ethical positions as being contrary to the *Standards*. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reason: This section addresses only doctrinal beliefs. Consistency also requires addressing the question of ethical positions.➢

*In bringing the recommendation, the advisory committee moderator announced some editorial changes in the text of the recommendation. These changes are reflected in the recommendation as printed.

***Conscience Clauses in the* Book of Church Order**

5. **The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to retain the substance of the "Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity in the RCA Concerning Women as Church Officers" (*Book of Church Order* amendments adopted by the 1980 General Synod for recommendation to the classes for approval and declared by the 1981 General Synod to have been approved by classes for incorporation into the *Book of Church Order—MGS 1980*, R-23, pp. 286-87 and *MGS 1981*, R-4, p. 81).**

Reasons:

1. In 1980 the General Synod approved and sent to the classes a package of 4 amendments to the *Book of Church Order* to be voted on as one proposal. The "Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity in the RCA Concerning Women as Church Officers" explicitly indicated that the ministers of the Word are those "men and women" who have been inducted into that office. It provided that no classis member may obstruct the classis in fulfilling its responsibility for the licensure, ordination and installation of women as ministers. It affirmed the right of individual members of classis to abstain from participating in licensure, ordination, or installation of women if their consciences, as illuminated by Scripture, would not allow them to do so. And it provided that no ministers of the Word or members of congregations can be penalized for their support or opposition, on scriptural grounds, to the ordination of women to church offices. The "Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity" was approved by two-thirds of the classes, including a majority of the classes in each regional synod. It was then given final approval by the General Synod of 1981. (Text of amendments at the end of the overture).

2. From 1918 through 1951 the General Synod received eleven overtures in eight different years, requesting amendment to the RCA Constitution to open the offices to women. In 1952 thirteen overtures were received, six favoring and seven opposing the changes. An amendment was sent to the classes to open the offices, but it did not receive approval.

3. The General Synod of 1955 appointed a five-member committee which produced six articles for *The Church Herald.* These were included as 31 pages of a 44 page booklet issued as a report to the 1958 General Synod. The report urged a vote by the classes to open the offices of elder, deacon and minister of the Word to women, beginning in 1962.

   a. The five-member committee consisted of professors at Hope College, Central College, Western Theological Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary and one layman.

   b. The six short articles in *The Church Herald* dealt with the history of the discussions on the ordination of women in the Reformed Church before the committee's report, the practice of other churches in the ordination of women, practices in the early and post-apostolic church, the nature of church offices as they relate to the ordination of women, the ordination of women in the Old Testament, and the ordination of women in the New Testament.

   c. The key recommendation of the special committee's report is found on page 42, and was adopted by the General Synod: "Accordingly, we recommend that General Synod make the following declarative statement: 'Scripture nowhere excludes prominence, and equal status with men in the Church of Jesus Christ.' "

   d. The report of the Synod of 1958 concluded with a strong statement on the freedom of local congregations to make their own decisions: "Making women eligible to all the offices, even though scripturally sound, may arouse fears that the Church is not equal to her responsibility. We would not minimize the fears nor the practical difficulties and tensions the Reformed Church in America would face. We would like to point out, however, that in case the offices are open to women as a policy in the Reformed Church in America, each congregation and each consistory retains the responsibility of deciding whether the Spirit of God is calling any woman to an office. The ultimate authority for calling, ordaining, and installing is on the local level. No deliverance of General Synod on the question of women's eligibility to office will change the Reformed principle of church polity that the power of ordaining and installing rest in consistory and classis. This power and authority is in no way bound or restricted by the General Synod declaring on the basis of its interpretation of Scripture, the offices in the church ought to be open to women as well as to men. Each consistory and each classis has the solemn responsibility of deciding whether practical difficulties and possible resulting tensions would restrain them from opening an office to a women." (Page 43)

   e. The proposal from the 1958 General Synod failed to receive the necessary support from the classes.

4. After the 1958 proposal failed, amendments were proposed and sent to classes to open the offices of elder and deacon to women (1967), to open all three offices (separate amendments on elders and deacons, and on ministers - 1969), or to allow each classis to authorize such ordinations (1970). Reference was often made to the declarative statement (c. above) and the booklet of the special committee of 1958. The booklet was out of print for many years, until the Synod of 1991 authorized its re-printing.

5. In 1971 the General Synod sent an amendment opening the offices of elder and deacon to women, which was approved by the classes, and took effect in June of 1972. The 1972 General Synod sent an amendment opening the office of minister of the Word to women, which did not pass.

6. After the offices of elder and deacon were open to women, the General Synod Executive Committee published in *The Church Herald* on March 16, 1973 a statement of clarification, similar to that found in the booklet from 1958: "It is apparent that women are now, by General Synod 1972 declarative act, eligible for the offices of elder and deacon. This is so, even if a local congregation has its own bylaws which limit these offices to "male" members. The local church bylaws, if these limit the office of elder and deacon to "male" members, should be changed to be in accordance with The Government of the RCA. The constitutional authorization is as follows: ...It should be noted that the requirement of deleting 'male' from members who are eligible to serve as elders and deacons does not mean that a congregation must elect women as elders and deacons. This is now authorized and permitted by The Government, but a consistory/congregation may still determine by its own procedures which members are to be nominated. That is, while authorized, it is not mandatory. If, however, nominations are made, such nominations cannot be disallowed because the member is a female."

7. The 1973 General Synod responded to an overture from the Classis of Illiana:

   "Classis of Illiana overtures General Synod to permit consistories to establish a consistorial by-law limiting consistory membership to male members of the congregation 21 years of age and above or at the discretion of the consistory 18 years of age and above.

   Reason:
   We believe a consistory has the right of interpreting Scripture to support this action."

   The Synod responded:

   "We recommend no action on the overture, recognizing instead that this matter can best be dealt with on the individual, congregational level.

   In practice, the ordination of women will be adopted in some churches and not in others, depending on the interpretation of Scriptures and the judgement of the consistory and congregation as to what will most contribute to the upbuilding of the church.

   Moreover, we believe it is improper for any consistory to establish a by-law which negates the action of General Synod. (ADOPTED)" (from page 111)

8. In August of 1973 Joyce Stedge was ordained as a minister of the Word by the Classis of Mid-Hudson, the first woman to be so ordained in the RCA. Considerable controversy ensued over the legality of that action, leading to a special consultation called by the General Synod Executive Committee, with representatives of the Regional Synods. Since no one from the classis had appealed the action, it was ruled that no challenge was possible. She served the Rochester Reformed Church of Accord, New York from 1973-1976, and was dismissed to the Presbyterian Church in 1979. (Since then some articles have mistakenly stated that the first women were ordained as ministers in 1978.)

9. After 1973 three more attempts to amend the *Book of Church Order* to permit the ordination of women as ministers failed. In 1977 the General Synod adopted the recommendation of the General Synod Executive Committee: "R-19. We RECOMMEND that General Synod request all classes to refrain from the ordination of women to the ministry of the Word until such time as the *Book of Church Order* is amended. (ADOPTED)" and adopted an overture from the Classis of Albany to send

to the classes an amendment to the *Book of Church Order*. That amendment failed, however.

10. In 1978 women were ordained as ministers of the Word in the Classes of Brooklyn, Bergen, and approval for an ordination granted in the Classis of Albany. Appeals were filed in all three classes. The classes are in different Regional Synods. The appeals were sustained in one regional synod, rejected in the other two, and in all cases appealed to the General Synod of 1979. At that synod 54% of the delegates voted by secret ballot to accept the interpretation of the Judicial Business Commission that the ordinations be upheld.

    a. Considerable controversy followed, with some classes voting not to enroll, license or ordain women as ministers of the Word. A full page ad of protest was published in *The Church Herald*, signed by two past presidents of General Synod and others from across the church, including those who favored and opposed the ordination of women as ministers of the Word.

    b. The United Presbyterian Church Permanent Judicial Commission had at about the same time ruled in the Kenyon case that ministers, elders, and seminary students, even if willing to serve with ordained women, could not be ordained and installed unless they favored the ordination of women, and would participate in their ordinations. It was ruled insufficient to pledge not to obstruct any lawful actions to nominate or elect women, and to further pledge to arrange for the ordination of lawfully elected women. The Presbyterian Church of Canada had taken a similar position, to go into effect in 1990. At that time the eldership in the United Presbyterian Church had been open to women for fifty years, but over 1,200 congregations did not have women in that office. (Deacons do not have a governing responsibility in presbyterian church government). Later amendments were adopted to require every UPUSA congregation to have women elders.

    c. The General Synod Executive Committee presented a communication and recommendation to the Synod of 1980:

    "From June, 1979, to April, 1980, the General Synod Executive Committee received communications from 14 individuals, 11 churches and 11 classes expressing concern about the action of the 1979 General Synod on the ordination of women to the office of minister of the Word."

    "Six of these communications were presented as overtures but were not accepted for the agenda by the GSEC since they alleged administrative error by the General Synod of 1979 and were thus judged to be complaints which are prohibited by the *BCO* (Chapter 11, Part III, Article V. Section 1). An additional reason for not accepting five of the overtures was that they asked the Synod either directly, or in effect, to rescind the judgement of the 1979 Synod on complaints submitted to it."

    Although the General Synod can, in most cases, rescind its legislative actions, it is not at liberty through legislative actions to rescind its judgements on complaints.

    "Nevertheless, through these letters and other means, the GSEC has recognized that many RCA members are dismayed because of General Synod's action concerning the ordination of women, even as others are encouraged. The GSEC also noted that the General Synod of 1979 addressed only the question of "whether or not the *Book of Church Order* of the Reformed Church in America permits or does not permit the ordination of women to the office of minister of the Word" (*MGS*, p. 67). The question of whether or not the *BCO* requires the ordination of women to the office of minister of the Word was not before the Synod.

"Because the members of the Reformed Church are not of one mind on this question and because our differing opinions are rooted in strong convictions and are accompanied by deep feelings, the following recommendation is presented to the General Synod.

"R-4.
(To call for careful avoidance of pressure which might lead either one who supports or one who opposes the action permitting the ordination of women to the office of minister of the Word to offend against his or her conscience, and to urge that no member of the church be penalized for conscientious objection to, or support of, the ordination of women.)"

d. It was in this backdrop of the lack of theological consensus, the continued challenge to the legality of women serving as ministers of the Word, the prospect of women being unsure whether they could be considered as candidates for ordination or be allowed to transfer into membership in some classes, and the possible objection to the legality of actions by ordained women, that the "Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity" was prepared.

e. The "Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity" (outlined on page 1 above) was adopted as a substitute for the General Synod Executive Committee's "R-4" above, using much of their language.

f. The "Peace in Diversity" Amendment was adopted by the General Synod with 3 "Reasons" given, and a letter from the Advisory Committee was approved to be sent with it to all ministers and congregations:

"Reasons:

1. To clarify and confirm through constitutional amendments the legality of the ordination of women as ministers of the Word.

2. To protect the rights of conscience of church members and officers and protect the rights of women candidates to ordination.

3. To bring peace in diversity in the RCA over the issue of women in church offices."

"TO THE REFORMED CHURCH FAMILY:

A Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity in the RCA
Concerning Women as Church Officers

After much deliberation as a committee, we adopted without dissent the enclosed proposal which was presented to the General Synod. After thorough discussion, the Synod adopted it with scarcely any dissent, followed by applause.

We believe that our committee and the Synod, representing varied views of the ordination of women, were satisfied that this represents a workable means of achieving peace with diversity in the Reformed Church in America. Because of our feeling of the tremendous importance of this action, we have asked the Synod for permission to share this information with you.

Sincerely in Christ,

THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF CHURCH ORDER

Voted: To authorize the sending of the cover letter with the "Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity in the RCA Concerning Women as Church Officers" to all ministers and congregations."

(*MGS 1980*, pp. 275-276.)

11. We conclude that the "Proposal to Maintain Peace and Diversity in the RCA Concerning Women as Church Officers," was built on the promise of respect and diversity reflected in the 1958 booklet, page 43, and the statement from the General Synod Executive Committee in March 1973 and the communication from the General Synod Executive Committee to the Synod of 1980. In fact, the language of the "Proposal to Maintain Peace and Diversity" is taken largely from the General Synod Executive Committee's recommendation to the 1980 General Synod.

12. We also conclude that the adoption of the proposal indicated that favoring or opposing women in church offices, on scriptural grounds is not a "salvation issue" in the RCA. That is, it is not essential that others agree with one's position in order to maintain fellowship with them and to continue to labor with them in the work of Christ. Sometimes the issue is phrased in different terms, such as some of the controversy through the years in the Christian Reformed Church, where the impression was given that only a "winner take all" position would ever be tolerated. We believe that the RCA already recognizes implicitly that this is not a salvation issue. We know that the Roman Catholic Church and the largest US Protestant church (the Southern Baptist) do not allow women in church offices, and that is the practice of many other denominations. We also recognize that many denominations do open all their offices to women. Overseas our missionaries work with a number of national denominations which do not allow women to serve in church offices. In other places, all offices are open to women. This has never been a "litmus test" for cooperation or ministry together in the US or overseas. While individuals in the RCA may express their understanding of scripture, always with graciousness, they have been able to be assured that they cannot be pressured to conform or leave their congregation or denomination.

13. In applying the "Proposal to Maintain Peace and Diversity" we recognize that there is no "collective conscience" allowed for the classis, such as had been promised in the 1958 report. Rather, the classis must arrange to enroll and supervise women candidates for the ministry, and those who have biblical objections cannot vote against the ordination of a woman, but must abstain. The conscience clause does not change anything in the individual congregation, which has never been under obligation to elect women consistory members, but there may be no legal barrier to nominations or election (such as congregational by-laws or a consistory requirement). The amendment did not address the question of a local - consistory recommending a woman member for enrollment by the classis as a candidate for the ministry. If the majority of a consistory could not conscientiously do so, we believe she would have to arrange for her enrollment by joining a congregation whose consistory would be willing to make such a recommendation.

14. The issue of "conscience" has been raised concerning the action of the General Synods and classes in adopting the package amendments to the *Book of Church Order*.

    a. The report of the Commission on Women to the 1996 General Synod (Workbook, page 249) quotes from the document "The Authority of the Church and the Individual Conscience." That is a subheading of the document "Authority and Conscience in the Church," which is found in The Church Speaks. That statement

was approved by the General Synod of 1976, four years before the 1980 and 1981 Synods adopted the amendments to the *Book of Church Order* in the "Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity."

Dr. James I. Cook, editor of The Church Speaks, explains in his introduction that the paper on "Authority and Conscience" had its origin in the 1974 report of the Special Committee to Review Reformed Church Participation in the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A...The Synod that year adopted a recommendation to request the Theological Commission to study 'the related question of conscience and authority, especially in reference to statements of church bodies (whether consistory, classis, synod, or council) and the role of these statements in the life of the Church and its member.' "

b. The General Synod of 1981, in response to an overture from the Classis of New Brunswick, requested the Theological Commission to study the role of conscience in the belief, practice, and polity of the Reformed Church in America. This authorization came from the same General Synod which also voted to give final approval to the "Proposal to Maintain Peace in Diversity."

c. The Theological Commission's report was adopted in 1984 by the General Synod, and states, "The Commission has reviewed the biblical data on conscience and numerous instances of Reformed Church history in which the claims of individual conscience were introduced. On the basis of that review, the following observations—relevant to General Synod's request—are offered.

1. The order established for church life expresses the conscience of the larger body. It has been derived from the expressions of conscience of many members over a considerable period of time.

2. The conscience of an individual must always be informed by Scripture or by God's revelation of truth in the natural order. The authority of conscience is not independently established. Thus, an expression of conscience on any given issue must always offer biblical (or natural order) evidence to substantiate itself.

3. The Reformed Church has built provisions into its order for the expression of individual conscience. The legislative process provides avenues for shaping the church's belief or practice. Members are assured fair hearings when their consciences lead them to disagree with practices or beliefs of the church. In its judicial procedures, the Reformed Church rightly provides for "friend of the court" advocacy on behalf of one whose conscience has placed him or her in jeopardy of discipline.

4. When individual conscience contends against the order of the church, order is always maintained. This may involve accommodation of the order to the individually-held view or a willingness of the church to tolerate diversity in belief or practice. Under the duress of conflict, the individual may leave the church (cf. *MGS 1976*, pp. 231-235). The church may, however, come to the point of expelling the dissident member.

5. The Reformed Church has a history of tolerance of those within whose views differ from those of the majority. The acceptance of Guiliam Bertholf's ordination in 1693; the flexibility offered in Holland, Michigan in 1948 [sic - 1848] regarding festival days; and the refusal to make a strict rule about free masonry in 1868 are examples of this tolerance."

d. The question may be raised as to whether the Peace and Diversity proposal would set a precedent of allowing similar diversity in the RCA on other matters. Those voting at the Synod, and later in the classes, and at the next General Synod, surely realized that such an option is always much less likely, when a change requires the approval of two successive General Synods and the approval of two-thirds of the 46 classes, unless there is a broad consensus across the church to approve such a change.

15. If, since the adoption of the conscience clauses in 1981, there have been any examples of ridicule, innuendos or obstruction contrary to them, we and the whole Reformed Church would strongly deplore such actions. But, the "conscience clauses" may continue to contribute to their intended purpose: "to maintain peace in diversity in the RCA concerning women as church officers."

16. Amendments to the *Book of Church Order* adopted in 1981 Concerning Women as Church Officers:

a. Amend Part I, Article 1, Section 3 (*BCO*, p. 12) to read: The ministers of the Word and those men and women who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established by the church. *("Persons" was replaced by "men and women"—Ed.)*

b. Amend Part II, Article 2, Section 7 (*BCO*, p. 24) to read: If individual members of the classis find that their consciences, as illuminated by Scripture, would not permit them to participate in the licensure, ordination, or installation of women as ministers of the Word, they shall not be required to participate in decisions or actions contrary to their consciences, but may not obstruct the classis in fulfilling its responsibility to arrange for the care, ordination, and installation of women candidates and ministers by means mutually agreed on by such women and the classis.

c. Amend Part II, Article 10 (*BCO*, p. 40) by adding the following new section: Section 15. Ministers of the Word shall not be pressured in such a way as to lead either one who supports or one who opposes, on scriptural grounds, the ordination of women to church offices to offend against his or her conscience; nor shall any church member be penalized for conscientious objection to, or support of the ordination of women to church offices; nor shall any minister of the Word obstruct by unconstitutional means the election, ordination, or installation of a woman to church offices.

d. Amend Part I, Article 5, Section 2 (*BCO*, p. 19) by adding the following new subsection:

h. They shall not penalize nor permit to be penalized any member for conscientious objection to, or support of, the ordination of women to church offices: nor shall they permit any member to obstruct by unconstitutional means the election, ordination, or installation of a woman to church offices." (From *The Church Herald*, October 2, 1981)

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-9.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This General Synod is not proposing any changes in the conscience clauses.

2. The concerns expressed in this overture will be satisfied by the church with the approval of R-5.◄

Board of Pensions—Theological Rationale

6. **The Regional Synod of New York overtures General Synod to provide the Board of Pensions and the Reformed Church Annuity Fund with a substantial theological rationale to support and direct its Statement of Investment Policy and Guidelines.**

Reasons:

1. The Board of Pensions adopted without discussion at its January 1998 meeting the following theological rationale inserted into its Statement of Investment Policy and Guidelines:

> Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal; but store up treasure in heaven...No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and money (Matt. 6:19-20, 24).
>
> Though in Jesus' teachings the number of references to earthly possessions exceeds any other category, what he said about money is succinctly captured in Matt. 6:19-34. It is passage in which he makes no distinction between the rich and poor; what matters is where one's treasure is. Treasure is from the Greek *thesaurus*, a word which has been exactly carried over into English and refers to what has been hidden in a depository against that time when it will be needed.
>
> Jesus taught that genuine security is only realized by those who have a single-minded focus on God's kingdom, who seek to live their lives according to God's loving and gracious will. He observed that when one's "treasure" is anything other than this, the result is anxiety. The citizens of God's kingdom are not to be anxious about tomorrow, and if they are focused on doing God's will today they won't be.
>
> Anxiety is inevitably in conflict with single-minded focus on the kingdom, and thus a primary obligation of the Board of Pensions is to manage its investments in such a way that those it serves are not diverted from the primary focus of their ministry. Financial resources are never to be valued as an end in themselves. Within the context of Christian discipleship, money is always to be understood as one means by which God makes it possible for us to meet the needs of the community. This is especially evident when the entrusted funds were contributed to make possible a life-long focus on the kingdom of God, reasonably free from the temptation to anxiety, which would lead to asking: "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear?"
>
> Unless the means to supply such basic needs are there, even the most Godly humans may grow anxious. Although tomorrow ought not be the Christian's preoccupation, tomorrow does come and leads to a certain decline in health, inability to earn one's living, to decay and death. Echoing a reflection by Reinhold Niebuhr on this same passage, while tomorrow will fulfill all things, it also destroys all things and creates new problems while it destroys old one.

A mandate provided by John Calvin for members of the Board of Pensions and those who benefit from the diligence of the Board of Pensions states:

> We are all stewards of everything God has conferred on us, by which we are able to help our neighbor, and are required to render account of our stewardship.

2. This current theological rationale is inadequate in several respects:

   a. The biblical foundation uses only one passage (Matt. 6:19-20, 24).

   b. The quoted verses ("do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth," and "you cannot serve God and wealth") argue against having an annuity fund at all!

   c. The existence of an annuity fund is none-the-less deemed necessary to alleviate the danger of undue anxiety about what tomorrow might bring. The current theological rationale argues that this temptation to be anxious hinders the single-minded focus on God's kingdom, a focus necessary for proper ministry and discipleship. As a solution, the current theological rationale document implies a rationale and purported guidance that is in effect a maternalistic one: let the congregations pay the premiums, and mother church will reasonably well take care of those under its wings.

   d. This "single-minded focus" seems derived from a later verse (not quoted), "strive first for the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33). However, does "seeking first" mean "seeking only?" The verse itself suggests pluriformity, as evidenced by including "and his righteousness."

   e. The next step in the current theological rationale implies that mediocre investment results are evidence of not totally having caved in to worldly standards of greed and wealth. This is the theological equivalent of saying that sinning only a little has some merit, which counters the Reformed teaching of total depravity.

   f. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The current theological rationale document fails on two counts:

      1. For many anxiety, has ***not*** **been mitigated. Instead, the current manner of reporting and the investing philosophy of the Annuity Fund have raised serious concerns and have increased anxiety.**

      2. Moreover, the given theological rationale as adopted has no relevance to issues of more diversification and better investment options. Further implications and application of the proffered word ***thesaurus*** **(treasure) perhaps could have led to a far richer and deeper variety than two proposals recently put before the Board of Pensions.**

   g. The theological rationale as presented gives no guidelines by which to exercise steps of active faith in the realm of financial stewardship. Faith calls for more than demure trust (James 2:14).

   h. Jesus says a great deal about financial stewardship; can theology do any less, i.e. a mere one page?

3. The Regional Synod of New York submits this directly to the General Synod since it is the body to which the Board of Pensions reports. Many requests to the Board of Pensions for more information, clarification, and documentation by a task force of the

Classis of Rockland-Westchester (appointed to study questions raised in the classis and regional synod) have been met by the Board of Pensions with dismissal, less-than-useful correspondence, reluctant meetings, and no direct reporting of written concerns to the Board of Pensions itself. Board of Pensions members-at-large were not provided with documents containing the substance of classis' questions, nor with a critique by the task force of pending proposals of an entirely new nature. The critique stems partially from a lack of clear theological guidelines.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-10.
To request the Board of Pensions to review its published theological rationale, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, in order to continue its efforts to develop a comprehensive and theologically balanced rationale for its work, including the social principles of its investment policy. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. A more developed theological rationale would be useful to the church.

2. Such a policy may also provide a useful model to congregations and individuals.≺

INTRODUCTION

WORLD MISSION: BRINGING THE WHOLE GOSPEL TO THE WHOLE WORLD

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Near or far, the work of disciple-making is our great commission. WORLD MISSION deals with participation in God's mission in the world through Jesus Christ, using both people and material resources. It is concerned with such questions as:

- How can both the human resources and the material resources of the Reformed Church in America best be used in world mission programs?
- What forms of world mission are most appropriate in the contemporary world?
- What partnership in mission relationships are most appropriate?

The purpose of WORLD MISSION is to challenge and enable the members of the RCA to join with the Christian community around the world in making Christ known among all people through word and witness. WORLD MISSION:

- Seeks to stimulate a vision for mission.
- Interprets the RCA mission program needs to every local church.
- Encourages prayer for mission.
- Seeks financial support for the church's mission.
- Represents the RCA in partner church and mission organization relationships.
- Designs, administers, and evaluates programs.
- Develops opportunities for RCA members to enter long-term mission service.
- Expands and encourages volunteer service.

- Supervises mission programs and personnel.
- Provides opportunities for RCA members to learn from Christians of other countries and cultures.
- Advocates for justice, peace, and the renewal of God's creation.

Major responsibility for all aspects of WORLD MISSION is assigned to the General Synod Council's Mission Services Committee.

REPORTS ON WORLD MISSION

Report of the General Synod Council's Mission Services Committee

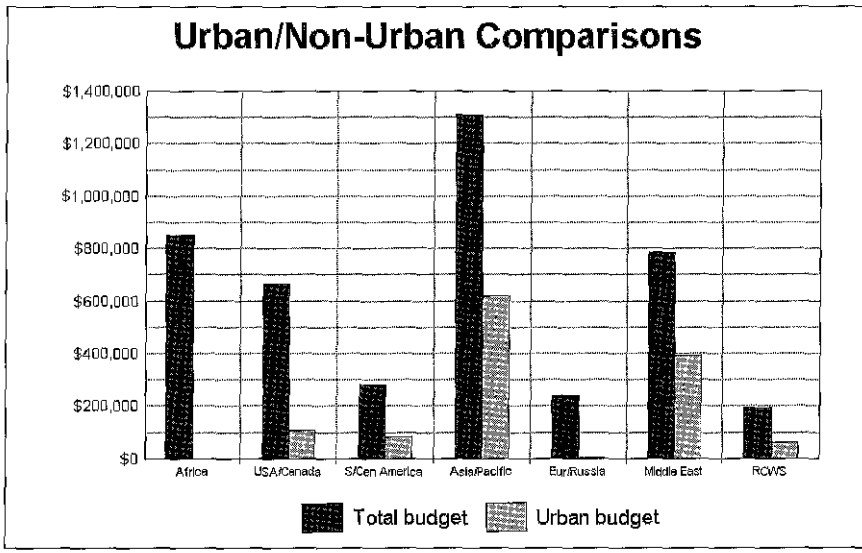
The Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod both affirms the work of Mission Services and provides direction for the future (*MGS 1997*, pp. 78-80). Of particular importance is the statement's underlying assumption that mission must be locally oriented and globally connected.

> The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world... congregations mission-minded...locally oriented, globally connected.

LOCALLY ORIENTED AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED . . . IN URBAN MINISTRY

The earth is experiencing a massive urban transition unparalleled in human history. By the year 2025 nearly two-thirds of the world's total population—more than five billion people (out of a projected 7.5 billion)—will be living in cities. In response to the challenge of the city, the 1996 General Synod affirmed the goal of Mission Services "to pay particular attention to ministry in cities as a place where the RCA discovers and models its practice of Mission is One" (*MSG 1996*, p. 408 and *MSG 1996*, R-1, p. 409).

In practice, this means urban ministry will be a priority for proposals and funding in the future. Currently, a third of the RCA's mission program is located in an urban context. Of the third, 87 percent is located in Asia, the Middle East, and Venezuela.



The 1994 General Synod directed Mission Services to develop partnerships in the former Soviet Union (*MGS 1994,* R-1, p. 383). Short-term volunteers, world mission program associates, and missionaries have been placed in Moscow, Russia; Budapest, Hungary;

Tallinn, Estonia; and Kiev, Ukraine. In keeping with the RCA's current focus on urban ministry, new urban initiatives have been proposed by RCA partner churches and are being developed in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Mexico City, Mexico, and Cairo, Egypt.

Locally Oriented

The strategic importance of urban ministry in the West is cited by Greenway and Monsma, *Cities: Mission's New Frontier*:

> The peoples and kindreds of the earth seemed far away one hundred years ago. The church's task was to send missionaries to find them and tell them the gospel...but something new has been added. People from all nations are coming to America. They crowd into our cities. In short, the ends of the earth have come to town...God is doing an amazing thing bringing all the kindreds of the earth to our doorstep.[1]

The cross-cultural nature of "foreign mission" has always been a challenge for missionaries the RCA has sent to the uttermost parts of the earth. The unanswered question at the end of the second millennium is "Will the Reformed Church in America be up to the challenge of cross-cultural mission in its own neighborhood?" It may be that methods of cross-cultural mission for the church at large will be best learned from the church in the city.

> In many ways, urban ministry is like the canary in the coal mine for the rest of the church—an early warning system, if you will. The future is already happening to us in urban ministry...The church in the city faces a situation very much like the church in the world as a whole. The multicultural, demanding, and challenging future is already here in the city. The lessons we learn today will benefit the whole church tomorrow. If [the Reformed Church in America] can't make it in the city, eventually it won't make it anywhere. [2]

In the belief that the best hope of the city is God's grace in Jesus Christ, and that the most guidance regarding cross-cultural mission will come from the urban church, the RCA has made dramatic commitments:

1. October 1996. The General Synod Council assigned responsibility for giving vision and direction to RCA urban ministries worldwide to the director of Mission Services.

2. March 1997. An Urban Ministries Team with representatives from each RCA regional synod and RCA racial/ethnic council was organized to give voice and vision to RCA urban ministries.

3. April 1997. The General Synod Council approved establishing an endowment to fund the continuing administration of the urban focus.

4. April 1997. A consultation in Hoboken, New Jersey, affirmed the RCA's commitment to urban ministry and produced the "Hoboken Affirmation" which outlines twelve principles for mission involvement in the city (*MGS 1997*, p. 51 and *MGS 1997*, pp. 412-13).

5. April 1998. The General Synod Council approved expanding funding for urban ministry to include a fund drive of $2,500,000 for staff and program to implement goals related to developing effective leadership, strengthening congregational life and witness, building partnerships between the urban and non-urban church, and eliminating social injustice.

6. April 1998. A coordinator for urban ministry was appointed to work with the Urban Ministry Team.

The exhortation of Jeremiah to Israel in exile is instructive for the RCA at the dawn of the third millennium: "Work for the good of the cities...Pray to me on their behalf, because if they are prosperous, you will be prosperous too" (Jer. 29:7, Good News Bible).

LOCALLY ENGAGED AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED... IN DIACONAL MINISTRY

Globally Connected

Today the RCA is globally connected to diaconal mission concerns: 1) through community economic development in India, Cambodia, and Africa; 2) through agriculture and animal husbandry in Africa; 3) through hunger education, advocacy, and relief via Reformed Church World Service around the globe; 4) through hands-on partnership in medical training and treatment in Mexico, Honduras, and Nicaragua; 5) through a home for street children in Ecuador; 6) through advocacy for justice for women and children in India and Canada; 7) through advocacy for those who suffer political and religious oppression in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Mexico; and 8) through the development of the diaconal ministry of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa.

Locally Engaged

The Office of Diaconal Ministries continues to implement the instruction of the 1993 General Synod to develop the biblical role of deacons in RCA congregations (*MGS 1993*, pp. 152-53). In fulfillment of this commitment, excellent training resources on the roles of both deacons and elders have been produced, hundreds of RCA consistories have invited General Synod Council staff to introduce the resources, annual training events for regional teams of deacons have been conducted, and the *Deacons' Bench* newsletter is published regularly.

A new development in diaconal ministries is taking shape in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, metropolitan area. The classes of North and South Grand Rapids have established the Grand Rapids Deacons' Coordinating Center. The mission statement of the center is:

To equip, enable, and undergird RCA deacons in the classes of North and South Grand Rapids as they seek to lead their congregations in demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ through ministries of mercy, service, and outreach.

A coordinator was hired to help the center serve as a hub for training deacons and to network deacons with each other and with helping agencies. Members of the Classis of Holland are considering establishing a similar deacons' coordinating center.

LOCALLY ORIENTED AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED... IN SHORT-TERM VOLUNTARY SERVICE

RCA volunteers are making a significant contribution to mission. With thirty-nine people serving for one year or more, twenty-five college students serving for a summer, and many others giving one to five months, short-term volunteers are expanding the RCA's mission presence around the world.

Globally Connected

Carolyn Frielink, from Guelph Reformed Church in Guelph, Ontario, is sharing the gospel with her junior high students in Japan. She recently has been counseling a girl who has been attending worship with her. The girl has asked Carolyn to teach her about Christ, using the English-Japanese Bible Carolyn gave her.

Seth and Stephanie Kaper-Dale are one-year volunteers in Guayaquil, Ecuador. They provide counseling and education to the children at the Prince of Peace Foundation, a home for street children. In addition, Seth and Stephanie are welcomed at homes in the community, where they pray, sing hymns, and read the Bible.

Locally Oriented

Thomas Akland, from First Church in Albany, New York, is volunteering in Walker, Kentucky for one year. In the name of Christ, he is providing medical help, GED tutoring, and food distribution.

Jennifer Steele, a three-year volunteer at Project Hospitality in Staten Island, New York City, coordinates a soup kitchen for one thousand homeless families and a food pantry that reaches two thousand families on a monthly basis.

LOCALLY ORIENTED AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED... IN RECIPROCAL FLOW MISSION

Global Connections Oriented Locally

The 1997 General Synod identified Canada and the United States as a "primary mission field" (*MSG 1997*, R-4, p. 422). In the task identified by missiologists as "the re-evangelization of the West," it is increasingly clear that the western church will need the help of the global church. Indeed, the global church will evangelize the West by themselves if the western church refuses their offer of partnership—most two-thirds world churches are already sending their missionaries to the shores of North America!

Significant energy must be given to "reciprocal flow missions" in which those who have traditionally been "senders" become "receivers." In this way God's gifts of mission are shared in ways that are mutually supportive and mutually accountable:

1. At its October 1997 meeting the General Synod Council approved a Mission Services initiative called "Global Prayer Partners." The purpose of Global Prayer Partners is to establish reciprocal flow relationships between congregations, and international relationships characterized by intercessory prayer that is informed, regular, and zealous. Mission Services area supervisors fill a liaison role between congregations to establish relationships, clarify expectations, and monitor effectiveness.

2. By the year 2020, Muslims will likely be the second largest faith community in the United States. As Muslim mosques continue to join Christian steeples on the landscape of Canada and U.S. cities and towns, it will be crucial for RCA congregations to understand their witness to the uniqueness of Christ from the perspective of RCA missionaries, Christian nationals, and partners in the Middle East and Africa. A ready resource in the RCA's midst is the Rev. Harold Vogelaar, who spent twenty-five years in pastoral and educational mission work in the Middle East. Currently Vogelaar is an RCA missionary who serves in a joint ministry with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. His central task is to help Christians become aware of and sensitive to their Muslim neighbors and colleagues, and to be intentional in their witness.

3. It is reported that immigrants from Chiapas, Mexico, where the RCA has been in a very successful partnership with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico for seventy-five years, are settling in Bronx, New York. This opportunity fairly begs for the evangelistic and church planting gifts of the Chiapan church to flow to the Reformed Church in America in reciprocal ways.

LOCALLY ORIENTED AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED... IN DISCERNING THE MISSION-MIND OF GOD

The RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision acknowledges that the Holy Spirit leads the missional church, that God's mission is never accomplished in our own power (*MGS 1997,* p. 78):

> To live out this vision...our decision-making will be transformed by a pervasive climate of worship, discernment, and biblical reflection. (*MGS 1997,* p. 80).

At the heart of the Statement of Mission and Vision is the belief that each congregation is called to be a mission station, that mission arises from the local congregation, that the structures and resources of the denomination serve the mission of the local congregation, and that local congregations' wisdom and experience are needed in order to discern the denomination's priorities for mission.

Mission is One Convocation

Mission Services believes that the process of living out the vision, already begun in congregations and classes, include a denomination-wide Mission Is One Convocation given entirely to discerning God's will for the missional church into the next millennium—a thousand churches discerning the times and God's will so that in a million ways the RCA will reach out to the lost and broken world so loved by God.

The hoped-for outcomes of the convocation include the following: 1) the church discerns the call of God for the times in which it is living; 2) the church is inspired to boldly and creatively be the church in mission; 3) the church establishes networks that link leaders, congregations, and judicatories; and 4) the congregations set the agenda for the denomination's staff, units, agencies, and judicatories.

Since the best exegesis is done, as Karl Barth said, "with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other hand," the convocation is to be marked by inspiring worship and secular wondering, seeking signs from God, and reading the signs of the times, praying for discernment, and discerning prophecy.

LOCALLY ORIENTED AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED... IN PARTNERSHIP-IN-MISSION SHARES

Local Congregations

The heart of mission is in the local church through its local orientation and global connections. In 1997 large and small congregations alike not only increased financial giving to RCA mission but did so with creativity and boldness:

On November 20, 1997, farmers from **Martin Reformed Church in Martin, Michigan,** harvested four thousand bushels of "Crops for Christ." The crop last year was corn—about $10,000 worth—of which $6,000 in profits was donated to Reformed Church World Service for world hunger relief. The congregation rents forty-two acres of land, and local businesses donate seeds, fertilizer, and spraying equipment. The harvesting implements are loaned by

farmers of the congregation, who also donate their time. Crops are rotated yearly between corn and soybeans. "As farmers our job is to feed the world," said Rob Veld, a crop and hog farmer who coordinates the program. "This is a logical expression of our work and of our faith."

Christ Memorial Church in Holland, Michigan, decided to concentrate a major portion of its mission interest and support in South Africa in order to make a significant impact. A fourfold partnership was formed involving the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, Christ Memorial Church, the Reformed Church in America, and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. The financial gifts of the partners will attract United States aid dollars in equal amounts and will increase the capacity of the diaconal ministries of the African church's regional synods, particularly in community economic development.

A rural congregation, **First Reformed Church in Maurice, Iowa**, has put its muscles into missionary commitment. In addition to $24,000 in gifts to the GSC mission program, it sent out six volunteer work groups within one year. The time the volunteers gave represents the equivalent of one person working for one full year. The volunteers served in disaster response in Grand Forks, North Dakota, in rebuilding the church sanctuary in Mescalero, New Mexico, and in rebuilding First Missionary Baptist Church in Enid, Oklahoma.

A few years ago **Pembroke Community Reformed Church in Saint Anne, Illinois**, a congregation that has struggled with budget, took on mission support of $300 annually. Members found themselves so blessed by mission giving that they continued to increase their support. They now give $2,900 to RCA mission programs and are considering another increase.

The **Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California**, when contacted by the Russian Orthodox Church to help develop a Sunday school curriculum for children, turned to the RCA denomination as a whole, challenging other congregations to support the project.

A smaller congregation that has a long history of supporting mission recently took steps to personally involve members of the congregation in mission support. **Herkimer Reformed Church in Herkimer, New York**, emphasizes one mission each month, whether it is local, regional, or global. The church sets a goal regarding the program it chooses to support, along with projects to support the program. The congregation becomes involved in raising support, working at the site, coordinating the activities, and participating on a personal level in a number of different monthly mission opportunities.

Partnership-in-Mission Shares

As the RCA looks to mission that is locally engaged and globally connected, both the generosity of the congregations and the needs of the world need to be acknowledged. While virtually every mainline denomination has experienced significant shortfall in mission giving, resulting in worldwide cutbacks and consolidations, financial support to RCA mission continues to increase. This is a result of increased numbers of Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares by congregations and individuals, bequests and legacies, investment interests, partnership reimbursements, special projects, and offerings from Reformed Church Women's Ministries—all of this coupled with restraints in spending. The good news is that there has been sufficient giving for actual expenditures; the "less than good news" is that the needs of local and global mission far outstrip the mission income. The urgency and magnitude of God's mission challenges RCA generosity daily! So, the message is thanks, and please continue to increase giving!

In order to meet the needs of the rising cost of missions because of new mission ventures, increased salaries and benefits for missionaries and staff, and the increasing cost of goods and services, the General Synod Council, at its April 1998 meeting, approved a $4,000 per PIM share level for 1999. This is an increase of $200 above the 1998 PIM share of $3,800.

Mission in 1998 must be locally engaged and globally connected, a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

R-1.
To encourage each RCA congregation to assume one or more Partnership-in-Mission share(s) in the RCA mission program, and to ask those who already have Partnership-in-Mission share(s) to increase their shares in 1998-99. (ADOPTED)

LOCALLY ORIENTED AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED. . . THROUGH MISSION SERVICES STAFF

Retirements

In 1998 two Mission Services staff, who have given themselves tirelessly to local and global mission, will retire. Eugene Meerdink completes his work with Mission Services on August 31, 1998; and the Rev. Richard Vander Voet completes his work with Mission Services on November 30, 1998.

In appreciation for their years of dedicated service, Mission Services recommends:

R-2.
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS Eugene Meerdink, along with his wife, Arlene, served as RCA missionaries in Chiapas, Mexico, from 1967 to 1971 and from 1984 to 1994; and

WHEREAS during his tenure in Chiapas, Eugene Meerdink taught at the Girls Bible School and assisted in the development of a new theological seminary and media center, while Arlene Meerdink, a registered nurse and skilled musician, worked in areas of health education and music; and

WHEREAS since 1994 Eugene Meerdink has served as supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa and coordinator for mission stewardship in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics and the classes of Brooklyn, Nassau-Suffolk, and New York; and

WHEREAS Eugene Meerdink has witnessed faithfully and energetically to his love of the Lord as both a missionary and a Mission Services staff person;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, on the eighth day of June 1998, expresses its gratitude and appreciation to Eugene Meerdink. (ADOPTED)

R-3.
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS the Rev. Richard Vander Voet served Bethel Reformed Church in Bellflower, California, from 1958 to 1961; Church in the Valley in Rowland Heights, California, from 1962 to 1967; Second Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1967 to 1974; and in 1974 founded and served an outreach ministry in one of the largest enclosed shopping malls in metropolitan Chicago; and

WHEREAS Richard Vander Voet served the Reformed Church in America as area secretary for the Americas from 1980 to 1993, as director of Mission Services from 1993 to 1996, and as coordinator for volunteer services and director of Reformed Church World Service and disaster response from 1996 to 1998; and

WHEREAS Richard Vander Voet has championed the ultimate worth of mission which is locally oriented and globally connected, and sought so to live in faithfulness to the Lord of the church;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, on the eighth day of June 1998, expresses its gratitude and appreciation to the Rev. Richard Vander Voet. (ADOPTED)

➢The Rev. John Hubers, moderator of the advisory committee on World Mission requested the president to ask privilege of the floor for the Rev. Bruce Menning, director of Mission Services.➢

VOTED: To grant privilege of the floor to the Rev. Bruce Menning

➢The Rev. Bruce Menning presented plaques to Mr. Eugene and Mrs. Arlene Meerdink and the Rev. Richard and Mrs. Beverly Vander Voet. (Beverly was unable to be present at Synod.)➢

[1] Roger Greenway and Timothy Monsma, *Cities: Mission's New Frontier*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989, p. 61.
[2] Bob Brashear, "The Church in the City: The Future is Already Here," *Church and Society* November/December 1995, pp. 18-19.

CHANGES IN MISSIONARY AND STAFF PERSONNEL

Appointments

The Rev. Richard and Maja Westra were appointed missionaries to Bahrain. Richard serves as the senior pastor of the English language congregation in Bahrain.

Dr. Haruun Ruun was appointed as a world mission program associate. He serves as the executive secretary of the New Sudan Council of Churches.

The Rev. William Swanson and the Rev. Twila Schock were appointed as world mission program associates. They serve the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy in Moscow, Russia.

Brian Bruxvoort was appointed as a world mission program associate. With his wife, Elizabeth, he serves in Alaska, where he works with Missionary Aviation Repair Center (MARC) as a pilot and mechanic.

The Rev. Ernest Victor was appointed as a world mission program associate. He serves the Protestant Church in Oman.

George Goff was appointed as a world mission program associate. He serves in Honduras, working as a pilot and airplane mechanic.

Change of Service

The Rev. Rowland and Judy Van Es, who served as RCA missionaries in the Philippines since 1975, were reassigned to Tainan Theological College and Seminary in Taiwan.

John and Alice Mac Lean, who as world mission program associates served in Appalachia in partnership with the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA) since 1986, resigned and are now serving with the Coalition for Appalachian Ministry (CAM).

Duane and Carol Peterson, who as world mission program associates were serving with the Northern Cambria Community Development Corporation for the past year, were reassigned to Jackson County Ministries, where Duane serves as operations manager.

Larry and Linda McAuley, who as RCA missionaries served in Alale, Kenya, have completed their work in Alale. They are presently doing course study on leadership development/discipling. Future plans for the McAuleys are pending.

Delvin and Debbra Braaksma, who as RCA missionaries were serving with the Orma people in eastern Kenya, will move to Tanzania in September 1998 to begin service in community development work with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee.

Resignations/Completions of Service

Merle and Karen Vander Sluis were appointed missionaries in 1994. They served in Aira, Ethiopia, from late 1994 through the end of 1997.

Daniel and LaDonna De Vries were appointed missionaries in 1986. They served in the Philippines from 1986 to 1997.

Deaths

Lillian Smies died on February 19, 1997. She served in Vellore, India, for thirty-three years as a missionary nurse. She was visiting India at the time of her death.

The Rev. Gordon Van Wyk died on April 9, 1997. With his wife, Bertha (Birdie) he served at Fukien Christian University in Foochow, China, from 1946 to 1950; and at Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan, from 1953 to 1985.

Mildred Cleghorn died on April 15, 1997. She served as an elder of the RCA American Indian congregation at Apache, Oklahoma, as a member of the General Program Council, and as a member of the RCA American Indian Council executive committee.

Harry Pofahl died on October 3, 1997. He coordinated vocational training at the Katpadi Industrial Institute in India from 1963 to 1972. Following his service as an RCA missionary, he served as secretary for stewardship for the RCA from 1972 until his retirement in 1985.

Elsie Chaat died on January 25, 1998. With her late husband, Robert, she served at the Comanche Reformed Church in Lawton, Oklahoma from 1931 to 1969.

Volunteer Services Assignments

Africa:	Jay Haarsevoort	Cindy Miller
	Bart Hisgen	Laura Patrouille
	Karen Hoffman	Kara Vander Kamp
Canada:	Kirsten Shepler	
China:	Landon Van Dyke	
Ecuador:	Seth and Stephanie Kaper-Dale	
Hong Kong:	Rachel Maris	
Japan:	Vince Boraas	Janelle Kolk
	Jerre Bush	Kathy Lang
	Susan Shibe Davis	James and Janice Moore
	Anita Driese	Marti Peters
	Stella Fowler	Kevin Tyson
	Carolyn Frielink	RuthAnne and Victor Van Voorst
	Jason Green	Denise Wallingford
	Rebekah Hanousek	Brian Zylstra
	Hans Harder	
Honduras:	Benjamin Doolittle	
Slovakia:	Kolin Goncalves and Denise Meyer	
Taiwan:	Jeffrey and Kristin Gowman	
United States:	Lend-A-Hand Center, Walker, Kentucky	Tom Akland
	The Way Out Ministries, Hawaiian Gradens, California	Heidi Jones
	Project Hospitality, Staten Island, New York	Jennifer Steele

From the Report of the President

➢P-4 (p. 43) was referred to the advisory committee on World Mission.

In response to P-4 (p. 43) the advisory committee recommended:

R-4.
To instruct the General Synod Council and its Mission Services Unit to convene a global/local Mission Convocation of the Reformed Church in America, to be held in the spring of 2000; and further,

to plan the convocation to be self-funded, paid for by the churches and persons who participate; and further,

to anticipate that 1,000 to 1,200 persons will attend, including both clergy and laity selected and invited from the whole church; and further,

to design the convocation to reflect the global/local nature of mission in today's world; to reflect the multi-ethnic reality in which we live; and to highlight the global opportunities for evangelism and church planting among unreached peoples, especially in the cities of Europe and North America and around the world; and further,

to include a number of different mission initiatives that together present a realistic picture of the numerous ways in which the RCA is becoming "a missionary denomination for the twenty-first century;" and further,

in preparation for the convocation, to involve local discovery groups from all around the church, who will gather to examine mission opportunities in their own contexts; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council, in cooperation with its Mission Services Unit, to fund a design team for the Mission Convocation on an if-raised basis.

Reason: The advisory committee referred synod to the president's report (pp. 34-46) as reason to vote in support of this recommendation.≺

➢Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-4, synod:

VOTED: To instruct the General Synod Council and its Mission Services Unit to convene a global/local Mission Convocation of the Reformed Church in America, to be held in the spring of 2000; and further,

to plan the convocation to be self-funded, paid for by the churches and persons who participate and that means be explored and secured to provide financial assistance for the participation of churches and persons precluded from fulfilling the requirement of self-funding by their economic realities; and further,

to anticipate that 1,000 to 1,200 persons will attend, including both clergy and laity selected and invited from the whole church; and further,

to design the convocation to reflect the global/local nature of mission in today's world; to reflect the multi-ethnic reality in which we live; and to highlight the global opportunities for evangelism and church planting among unreached peoples, especially in the cities of Europe and North America and around the world; and further,

to include a number of different mission initiatives that together present a realistic picture of the numerous ways in which the RCA is becoming "a missionary denomination for the twenty-first century;" and further,

in preparation for the convocation, to involve local discovery groups from all around the church, who will gather to examine mission opportunities in their own contexts; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council, in cooperation with its Mission Services Unit, to fund a design team for the Mission Convocation on an if-raised basis.

P-5 (p. 44) was also referred to the advisory committee on World Mission.≺

➢In response to P-5 (p. 44) the advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To instruct Mission Services of the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the Commission on Christian Unity, to explore ways to develop three new mission partnerships (one each year for the next three years) with churches or mission agencies in Africa, Asia, Middle East, or Latin America for mission in a third location; and further,

that special attention be given to experimental mission endeavors in the cities of the world, seeking active participation on the part of RCA congregations in the ongoing ministry of these new partnerships; and further,

that these partnerships focus on long-term initiatives that emphasize religious freedom. Calling for a reduction of religious persecution worldwide, especially of Christians; and further,

that these partnerships foster compassionate witness in word and deed among unreached peoples found in cities, especially in situations of religious persecution and among displaced peoples and refugees. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The advisory committee referred synod to the president's report (pp. 34-46) as reason to vote in support of this recommendation.≺

Report of the Commission on Nominations

The Commission on Nominations submitted for consideration and election the following names:

Note: *indicates a final term
#indicates an official nomination from the assembly, institution, or agency listed

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Class of 1999

John Elliott, Jr. ..... At-large

Class of 2000

Toni Macon ..... At-large

Class of 2001

Irvin L. Boersen ..... Classis of Muskegon#
*John Bowen ..... Classis of Columbia-Greene#
Paul Darby ..... Classis of New York#
*Carl Gearhart ..... Classis of Pleasant Prairie#
John Hiemstra ..... Classis of Greater Palisades#
Renee House ..... At-large
*Gerrit (Jerry) Koobs ..... Classis of Ontario#
*Rodney Koopmans ..... At-large
James K. Marvel ..... Classis of the Southwest#
David Melvin ..... Classis of Chicago#
Joan P. Nienhuis ..... Classis of Cascades#
*Gene Poll ..... Classis of Illinois#
Okke Postma ..... Classis of Rockland-Westchester#
Edward Smith ..... Classis of Brooklyn#
Deborah Swanson ..... At-large
*Roger Vander Kolk ..... Classis of Zeeland#
Mark Volkers ..... Classis of East Sioux#
Robert White ..... Classis of Schenectady#

BOARD OF PENSIONS

Class of 1999

Harry De Bruyn ..... Financial Field

Class of 2000

Tom Putnam ..... Financial Field

Class of 2001

Richard Doll ..... Financial Field
Carolyn Jones-Assini ..... Medical Field

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Class of 1999

David Cooper ..... NBTS#
Kenneth Saunders ..... NBTS#
Hak Kwon Lee ..... NBTS#

Class of 2001

*Beverly Bell Winslow ..... Regional Synod of New York
Diane Clark ..... NBTS#
Don Hilliard ..... NBTS#
Carolyn Jones-Assini ..... NBTS#
Carol Kuhlthau ..... NBTS#
*Diane Tice ..... Regional Synod of Albany
June Veld ..... Regional Synod of Mid-America
*Ruth Waller ..... Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AGENCY

Class of 2001

*Sherwin Broersma ..... Regional Synod of New York
*Barbara Nauta ..... TEA#

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, MINISTERIAL FORMATION COORDINATING AGENCY

Class of 1999

†Christopher Moore ..... Commission on Nominations
David Schutt ..... TEA#

Class of 2000

Alan Baker ..... Commission on Nominations
Cornelis Koolhaas ..... TEA#
Christina The ..... TEA#

Class of 2001

†Thomas Boogaart ..... Commission on Nominations
Marty Bultman ..... Commission on Nominations
Barbara Nauta ..... TEA#
Carol Wagner ..... Commission on Nominations

†Following the meeting of General Synod, these two persons indicated that they were not able to serve at this time.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Class of 2001

Mary Bauman ..... WTS#
Kris De Pree ..... WTS#
*Marc de Waard ..... Regional Synod of the Far West
*Marcia Elgersman ..... Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
*Alfredo Gonzalez ..... WTS#
*Andrea Kragt ..... WTS#
Char Ten Clay ..... WTS#
Steven Vander Molen ..... WTS#

Class of 2002

*Ronald Hartgerink ..... WTS#
*Lynn Smith ..... WTS#

EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE *CHURCH HERALD*

Class of 2001

Mark Huizinga ..... Regional Synod of the Great Lakes#
Mark Kraai ..... Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics#
Harlan Van Oort ..... At-large
Livingstone Chen ..... At-large

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Class of 2001
*Donald De Young
Jo Anna Cary Lougin
*Frederick Mueller

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Class of 2001
*Richard Bribn
*Stanley Olson
Mary Thomas

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Class of 1999
Marlin Vis

Class of 2001
Carol Bechtel
*Marcia Bradsell
Norman Kolenbrander

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER

Class of 2001
*Allan Janssen

COMMISSION ON HISTORY

Class of 2001
*Christopher Moore
*Jennifer Reece

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS

Class of 2001

*Donald De Vries	Regional Synod of the Far West#
*Nancy Schoep	Regional Synod of Albany#
*Larry Schuyler	Regional Synod of the Great Lakes#

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS

Class of 1999

*Charles Van Engen	Past President of General Synod

Class of 2001

*Calvin Bensema	Regional Synod of the Far West#
David Breen	Regional Synod of the Great Lakes#
Barbara Cullum	Regional Synod of Albany#
Barbara Neevel	Reformed Church Women's Ministries#

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY

Class of 2001
*Juan Carmona
*Paul Fries
Amy Jo Hawley
David Waanders

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Class of 2001

Stuart Clark
*Nancy Cooper
*Carole Walker

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST, U.S.A.

Class of 2001

Liala Beukema ..... Commission on Christian Unity#
*I. John Hesselink ..... Commission on Christian Unity#
Taylor Holbrook ..... Commission on Christian Unity#
Lynn Japinga ..... Commission on Christian Unity#
Mark Nieuwsma ..... Commission on Christian Unity#

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

Class of 2001

Douglas Fromm ..... Commission on Christian Unity#
Anna Melissa James ..... Commission on Christian Unity#

BUILDING AND EXTENSION FUND

Class of 2001

*Robert Carlson ..... Building and Extension Fund#
*Linda McLane ..... Building and Extension Fund#

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, CENTRAL COLLEGE

Class of 2002

*J. Lanier Little
*John Sikkink
Donna Smith

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, HOPE COLLEGE

Class of 1999

Timothy Brown

Class of 2002

Lynne Hendricks
*Gregg Mast

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE

Class of 2000

Mary Ann Wierks

Class of 2002

Elizabeth Campbell
Nancy Schoep

R-1.

To Elect the above Mentioned Nominees to the Respective General Synod Agencies and Commissions as Listed. (ADOPTED)

EDITORIAL REPORT

In accordance with the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 3, Section 2, all proposed amendments to the *BCO* which have been approved shall be referred to the corresponding delegate from the Commission on Church Order in consultation with the general secretary for final wording and report back to the Synod.

Of the *BCO* amendments and amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws approved at this meeting, the following require attention by this General Synod.

R-1.
To approve the editorial changes to R-1, page 284 (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

> **To approve and distribute to RCA classes and congregations "The Ordination of Minister of Word and sSacrament" and "Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of Word and sSacrament" for a two-year period of study and provisional use, with responses submitted to the Commission on Christian Worship by January 1, 2000.**

R-2.
To approve the editorial changes to R-12, page 285 (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Article IX
Certificates of Fitness for Ministry

Sec. 2 b. The General Synod through the board of trustees of the ~~Theological Education Agency~~ Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency shall require the applicant to furnish, at the conclusion of seminary studies, the following: a master of divinity degree or its equivalent from a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the ~~General Synod Council~~ Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency; a transcript of the applicant's academic record at this seminary; and evidence of confessing membership in a reformed church of the classis making the petition.

R-3.
To approve the editorial change to R-4, page 287 (addition is underlined):

> **To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 4a for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):**

R-4.
To approve the editorial changes to R-5, page 288 (additional are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part 1, Article 2, Section ~~15~~ 16, for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletion is stricken out):

~~Sec. 15.~~ 16. ~~The consistory shall forward to the appropriate congregation or classis stated clerk within one month the names, addresses, and pertinent information regarding persons moving from the bounds of the local church.~~

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE

Referrals of General Secretary Proposals and New Business Concerning New Brunswick Theological Seminary

P-1 (p. 60), from the report of the general secretary, and new business presented at the first session of Synod concerning New Brunswick Theological Seminary (p. 33) were referred to the Committee of Reference. P-2 (p. 61), also from the report of the general secretary, was referred to the Committee of Reference.

➢In response to P-1 (p. 60) and the new business concerning New Brunswick Theological Seminary (p. 33), the Committee of Reference recommended:

> **R-1.**
> **To instruct this General Synod to refrain from deliberative debate and policy decisions specifically relating to homosexuality, as these matters have already been thoroughly addressed by the previous synods, and to urge this same action upon the 1999 and 2000 General Synods; and further,**
>
> **to request all commissions, agencies, assemblies, and institutions related to the General Synod to refrain from taking any action that would be in obvious contradiction of our stated positions, as expressed especially in 1978, 1979, 1990 and 1994; and further,**
>
> **to instruct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee, to help enable congregations and classes to enter a process of intentional discernment over the next two years concerning the pastoral challenges raised by the issue of homosexuality, utilizing the study guide and other resources, in order to fulfill the actions called for on this matter by the 1994 General Synod.***

* The word specifically was added to the recommendation during discussion of the recommendation by the Synod and was accepted by the chair and by the presenter of the recommendation as an acceptable and helpful editorial change.

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-1:

> **R-1.**
> **To request the assemblies and judicatories of the Reformed Church in America to foster and promote opportunities for dialogue in which all segments of the church, including persons of homosexual orientation are included; and further,**
>
> **to insure that such opportunities for dialogue are so structured as to provide secure venues for honest expression and personal vulnerability by all involved; and further;**
>
> **to request the judicatories of the Reformed Church in America to refrain from discipline based solely on a person's sexual orientation or theological judgements concerning sexual orientation. The motion LOST.) (Yes - 109; No - 160)**

(A motion was made and supported to take a separate vote for each of the paragraphs in R-1. The motion LOST.)

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-1, Synod:

VOTED: To instruct this General Synod to refrain from deliberative debate and policy decisions specifically relating to homosexuality, as these matters have already been thoroughly addressed by the previous synods, and to urge this same action upon the 1999 and 2000 General Synods; and further,

to request all commissions, agencies, assemblies, and institutions related to the General Synod to refrain from taking any action that would be in obvious contradiction of our stated positions, as expressed especially in 1978, 1979, 1990 and 1994; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee, to help enable congregations and classes to enter a process of intentional discernment over the next two years concerning the pastoral challenges raised by the ~~issue of homosexuality~~ existence of persons of homosexual orientation within our churches and within the communities in which we are called to minister, utilizing the study guide and other resources, in order to fulfill the actions called for on this matter by the 1994 General Synod.

In response to P-2, the Committee of Reference Recommended:

R-2.
To instruct the 1998 General Synod president and vice-president, the moderator of the General Synod Council, and the general secretary to initiate a process to study alternative ways to conduct business meetings and make decisions in the assemblies of the Reformed Church in America; and further,

to include an evaluation of various methods used by other church bodies as a part of this process; and further,

to submit a report, with recommendation, to the General Synod no later than 2000. (ADOPTED)

REFERRAL OF GENERAL SYNOD PRESIDENT PROPOSAL

P-1 (p. 39) was referred to the Committee of Reference.

In response to P-1 (p. 39), the Committee of Reference recommended:

R-3.
To instruct the General Synod Council to refer to the ad hoc committee to review the *Book of Church Order* (for the purpose of suggesting possible revisions "that will allow greater flexibility in the method of consistory selection and will emphasize the consistory's calling to give spiritual leadership in the ministry and mission of congregations" -- *MGS* 1997, P-3, p. 50) the responsibility to also consider how the Reformed Church in America can develop a new understanding of the purpose, makeup, and work of its consistories

so that consistories may begin to see themselves and to function as agents of mission and ministry in their contexts, for an initial report to the 1999 General Synod and a final report to the General Synod of 2000, and further;

to instruct the General Synod Council to assure that the membership of the ad hoc committee includes at least on long-term cross-cultural missionary, two ministers of Word and sacrament, three elders, and three deacons, with the group to include at least four women. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The ad hoc committee formed by the General Synod Council in response to the instruction of the 1997 General Synod was not convened this past year. The mandate of the committee can be easily expanded and its membership adjusted prior to its first meeting in the early fall of 1999.

2. The formation of another task force to consider the role and function of consistories while the ad hoc committee is considering church order issues will be confusing and will necessitate collaborative work between the two groups. The task assigned to the ad hoc committee by the 1997 synod and the tasks identified in this recommendation can be addressed more responsibly, effectively, and at less cost by a single team.≺

REFERRAL OF REQUEST TO FROM THE STATED CLERKS REGARDING A PRESENTATION

The request by stated clerks to make a presentation to the General Synod, was referred to the Committee of Reference.

≻In response to the request of the Stated Clerks, the Committee of Reference requested permission for the Rev. Vernon Hoffs, the Rev. Allan Janssen, and Everett Zabriskie to make a presentation to Synod. The stated clerks presented to Synod a revised "T.U.L.I.P.":

T — Tidiness abounding
U — Unconditional rejection of being told what to do
L — Loquacity of Argumentation
I — Irresistible Charm
P — Profound Perspicacity

Leaves of Absence

The Committee of Reference reported that all requests for leaves of absence were reviewed and found to be acceptable.

Approval of the Journal

The journal of actions of Synod for Friday, Saturday morning, and Monday was posted for information and review by the delegates.

VOTED: To approve the journal of Synod actions for Friday, Saturday, and Monday and to instruct the officers of General Synod to review and approve the journal for the meetings of Tuesday and of Wednesday morning.≺

RESOLUTIONS

The Committee of Reference presented the following resolutions:

R-1
Whereas the delegates and guests of General Synod have been graciously received by Hope College and Western Theological Seminary; and

whereas the beautiful setting, hospitality of the City of Holland, and meeting space have been conducive to the work, comfort, and productivity of the delegates;

therefore, be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its gratitude to Hope College and Western Theological Seminary for their hospitality in hosting delegates of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

R-2
Whereas the members of area churches within the Classes of Holland and Zeeland provided transportation from and to the airport with the coordination of Lamont Dirkse and David Vanderwel; and

whereas the ministers and members of area churches within the Classes and Holland and Zeeland opened their houses of worship to the delegates for Sunday worship; and

whereas these Christian brothers and sisters hosted the delegates of General Synod with extreme grace and thoughtfulness.

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its sincere appreciation to the pastors and members of the churches of the Classis of Holland and the Classis of Zeeland. (ADOPTED)

R-3.
Whereas the musicians of First Reformed Church and the Ebeneezer Reformed Church presented a festival of music for the enjoyment and edification of the delegates on Saturday evening; and

whereas Stacy Blair inspired us with his music, his insight, and his vision;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its sincere appreciation to First Reformed Church, Ebeneezer Reformed Church, and Stacy Blair for sharing their faith with us through their music and to the Rev. Richard Baukema for hosting this evening of praise. (ADOPTED)

R-4.
Whereas St. Francis de Sales Church of Holland graciously hosted the General Synod for its Sunday evening worship; and

whereas St. Francis de Sales Church members enthusiastically led General Synod delegates on tours of their beautiful new church building, patiently explaining the relationship between their building architecture and their theology, building bridges between our communions; and

whereas Third Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, hosted a reception following worship;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its sincere thanks to St. Francis de Sales Church of Holland, Michigan, and its pastor Fr. Stephen Dudek, and congratulates the congregation on the dedication of its new sanctuary and expresses its sincere thanks to Third Reformed Church for its gracious hospitality. (ADOPTED)

R-5.
Whereas Western Theological Seminary and Hope College received the delegates and guests of the General Synod at a reception and picnic in the beautiful Pine Grove;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its sincere appreciation for the warm atmosphere and the delicious meal they shared. (ADOPTED)

R-6.
Whereas the Rev. John Bell has led us in music and singing in a creative energetic, and spirit-provoking manner, has introduced us to the music and hymns of the World Church, and has created a joy and spontaneity in our worship;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its sincere gratitude to God for sending this gifted preacher and musician to our midst. (ADOPTED)

R-7.
Whereas the Rev. Gloria McCanna and the Rev. Stephen Struikmans and the Worship Commission provided leadership for a joyous and inspiring worship focused on our synodical theme "God's Spirit Upon Us: Proclaiming;" and

whereas the beautiful banners adorning the Chancel of the Hope College Chapel were provided by Hope Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its gratitude to the Rev. Gloria McCanna, the Rev. Stephen Struikmans, the Worship Commission, and Hope Reformed Church for their inspiration, encouragement and illumination. (ADOPTED)

R-8.
We resolve to affirm the following action taken by the Reformed Church in America chaplains at their business meeting, June 5, 1998:

Resolved: That since the Rev. Alvin J. Poppen has announced his retirement at the end of this year, and since this may be his last meeting with us in a leadership role, we hereby express the following motion and ask that it be forwarded to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America;

The specialized ministers in the Reformed Church in America hereby express their appreciation and gratitude to the Rev. Alvin J. Poppen, who has provided outstanding leadership through the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services. His work with the military chaplains, providing ecclesial endorsement, his professional guidance and pastoral care; his administrative skill in helping both our institutional and military chaplaincy roles to evolve, have all been of the highest quality. His support for the annual chaplains conference has contributed to the development of a strong support network for the chaplains, who often minister alone in isolated places, far from sources of encouragement and care by the Reformed Church. His integrity, skill and pastoral care are cause for our thanksgiving to God. We hope for him many fruitful and creative years in his retirement. (ADOPTED)

R-9.
Whereas the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen presided with creativity, enthusiasm, humor, sincerity, and vision during his tenure as president of General Synod, focusing on the church's mission both local and global;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its heartfelt thanks to almighty God for the dedicated and inspired service of the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen. (ADOPTED)

R-10.
Whereas the Rev. Frederick (Fritz) Kruithof, vice president of General Synod, has faithfully discharged his duties throughout a challenging year;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its gratitude to the Rev. Frederick (Fritz) Kruithof and pledges to him our prayers during his term as president of General Synod. (ADOPTED)

R-11.
Whereas the Rev. Dr. Vernon Hoffs has been elected vice-president of General Synod;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its congratulations and commends the Rev. Dr. Vernon Hoffs to the care of the sustainer. (ADOPTED)

R-12.
Whereas the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, has listened carefully, heard what's been left unsaid, and has pastorally articulated both the pain and joy of our life together; and

whereas, he has served the denomination with passion, integrity, and with courage;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its sincere appreciation and thanks to its general secretary and praises God for the gifts we receive through his leadership. (ADOPTED)

R-13.
Whereas the moderators and vice moderators of the various advisory committees, staff members, and resource persons facilitated the work of the advisory committee and the General Synod with open minds and open hearts, to the end that all things were done decently and in good order;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its heartfelt thanks for their dedicated service. (ADOPTED)

R-14.
Whereas the many elder delegates offered their tireless energies and careful consideration to the work and deliberations of the General Synod; and

whereas many of them are doing so at the cost of sacrificing personal vacation time;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, enthusiastically expresses its thanksgiving to almighty God for the commitment and love of its elder delegates to the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

R-15.
Whereas Ken and Beth Van Prooyen have generously and graciously given of their vacation time to serve the General Synod as sound technicians for the past twenty-four years;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its gratitude to Ken and Beth Van Prooyen. (ADOPTED)

R-16.
Whereas the staff of the Reformed Church in America, as well as the regional synod and classis staff who are present at the 1998 General Synod, have given of themselves tirelessly with enthusiasm, grace, good humor, dedication and openness;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its affirmation of the work performed by these staff persons and offers its prayers for God's blessings upon each and every member of the staff and their families. (ADOPTED)

R-17.
Whereas Russell Paarlberg has served the General Synod as its parliamentarian with competence and patience;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, thanks Russell Paarlberg for his dedicated contribution to the work of the synod. (ADOPTED)

R-18.
Whereas the following members of the various General Synod commissions, councils, and agencies are completing their terms of service this year, having served the Lord and the church faithfully in their respective capacities;

therefore be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June, 1998, expresses its enthusiastic appreciation. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Council:

Harry DeBruyn
Michael Edwards
Victor Eimicke
L'anni Hill
Carolyn Jones-Assini
Peter Manting
Larry Martinsen
Daniel Meeter
Nancy Miller
Arthur Schmid
Sara Smith
Steven Vandermolen
Anthony Vis

Upon a motion from the floor, Synod:

VOTED: Be it resolved that the 192nd General Synod of the RCA commends the Rev. David Schreuder for this faithfulness, dedication, and tireless years of service as secretary for General Synod operations and wishes him God's blessing as he leaves this position for other endeavors in Christ's church. (ADOPTED)

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Rev. Frederick R. Kruithof, pastor of the Second Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, was elected president. The Rev. Dr. Vernon Hoffs, executive minister, Classis of California, was elected vice-president.

➢Upon his election as president of General Synod, the Rev. Frederick R. Kruithof addressed the Synod.

ADDRESS BY THE REV. FREDERICK R. KRUITHOF

Being accorded the honor of being your vice-president a year ago in Milwaukee was a thrill, and as I told you, a bit of a shock.

I thank you for the honor given today to serve as president of this historic denomination. It is particularly fitting for this to occur in Holland, a place that has not been our home for thirty-four years or since graduation from Western Theological Seminary. It had been, however, my residence, on two different occasions prior, for a total of eighteen years—eleven as a "PK" growing up at old First on the corner of ninth and Central, and then during my years of college and seminary.

Approximately three blocks from here, on the front lawn of what was then First Reformed's parsonage, a home now occupied by Tony Kooiker next to the Peale Science Center, I sold lemonade to the likes of Bud Hinga and Esther Snow. I righted tackling dummies on the old field under Carnegie-Schouten Gymnasium for people like Russ Norden, Nick Yonker, and Gene Campbell. I recall the T-barracks and I remember sliding on the hill next to Lubbers Hall. Al Vanderbush would scream at me from the top floor of Van Raalte Hall because as college statistician I had not gotten the basketball score in the morning paper.

It is certainly easy to be a nostalgia nut, but we have a future to face. This vice-presidential year has enabled me to learn from Wes, Tony, and Chuck, and I thank them. I also thank the many other leaders and support people of the RCA who have been helpful.

It is especially gratifying to have my wife, Sharon; my mother, Marie; my mother-in-law, Jo; and the people from Second Reformed here this afternoon. You have given me an honor not accorded to my father, in the same position, back in 1951 at Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania. I'm grateful that Mom could see this.

We face a challenging future. But we adopted a marvelous Mission and Vision Statement to assist us. There are questions and concerns.

I have studied and prayed over the themes of recent presidents:

Lou Lotz: Communication and the *Church Herald*
Beth Marcus: Laity
Warren Burgess: Revival
Harold Korver: Leadership
John Hesselink: Theology
Tony Vis: Revitalization
Chuck Van Engen: Mission, both global and local

From all of these I have borrowed, and I hope to build on something that has been evolving in my heart and mind since Milwaukee.

I believe that we are ready at this time to concentrate on "Prayer, Encouragement, and Care" (PEC), a literal pecking order, if you will.

It is time for us to celebrate the diaconal mindset and approach to ministry: in our times of difference, hurt, apathy, and distrust, to affirm; to focus on ministries like Stephen Ministries and other wonderful caring components.

It is time for us as a denomination and in our role as members of the world church, in distressing and changing times, to pray for and with each other; to encourage one another; and, above all, to care for our brothers and sisters and for our other faith and nonfaith partners worldwide.

I covet your prayers for this, in order that communication may thrive, that the role of the laity may be enhanced, that leadership may be noted and poised, that theology may be at our base, that revitalization may be real and evident, and that mission may find us following Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

III. CLOSE OF GENERAL SYNOD

CLOSE AND ADJOURNMENT

President Charles Van Engen presented president-elect Frederick R. Kruithof with the traditional bell and gavel and the presidential cross.

The 192nd General Synod concluded its business and adjourned at 12:15 PM on Wednesday, June 10, 1998 with a closing installation of officers and a worship service of Word and Sacrament. The next regular session of the General Synod will be held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, June 11-16, 1999.

Charles Van Engen, President
Frederick R. Kruithof, Vice-President
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary