RECENT OFFICERS OF GENERAL SYNOD

A list of presidents, from the first in 1794 to 1955, can be found on pages 308-311 of the 1956 *Minutes of General Synod*. The list of presidents from 1956-1978 can be found on page i of the 2002 *Minutes of General Synod.*

PRESIDENTS

Year of Election	*From*	*Place of Election*
1979—The Rev. Edwin G. Mulder	Michigan	Holland, MI
1980—The Rev. Harry Buis	Michigan	Schenectady, NY
1981—The Rev. Jack H. Hascup	New York	Hamilton, ON
1982—The Rev. James I. Cook	Michigan	Orange City, IA
1983—The Rev. Leonard V. Kalkwarf	Pennsylvania	Pella, IA
1984—The Rev. William C. Brownson	Michigan	New Brunswick, NJ
1985—The Rev. Kenneth N. Leestma	California	Kalamazoo, MI
1986—The Rev. James A. Neevel	New York	Garden Grove, CA
1987—The Rev. Robert L. Wise	Oklahoma	Holland, MI
1988—The Rev. Wilbur T. Washington	New York	Bronx, NY
1989—The Rev. Sylvio J. Scorza	Iowa	Grand Rapids, MI
1990—The Rev. John E. Hiemstra	New York	Orange City, IA
1991—The Rev. Louis E. Lotz	Iowa	Holland, MI
1992—Elder Beth E. Marcus	Michigan	Albany, NY
1993—The Rev. Warren D. Burgess	Michigan	Vancouver, BC
1994—The Rev. Harold J. Korver	California	Pella, IA
1995—The Rev. I. John Hesselink	Michigan	Mahwah, NJ
1996—The Rev. Anthony D. Vis	Iowa	Orange City, IA
1997—The Rev. Charles Van Engen	California	Milwaukee, WI
1998—The Rev. Frederick Kruithof	Michigan	Holland, MI
1999—The Rev. Gregg Mast	New York	Sioux Falls, SD
2000—Elder Carol L. Mutch	New Jersey	Hempstead, NY
2001—The Rev. Steven R. Brooks	Colorado	Pella, IA
2002—The Rev. John C. H. Chang	New York	Orange City, IA
2003—The Rev. David D. Schutt	California	Holland, MI
2004—The Rev. Steven VanderMolen	Iowa	Wheaton, IL
2005—The Rev. Irving Rivera	New York	Schenectady, NY
2006—Elder Bradley Lewis	New York	Pella, IA
2007—The Rev. John Ornee	Michigan	Pella, IA
2008—The Rev. Carol Bechtel	Michigan	Holland, MI
2009—The Rev. James Seawood	New York	Holland, MI
2010—The Rev. Donald Poest	Ohio	Orange City, IA

STATED CLERKS

The Rev. John A. Ingham	1932-1942
The Rev. James E. Hoffman	1942-1961
The Rev. Marion de Velder	1961-1968

GENERAL SECRETARIES

The Rev. Marion de Velder	1968-1977
The Rev. Arie R. Brouwer	1977-1983
The Rev. Edwin G. Mulder	1983-1994
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson	1994-

ROSTERS

*Indicates serving a final term

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Fred Algera	2011*	RSC
Ned Beadel	2010*	RSFW
Carol Bechtel, *Moderator*	2010*	PP, GS
Glen Blumer	2010*	
Randall Bohl	2012*	
Jonathon Brown	2013*	
John Busman	2012*	RSH
Michelle Chahine	2011*	RSGL
James Cobb *(Ecumenical ELCA, non-voting)*	2013*	
Thomas De Vries	2010*	
Thomas Dibble	2013*	RSMAt
Stephanie Doeschot	2011*	At-large
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson *(General Secretary)*		Ex-officio
Larryl Humme	2013*	At-large
Aaron Klein	2011*	
Marianne Lin	2011*	At-large
Toni Macon	2012*	RSNY
Richard Morano	2010*	RSA
Lizbeth Moss	2011*	
David Patterson	2012*	
Christopher Poest	2013*	RSMAm
Donald Poest	2012*	VP, GS
Kathryn Romero	2013*	
James Seawood	2011*	P, GS
James Steward	2010*	At-large
Arnold Van Ankum	2010*	
Evan Vermeer	2012*	
Ai-Lan Wang	2013*	At-large
Vacancy	2012	At-large

RACIAL/ETHNIC COUNCILS

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Shawn Gibson
C.J. Grier
Wilbur Jones, Chairperson
Jo Anna Lougin
Annie Lee Phillips
Jimmie Stevenson

COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Pavel Alas
Leonor Caballero
Rafael Garcia
Fernando Jensen
German Moreno, President
Carlos Rivera
Jose Serrano

COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Ock Kee Byun
John Chang
Norman Chen
Hak Ryong Kim, Chairperson
Joel Kim
Baktha Kumar
Hong-Jen Lin
Chun-Fa Mo
Gerri Yoshida

COMMISSIONS

CHRISTIAN ACTION

Thomas Goodhart, *Moderator* 2011*
Linda Hippenhammer.....2010
Samuel Kwon 2012*
Pamela Pater-Ennis 2010
Terry Provance *(Reformed ecumenical observer)* 2011*
Mark Rich *(ELCA ecumenical observer)*.....2011
Dayber Rodrigues Goncalves.....2011
Loretta Rolle.....2012
Cora Solomon.....2011
Jimmie Stevenson.....2010
Steve Young 2012*

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Brooke Boersma.....2012
James Daniels.....2010
Lois Fiegl 2011
Mitchell Kinsinger, *Moderator* 2011
Scott Nyp.....2012
Dennis TeBeest 2012
Vacancy.....2010

CHRISTIAN UNITY

William Bennett 2010
Judith Cobb .....2011* ELCA
Harold Delhagen, *Moderator* 2011*
Christopher Dorn.....2011*
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson *(General Secretary)* *Ex-officio*
Jeffrey Japinga 2012
Fernando Jensen 2011
G. Oliver Patterson.....2012*
Susan Sgarlat.....2012
Vacancy.....2010

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Glenda De Koster	2010	
Christopher Grier	2010	
M. Scot Sherman	2012	
Timothy TenClay, *Moderator*	2010*	
Adriene Thorne	2011	
Lisa Tice	2011	
Andrew Vivanco	2012	

CHURCH ORDER

Joshua Bode	2012	
James Donkersloot	2011*	
Randy Kooy, *Moderator*	2011*	
Jason Schnelker	2012*	
Lori Walber	2010	

HISTORY

Douglas Carlson	2010	
Mary Kansfield	2011*	
Hartmut Kramer-Mills	2012*	
J. Jeffery Tyler, *Moderator*	2011*	
Audrey Vermilyea	2010	
Lori Witt	2012*	

JUDICIAL BUSINESS

Richard Baukema	2010	RSGL
James Ramsay	2012*	RSC
Wayne Sneller	2011*	RSH
Edward Thornton	2012	RSMAt
Cary Winn, *Moderator*	2012*	RSMAm
John Wood	2011*	RSNY
Vacancy	2010	RSA
Vacancy	2010	RSFW

NOMINATIONS

Carol Bechtel	2010*	PP, GS
Donald Broek	2012*	RSH
John Chang	2012*	CPAAM
Kenneth Labbé	2012	RSC
Mary Linge	2012	RSNY
Carol Mutch, *Moderator*	2011*	RSMAt
Nolan Palsma	2010	RSA
Annie Lee Phillips	2011	AAC
Santos Rivera	2010*	CHM
Sherwin Weener	2010	RSGL
Paul Wernlund	2011*	RSMAm
Vacancy	2010	RSFW
Vacancy	2011	NAIMC

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Santos Gonzalez	2012	CHM
So Ae Heintzelman	2010	CPAAM
Mark Kellar, *Moderator*	2011*	AAC
Kevin McMahan	2011	
Kenneth Petty	2011	
Keith Ross	2012	
Lois (Holly) Schut	2010	
Lewis Tait	2012	

THEOLOGY

J. Todd Billings	2010	
Jeanne Boland	2010*	
James Brownson, *Moderator*	2010*	
Su Chang	2010*	
James De Jong *(Reformed ecumenical observer)*	2011	
Eugene Fisher	2012	
Steven Hoogerwerf	2011	
Philip Hougen (*ELCA ecumenical observer)*	2011	
Renee House	2011	
Angie Mabry-Nauta	2012*	
Young Aie Na	2011*	
David Timmer	2012	

WOMEN

Kathryn Brogan	2012	
Mark Bush	2012*	
Leonor Cabellero	2011	
Joanne Fernandez-McDermott	2010	
Lynn Japinga	2011	
Stacey Midge, *Moderator*	2012*	
Steve Robbins	2010	
Lisa Tait	2010	

AGENCIES

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES

Carol Bechtel	2010*	GSC Moderator
Dennis Bolling	2012	
John De Koster	2012*	
Philip Doeschot	2010*	
Mary Draayer	2012*	
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *General Secretary*		*Ex-officio*
Vernon Hoffs	2012	
Daniel Kleinheksel	2010	
Janet Krueger	2010	
Donald Poest	2012*	VP, GS
Paul Pratt, *President*	2011*	
James Seawood	2011*	P, GS
Douglas Struyk	2010*	
Carl Van Voorst	2011	

Craig Vander Molen.....2012*
Gerald Vander Wal 2011*
Timothy Zeutenhorst.....2010

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CHURCH GROWTH FUND, INC.

Barbara Boers, *Treasurer*
Kenneth Bradsell, *Assistant Secretary*
Robert Carlson, *President*.....2010
Diane Faubion 2011
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson *Ex-officio*
Stephen Hanson.....2012
John Koerselman.....2011
George Schneidermann 2010
Benjamin Sweet 2012

REFORMED CHURCH PRESS

Paul Boice
Kenneth Bradsell
Thomas De Vries 2010*
Lizbeth Moss.....2011*

MINISTERIAL FORMATION CERTIFICATION AGENCY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Eddy Aleman 2012
Dwight Bailey 2011
James Brownson.....2010
Nancy Ann Callender.....2011*
Marjorie Giles 2010*
Renee House.....2012*
Bradley Lewis 2010
Barton Strong, *Moderator*.....2010*
David Theonugraha.....2012*

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ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CONVENED IN ITS TWO HUNDRED AND FOURTH REGULAR SESSION ON THE CAMPUS OF NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE IN ORANGE CITY, IOWA, ON THURSDAY, THE TENTH OF JUNE, A.D. TWO THOUSAND TEN, AT 3:03 P.M., CENTRAL TIME.

FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The General Synod was opened by president James Seawood on Thursday afternoon, June 10, 2010, with a worship liturgy led by the Rev. Timothy Ten Clay and elder Lois Fiegl, Rochester Classis delegate.

WORSHIP

Evening worship on June 10 was held at 7:30 p.m. in Christ Chapel. Participants in the service included the Rev. James Seawood, president of the General Synod, who preached the Word; the Rev. Gloria McCanna, pastor of the first Reformed Church, Fishkill, New York, and Andrew Yamamoto, student corresponding delegate from Western Theological Seminary, liturgists; and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary, and the Rev. James Seawood, officiants at the Lord's table.

The synod was led in the "Order for the Liturgical Declaration of the Belhar Confession" to celebrate the historic adoption of the Belhar Confession as the fourth Doctrinal Standard of the Reformed Church in America. Participants were the Rev. Godfrey Betha, Actuarius, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaleson, RCA general secretary; the Rev. Douglas Fromm, General Synod associate for Ecumenical Relations, the Rev. Prof. Selaelo Thias Kgatla, moderator, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, elder Oliver Patterson, and elder Sarah Smith. General Secretary Emeritus Rev. Dr. Edwin Mulder responded to the adoption of the Belhar.

Thursday Afternoon
Order for the Liturgical Declaration of the Belhar Confession—as noted above

Thursday Evening
Opening Worship Service—The Rev. James Seawood

Friday Morning
Opening Worship—Rev. Jhonny Alicea-Báez, director of Global Mission

Friday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Lisa Vander Wal, Schenectady Classis

Friday Evening
Opening Prayer—Elder Mark Santo, Classis of New York
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Anni Mingin, City Classis

Saturday Morning
Opening Worship—The Rev. Thomas Goodhart, corresponding delegate from the Commission on Christian Action; the Rev. Sung Kim, Lake Erie Classis; and the Rev. Tim Ten Clay

Saturday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Mark Andersen, Montgomery Classis
Closing Prayer—Elder Kenneth Neevel, Holland Classis

Sunday Morning
General Synod participants worshiped in area churches

Sunday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Fernando Jensen, Classis of Florida
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Dwayne Jackson, Classis of Queens

Sunday Evening
Opening Prayer—Elder Christina Barthel, Classis of Illinois
Evening Prayers—Ann Reilly, Seminarian Seminar participant from New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Monday Morning
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Harold Delhagen, corresponding delegate from the Commission on Christian Unity, offered prayer at the opening of the Ecumenical Breakfast
Opening Worship—The Rev. Godfrey Betha, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; Adriana Ostapenko, seminarian, Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; Lindsey DeKruif, seminarian, Western Theological Seminary; Noah Livingston, seminarian, Western Theological Seminary
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Dr. James Brownson, General Synod Professor

Monday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Miguel Cruz, Classis of Holland
Closing Prayer—Elder Henry Bruines, Classis of Ontario

Monday Evening
Opening Prayer—Elder Randy Kooy, Classis of Illiana
Evening Prayers—Elder Michael Ehrenfried, City Classis

Tuesday Morning
Opening Worship—The Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, moderator of the General Synod Council
Installation Service for New Officers

An installation service for the new officers of General Synod and a Communion service were held on Tuesday, June 15. Participants in the service included the Rev. James Seawood, president of General Synod; the Rev. Donald Poest, vice president of General Synod; the Rev. Lisa Vander Wal, vice president elect of General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary; the Rev. Harold Delhagen, Synod of Albany, preacher; and ministry candidate Marijke Strong and elder James Nakakihara, liturgists.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

In order that the parliamentarian, John De Koster, and executive staff may respond to questions for clarification and participate as requested by the General Synod president in presentations to the General Synod and in other activities that appear on the agenda, the General Synod:

VOTED: To grant privilege of the floor to the parliamentarian and the General Synod Council executive staff so they may respond to questions for clarification and participate as requested by the president in presentations and other activities on the agenda.

SEATING OF DELEGATES

The general secretary informed the synod that there were no irregularities and all delegates could be seated. The possible membership of General Synod was 254, with enrolled membership at 237; therefore, a quorum was declared present.

MINUTES AND JOURNAL

The Acts and Proceedings of the 203rd regular session of the General Synod were read by title. The General Synod authorized its officers to approve the journal of actions.

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

General Synod Council members Stephanie Doeschot and Larryl Humme, and Nolan Palsma, corresponding delegate from the Commission on Nominations, were appointed as tellers. The following seminarians were also appointed as tellers:

Roberta Arden
Daniel Bailey-Yavonditte
John Chen
Lindsey DeKruif
Scott De Leeuw
Janet Fritzinger
Chris Heitkamp
Robert Horstman
Patience Johnson
Benjamin Kappers
Sun Kim
Kristin Livingston
Noah Livingston
Adriana Ostapenko
Sarah Palsma
Ann Reilly
Grace Rim
Marijke Strong
Richard Van Dop
Maudelin Willock
Andrew Yamamoto

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND SCHEDULE

The General Synod approved a schedule based on the agenda of General Synod prescribed in the Special Rules of Order (*BCO* 2003, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1).

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

Ecumenical presentations regarding the Belhar Confession—Monday morning
The Rev. Godfrey Betha, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa
The Rev. Professor S. T. Kgatla, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa
The Rev. Donald McCoid, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The Rev. Roger Willer, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Panel members on Belhar in Our Future—Voices in the RCA:
Daniel Bailey-Yavonditte, ministry candidate
Earl James, coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice
Sarah Palsma, ministry candidate
The Rev. Tim Vink, coordinator for church multiplication
Maudelin Willock, ministry candidate

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The General Synod approved the list of delegates serving on advisory committees.

VOTED: To approve the 2010 General Synod advisory committee assignments.

All regular and corresponding delegates were assigned to one of twenty "all-synod advisory committees." Each of these advisory committees reviewed the same reports and recommendations pertaining to the business before synod. The president named one delegate to be moderator of each of these issue advisory committees. The named topics were: 1) Multiplication and Revitalization, 2) Funding Our Mission Together, and 3) Board of Benefits Services.

A limited number of delegates were designated by the president to serve on advisory committees that considered specific business on church order and governance, overtures and new business, theology, and our multiracial future freed from racism.

Moderators of the All-Synod Advisory Committees

Mark Andersen
Miguel Cruz
Carson Culp
Lois Fiegl
Janice Fox
Andrea Godwin-Stremler
Renée House
John Hubers
Dwayne Jackson
Fernando Jensen
George Montanari
James Nakakihara
Kenneth Neevel
Phyllis Palsma
Steven Pierce
Mark Prestriedge
Allen Pruis
Jackie Smallbones
Kyunghoon Suh
Lisa Vander Wal

General Synod Advisory Committees

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER AND GOVERNANCE

Moderator: Brian Hellenga (West Sioux)
Vice Moderator: Larry Schuyler (Holland)
Ministers:
Mark Andersen (Montgomery)
James O'Connell (Passaic Valley)
Donald Rowe (Central California)
Elders:
David Mejeur (Southwest Michigan)
Nancy Ruiter (New Brunswick)
Diane Schrotenboer (Holland)
Linda Young (Schenectady)
Corresponding:
Randy Kooy (Commission on Church Order)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MULTIRACIAL FUTURE FREED FROM RACISM

Moderator: Anna Jackson (Queens)
Vice Moderator: Ruth Webb (Canadian Prairies)
Ministers:
Christopher Cano (City)
Jeffrey Petersen (North Grand Rapids)
Daniel Ramm (Brooklyn)
Rebecca Town (Schoharie)
Elders:
Kenneth Chase (New York)
Daniel DeVries (West Sioux)
Jo Anna Lougin (Central California)
Wilma Powell (Greater Palisades)
Corresponding:
Mark Kellar (Commission on Race and Ethnicity)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS

Moderator: Donald Hoover (Rockland-Westchester)
Vice Moderator: Susan Converse (Nassau-Suffolk)
Ministers:
John Coakley (GS Professor)
Vance Elzinga (Central Iowa)
Timothy Meendering (North Grand Rapids)
John Schmidt (Zeeland)
Elders
Matthew Fong (Central California)
Mary Linge (Mid-Hudson)
Elliott Ten Clay (Illiana)
Joyce Wyka (Orange)
Corresponding
Harold Delhagen (Commission on Christian Unity)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY

Moderator: Elizabeth Hardeman (East Sioux)
Vice Moderator: David Landegent (Holland)
Ministers:
Thomas Boogaart (GS Professor)
Judson Marvel (Zeeland)
David Phillips (Rocky Mountains)
Robert Williams (Rockland-Westchester)
Stephen Yon (Delaware-Raritan)
Elders
David Ivey (Central Plains)
John Ringdahl (Florida)
Faye Stinson (Delaware-Raritan)
Elmer Van Drunen (Illiana)
Corresponding
Renée House (Commission on Theology)

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS

The General Secretary noted that the Office of the General Synod received no communications that were required to be referred to appropriate committees.

PRESENTATION AND REFERRAL OF NEW BUSINESS

No items of new business were presented to the synod.

A Ministry from the Bottom Up

By James Seawood
President, General Synod

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Thank you for honoring me with the blessing to be your General Synod president for the past year. Visiting our churches and missionaries has expanded my understanding of who we are and given me new insight into the marvelous opportunities open to us for ministry and for revival. Our denominational staff has been just wonderful. Whenever I could think of the right question, they would be ready with helpful recommendations. I thank the members and leaders of Brighton Heights Reformed Church for their patience and faithfulness.

Over the past year, in addition to visiting classes, consistories, and our seminaries, my wife and I have visited South Africa, Mozambique, Japan, Israel, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Canada. From all of my visits, and relationships, and conversations, I believe God spoke to me powerfully and clearly about a theme to recommend to you as one of our guiding ministry principles. That principle is that ministry, whenever and wherever possible, should originate from the bottom and go up. "Ministry from the bottom up."

There is so much I could share with you about my experiences this year. Some of them I will leave only for the written record. What I feel called to focus on today are those experiences, learnings, and recommendations directly tied to ministry from the bottom up. But, first, what does that phrase mean?

I have come to understand that ministry from the bottom up comes to us in at least three phases.

First, we must engage in "a ministry of presence." That was a term I learned when I was a chaplain in the United States Army. While we chaplains had offices and some Sunday responsibilities, our real work was to be present with the soldiers and their family members where they lived their everyday lives. We had to visit them in their homes and places of work, recreation, and worship. When we were present with them, we gained greater credibility and insight in order to minister to and with them. That should be no surprise for us. Jesus left heaven to be with us on earth. We, too, must leave our havens to engage the earthy lives of the people of God. Our ministry of presence is about being incarnational in everyday, practical ways.

Second, ministry from the bottom up means that while we are present with people in their places, we must listen and learn from them with the ear and heart of Jesus. So, when with the people, hear their stories. Learn what is on their hearts and minds. Know well the sights and sounds and smells and the many contexts the people we serve live in everyday. We could never know well those things from our offices or our preferred places of being. We have to be with the people where they are in order to better have the ear and heart of Jesus for them.

Third, based on what we learn when we are present with people, we must be and act with and for them as the hands and feet of Jesus. It is not enough for us to commiserate. It is not enough for us to pray for blessing and relief and then walk away. We must respond and make the kinds of differences for and with them that Jesus did when he walked the earth as one of us. Critical spiritual results from our ministry of presence include us seeking:

1. Unity with those we serve.

2. Reconciliation, or the elimination of hostilities and dividing walls, among those we serve.

3. Justice for those we serve when only interpersonal or systemic changes will make their situations right in the sight of God.

Ministry from the bottom up. This is an incarnational matter. It requires that we be present with people where they are. It requires that we listen to them with the ear and heart of Jesus. It requires that we be and act for and with them as the hands and feet of Jesus. When we engage our missions and ministries from the bottom up, we see transformation, new life, and revival breaking out in ways only the Spirit of God fully knows and understands.

Now I will share with you just some of my experiences and learnings this year, and my recommendations.

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

Our visits to South Africa and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) provided time to 1) experience life and ministry of our brothers and sisters who birthed the Belhar Confession and 2) assess South Africa after the release of Nelson Mandela, comparing current realities with expectations. With all the positive political, economic, and social change that has occurred, including a growing middle class, the majority of South Africans are as poor as ever, uneducated, and fighting for jobs, food, housing, and health care. The economy is still controlled by the white minority and the Dutch Reformed Church has not repudiated its historic support of apartheid and the heresy of racial superiority as a God-given right to reconcile with the URCSA. Further, the masses remain frustrated because of the inadequate government-supported schools and the cost of private schools, state-run hospitals with decreasing staff, and politicians who have not delivered on promises. Through the power and impact of the Belhar Confession, in various places of the country, the URCSA is making heroic attempts to address these situations. BADISA, a social welfare organization, is one such ministry effort. BADISA is a collaboration between the URCSA and the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. It has a head office in Cape Town and branches all over South Africa. BADISA branches offer schooling, job creation, senior citizens' services, and drug and alcohol prevention and treatment programs, and they combat HIV/AIDS. They meet people where they are and minister from the bottom up.

Iglesia Reformada Dominicana—Dominican Republic

My trip to the Dominican Republic on January 5-7, 2010, with the Revs. Ken Bradsell, Jon Norton, Luis Perez, Brigido Cabrera (who represents the RCA and its Hispanic Council), and Andres Serrano to celebrate the birth of the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana was an unexpected blessing. It was awesome to see the enthusiasm and joy the pastors and elders shared as they studied the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession, and the Belhar Confession. These pastors were so happy to be a part of the Reformed tradition and the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana. The church is growing daily as the word is preached and members continue to witness. The programming of Radio Impacto, the broadcast ministry through which Andres Serrano gives pastors an opportunity to reach people using radio, is significant. Preaching in the churches they pastor, witnessing the spirit and energy of their worship services, and seeing the commitment of the people was awesome.

I will never forget the ministry-from-the-bottom-up story of IRD pastor Carlos, a Dominican church planter. For twenty-five years, this faithful brother in Christ has listened

to God and to many people. For twenty-five years, he felt compelled by the Spirit to plant churches to gather and bring strength and healing to the many people whose lives he knew intimately. Out of curiosity, I asked him when he was ordained. He told me, "Two years ago." You can imagine my shock and awe. My mindset was moved by familiar process and credentialing. His mindset was moved by being present with people. My point is not to say anything against our processes and credentialing. My point is to say that ministry from the bottom up brings unimagined power and vitality. Let me say as well that I had no idea that I would personally see the strength, organization, and compassion of the Dominican Reformed Church as we worked together to offer emergency relief and save lives in Haiti. More about that later.

Israel—Palestine

We had an unforgettable experience in the Holy Land in October 2009. Emra and I, general secretary Wes Granberg-Michaelson, vice president Don Poest, and Jerry Dykstra, the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, along with some of his colleagues, made that unforgettable pilgrimage together. RCA missionaries Marlin and Sally Vis led us. If you ever get a chance to visit Marlin and Sally Vis, please do. They have been present with the people in amazing ways. Marlin knows Jerusalem in a way that brings the places where Jesus walked alive through the stories he tells.

The aspect of our visit that most impressed me was time spent with Palestinian families and Palestinian refugees. We lived for two days with a Palestinian family on the West Bank, Anwar and Mirvat Bannoura and their children, Natalie and Sari. Hearing and experiencing firsthand the struggles this family experiences daily living on the West Bank was very enlightening as well as heartbreaking. I did not understand how settlements are started or their sizes and locations prior to this visit to the West Bank. Actually standing beside the huge wall that runs through ancestral lands, olive vineyards, and communities and separates Israel and the West Bank impressed upon me the lengths the Israeli government will go to enforce military rule in the area. To cross from the Palestinian side of the wall to the Israeli side would take my host several hours. He has to stand in line for four to six hours every day and be searched in order to work in Israel. Life on the West Bank is very difficult. The Palestinians pay more for everything; earn less, if they can find a job; and their living areas are totally controlled by the Israelis. One night we came home to find that the Israelis had turned the lights off because of an incident in Jerusalem. Also, water had to be stored in cisterns on rooftops because water could also be shut off at any time. Anwar has over two thousand family members in the Bethlehem area and his family has lived there over a thousand years.

The violence, contempt, hatred, and killing continue. I'm thankful for the opportunity to walk the streets of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Galilee, and Nazareth. I hope to lead a Christian Peacemaker Delegation pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2013. Some of you may want to be a part of that delegation.

Haiti

All of my life I had heard about Haiti and the freedom fighters. Toussaint L'Ouverture was lifted up in my community as our leaders would admonish us to fight for freedom and against racism and segregation. With all that I had heard about these Haitian freedom fighters, I also had questions about how this country became the poorest nation in the western hemisphere and why the RCA did not have a mission presence in this nation so close to our borders.

When we were in the Dominican Republic, we decided to visit Haiti. Brigido Cabrera, Andres Serrano, and Yeral Ogando of the IRD consented to escort my wife and me across the border into Haiti. After seven hours on a bus from Santo Domingo to Port-au-Prince, we could hardly believe the everyday life conditions of many of the people we saw. Haiti was in trouble before the earthquake! The day after we arrived, on January 12, 2010, the earthquake hit Haiti. Details of that experience are on our denominational website. Now, with over a quarter million dead, millions homeless, and cities destroyed, Haiti needs everything. Millions of dollars have been pledged, but there appears to be a lack of organization and lack of resolve to help Haitians recover. My February visit revealed that things were getting worse and reports from church members that have recently visited confirm that international aid is trickling in very slowly and the people are very frustrated as food, shelter, and medical supplies are limited and people continue to die from infection and disease.

Randall Robinson, in his book *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, from Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*, chronicles how the international community has systematically repressed the Haitian people and worked to prevent Haitians from becoming self determining from the day of their independence in 1804. Haiti was in trouble before the earthquake. Robinson traces the history of a people forced across the Atlantic in chains, recounting their spectacularly successful slave revolt against France and the two hundred years of reprisals that followed. Haiti's plight up until this point has been attributable to bad and painful American, French, and western policy that some believe is motivated by Toussaint L'Ouverture's victory over Napoleon.

After its defeat, France demanded reparations from the newly freed black Republic of Haiti, bankrupting the country. The Vatican didn't recognize Haiti until the 1860s. The western nations of the world, responding to a call for isolation and embargo from Thomas Jefferson, imposed sanctions on Haiti that lasted until the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States. Then in 1915 Woodrow Wilson, with a force of American marines, invaded and occupied Haiti until 1934. They took control of the country, seized land and redistributed it to American corporations, collected customs duties, and ran the country as if it were an American possession.

This was then followed by the dictatorial blight of the Duvaliers and all of the other military generals that were armed by the United States, culminating in an American-led operation that removed Haiti's first democratically elected president and his entire government in 2004.

The American people know almost nothing about what happened in 2004, about the abduction of President Aristide, about the destruction of Haiti's democracy as a result of the efforts of both the United States and the French government. We need to know that.

And I think that the only way we can move ahead constructively with Haiti is to begin by 1) telling the full story of our relationship with Haiti since 1804, what happened in the nineteenth century, and what has happened in the twentieth century, and 2) by doing ministry from the bottom up. Only then might Americans understand at long last that Haiti's misery is largely not of its own making.

In response to the desperate need in Haiti, I propose:

P-1
To direct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana, to establish a Reformed Church in America mission presence in Haiti for a minimum of five years

that 1) partners with appropriate local relief and development organizations and congregations and 2) focuses on responding to devastation from the 2010 earthquake and equipping congregations and church leaders with knowledge, skills, and tools to build community and overcome poverty.

[*Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business. See pages 181-182.*]

Tulare Community Church—Tulare, California

Tulare Community Church is located in the San Joaquin Valley, California. Their mission statement reads: "Tulare Community Church is called to glorify God by producing hundreds of healthy followers of Christ who courageously and unselfishly start dozens of reproducing churches."

"Called to start dozens of reproducing churches." This bold idea is in the mission statement. I had heard so much about this ministry and was elated to be invited by Rev. Mark Schwarz to bring the message at their February 29, 2010, Unity Service. The church plants that sent representatives to the unity service by my count were: Sunrise Community Church, Fresno Hmong Community Christian Reformed Church, Bethesda Community Church, Village of Hope, the Journey, The LaLu Community Church, Sequoia Community Church, and New Hope Community Church. Can you imagine all these churches coming together on the Tulare campus? The service was electrifying.

I could sense from the conversation and the spirit in the service that they believed that churches are supposed to grow and multiply. Members shared their urgency to plant new churches in the area and that they might even like to be a part of the group that leaves the mother church to participate in a new plant.

I was particularly interested to hear about New Life Community, which had become a part of Tulare Community Church. New Life Community Church was formerly an African Methodist Episcopal Church. New Life was a part of one of the oldest black denominations in America. In my mind, leaving the African Methodist Episcopal Church to become a part of the RCA is not only radical, it's unheard of. Rev. Larry Dodson indicates that they made the shift because of our openness to embrace all people. We must be on the right track with our emphasis on being multiracial and multicultural.

On a number of accounts, this great congregation is doing ministry from the bottom up. They are present with so many people, listening to them with the ears and heart of Jesus, serving them as his hands and feet.

Maasai Well Project—Kenya

Global Mission has been in partnership with the Maasai Inland Mission to bring relief to the people of the Rift Valley that have gone through years of devastating drought. RCA churches from around the country have supported the digging of wells and pledged to support four more wells to bring clean, safe water to these nomadic people. Our hope is that as more wells are completed the Maasai can spend less time searching for water and more time educating their children. We have that hope only because of deep, close, and personal relationships with some Maasai and their leaders.

An RCA delegation attended the dedication of a new well that is bringing much needed water to the Maasai people. The delegation included James and LaurieAnn Olsen, Barbara

Oliveira from New Hope Community Church in Fremont, California; Anna Gonzales from Park Hills Community Church in Los Angeles; Leatha Johnson from DeWitt Reformed Church in New York City, and Emra and me. We were led by Rev. Derrick Jones, supervisor of RCA mission in Africa, and Maasai pastor Simon Muntolol.

I ask us to join this "living water" project by dedicating half of our General Synod offering this year to support a school we visited where the Maasai have allowed their children to receive a school education.

Social Justice

I have shared with you just a few of the experiences and learnings God has blessed me with over the past year. I want to hold up for your consideration now some additional learnings with some recommendations.

Everywhere we went, we saw clearly how ministry from the bottom up and the ministry of presence can and should lead to powerful outcomes and results. In many instances, those outcomes and results are expressed through the multiplication of new churches and evangelical outreach by existing congregations. The RCA is making great strides for the reign of God there.

But the other side of our responses to ministry from the bottom up must result in seeking justice for those with whom we stand. In Isaiah 58, God through his prophet tells God's devout people:

> Is not this the fast that I choose: to loosen 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?

Jesus, in his first recorded sermon, found in the Gospel of Luke, drew these words from those words:

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (NIV).

Jesus was telling the people of God all over again about social justice being strong in the heart of God.

Over many years, we in the RCA denominationally and congregationally have seen a decline in our collective response to the need for justice domestically and around the world. We have not listened as we should to learn with the ear and heart of Jesus about the need for justice, nor have we acted as we should as his hands and feet to ensure justice comes.

Brothers and sisters, we need to get out of our comfort zone and learn from the everyday experiences of the people with whom we minister, review our denominational commitments, and leap to the side of Jesus to proclaim freedom for prisoners and release for the oppressed. We have written many fine and helpful papers about justice opportunities. But this is not finally about writing or about papers. It is finally about what our shared mission identifies us to be:

> …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.

I recommend to you the following:

P-2

To direct the Commission on Christian Action, in consultation with at least one representative from the Commission on Christian Unity, at least one member of the General Synod Council (GSC) representing the GSC's Global Mission programs, and one member of each racial/ethnic council, to develop a strategy for social justice advocacy for the RCA. The strategy should review and consider the social justice ministries of at least the following: the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, Sojourners, Bread for the World, the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A., and the Global Christian Forum, and is to consider other efforts of the Reformed Church in America itself. The strategy should include the following features:

1. **Recommend critical social justice issues and methods other than merely signing on to letters.**
2. **Promote and emphasize the engagement of RCA congregations, consistent with the RCA's mission statement, in social justice advocacy.**
3. **Balance between North American and global social justice needs.**
4. **Address communications methods to get critical social justice information to people in the pews.**
5. **Recommend a structure for implementing the strategy, recognizing that the RCA has a limited capacity to lead multiple, centralized social advocacy initiatives; and further,**

to direct the commission to provide 1) an interim report with recommendations to the General Synod Council by January 10, 2011, with a copy to the Commission on Christian Unity, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the racial/ethnic councils and 2) a final report by January 10, 2012, with the same distribution; and further,

to direct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Action, to present a paper to General Synod 2012 that gives guidance to congregations and our denomination on responding to human need through social justice advocacy that reflects biblical and theological considerations, including insights from the Belhar Confession.

[*Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business.* *See page 182.*]

Multiracial Future Freed from Racism

In 2008, General Synod added a sixth element to Our Call: multiracial future, freed from racism. In 2009, General Synod affirmed that "Racism is sin because it is an offense to God." Everywhere we have traveled during my presidency, domestically and globally, the scourge of racism was evident. Racial categories continue to be used to be used to divide, exploit, and oppress. All human beings share a common DNA. Not only are we brothers and sisters in Christ, we are in fact brothers and sisters at the microbiological level. Need a kidney or a transfusion? We are all homo sapiens. We are all a part of the same human family. Deeper still than that, we are all image-bearers of the almighty God.

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion…So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26-27).

Yet around the church I'm asked, "But Pastor, how shall we be freed from racism?" My first response is, "Admit that racism is sin, an offense against God, and confess your need for forgiveness." In Christ there is liberation from sin, even the sin of racism. Confess, repent, and be transformed. Be made new and sin no more. Christ makes the difference! Let's dare to talk honestly about the sin of racism and the depth of our sin that it might be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit so that we might be healed and delivered.

In John 17, in what is sometimes called his high priestly prayer, Jesus begged God that his followers would all be one, just as he and the Father are one. He prayed as if racism or race-based decisions or actions or cultural differences would not have the final word. He asked God to guarantee that we would be one like he and his Father are one.

In Revelation 5, we find that Jesus was not idle from the time he prayed that prayer until the time John the Revelator saw in a vision. By his death and subsequent work, Jesus guaranteed that the church would be multiracial. It is for us to be on the side of that future and practice the multiracial reign of God now.

Toward our multiracial future freed from racism, I recommend the following proposals:

P-3
To direct the General Synod Council to sponsor a two-year denomination-wide dialogue on race, racial righteousness, and racism; and further,

that the goals of the dialogue are to explore the potentials for the Reformed Church in America becoming more multiracial and freer from racism within all of its agencies, assemblies, and institutions; and that all RCA classes, regional synods, and educational institutions be urged to participate in the dialogue; and further,

that key activities in the dialogue include 1) reviewing biblical and theological bases for our multiracial church, 2) identifying relevant area demographics to project potential multiracial relationship and ministry development, 3) training suitable for our multiracial future, and 4) planning specific annual steps for becoming more multiracial and freer from racism; and further,

that the General Synod allocate resources to fund the dialogue.

P-4
To urge the RCA's regional synods, classes, and consistories, the theological seminaries, the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA), and affiliated colleges to develop ongoing ministry teams that champion for them the values, goals, activities, and relationships needed to become more multiracial and freer from racism; and further,

to direct the General Synod Council to develop and/or identify suitable resources for the development of such teams and collaborate with synods, classes, theological seminaries, MFCA and affiliated colleges interested in exploring, initiating, and empowering such teams in their respective areas.

P-5
To direct the General Synod Council to develop and/or identify suitable resources for anti-racism training for regional synods, classes, congregations, theological seminaries, the MFCA, and affiliated colleges; and further,

to urge all RCA classes, regional synods, congregations, theological seminaries, the MFCA, and affiliated colleges to participate in anti-racism training.

[*Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-3, P-4, and P-5 were referred to the Advisory Committee on Our Multiracial Future Freed from Racism. See pages 182-183.*]

Native American/First Nation

The 1992 General Synod adopted several resolutions concerning Native Americans. It's important that we remember that we have yet to fully keep our commitment to give voice and to honor our Native American/First Nations brothers and sisters. Here are some of those resolutions.

R-1 To instruct the general secretary to write to the consistories of the RCA American Indian congregations, expressing the Reformed Church in America's gratitude for the unique contributions of native Americans to American life. (ADOPTED)

R-2 To acknowledge the pain and suffering experienced by native Americans as a result of the encounter between two cultures and to recognize the complicity of the RCA in inflicting that suffering. (ADOPTED)

R-3 To instruct the Office of Social Witness, in cooperation with the Office of Education and Faith Development and the American Indian Council, to prepare and distribute to the RCA churches a list of resources and strategies which will assist them in further reflecting on these issues. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

R-5 To request that the RCA representatives to the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), in consultation with the American Indian Council, join with other ICCR members in developing shareholder initiatives with those corporations in which the RCA holds stock and that have an impact on American Indian reservations through their exploration, mineral leasing, and mining activities, toxic waste disposal, or agribusiness activities. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

R-6 To request that the Reformed Church in America Mission Investment Committee explore possibilities for investment of RCA resources in appropriate economic development projects in partnership with tribal people. (ADOPTED)

R-7 To instruct the minister for social witness, in consultation with the American Indian Council, to make available to the RCA information concerning legislation which promotes the self determination of native Americans, and to encourage members of the RCA to support such legislation. (ADOPTED) [*MGS 1992*, pp. 118-119]

It is timely for us to again review those General Synod recommendations on this matter and engage them in fresh and ongoing ways.

Also of note is that a task force authorized by the 2009 General Synod reported this year and recommends an additional task force be organized that is comprised of Native American and First Nations people to develop a restoration plan for the RCA's relationship with its Native American and First Nations people. I strongly support the development of that task force, as well as its proposed mandate.

In addition, I propose the following recommendation. It will help the RCA ensure that our multiracial future is freed from the racism that has afflicted our relationships with our Native American and First Nations brothers and sisters.

P-6
To direct the Commission on History in consultation with the General Synod Council to jointly develop a new study that:

1. **Provides a comprehensive review of the history of the Reformed Church in America and Native Americans/First Nations peoples.**
2. **Is completed and presented at General Synod 2011.**
3. **Is forwarded to classes, regional synods, and affiliated RCA colleges and seminaries; and further,**

to urge regional synods and RCA-affiliated colleges and seminaries to 1) present or sponsor an annual educational event using that study document as a primary source, and 2) forward an annual report to the General Synod Council that describes and provides the outcomes of the event; and further,

to direct the Commission on Christian Action to study what other denominations such as, but not limited to, the Reformed Church in America's Formula of Agreement partners and the Christian Reformed Church in North America, are doing to rectify in current ministries with and among Native American and First Nations peoples harm done by those denominations to them in the past. The study should focus on:

1. **Reconciliation efforts undertaken.**
2. **Efforts Native Americans and First Nations peoples identify as restorative, blessing, and beneficial.**

A written report is to be forwarded to GSC for review and appropriate implementation by February 28, 2011.

[*Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-6 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Our Multiracial Future Freed from Racism. See pages 183-184.*]

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, this has been a year that I will never forget. Thank you for your confidence and thank you for this great honor. I look forward to working with the General Synod Council and our commissions and congregations as we shepherd these and the other proposals before us through to implementation.

The Journey from Jerusalem to Antioch

By Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
General Secretary, Reformed Church in America

The Reformed Church in America is on a journey from Jerusalem to Antioch. How we navigate this path, and how we live out the relationship between a treasured tradition and a missional calling, will determine our future as a denomination.

Last October, I went "up to Jerusalem" with our General Synod president, James Seawood, his wife, Emra, our vice president, Don Poest, and Jerry Dykstra, the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, along with some of his colleagues. We were making a pilgrimage there, led by RCA missionaries Marlin and Sally Vis.

We were following an ancient tradition. At the time of Jesus, the Temple, rebuilt by Herod, made Jerusalem a major center of pilgrimage in the world. Jews would dream of going to Jerusalem, and thousands did, including the family of Jesus, during the three religious festivals observed each year.

In the last fateful week of his life, Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem—which is on a hill—during the celebration of Passover. It was in Jerusalem that he was crucified and where God raised him from the dead. Marlin and Sally took us to a high corner of the city that might have been the area where the disciples were gathering and hiding after the ascension, and when the Spirit came at Pentecost.

So the church, including all of us gathered here in this gymnasium in Orange City, Iowa, can trace our roots back to that place in the city of Jerusalem. It's the fountainhead of our faith.

Yet Jerusalem did not become the center of the early church's mission in the world.

Jesus' last words before his ascension commissioned his followers to go to the ends of the earth, to baptize, and to make disciples (Mt. 28:18-20). But they stayed in Jerusalem. Controversy and persecution faced these first believers. The high priest had the apostles arrested and ordered them, unsuccessfully, to stop preaching. Then Stephen was arrested and stoned to death, while Saul looked on with approval.

Many who were these early followers of Jesus then fled Jerusalem, and some traveled as far as Antioch (Acts 11:19). That was three hundred miles away, a journey of about ten days on foot. Antioch was not only separated geographically from Jerusalem. Culturally, socially, politically, and religiously it was a different world.

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria, with up to half a million inhabitants. In stark contrast to Jerusalem, with its Palestinian Judaism, Antioch was a city of Hellenistic culture, with its various deities and religious practices. Located up a river, fifteen miles from the sea, it was a center of trade and interchange throughout the Roman Empire.

At the city's center was the marketplace, or *agora*, and the council chamber, theater, stadium, and educational gymnasium. Antioch was highly cosmopolitan, with Syrian, Cypriot, Egyptian, and Persian influences, as well as a Jewish population. Its main street was paved with marble and lighted at night. But despite the luxuries of this leading city in the empire, the gulf between rich and poor was stark. One third of the population was slaves, and most of the inhabitants were crowded into tenements more densely populated

than today's major urban areas. Poor sanitation and health conditions meant that half of all children died at birth or during infancy. Plus, people of many races and ethnic groups living together in such conditions led to frequent conflict, and even riots.

It was here in Antioch that the gospel, brought by those fleeing Jerusalem, took root and flourished. The story is described in the eleventh chapter of Acts. In Antioch, the gospel was shared with Greeks, and many came to faith as this young church grew. The Antioch church lived out the scandalous assertion that Jewish identity and practice were no longer the only way to enter into the grace of God. This fellowship was not dependent upon continuing observance of Jewish law or worship in the synagogue, but solely upon embracing the message of Jesus, acknowledging him as the Christ, and living in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The amazing, incarnational power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Word that was made flesh in the Jewish culture just outside Jerusalem, in Bethlehem, the city of David, now became incarnate within this foreign, cosmopolitan Greek culture of one of the Roman Empire's leading cities.

The church at Antioch became the crucible for the missional imagination of the Christian faith.

Preaching of the gospel moved out of the synagogue and into the agora—the marketplace. In the midst of shrines and deities, and among magicians, astrologers, diviners, philosophers, Stoics, cynics, and many others, the gospel of the Lord Jesus was preached. Moreover, worship now moved to households—groups of extended families, servants, and others living under one roof. These formed the basis for house churches, the primary expression of this emerging Christian community.

The conflict that follows is recorded in Acts. The church in Jerusalem—made up of those apostles and others who survived and maintained a presence as the "headquarters" of the church—is unsettled by what is happening in Antioch. They send Barnabas to investigate how the gospel could be shared with non-Jews, and how Jewish practices were being discarded. Barnabas, however, is described as the "encourager." His first question seems to be, "What is God doing here?" We read that "when he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion" (Acts 11:23). Many more believed, and the church continued to grow.

Barnabas went to find Saul, the converted former persecutor of the church, and brought him to this newly created church in Antioch to build up the body. And it is here, amid all the foreign and competing religious beliefs, values, and lifestyles, that believers are given a name to distinguish their identity—they are called "Christians."

Yet, the conflict persists, and isn't resolved until the Council of Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15. Those in Antioch, recognizing that they are affirmed in their fresh expression of the gospel, respect the reasonable requests from the founding church in Jerusalem. Upon listening to the experience of what God's grace was doing, the Church in Jerusalem empowered and affirmed the Church at Antioch. Antioch became the first missional church, the center of the early church's mission in the world, sending Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus and the world beyond.

Historian Rodney Stark estimates that at the time the church at Antioch was emerging, around 40 C.E., there were about a thousand believers in the world. The astonishing truth is that the gospel's incarnation in this Hellenistic, cosmopolitan city—along with Barnabas' favorable report about the grace of God at work there and the mutual under-

standing reached at the Council of Jerusalem—prepared the way for Christian faith to transform the known world. If Barnabas had given a negative report, or if the Council of Jerusalem had reached a different conclusion, we would not be gathered here today.

It's this journey from Jerusalem to Antioch that defines the church's life today. The most critical challenge facing the Reformed Church in America today is making the transition from being a settled denomination to becoming a missional church.

Remember this definition: A missional church places its commitment to participate in God's mission in the world at the center of its life and identity. As Christ's body, the church, we are called, gathered, formed, and then sent—sent through the power of the Spirit to join in what God is already doing in the world. This movement requires understanding how the dynamics of Jerusalem and Antioch are still active today.

It is easy and tempting to draw dichotomies, and to play tradition and mission over against each other. But in doing so there's great danger; we go down a path that does not serve us well, nor draw the appropriate lessons from the biblical account of the early church.

Much of the conflict in the church today reflects the tension between Jerusalem and Antioch. Here at this synod are those on the frontier and cutting edge of contemporary mission—imaginative new church starts, innovative worship, creative ministry in new subcultures, revitalizing congregations reaching their communities through new mission, and much more. Others at the synod bring a deep commitment to upholding the core of our identity as a Reformed body—our polity, forms of worship, confessions, and principles of governance that historically have shaped who we are.

A church-wide gathering such as this General Synod is in the tradition of the Council of Jerusalem. Like the early church, we believe that the Holy Spirit speaks to God's assembled people. So we can learn from the experience of Jerusalem and Antioch, and place our own journey today within that biblical story.

The journey between Jerusalem and Antioch was a two-way street. Those in Antioch knew that Jerusalem was the wellspring of their faith, the source from which the gospel message had first emerged. Those in Jerusalem affirmed what God's grace was doing and subsequently had to wrestle with how it changed their understanding of the gospel message. Through sending Barnabas, Jerusalem began by asking the right questions: What is God doing in Antioch? Is this the work of the same Spirit? How can we listen, learn, and encourage, as well as guide and instruct?

This mutual relationship led to a climate marked by honesty and transparency, and by deep commitment and openness to discovering the ongoing work of God's grace in their midst. This climate allowed the early church to grow, and to transform the known world. The church needs that climate today, between all those who have leadership and responsibilities in today's Jerusalems, and all those addressing the realities and challenges of today's Antiochs.

The churches in Jerusalem and Antioch remained in dialogue and relationship after the initial visit from Barnabas. Peter visited the church at Antioch, and Paul, in addition to his expansive missionary journeys from Antioch, visited Jerusalem at least three or four times. One of those visits was especially remarkable. At a time when famine affected Jerusalem and Judea, the churches planted from Antioch through Paul's missionary leadership collected funds for their fellow believers in Jerusalem. Paul, with Barnabas, delivered this assistance to the church leadership in Jerusalem. This was not simply an action meeting human need, but a deep demonstration of the mutual belonging between Antioch and Jerusalem.

As delegates to this General Synod, I invite you to view the present journey of the Reformed Church in America, and the issues that we face at this General Synod, through the New Testament lens of the relationship between Jerusalem and Antioch. Many of the challenges that the RCA faces today, reflected in your Workbook, are created by the dialogue between our missional journey and our historic identity. We're dealing with the question of whether a classis should only be defined geographically—a question raised by the missional vision of some congregations. A survey of attitudes in the RCA toward baptism is underway. Proposals for clarifying the accountability and expectations for commissioned pastors have been brought to this synod.

A task force has offered us a sound proposal for a "worship renewal project." Another report deals with the growing challenges and costs of training ministerial leadership, as candidates today are not only at our two RCA seminaries, but also scattered throughout the country and entering the RCA through the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency's process. Further, the Reformed and Missional Task Force brings us a deeply insightful report after two years of dialogue in the RCA, with proposals for how we rethink the roles of the classis and the consistory. Questions about how we fund our work together are also before us. All these examples and more reflect issues that come to the surface when we are on a journey from Jerusalem to Antioch.

What set this journey in motion in the twenty-first century for the RCA is Our Call, the ten-year goal to revitalize existing congregations and plant new congregations. The Spirit, of course, is the one who leads the church into God's mission. But just as in Acts, when Paul, Barnabas, and others set out in specific directions, the RCA's General Synod made intentional commitments in 2003 around church multiplication and congregational revitalization. We said it simply and clearly:

> …we believe God is calling the Reformed Church in America over the next ten years to focus its efforts and resources on
> - Starting new congregations and
> - Revitalizing existing congregations,
>
> thereby empowering fruitful and faithful ministries for the glory of God.

We have followed this commitment for the last seven years; it is bearing fruit, and we are being transformed in the process.

Our church multiplication process is a joy to behold. Today, there are 249 new congregations in the RCA where over 17,500 people are worshiping and becoming locally and globally engaged in mission. Further, more than one-third of these congregations are multiracial or ethnically different than the RCA Anglo majority. We are on course for starting four hundred new congregations by the end of Our Call in 2013.

These new congregations understand the challenges of Antioch. One of these congregations in Michigan has even taken the name of Antioch. Many are turning their attention to our cities—the urban areas which, tragically, in too many cases, RCA congregations deserted a few decades ago. These congregations are recognizing that the best way to reach a postmodern culture is through a countercultural expression of Christianity that is rooted in the city and loves the city, but has a vision of transformation that begins with the individual and reaches into the community. The challenge of the church in Antioch—ministry in the midst of a cosmopolitan, racially diverse, religiously curious, foreign culture—is being experienced two thousand years later by many of our new RCA church starts. And as in the time of Acts, "a great number have become believers and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21).

But we face significant challenges. The need for pastoral leaders who are uniquely gifted and trained for the task of starting new congregations is growing rapidly. Our present system of ministerial training was designed to shape leaders for Jerusalem rather than Antioch. Yet, I know the leaders of our seminaries are alert to this challenge and dedicated to addressing it.

Also deeply problematic, however, is that our polity and practice make new congregations essentially invisible to our official statistics and reporting until they become "organized." Briefly, here's how the system works: a new church start is begun, often by a parenting church. In fact, about one hundred established RCA congregations are currently in the process of birthing a new congregation. The new church begins to gather and worship. At some point a "New Congregation Plan" is submitted and approved, bringing the new congregation into the wider RCA network, and making it eligible for various kinds of assistance. Eventually, the congregation becomes "organized" as a church in the RCA, and only then does it "count" in our polity. Often that process takes four years or more.

But until that point, nothing is officially reported. The number of people worshiping, or baptized, or making confession of faith appears nowhere. You have to dig deep into the appendix in the "Orange Book" for such statistics. Those who hold so much promise for our future are officially invisible in the present. This makes no sense at all, and dishonors those experiencing the grace and love of God in Christ in these emerging congregations. Let me show you a graph that illustrates this. On the screen you'll see a yellow line that shows confessing membership for all organized RCA churches in three classes; this corresponds with the numbers you'd see in the *Minutes of General Synod*. These three classes also voluntarily track data related to new church starts. Let's see what happens if we add in those worshiping in these congregations that have not yet officially organized. Imagine what this would look like if we had this data from all of our classes.

Here's an additional problem. The major tangible difference for a congregation once it becomes organized is that it must begin to pay assessments. We have to rethink and reform how we nurture and maintain strong links between our new congregations and the wider denominational fellowship from the very beginning of these church starts. An overture from four classes in the Synod of Heartland presents a way to address this challenge.

We can easily change the problem of statistical invisibility for our new church starts. In direct response to these concerns I instructed the General Synod office to develop a "New Church Report Form" to be completed by new church starts annually, starting next year, under the supervision of the classes and in parallel with the annual Consistorial Report Form that is completed by our organized churches. This data will be published in an integrated fashion alongside the data for organized churches, arranged by classis, in the annual *Minutes of the General Synod*.

The "data gap" created by the statistical invisibility of our new churches can be addressed quite straightforwardly. Where your help is needed, as the assembled body, is on the questions raised by the "relationship gap" that must be bridged as our new churches are enfolded into the RCA; this challenge is greater than the numerical or financial challenges, and concerns our life together as a whole. My hope is that the wisdom and insight that each of you bring to the All-Synod Advisory Committees will provide guidance and direction in the remaining three years of Our Call. In these advisory committees, along with considering the data, you'll be discussing how new and existing congregations learn from and enrich one another. You will have the opportunity to give advice and, if needed, propose recommendations to the General Synod about the relationship of our new churches to questions of denominational formation, identity, and engagement in shared mission. This is part of the challenge of figuring out the relationship of Jerusalem and Antioch in our own day.

Our Call was clear about focusing on revitalizing our existing congregations as well as starting new ones. Indeed, for some regions of the RCA, where existing congregations are struggling to survive in the midst of a declining population and a depressed economy, church multiplication seems daunting or nearly impossible, while congregational revitalization is imperative.

At its core, congregational revitalization is the work of God's Spirit. We know what it looks like, however. Moreover, in seven years we've learned how to prepare the soil of congregations, making the work of revitalization more likely to bear fruit.

What is a revitalizing congregation? It is "a body of believers, responsive to God's call, developing a faithful and fruitful life through new mission, new ministries, and new members." In the Report of the General Synod Council on Revitalization and RCA Congregations (pp. 197-206), you'll find a full picture, with descriptions of our goals, expected outcomes, strategies, and current data that are breathtaking. We have been on a serious, seven-year process of discovering the keys that can unlock the Spirit's work of revitalization in a congregation's life.

One of those keys is pastors participating with other pastors in coached revitalizing networks. Presently, 479 pastors are involved in 77 such network groups. We've discovered the power of coaching relationships and trained scores of people in this skill, providing support for pastors facing the inevitable challenges and conflicts that come in the process of congregational revitalization.

Since the beginning of Our Call, however, we have struggled with two questions: How do we measure revitalization? And do we set goals for the numerical growth of our members?

Revitalization, in the end, is not about our own self-preservation. That's what we have to keep clear. It's about God transforming lives, communities, and the world. Congregations seek renewed spiritual vitality and health for the sake of extending God's grace and love to the world around them. Therefore, revitalization efforts equip people and congregations to participate more fully in God's mission through more faithful discipleship, the discovery of gifts, a deeper practice of prayer, worship renewal, empowering lay leadership, and a radical attentiveness to the world outside their doors.

But how is that measured? How do we know whether or not it's happening? Author Reggie McNeal, a frequent speaker in RCA gatherings, has called for a new "missional scorecard." Instead of counting "butts in the pew," he challenges us to measure the impact a congregation is making in its community. We have RCA congregations working on how they will measure "missional vital signs." But this is a challenge that we are far from solving in the RCA as a whole.

We can also measure the making of new disciples, for instance, through adult baptisms, professions of faith, and reaffirmations of faith. Further, you'll see in the Workbook the rigorous way in which specific goals related to revitalization have measurable outcomes. The General Synod Council is holding us accountable to achieve these ends.

But that brings us back to the challenge of numerical growth in members. From the time Our Call was adopted in 2003 we've had a debate about growth. In part, that's fueled by the decline in our official numbers. We've been reluctant to honestly face "what is so." And we must look at reality. The number of confessing members in our churches has declined by about 8 percent since 2003. Even more sobering, if you look at each classis, you'll find that 82 percent of them have been in decline since 2003. Some have argued that our clear and stated goal must be to reverse this trend.

Others have said the pace and amount of growth ought to be left to the work of the Holy Spirit. Many note that congregational settings and possibilities vary enormously. Still others say that growth goals simply induce guilt in some congregations that are doing all they can to carry out faithful ministry.

A deeper problem is that there is good reason to be somewhat skeptical about these numbers. As we all know, assessments are tied to confessing members. You are aware of the temptation to reclassify people in your congregation for budgetary reasons. That's one reason why we must find a new way to determine assessments. Our current system is pastorally harmful, theologically suspect, and pragmatically unfair. A task force, under the direction of last year's General Synod, has been exploring the role of assessments in our funding models; you can read their report on pages 75 through 77.

Further, we get a different picture of what is happening in our churches when we compare congregational income trends to the numbers of confessing members that are reported. In the last decade the number of confessing members reported on the Consistorial Report Form decreased by 15 percent while total giving increased by 17 percent. More importantly, when the reality of those in our newly emerging congregations is added to the statistical mix, the picture changes again, as you will see in material provided to you in your advisory groups.

But we come back to our original challenge. Should numerical growth be a goal? Perhaps we are helped by the story of Antioch. Three times in the twelve verses in Acts 11 that describe the church, Luke includes references to "a great many people" or "a great number" turning to the Lord and becoming part of this church. That's typical in Acts. These are not numbers; these are people—individuals who are encountering the living Christ. That's why these statistics matter. We're not talking about growth for growth's sake. We're talking about the number of people brought into the fellowship of the grace and love of God in Christ and living as his disciples. Of course we yearn for that number to grow.

That doesn't compel us, however, to set rigid numerical targets as if to predict the work of God's Spirit. But if we faithfully invite and focus on the revitalizing work of the Spirit in our congregations, then we can surely expect, in God's own time, fruitful new ministry, new mission, and new members.

Within our polity, the assembly closest to the life of our congregations is the classis. Over the past seven years, one of our basic challenges has been to discover how the classis can best participate in the work of Our Call.

When I've met this past year with our eight regional synod executives, one of the questions raised, which I still carry with me, is this: "How do we build healthier assemblies that encourage the missional engagement of our congregations?" In other words, how do we nurture courageous classis leadership that fosters accountability and strengthens a missional focus?

The report from the Reformed and Missional Task Force brings this challenge clearly to this General Synod. Its survey of nearly nine hundred RCA ministers, elders, and deacons found that although these leaders do not perceive the basic structure of our four assemblies as an obstacle to missional engagement, they express a high level of frustration with how those assemblies are functioning. This was most true at the classis level. The Reformed and Missional Task Force report puts it this way:

> If we are to better equip and resource local congregations and ministries for a missional future, it is imperative that we "re-imagine" the classis and place higher priority on

> the role of the classis to focus on the world….Another way to say this is that the classis needs to…move beyond "maintenance" to "missional" (p. 111).

The task force has offered helpful recommendations to that end, including proposed changes in our *Book of Church Order* that would reemphasize the missional responsibilities of the classis. It's like Jerusalem sharpening its focus by paying more attention to Antioch.

Congregational revitalization cannot happen in isolation. The commitment and support of each classis is a crucial ingredient. Therefore, in keeping with the directions set by the Reformed and Missional Task Force, I offer the following proposal:

P-1
That the General Synod urge each classis to:

1. **Develop specific and measurable revitalization goals, focused on the three dimensions of the Great Commandment and Great Commission: our love for God, our love for neighbor (missional impact), and the number of new disciples in our churches;**
2. **Invite at least five congregations to make a specific commitment to becoming revitalizing churches, and provide mutual support and assistance in this process;**
3. **Project the trends and establish goals for confessing members, and other categories, anticipated in the next three years;**
4. **Share the stories of revitalization with the wider church through the General Synod Council (GSC); and further,**

to instruct the GSC to include information on the classes' progress toward these goals in its annual report to General Synod during the last three years of Our Call, 2011, 2012, and 2013.

[*Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the All-Synod Advisory Committees on Multiplication and Revitalization. See pages 207-208.*]

The major initiatives of church multiplication and congregational revitalization are possible only through the other elements of Our Call: leadership, discipleship, mission, and a multiracial future freed from racism. In last year's report I focused significantly on discipleship. This year I want to highlight one challenge in leadership.

During the past couple of years I've called together retreats with "young emerging leaders" in the RCA. These are young people identified by others with gifts for future ministerial leadership, and many are from non-RCA backgrounds. They've been drawn to the RCA because of our missional convictions, our embrace of the Belhar Confession, our ecumenical commitments, and our evangelical spirit and they appreciate our rich history and distinctive Reformed character. A number are from non-Anglo racial backgrounds. We share together in these retreats the stories of our journey with Christ.

Often, I've heard from those who didn't grow up in the RCA the difficulties of breaking into our "system." Many students today enter seminaries out of a deep calling to ministry, but without being certain which denomination will be their home. Some encounter the RCA through friends or through reading, and are drawn to our theology, and especially to our missional commitment. They explore the process for pursuing ordination. The first step is belonging to an RCA congregation, and being recommended by its consistory to be taken under care by a classis.

Now think about this. For someone raised in the RCA, or belonging to an RCA congregation, this makes sense. But what if you're in seminary in New Haven, Connecticut, or Jackson, Mississippi, where there are no RCA congregations? Or take my own case. When I first sensed the call to become ordained in the RCA, I was living in Missoula, Montana. There was only one RCA congregation in the state, and it was about 175 miles away, on the other side of the Continental Divide.

I've listened to Cor Kors, our director of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, share his frustration that gifted students he talks with who are drawn to the RCA have no reasonable way to join an RCA congregation. His stories were often echoed at the young emerging leaders retreats.

Our present pastoral formation process is prepared with Jerusalem in mind. It works well for those who were brought up in RCA congregations and whose call to ministry emerged from that setting. But our Antioch experiences seem to suggest the need for a modification in order to accommodate those who are drawn to the RCA from the outside, through all sorts of channels. We could make an alternative provision for candidates to be accepted under care directly by a classis when prior membership in an RCA congregation is not feasible. The process, as now, would still require deep experience in the RCA before ordination, but wouldn't put this as a prerequisite for every candidate at the beginning. Therefore, I make the following proposal:

P-2
To instruct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, to make provision in the RCA's Book of Church Order, in the article "Supervision of Students of Theology" (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8), that under certain circumstances a candidate may apply directly to a classis to be enrolled as a candidate for the ministry; with report to the 2011 General Synod.

[Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance. See page 184.]

This General Synod will be remembered for decades to come as the session at which the Belhar Confession officially became the fourth confessional standard of the Reformed Church in America. Others, including our president, will be speaking to the significance of this event. I offer only one observation.

Adopting the Belhar certainly acknowledges the past suffering and courageous witness of our brothers and sisters from southern Africa. But even more importantly, adopting the Belhar will shape the future witness and life of the Reformed Church in America. In the past few years, as Our Call and our church multiplication efforts began expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of the RCA, it became clear that the Belhar is, in my judgment, a providential gift, providing a confessional foundation for a multiracial future freed from racism.

The church in Antioch, out of its missional calling, had to confront what God's work in Jesus meant for the division between Jew and Greek—a matter so pressing that it affected who could eat together at the same table. Believers in Antioch grasped the radical nature of reconciliation brought by Jesus. Their theology, and their confession of faith, was affected. Jesus, for instance, was no longer just the Messiah; Jesus was Christ and Lord.

It is worth remembering, therefore, that it has been our own missional journey, given direc-

tion by Our Call in 2003, that underscored the need for confessing our faith in fresh ways. While the Belhar was presented to us years before, it became alive as a potential fourth confession when we began to understand more fully how God was working in our midst, and shaping a missional future.

The Belhar also calls us, powerfully, to the unity of the church. Let me quote a portion of what we now confess:

> …this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity.

Those are moving and inspiring words, drawn deeply from Scripture. They remind us of our ongoing biblical call to unity, even in the midst of difficult and trying circumstances. These words can guide us as we face our differences both within our fellowship and among our ecumenical partners, who in turn also struggle with differences within their fellowships. This is true for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, with whom the RCA maintains a valuable commitment, secured through years of faithful dialogue, in the spirit of mutual affirmation and admonition provided for in the Formula of Agreement. As we deal with overtures addressing this relationship, let us remember the promises we have made to one another, and be mindful of our obligation to bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

As we consider the source and nature of our unity, let us return once again to the story of Jerusalem and Antioch. One scholar, Jerome Crowe, described the enormous diversity that existed in the church at Antioch, comprised as it was of many individual house churches. He then says this:

> Where are we to locate the unifying factor in all that abundant and even bewildering diversity? Certainly not in...common codes of morality, uniform styles of worship, a basic organizational structure or style of leadership. What unified them all, Jews and Gentiles alike, was something much simpler and far more seated. It was a basic attitude toward one man, a Jew not long dead, Jesus of Nazareth. They claimed that they experienced him as a living presence in their midst, medium of God's saving action and of the Spirit manifest in the life and mission of their community…
>
> The experience of the communities both in Jerusalem and in Antioch went to show that unity was never something to be taken for granted…Quite the contrary, the koinonia that was the gift of the Spirit could be fractured by human failures and fostered by care for the needs of other communities—practical demonstrations of the kind of unity the Spirit inspired. The task of ecumenism in the Church is as old as the first community in Jerusalem, but it was never more urgent than in the new situation in Antioch.

My friends, that task remains urgent in this day. The fact that Jerusalem and Antioch found

the ways to preserve their unity in the midst of staggering differences is the reason why we are here today. Certainly, we are obliged to do no less.

Our call to unity has also led to deeper cooperation with the Christian Reformed Church in the past year. Together we've reviewed our many current areas of collaboration, and determined strategically where future cooperation can strengthen the mission that we each are called to. In April, a large group of parent church leaders and church planters from the CRC and RCA met in Orlando, and together we are pursuing avenues of support for each of our future church multiplication and revitalization efforts.

That brings me back to my time in Jerusalem. When I was there with the RCA/CRC group, Marlin and Sally Vis took us outside the city to where we viewed a series of hillsides. We could see a series of concentric circles etched into the ground going around these hills from bottom to top. Marlin told us that these were ancient "feeding paths." Shepherds led the flocks around and around the hillside on these paths in order to feed their sheep.

But then Marlin pointed out other, less worn paths that we could follow with our eyes. These led away from a hillside into a valley, and on to other hills and destinations. These, Marlin said, were called "paths of righteousness." The feeding paths simply went around and around a hill, but the paths of righteousness led somewhere new.

How many of our congregations are caught in the comfortable cycle of familiar feeding paths?

The early church moved from a feeding path to a path of righteousness. That ten day, three hundred mile journey from Jerusalem to Antioch followed a path of righteousness. The same was true when the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus and Iconium, to Lystra and Derbe; and on journeys to Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and beyond.

Following Our Call, the RCA has embarked on a journey leading us on some unfamiliar "paths of righteousness," taking us to places like San Francisco, Philadelphia, Denver, Toronto, Chicago. Many of our congregations, in places like Traverse City, Cedar Falls, Poughkeepsie, and throughout North America are taking steps outward from well-worn feeding paths to destinations where God's mission is leading them.

Together, we are walking the dusty road from Jerusalem to Antioch. We're with one another, beckoned to God's future. The One who died and rose is with us. The Spirit creates and sustains our community. And we know that we are being led on paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
>
> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
>
> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Amen.

Report of the General Synod Council Serving as the Executive Committee of the General Synod

The Son of God gathers, preserves, and protects the church by his Spirit and his Word (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 54). The church exists to announce, teach, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church speaks and it acts. For those of us in the Reformed tradition, the church governs its life and it determines how best to carry out its mission through its assemblies.

God seeks certain characteristics, and the world also watches to see if those characteristics are evident in our life and work together. Our ability to go forth and preach the gospel is the work of our congregations and the denomination. Together we are a body of committed believers in covenant with one another. Christ's mission is enhanced when the Word of God and our love for each other is the foundation for order, discipline, and effectiveness. This Reformed understanding of the church and the manner through which we govern our life together is foundational to Our Call.

Our prayer throughout the year and as we meet as a General Synod body is that our unity and attention to governance will glorify God.

> The General Synod Council is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It shall act as the executive committee of the General Synod and it shall administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It shall implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies. It shall support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the several commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church (*Book of Church Order* [*BCO*], Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1).

The General Synod Council serves "as the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod, and as the Board of Trustees of the General Synod as may be required by law" (*BCO,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6a).

For a full listing of the responsibilities of the General Synod Council, delegates will want to refer to the Bylaws of the General Synod (*BCO,* Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6).

The work of the General Synod Council, as directed by previous General Synods, is reported to this General Synod in two areas: 1) matters of governance—the work the General Synod Council (GSC) has done with respect to a) the meeting of the General Synod, b) matters of its own organization, including its oversight and stewardship of the financial resources given to it, c) its support and supervision of denominational staff and the general secretary, d) the work of its committees, teams, and racial and ethnic councils, and e) a general overview of the work of the church are reported by the GSC in its role as the General Synod Executive Committee; and 2) the work the GSC has done with regard to the oversight of the mission and ministry assigned to it by the General Synod under the rubric of Our Call, the General Synod's ten-year goal, and which is reported by the GSC in its role as the General Synod's program agency. Referrals addressed to the GSC from previous General Synods are dealt with throughout this report.

Review of Regional Synod Minutes

The General Synod office received and read the 2009 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York. The minutes were found to be in order.

Ad Interim Appointments

The following persons served for one or more meetings on the body indicated, based on the ad interim approval of the General Synod Council:

To the New Brunswick Theological Seminary Board of Trustees:
Michael Beals, Class of 2013
To the Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees:
Karen Barker and George Brown, Class of 2012
To the Commission on Nominations:
Annie Lee Phillips, Class of 2011

If members are serving on an ongoing basis, their names are submitted for General Synod approval in the report of the Commission on Nominations.

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

GENERAL SYNOD MEETING

Referral of Business

The 2009 General Synod tabled R-52 from the report of the Board of Benefits Services due to lack of time to address the issue appropriately. The recommendation needed to be taken off the table in order for the 2010 General Synod to consider it. The recommendation was be addressed during the report from the Board of Benefits Services in all-synod advisory committee discussions prior to discussion and decision in a plenary session.

R-2
To take from the table the 2009 recommendation R-52 from the report of the Board of Benefits Services. (ADOPTED)

The business of General Synod was assigned to the appropriate committees as presented in the General Synod Workbook.

R-3
To approve the agenda and schedule of the General Synod as presented in the General Synod Workbook. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Offering

The General Synod received offerings at the opening worship on Thursday evening and at the closing worship on Tuesday afternoon. The offerings have been designated by General Synod president James Seawood to support education in Haiti and among the Maasai in Kenya.

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 reported on classes' payments of General Synod assessments and reported whether there were any delegates who could not be seated because of irregularities.

Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

The General Synod of 2009 adopted and referred to the classes for approval seven amendments to the *Book of Church Order*. The amendments are recorded in the 2009 *Minutes of General Synod* as noted.

		Approved	Disapproved
1.	**Additional General Synod Delegates from Underrepresented Groups** (*MGS 2009,* R-14, p. 90) *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1 and Article 3 Section	**26**	**20**
2.	**Adding the Belhar Confession as a Doctrinal Standard** (*MGS 2009,* R-55, p. 247) *BCO,* Preamble	**32**	**14**
3.	**Recourse for the Decision of an Investigative Committee** (*MGS 2009,* R-58, p. 290) *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 6	**43**	**3**
4.	**Supersession of a Consistory – Additional Condition: Financial Irregularities** (*MGS 2009,* R-59, p. 291-292) *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 12	**46**	**0**
5.	**Supersession of a Consistory at the Request of Consistory** (*MGS 2009,* R-60, p. 292) *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 12	**45**	**1**
6.	**Clarification of the Process for Supersession of a Consistory** (*MGS 2009,* R-61, p. 293-294) *BCO,* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7	**43**	**3**
7.	**Receiving Ministers from Other Denominations** (*MGS 2009,* R-62, p. 296-298) *BCO,* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11	**43**	**3**

Amendment 1 did not receive the required 2/3 votes; therefore, the following recommendations are offered:

R-4
To declare amendments 3 through 7 to be approved and that they be incorporated into the 2010 edition of the *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

R-5
To declare amendment 2 to be approved and that it be incorporated into the 2010 edition of the *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

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

The 2009 General Synod approved in first reading for recommendation to the 2010 General Synod the following amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod:

Church Growth Fund Representation at General Synod—*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Section 13 (*MGS 2009*, R-63, p. 298)

Membership of the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship—*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12a (*MGS 2009*, R-64, p. 299)

Commission Additional Appointments—*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8 (*MGS 2009*, R-15, pp. 91-92)

R-6
To declare the above amendments approved by the 2010 General Synod in first reading to be incorporated into the 2010 edition of the Bylaws of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Appointment of the 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 VI).

R-7
To appoint Barbara Boers as 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 VI). In order for Kenneth Bradsell, director of Operations and Support, to have authority to sign legal documents for the corporation of the General Synod, it is necessary to approve the following recommendation:

R-8
To appoint Kenneth Bradsell assistant secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Planning

A General Synod planning team works on behalf of the GSC annually to propose an agenda, schedule, worship, and special events and activities for the annual meeting. The team members this year were Carol Bechtel, Peg Luidens, Kenneth Bradsell (facilitator), Jessica Bratt, Ken Eriks, Juel Grevenstuk, Deborah Morris, Rodger Price, Christina Tazelaar, Tim

Vink, and Charlie White. The team reported to the GSC at its spring meeting. The meeting plan outlined below was reviewed and adopted.

The team understood from the beginning of its work on the 2010 synod that the meeting, as in recent years, must be designed in ways that convey to all participants the commitment of the RCA to its stated mission and vision, and to accomplishing the General Synod's goals as described in Our Call. The General Synod officers and the GSC had urged the team this year to "frame" the business of the 2010 meeting around the two foundational elements of Our Call, church multiplication and church revitalization.

The officers, the general secretary, and the members of many commissions urged the team to keep in mind as it planned the 2010 synod 1) to continue the practice begun in 2007 of making provision for all delegates to discuss and respond to issues that seem to have the widest impact on the life and mission of the church, 2) to make better use of time so that reports of all General Synod commissions and other entities get fuller consideration by the delegates, and 3) to utilize the arrangement of delegates at round tables for discussion, discernment, and the formation of community. The team has attempted to address these concerns in its plan for the meeting.

The team continues to understand that its ongoing task on behalf of the GSC is to offer ways to conduct the meeting of the synod so that the manner in which the church does its work as an assembly reflects the church's values—in essence, that we act with each other in ways that model the body of Christ in the world.

The planning team conducted its work according to the following values:

- General Synod is a place where the church has the opportunity to live into its future. Hope is defined as God going before us and making all things new. The synod engages in transformational work when:
  - It uses means that enable knowledge, understanding, and full insight…
    …of issues.
    …of the work of the larger church.
    …of relationship/community.
  - There is empowerment of everyone as a matter of faithfulness to the gospel (for example, for this year, emphasis on becoming a multiracial church).
  - Delegates are affirmed in the knowledge that they are sons and daughters of Jesus Christ and recognize that identity in each other.
  - Delegates trust and remember that the Spirit is working in and through local congregations; in and through the agencies, assemblies, and entities of the church; and in and through the General Synod.
  - Delegates, guests, officers, and staff are hospitable to one another.
  - The agenda for meeting integrates work, worship, fellowship, and prayer.

General Synod Meeting Location

The location for the next annual meeting of the General Synod is Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from June 16-21, 2011. The General Synod is able to respond to invitations from the assemblies of the church to meet in other locations. Planning for the meeting requires invitations to be submitted at least two years in advance of the proposed meeting.

Developing a Church-wide Discernment Process

At its October 2009 meeting the RCA's General Synod Council, with feedback from the RCA commissions meeting simultaneously, passed the following recommendation:

> To instruct the general secretary to appoint a team inclusive of GSC staff, up to three members of the GSC, and up to three members of General Synod commissions to develop a plan that engages the assemblies of the church (consistories, classes, regional synods, and the General Synod) in a process of discernment of the RCA's continuing call to mission and ministry, to begin in 2010; and further, to instruct the general secretary to direct the team to include in the process a plan for a simultaneous General Synod and an all church mission/ministry immersion event in the summer of 2012 in the San Francisco/San Francisco Bay area; and further, to report the plan and event design to the GSC at its March 2010 meeting (GSC 09-30, Oct. 2009).

At the general secretary's invitation, the following participants gathered for an initial meeting in Chicago from March 22 through 23, 2010: Wes Granberg-Michaelson, Jessica Bratt, Ken Eriks, Tom De Vries, Evan Vermeer, Stephanie Doeschot, Don Poest, Gerri Yoshida, Marijke Strong, and Harold Delhagen. Tony Vis, Scot Sherman, Nancy Miller, and Cora Taitt were interested in being part of this process but were unable to attend.

A few reflection questions guided our work:

- What impact has Our Call had on the RCA? Where has it brought us? How are we changing as a result?
- What are the components of an effective discernment process?
- What are the best ways to listen to a wide range of voices in the church?

The meeting was marked by immersion in Scripture and prayer. The team identified key values to guide this process, and found a great degree of consensus around steps that could lead the RCA from General Synod 2010 to the conclusion of Our Call in 2013. They reviewed the recent history of events and processes that have facilitated discernment in the RCA (e.g., the mission and vision statement, Mission 2000 and the Pentecost Letter, the adoption of Our Call, and the One Thing event). They also explored what role a denomination-wide event can play in this type of a process. The reality that there is a decreasing likelihood of having the combined General Synod and event in San Francisco in 2012 freed the team to explore what role a separate (i.e., non-governance) event could have, and what the optimal timing might be for such an event. The group proposes an event for the winter or early spring of 2012.

Below is an emerging outline of the proposed discernment process and its implementation.

Discovering God's Direction: A Process of Prayer and Discernment

Biblical Foundations

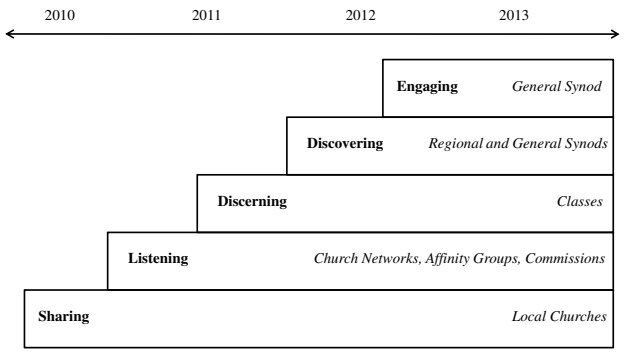
- Acts 11—Jerusalem and Antioch
- Colossians 3:12-17—Deepening relationship

Validating Values

- Patience and commitment to process
- Personal connection
- Wide range of voices
- Invitation versus inspection
- Valuing both past and present
- Multi-option delivery system
- Deepening trust through relationship and process
- Telling stories as illustrations of God at work
- Local church and classis commitment to the process
- Simple and reproducible discernment model

Exploration Questions as We Share, Listen, Discern, Discover, and Engage

- Sharing: How is God working…
  - Within you?
  - Through you?
  - Ahead of you?
- Listening: What is God saying?
- Discerning: What common things is God showing us?
- Discovering: Where does God's work in our past and our present point us into our future?
- Engagement: What adjustments is God asking us to make?



OVERVIEW OF THE GSC'S WORK ON MATTERS OF ITS INTERNAL GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

During the past year the General Synod Council continued to operate internally according to its modifications of a not-for-profit governance practice known as "policy governance" developed by John and Miriam Carver. Policy governance has allowed the GSC to enhance its ability to monitor various "ends" and objectives established to fulfill the General Synod's directives regarding Our Call, the General Synod's ten-year goal for mission and ministry. Policy governance has also enhanced the GSC's ability to both support and monitor the work of its general secretary and staff through a series of "limitations" policies. The GSC has also established and holds itself accountable for its own work through policies concerning its own internal "governance" and its relationships with the general secretary and staff.

During the past year both the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and the Board of Benefits Services concluded work on their plans to also become boards operating with policy governance. In the coming months the GSC will work with BOBS and the MFCA to clarify the governing relationship of these agencies with the GSC in its capacity as the executive committee of the General Synod. The work is anticipated to be completed in time for fall meetings of all three entities.

RCA Salary Structure for FY 2010

For many years prior to 2008 the RCA staff salary structure was based on the average clergy salary of full-time ministers serving in local congregations, which was determined by a survey. In 2006 the General Synod Council adopted policies to govern its own work and to establish clear guidelines for oversight of its staff. The policy pertaining to staff com-

pensation states: "With respect to employment, compensation, and benefits and recognition of employees, consultants, contract workers, and volunteers, the general secretary will not cause or allow jeopardy to fiscal integrity or to public image or decisions that are unrelated to the relevant market" (GSC Policy EL-7).

The general secretary instructed the personnel office to begin a study of the RCA staff compensation methodology, a study begun in the fall of 2006 with the assistance of an external personnel consultant. The completed study led to a new system developed by The Employers' Association, a Grand Rapids, Michigan, not-for-profit human resources support group incorporated in 1939. Two key factors were considered in the development of the new system. First, an evaluation system was utilized to ascertain that internal equity was reestablished for all positions based on their ultimate contribution to the RCA's mission and vision. Secondly, all internal positions were benchmarked against externally appropriate positions (by responsibility) through the use of salary compensation surveys in the private, non-profit, and church sectors, as well as relative comparison of jobs in national and regional areas. This new system is sensitive to regional differences in cost of living and takes into account the RCA's varied benefit package.

This new system incorporates a model that utilizes fourteen levels instead of the six levels in the previous classification system. The new levels span grades 10 to 23; Grade 10 represents the most junior clerical positions and Grade 23 represents the top executive position, general secretary. The following is a rough correlation between the old and new systems:

Classification	VI A and B	=	Grade 10 and 11
Classification	V	=	Grade 12 and 13
Classification	IV	=	Grade 14
Classification	IIIA & B	=	Grade 15, 16, 17
Classification	II	=	Grade 18, 19, 20, 21, 22
Classification	I	=	Grade 23

To further clarify, the grades fall into the following categories of the GSC staff salary administration format:

Professional Associates, Executive Assistants, Administrative Assistants,
Secretarial and Office Staff: Grades 14-10
Executive Staff: Grades 22-15
General Secretary: Grade 23

The following tables represent the 2009 salary ranges by region, which were used again in 2010:

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA COMPENSATION STRUCTURE - MICHIGAN

2009							
	HOURLY PAY RATE			ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE			RANGE
GRADE	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	SPREAD
10	11.19	$12.79	14.39	21,823	$24,941	28,058	25%
11	12.59	$14.39	16.19	24,553	$28,061	31,568	25%
12	14.27	$16.79	19.31	27,829	$32,741	37,652	30%
13	16.99	$19.99	22.99	33,133	$38,981	44,828	30%
14	19.79	$23.99	28.19	38,594	$46,781	54,967	35%
15	23.08	$27.97	32.86	44,997	$54,542	64,086	35%
16	26.55	$33.19	39.83	51,776	$64,721	77,665	40%
17	31.37	$39.21	47.05	61,168	$76,460	91,751	40%
18	35.77	$46.16	56.55	69,759	$90,012	110,265	45%
19	41.52	$53.58	65.64	80,973	$104,481	127,989	45%
20	46.72	$62.29	77.86	91,099	$121,466	151,832	50%
21	53.45	$71.27	89.09	104,232	$138,977	173,721	50%
22	58.94	$81.29	103.64	114,924	$158,516	202,107	55%
23	66.59	$91.85	117.11	129,853	$179,108	228,362	55%

MICHIGAN USED AS BASE RATE OF PAY

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA COMPENSATION STRUCTURE - NEW YORK

2009							
	HOURLY PAY RATE			ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE			RANGE
GRADE	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	SPREAD
10	12.64	$14.45	16.26	24,655	$28,178	31,700	25%
11	14.23	$16.26	18.29	27,744	$31,707	35,670	25%
12	16.12	$18.97	21.82	31,443	$36,992	42,540	30%
13	19.20	$22.59	25.98	37,443	$44,051	50,658	30%
14	22.36	$27.10	31.84	43,597	$52,845	62,093	35%
15	26.07	$31.60	37.13	50,837	$61,620	72,404	35%
16	30.01	$37.51	45.01	58,516	$73,145	87,773	40%
17	35.44	$44.30	53.16	69,108	$86,385	103,662	40%
18	40.42	$52.16	63.90	78,827	$101,712	124,597	45%
19	46.93	$60.55	74.17	91,506	$118,073	144,639	45%
20	52.79	$70.39	87.99	102,945	$137,261	171,576	50%
21	60.39	$80.52	100.65	117,761	$157,014	196,268	50%
22	66.60	$91.86	117.12	129,867	$179,127	228,387	55%
23	75.25	$103.79	132.33	146,733	$202,391	258,048	55%

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA COMPENSATION STRUCTURE - IOWA

2009							
	HOURLY PAY RATE			ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE			RANGE
GRADE	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	SPREAD
10	10.97	$12.54	14.11	21,396	$24,453	27,510	25%
11	12.34	$14.10	15.86	24,058	$27,495	30,932	25%
12	13.99	$16.46	18.93	27,282	$32,097	36,912	30%
13	16.65	$19.59	22.53	32,470	$38,201	43,931	30%
14	19.39	$23.50	27.61	37,806	$45,825	53,844	35%
15	22.61	$27.41	32.21	44,096	$53,450	62,803	35%
16	26.02	$32.53	39.04	50,747	$63,434	76,120	40%
17	30.74	$38.42	46.10	59,935	$74,919	89,903	40%
18	35.06	$45.24	55.42	68,369	$88,218	108,067	45%
19	40.70	$52.51	64.32	79,356	$102,395	125,433	45%
20	45.78	$61.04	76.30	89,271	$119,028	148,785	50%
21	52.37	$69.83	87.29	102,126	$136,169	170,211	50%
22	57.75	$79.66	101.57	112,619	$155,337	198,055	55%
23	65.26	$90.02	114.78	127,266	$175,539	223,812	55%

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA COMPENSATION STRUCTURE - CALIFORNIA

2009							
	HOURLY PAY RATE			ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE			RANGE
GRADE	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	SPREAD
10	12.31	$14.07	15.83	24,007	$27,437	30,866	25%
11	13.85	$15.83	17.81	27,010	$30,869	34,727	25%
12	15.70	$18.47	21.24	30,614	$36,017	41,419	30%
13	18.69	$21.99	25.29	36,448	$42,881	49,313	30%
14	21.77	$26.39	31.01	42,455	$51,461	60,466	35%
15	25.38	$30.76	36.14	49,485	$59,982	70,479	35%
16	29.22	$36.52	43.82	56,971	$71,214	85,457	40%
17	34.50	$43.13	51.76	67,283	$84,104	100,924	40%
18	39.35	$50.78	62.21	76,741	$99,021	121,301	45%
19	45.68	$58.94	72.20	89,073	$114,933	140,793	45%
20	51.39	$68.52	85.65	100,211	$133,614	167,018	50%
21	58.79	$78.39	97.99	114,645	$152,861	191,076	50%
22	64.83	$89.42	114.01	126,418	$174,369	222,320	55%
23	73.25	$101.03	128.81	142,831	$197,009	251,186	55%

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA COMPENSATION STRUCTURE - ILLINOIS

2009							
HOURLY PAY RATE				ANNUALIZED SALARY RATE			RANGE
GRADE	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	LOW	POLICY	HIGH	SPREAD
10	12.08	$13.81	15.54	23,563	$26,930	30,296	25%
11	13.60	$15.54	17.48	26,515	$30,303	34,091	25%
12	15.42	$18.14	20.86	30,067	$35,373	40,679	30%
13	18.35	$21.59	24.83	35,785	$42,101	48,416	30%
14	21.37	$25.90	30.43	41,667	$50,505	59,343	35%
15	24.92	$30.20	35.49	48,584	$58,890	69,196	35%
16	28.68	$35.85	43.02	55,926	$69,908	83,889	40%
17	33.87	$42.34	50.81	66,050	$82,563	99,076	40%
18	38.63	$49.85	61.07	75,336	$97,208	119,079	45%
19	44.84	$57.86	70.88	87,441	$112,827	138,213	45%
20	50.45	$67.27	84.09	98,382	$131,177	163,971	50%
21	57.73	$76.97	96.21	112,569	$150,092	187,614	50%
22	63.65	$87.79	111.93	124,113	$171,191	218,268	55%
23	71.92	$99.20	126.48	140,244	$193,440	246,636	55%

The classification system evaluates positions based on duties and tasks as identified by the position incumbent and as verified/validated by his or her manager. As positions change and duties are modified, the system allows for reevaluation and placement of employees into different appropriate ranges. It also provides management with objective criteria when informing employees what must be done to advance within both the organization and within his or her assigned pay range. The system, when reviewed and updated regularly based on competitive benchmark pay data (as opposed to applying across the board adjustments that may not reflect actual pay practices), will serve the church well as it seeks to advance God's kingdom.

General Secretary's Review

The General Synod Council has a Relationship and Review Committee appointed annually by the moderator. The committee is responsible for providing pastoral care, counsel, and support for the general secretary. In addition, the committee conducts an annual performance review based on expected job outputs, and a broader and more extensive performance review receiving input from the wider church every third year.

With the current governance structure, the general secretary is required to provide "monitoring reports" at each meeting of GSC. The monitoring reports detail strategies, outcomes, supporting data, progress, and compliance in the accomplishment of stated ends policies for seven strategic policy areas determined by GSC. In effect, the performance of the general secretary is evaluated every time GSC meets. This monitoring report process makes public the effectiveness of the general secretary in carrying out requisite responsibilities.

In analyzing and reviewing the monitoring reports each provided action and progress in the

realization of the stated ends policies. The general secretary should be commended for the effort and achievement in leading staff in the accomplishment of agreed upon ends.

The committee reports to the GSC at the fall and spring meetings in executive session. As part of this process the general secretary completes a "self-evaluation" instrument, an instrument also used in the annual evaluation process for all GSC personnel. The committee addresses with the general secretary goals in areas of personal and professional improvement.

In accord with the GSC's personnel policies, the committee proposed and the GSC approved a sabbatical for the general secretary for April through May, 2010, to be continued for one additional month later in the summer of 2010.

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON FINANCE

Financing the Denominational Programs of the Reformed Church in America

Financing for the programs and services provided by the General Synod Council comes from a variety of sources. Income for the General Synod Council for fiscal 2009 included:

- 56 percent from voluntary contributions from congregations and individuals. These funds are primarily designated for specific programs that support Global Mission, church multiplication, discipleship, leadership, revitalization, and a multiracial future freed from racism.
- 33 percent from the General Synod assessment.
- 11 percent from investment, event registration, and sales income.

The Board of Benefits Services is primarily funded from fees paid by retirement and insurance plan participants. The Board of Benefits Services also receives a $1.50 per member assessment to assist with the cost of its emergency assistance program.

The Church Growth Fund is funded from interest on church building loans and investment income.

Both the Board of Benefits Services and the Church Growth Fund also receive voluntary contributions that enhance the resources available to them for assistance and loans.

Financial Summary—Fiscal Year 2009

The General Synod Council financial results for 2009 were impacted by the economy and the cost reductions made in February 2009. Total expenses decreased $2.2 million between fiscal 2008 and 2009. Of the reduction $1 million is in Global Mission as a result of reduced travel expenses for missionaries, staff reductions, and other adjustments. The expenses related to the work of the General Synod, management, and development expenses decreased by just over $1 million. This reduction is the result of staff reductions, reductions in program and travel expenses, and other cost savings made in 2009 as well as the reduced administrative costs from moving the finance office to Grand Rapids. The GSC continues to maintain unrestricted operating reserves above the GSC executive limitation of three months of operating expenses.

The Board of Benefits Services Insurance Fund continued to show solid financial results for the fiscal year even with an increase in claims and opportunities for wellness and prevention programs.

The Board of Benefits Services Retirement Program's assets continued to be impacted by the economic downturn through March 2009 when investment results began to improve. Participant accounts began to recover market value in fiscal 2009. Individuals and organizations invested $9.1 million in the 403(b) Retirement Plan, which is 4 percent less than the previous year.

The Church Growth Fund's financial performance continues to be strong while operating efficiently with low administrative costs when compared to other denominational church growth funds. The Church Growth Fund offers favorable interest rates on loans to local churches for building and expansion projects. As of September 30, 2009, it had $34.52 million in loans outstanding. For further information regarding the work of the CGF including its loan and investment note programs and the grant it provides to the GSC for church multiplication work, see the more detailed report of the Church Growth Fund on page 152.

Annual Audit

The 2009 financial statements of the General Synod Council; Board of Benefits Services Insurance, Retirement, and General Funds; Church Growth Fund; RCA Fund; and Endowment Fund were audited by Capin Crouse LLP, Certified Public Accountants. Delegates are invited to visit the RCA website to review the complete set of audited financial statements. The statements are available at www.rca.org in the Leadership/Finance Services tabs. The GSC Audit Committee received and reviewed the audited financial statements and management letters for the corporations listed above. Each corporation received an unqualified audit opinion.

The GSC Investment Programs

The GSC's investments are managed by outside investment managers. The treasurer, the GSC Investment Advisory Committee, and the various boards are responsible for ensuring that the GSC's funds are prudently invested, investment managers adhere to established investment policies, and performance of the funds is monitored on an ongoing basis. The committee meets twice a year to carry out these responsibilities. The following is a brief overview of the investments in the RCA Fund, the Endowment Fund, the Retirement Program, and the Planned Giving Programs. Individual investments in the RCA Fund and Endowment Fund are listed in each audited financial statement and can be found on the RCA website, www.rca.org, in the Leadership/Finance Services tabs.

The RCA Fund

The RCA Fund makes it possible for local churches, classes, agencies, and regional synods to receive a competitive rate of return for the short-term investment of surplus funds. The RCA Fund is also used for investing the excess operating funds of the GSC, Board of Benefits Services, and Church Growth Fund, providing both liquidity and solid investment results.

The Bank of New York/Mellon actively manages a portfolio of fixed income securities including corporate bonds, U.S. treasuries and agencies, and mortgage backed securities. The total rate of return, including unrealized gains and losses, of the assets managed by the Bank of New York/Mellon was 7.44 percent for fiscal 2009 versus a 5.85 percent return for the benchmark. RCA Fund participants receive distributions of earned income (dividends and interests) on a quarterly basis. These distributions in fiscal 2009 were $1,791,496 compared to $2,528,809 for fiscal 2008. The average distribution to 240 RCA Fund participants was 4.07 percent in fiscal 2009 based on paying out realized earnings. At September 30, 2009, the RCA Fund held a reserve of $2,731,741, which represents the accumulated unrealized gains in the fund.

The investment goals and objectives for the RCA Fund are available upon request from the treasurer.

RCA Endowment Fund

As of December 31, 2009, there were 230 accounts in the RCA Endowment Fund. Market value of the portfolio was $11.8 million and historic dollar value was $11.1 million. In light of the losses of market value on all endowed investments during fiscal year 2009, the market value of each endowment has been closely monitored against the historic dollar value by quarter to ensure compliance with the intent of each endowment and applicable laws. In order to preserve the corpus of the endowments, the RCA Endowment Fund's policy for fiscal year 2009 was to pay out 5 percent of a five-year rolling average market value to be distributed in four equal quarterly installments while monitoring historic dollar values for each endowment.

Legg Mason Investment Advisors serves as investment manager for the portfolio. The investment objective is to generate long-term preservation and growth of capital after inflation. Portfolio investments are diversified among high quality companies and industry sectors to reduce risk. Specific questions about the investment goals and objectives can be directed to the treasurer.

Retirement Program Investments

Fidelity Investments serves as investment manager and record keeper for the 403(b) Retirement Plan and the non-qualified Retirement Plan. Plan participants may select from a variety of Fidelity and socially screened mutual funds that have been approved by the Board of Benefits Services. Additionally, participants have the option of transferring their account balances from one fund to another within the guidelines established by the board.

The Investment Advisory Committee and the Board of Benefits Services monitors investment performance, replacing funds with consistent underperformance. Changes to invest options will be made in mid-2010.

Plan participants receive quarterly information concerning performance versus benchmarks of all mutual funds that are part of these plans. Return information is also available at www.fidelity.com.

Planned Giving Programs

The General Synod Council manages gift annuity and pooled income funds and acts as trustee for several charitable remainder trusts. State Street Global Advisors provides investment management and recordkeeping services for these programs. At December 31, 2009, State Street managed GSC planned giving assets totaling $2,556,273. The primary investment objective is to provide for long-term growth of principal and income without undue exposure to risk. The portfolios are invested in equities, fixed income, and cash equivalents based upon an acceptable asset mix that is conducive to participation in rising markets, while permitting adequate protection in falling markets. The investment mix takes into consideration factors such as the type of life income vehicle, the payout requirements, beneficiary income requirements, and overall investment policy of the GSC.

The charitable gift annuity investments gained 24.9 percent during calendar 2009. The average payout rate to annuitants was between 14 percent and 16 percent. Ninety-seven percent of our annuity assets are managed under the laws of the State of New York, which has increased the asset to liability reserve requirement. In December 2008 the GSC inject-

ed $300,000 into the charitable gift annuities account with State Street Global Advisors. As a result of market improvement through the end of calendar 2009, $100,000 was returned to the GSC operating fund in January 2010. These funds are held in reserve in a money market account until such time as the market improves, or additional gift annuities are sold, providing an increase in the market value of the fund.

Mission Investments

In 1970 the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) established a mission investment policy that directed the General Program Council to make "available for mission investment purposes ten percent of the appropriated and unappropriated operating reserve" (GSEC Action 70-50). This policy continues in effect for the GSC. 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. Rather, factors considered include social impact, need, geographic proximity to GSC mission endeavors, and investment participation by other denominations and institutions.

At September 30, 2009, mission investments in twelve banks, credit unions, and other organizations totaled $517,664. Mission investment monies are placed with organizations and community banks such as the NCC Minority Bail Bond Fund; the Shared Interest Group (which invests in South Africa's democratic development); Oikocredit USA, Inc. and Oikocredit, Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society [Netherlands] (each of which makes small business loans in impoverished parts of the world); the Central Appalachian People Credit Union; Fonkoze USA, Inc. (which makes micro-credit loans in Haiti); Working Capital for Community Needs (which makes micro-credit loans and encourages fair trade practices); the Reformed Church in Mozambique; Union Settlement Credit Union (New York); City National Bank of New Jersey; United Bank of Philadelphia; Leviticus 25:23 Alternative Fund (Elmsford, New York); and Nkhoma Synod of Central Africa.

A committee whose members are GSC staff meets regularly to analyze the portfolio.

United States Internal Revenue Service Group Tax Exemption

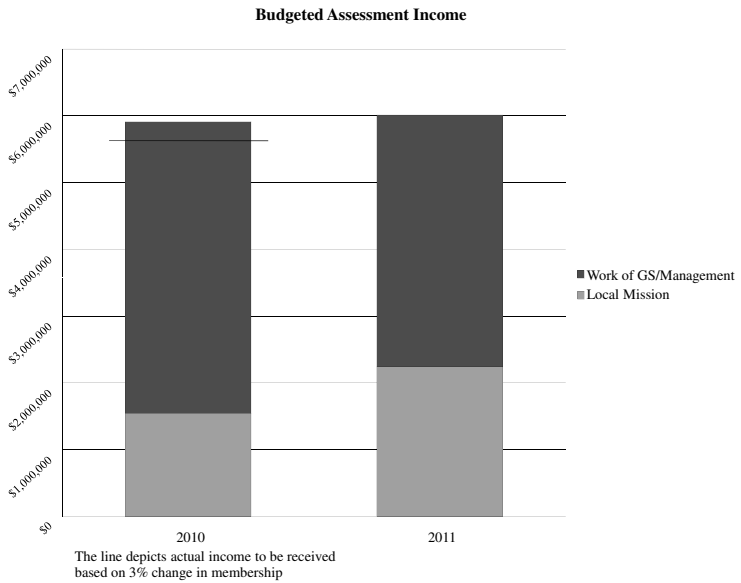
As the denomination's parent organization, the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America was granted a group tax exemption by the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on January 17, 1986. The exemption recognizes as exempt from federal income tax all agencies, assemblies (including local churches), and institutions within the RCA that have satisfied the requirements for inclusion in the group.

As a condition to the continuing effectiveness of the group exemption determination, the General Synod must maintain an accurate roster of agencies, assemblies, and institutions that are a part of the group for which the exemption has been granted. As a part of this process the General Synod must file annually with the Commissioner of the IRS a report summarizing additions to the roster, deletions from the roster, and any revisions to the information about those agencies, assemblies, and institutions that remain on the roster (such as changes of name or address). The report, filed in June of 2009, identified five entities added to the roster, three entities deleted from the roster, and twelve entities for which there was a change of name, change of address, or correction of employer identification number.

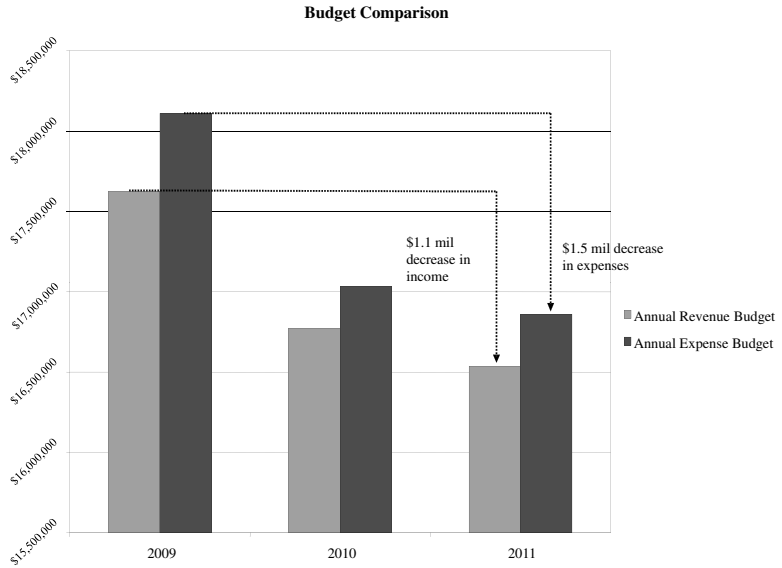
FISCAL YEAR 2011 GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL BUDGET

The fiscal 2011 budget for the General Synod Council has been developed with the following assumptions and strategies:

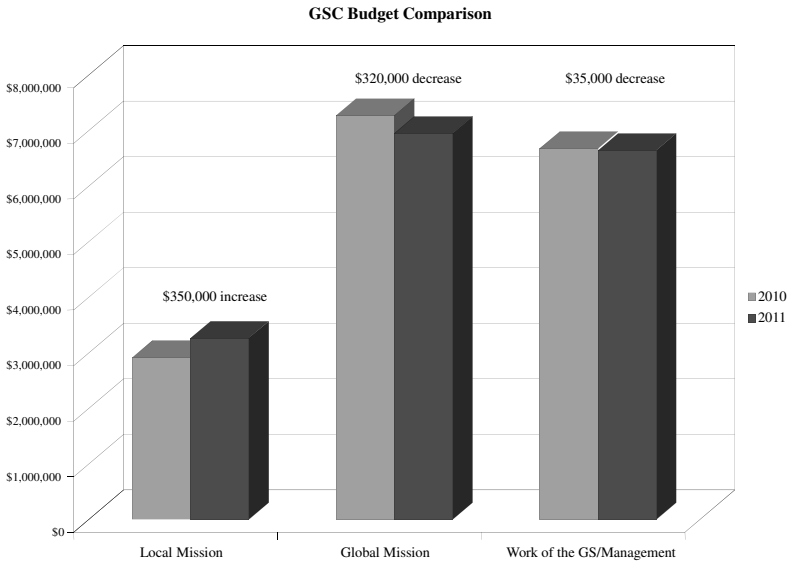
- Contributions for global and local mission cover over 50 percent of the budgeted costs to run the programs and support areas of the General Synod Council.
- Assessment income is just over $6 million, 37 percent of which is used to cover direct program costs of Our Call. The remainder is used to support Our Call and the work of General Synod.



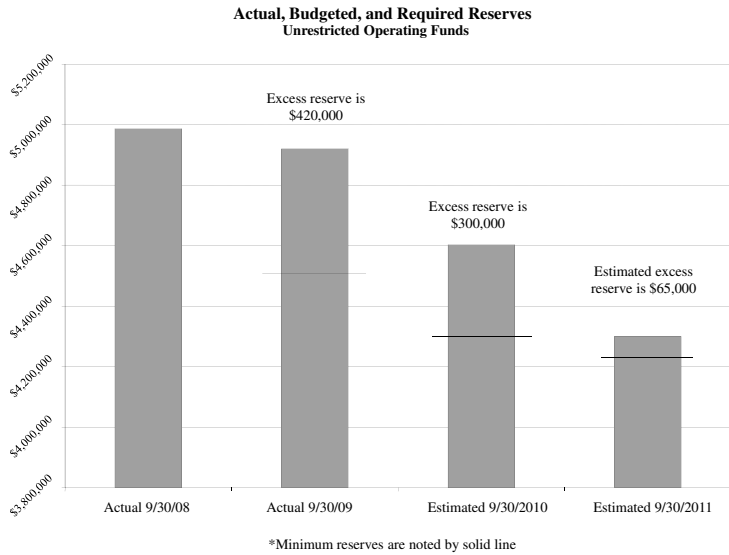
- For the 2010 budget, no change in the per-member amount and a small change in the number of confessing members were assumed. The actual number of confessing members decreased in 2008 by 3 percent resulting in a $180,000 decrease in income to the GSC in 2010.
- Expense reductions made in mid-2009 will continue to influence future years' budgets as seen in this budget comparison.



- Priority has been given to maintaining program areas while implementing cost savings in office and administrative areas.
- The Global Mission budget is funded primarily from Partnership-in-Mission share contributions and investment income. Total expenses for Global Mission are budgeted to be $320,000, or 4 percent less in 2011 than 2010 as a result of fewer missionaries in the field.
- Local mission, which includes five of the six areas of Our Call (multiplication, discipleship, revitalization, leadership, multiracial future freed from racism), has additional resources budgeted in 2011 as continued emphasis is placed on these efforts in the latter half of the ten-year goal.
- The 2011 budget includes full-time positions for the office for Women's Ministries and the director of the Asia/Pacific region for Global Mission.



- The 2009 budget was adjusted in February 2009 assuming a potential $400,000 draw on unrestricted reserves. The income assumptions made at that time were very conservative, including potential decreases in contribution and investment income. The year ended better than anticipated with under $100,000 drawn from reserves.
- The 2010 budget was prepared assuming a $300,000 draw on undesignated reserves.
- The 2011 budget has been prepared assuming another $300,000 draw on undesignated reserves plus an increased potential draw on designated reserves (monies saved for future years). The potential draw on reserves enables the GSC to continue the work of the General Synod with a proposed 3 percent increase in the per-member assessment. The following chart demonstrates the potential status of reserves and indicates the minimum reserve balance of three month's worth of operating expenses required by GSC Executive Limitations policies.



REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA
Budget FY 2011

	GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL									
	Church Multiplication/ Discipleship	Global Mission	Leadership/ Revitalization	MFCA	Opperations & Support	Office of General Secretary	IT	Finance	GSC Other	**GSC Subtotal**
REVENUE:										
Contributions & Fundraising Income	207,000	6,412,778	120,000	21,000	0	0	0	0	0	6,760,778
Assessment Income	1,287,894	0	695,494	258,000	1,436,620	515,117	403,703	323,415	0	4,920,243
Investment Income	43,000	150,000	62,000	33,500	0	96,400	0	20,000	0	404,900
RCA Fund Earnings	40,000	60,000	0	12,000	(5,000)	0	0	6,000	0	113,000
Grants from Other Budget Areas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transfers from Designated Funds	110,000	341,000	0	0	20,000	0	0	(40,000)	102,000	533,000
Other Income	17,200	2,000	9,200	85,500	13,100	3,200	2,600	92,000	0	224,800
Basic Service Cost Assigned	0	0	8,100	0	146,026	20,000	125,005	279,035	0	578,166
Total Revenue	1,705,094	6,965,778	894,794	410,000	1,610,746	634,717	531,308	680,450	102,000	13,534,887
EXPENSES:										
Staff Costs	1,137,114	1,063,940	579,993	245,386	883,461	385,338	456,575	498,497	(50,000)	5,200,304
Office Costs	147,745	127,478	70,470	32,964	135,053	48,000	42,467	57,578	0	661,755
Staff Travel	101,500	93,700	60,000	21,000	49,800	58,000	12,750	9,000	0	405,750
Program Costs	417,100	5,308,660	342,500	110,650	694,900	172,000	64,500	139,000	0	7,249,310
Grants to Other Budget Areas	13,000	372,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	385,000
Total Expenses	1,816,459	6,965,778	1,052,963	410,000	1,763,214	663,338	576,292	704,075	(50,000)	13,902,119
Net Revenue/(Expense)	(111,365)	0	(158,169)	0	(152,468)	(28,621)	(44,984)	(23,625)	152,000	(367,232)

GSC Subtotal	GSC Development	GSC Undesignated	Mailroom	Communication	Production	GSC 2011
6,760,778	26,000	50,000	0	0	0	6,836,778
4,920,243	255,821	0	0	835,509	0	6,011,573
404,900	0	0	0	0	0	404,900
113,000	10,000	0	0	2,000	9,000	134,000
0	442,000	0	0	0	36,000	478,000
533,000	0	0	0	0	0	533,000
224,800	5,300	80,000	300,000	2,200	920,882	1,533,182
578,166	0	0	0	26,000	0	604,166
13,534,887	739,121	130,000	300,000	865,709	965,882	16,535,599
5,200,304	487,502	0	108,876	354,044	551,615	6,702,341
661,755	41,507	0	34,453	25,725	66,267	829,707
405,750	44,000	0	2,000	14,000	6,000	471,750
7,249,310	134,500	0	153,500	568,500	342,000	8,447,810
385,000	23,000	0	0	0	0	408,000
13,902,119	730,509	0	298,829	962,269	965,882	16,859,608
(367,232)	8,612	130,000	1,171	(96,560)	0	(324,009)

2011 PROPOSED GENERAL SYNOD ASSESSMENT

The General Synod approves the annual per-member assessment for the work of the General Synod Council, disability ministry, the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS), and theological education. Historically, the assessment dollars that are provided to GSC for these activities comprise 2 percent of total congregational giving.

The 2010 assessment amounts approved at the 2009 Synod were:

Assessment Amounts for 2010		
General Synod Council	$	35.02
Disability ministry		0.23
BOBS assistance grants		1.50
Theological education		4.71
TOTAL	$	41.46

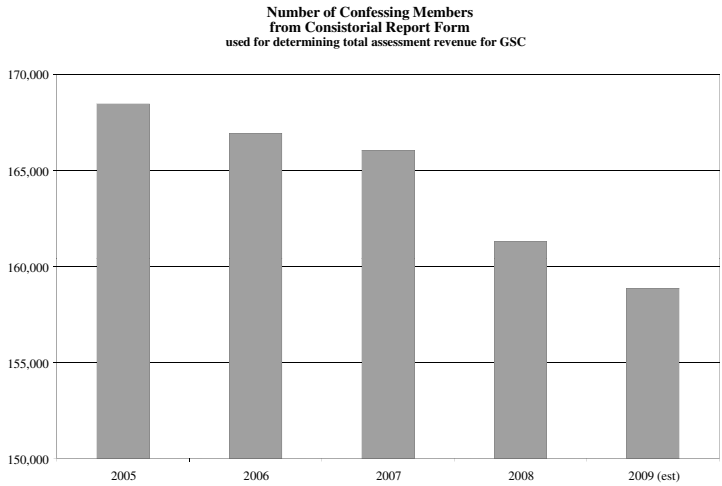
General Synod Council Assessment

The assessment revenue received by the General Synod Council is used for a portion of the costs of the General Synod, General Synod Council, and program expenses of the Our Call ten-year goal, including the support for this work provided by the office of the general secretary, General Synod office, development, finance, information technology, and communications. Assessment income provides a consistent stream of revenue to the General

Synod Council as we covenant to start new congregations, revitalize existing congregations, and work together to disciple, develop leaders, do global mission work, and work toward a multiracial future freed from racism.

Assessment revenue to the General Synod Council (GSC) will fund 35 percent of the 2011 budget. The remaining expenses are covered by contributions, investment income, fees for services, and event registration.

The per-member assessment request for GSC is impacted by changes in the number of confessing members. The following chart shows the number of confessing members as reported from the Consistorial Report Form (CRF) by year. The 2011 amount is estimated based on the CRF data available in mid-March. The total decrease in the number of confessing members in Reformed Church in America churches in these five years is approximately 6 percent.



The 2010 General Synod assessment request brought to the 2009 General Synod by GSC was frozen at the same per-member amount ($33.47) as the 2009 per-member amount. Additional amounts were added to the per-member assessment for new initiatives taken by General Synod 2009 for the Office for Women, adding delegates to General Synod, and task forces for worship, commissioned pastors, and baptism. These requests added $1.55 to the General Synod assessment request, making the total $35.02.

The loss in the number of confessing members, along with the frozen basic GSC assessment amount of $33.47, caused revenue to GSC to decrease by $160,000. If the per-member amount were to remain the same for 2011, revenue to GSC would decrease by an additional $80,000 based on the potential decrease in the number of confessing members. The per-member assessment request for 2011 is proposed to be $36.27. This per-member increase would provide total GSC assessment revenue of about the same amount as in 2010.

The All-Synod Advisory Committees on Funding Our Mission reported overwhelming support of R-9 through R-13.

R-9
To approve the General Synod Council 2011 assessment of $36.27 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

Disability Ministry Assessment

General Synod has discussed the need for a disability ministry since 1975. These conversations continued occasionally until a task force was created in 2004 which recommended in 2008 that a staff position be created. That same year, General Synod approved a paper from the Commission on Theology about welcoming people with disabilities into the life of the church. The 2010 Report of the General Synod Council on Disability Ministry throughout the RCA (page 214) provides a thorough description and context of the work done by the General Synod Council with the funds provided by assessments and contributions in 2009 and 2010. The 2011 assessment request will cover the full costs of carrying forward this work as described in the above referenced reports.

R-10
To approve the $0.60 per member assessment for disability ministry in 2011. (ADOPTED)

Board of Benefits Services Assessment

At least as far back as 1971, the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS) has been the recipient of a General Synod assessment that provides funding to help support retired pastors who have not received adequate retirement benefits and who have demonstrated financial need. For FY 2010, the $1.50 per member assessment provided $241,908 toward the assistance grant budget totaling $529,280.

Typically, additional funds are transferred from BOBS' General Fund to the Assistance Fund to make up any shortfall that may occur after inclusion of donations and investment income. It is expected that approximately $250,000 will need to be transferred from the BOBS General Fund in FY 2011.

Therefore, for 2011 the Board of Benefits Services recommends the continuation of the $1.50 per member assessment to help provide assistance to pastors who have not received adequate retirement benefits and have demonstrated financial need.

R-11
To approve the $1.50 per member assessment for the Board of Benefits Services to provide sufficient assistance funding for retired pastors who have a demonstrated need in 2011. (ADOPTED)

Theological Education Assessment

The Report of the Task Force on the Theological Education Assessment (page 151) thoroughly describes the assessment request for theological education, which covers funds for New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA). The proposal requests the same total dollars for the three institutions plus an additional $80,000 for reducing the fees for MFCA students, an annual gathering of professors of theology, and a coordination and collaboration group to address the mandates of care, call, and standards.

The theological education assessment was $4.71 in 2010. To maintain the same total dol-

lars for the three institutions in 2011, the per-member assessment would need to increase by $0.14 based on the estimated number of confessing members in 2009.

R-12
To approve the $4.85 per member assessment for theological education in 2011. (ADOPTED)

The Report of the Task Force on the Theological Assessment brought forth the following request:

R-13
To approve the $0.50 per member assessment in response to the Task Force on the Theological Education Assessment. (ADOPTED)

The General Synod Council, serving as the Executive Committee of the General Synod, brought recommendations regarding funding that the assembly had approved in previous recommendations:

R-14
To approve the $0.03 per-member assessment to fund R-17 for the task force to study assessments. (ADOPTED)

R-15
To approve the $0.25 per-member assessment to fund R-58 for resources and experiences to understand white privilege. (ADOPTED)

Total Assessment Requests

The 2010 actual and 2011 voted assessment amounts per member are:

Per-member assessment analysis

	2010 Actual	2011 GSC recommendation	Reports coming to 2011 Synod	2011 Total
General Synod Council	$ 35.02	$ 36.27		$ 36.27
Disability ministry	0.23	0.23	0.37	0.60
BOBS assistance grants	1.50	1.50		1.50
Theological education	4.71	4.71	0.14	4.85
Synod initiatives– theological education			0.50	0.50
Assessment task force			0.03	0.03
Understanding white privilege			0.25	0.25
	$ 41.46	$ 42.71	$ 1.29	$ 44.00

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of the GSC's development office is to encourage churches and individuals to steward their God-given resources and voluntarily give generously to support the kingdom of God through the Reformed Church in America. Its focus is to coordinate all fundraising efforts, including fundraising for Global Mission and each "cluster" that supports Our Call.

Development representatives, assigned by territory, also build relationships with and provide opportunities for individuals, foundations, organizations, and churches to accomplish their local and global mission objectives through outright gifts, bequests, life income plans, and grants. Gifts can be designated to a specific mission, missionary, or partner, or given to the Great Commission Connection, a fund that supports the specific areas of Our Call. Churches, classes, regions, and individuals can also invest in Church Growth Fund savings certificates. Each of these giving opportunities provides support for our shared call to follow Christ in mission.

PIM Share Support
Partner-in-Mission Support (PIM) provides support for 130 missionaries serving in thirty-nine countries around the world. Gifts are directed to a specific missionary or mission partner.

Great Commission Connection
Gifts to the Great Commission Connection can be designated to any area of Our Call:

- To *Global Mission* for unreached peoples, partner development, relief, or justice efforts around the world.
- To *Multiplication* to recruit, train, resource, and coach church planters to start new congregations, equipping them to touch hearts, change lives, and transform communities in the name of Jesus.
- To *Revitalization* to help train coaches, start pastors networks, and rekindle congregational ministries, helping churches to be agents of God's redemptive work in the world.
- To *Leadership* to help the RCA identify, develop, equip, and mobilize godly leaders to lead the church in mission.
- To *Discipleship* to train and coach discipleship leaders, and to translate and develop new resources to help congregations build effective faith development programs.
- To our *Multiracial Future Freed from Racism* to provide learning materials and collaborative experiences to help congregational leaders grow RCA ministries that are racially and ethnically equitable.

Contributions to the mission and ministry of the General Synod Council in fiscal year 2009 totaled $7,444,389; an additional $2,450,967 in donor designated gifts was released for ministry. These combined contributions totaled 56 percent of all funds available for global and local mission programs.

Pledge commitments to a specific missionary/mission partner through PIM shares of $7,149,840 were made and $6,241,567 (87 percent) were fulfilled. The 555 churches that participated in RCA Global Mission through PIM shares designated these commitments to the following regions:

Africa	26 percent
Asia/Pacific	14 percent
Americas	28 percent
Europe	8 percent
Middle East	19 percent
Non-designated	4 percent

Non-designated, other, and non-PIM share gifts to Global Mission helped fund underfunded regions. The total expenditures by region were as follows:

Africa	27 percent
Asia/Pacific	16 percent
Americas	27 percent
Europe	12 percent
Middle East	17 percent

Outright gifts to local mission (primarily designated to Our Call) totaled $526,565.

Development Celebrations

The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary, offered an introduction and invited the synod to view the "Great Commission Connection" DVD. The general secretary invited Marge Maas, Marvin and Jerene DeWitt, Laura De Vries, director of development, and the Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown, president of Western Theological Seminary, to the platform. Marge and her late husband Leonard Maas, and Marvin and Jerene DeWitt, were honored for their extreme generosity and commitment to the mission and ministry of the Reformed Church in America. Each couple was presented with a commemorative scrapbook filled with pages of thanks from the various RCA ministries they have supported. The Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown offered a prayer of gratitude.

Missional Impact Partners

The general secretary recognized the 2009 Missional Impact Partner Churches—sixty-eight churches were recognized for giving 10 percent of their total income or gifts exceeding $40,000 to a local or global mission or ministry of the RCA.

Addisville Reformed Church, Richboro, PA
American Reformed Church, Orange City, IA
Apache Reformed Church, Apache, OK
Bethany Reformed Church, Clara City, MN
Bethel Reformed Church, Leota, MN
Calgary Community Reformed Church, Calgary, AB
Central Reformed Church, Sioux Center, IA
Chandler Reformed Church, Chandler, MN
Christian Park Reformed Church, Indianapolis, IN
Clymer Hill Reformed Church, Clymer, NY
Collegiate Corporation, New York, NY
Community Church, Douglaston, NY
Ebenezer Reformed Church, Stoney Creek, ON
Ebenezer Reformed Church, Leighton, IA
Ebenezer Reformed Church, Oregon, IL
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Whitby, ON
Fair Haven Ministries, Hudsonville, MI

Faith Reformed Church, Rock Valley, IA
Faith Reformed Church, Zeeland, MI
Fellowship Reformed Church, Holland, MI
Fifth Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
First Reformed Church, Baldwin, WI
First Reformed Church, Grandville, MI
First Reformed Church, Harrison, SD
First Reformed Church, Hasbrouck Heights, NJ
First Reformed Church, Oostburg, WI
First Reformed Church, Orange City, IA
First Reformed Church, Pella, IA
First Reformed Church, Portage, MI
First Reformed Church, Rock Rapids, IA
First Reformed Church, Saddle Brook, NJ
First Reformed Church, Sheldon, IA
First Reformed Church, Sioux Center, IA
First Reformed Church, Sully, IA
First Reformed Church, Three Oaks, MI
First Reformed Church of Wichert, Saint Anne, IL
First Reformed Melvin, Melvin, IA
Fort Washington Collegiate Church, New York, NY
Glen Lake Community Reformed Church, Glen Arbor, MI
Glenmont Community Church, Glenmont, NY
Hamlin Reformed Church, Castlewood, SD
Hope Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI
Immanuel Reformed Church, Belmond, IA
Jamestown Reformed Church, Jamestown, MI
Lisha's Kill Reformed Church, Schenectady, NY
Maplewood Reformed Church, Holland, MI
Marble Collegiate Church, New York, NY
Massapequa Reformed Church, Massapequa, NY
Meredith Drive Reformed Church, Des Moines, IA
Middle Collegiate Church, New York, NY
New Hope Community Reformed Church, Wausau, WI
North Holland Reformed Church, Holland, MI
North Park Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, MI
Old Paramus Reformed Church, Ridgewood, NJ
Olivet Reformed Church, Grandville, MI
Otley Reformed Church, Otley, IA
Ottawa Reformed Church, West Olive, MI
Overisel Reformed Church, Holland, MI
Pella Reformed Church, Adams, NE
Raritan Reformed Church, Raritan, IL
Reformed Church of Palmyra, Palmyra, NY
Reformed Church of Stout, Stout, IA
Second Reformed Church, Pella, IA
Strasburg Reformed Church, Strasburg, ND
Third Reformed Church, Holland, MI
Trinity Reformed Church, Orange City, IA
Trinity Reformed Church, Pella, IA
West End Collegiate Church, New York, NY

RCA Church Growth Fund
Since 1861, the Church Growth Fund has enabled RCA churches to borrow money to build new or renovate existing buildings to carry out ministry to their communities. In the past ten years it has also awarded over $2.6 million in grants to help start new congregations. Bequests and outright gifts are being sought and savings certificates, which typically offer interest rates higher than market rates, are offered to support this important ministry.

The Van Bunschooten Bequest

The RCA continues to recognize and thank those who respond through membership in a giving society known as the Van Bunschooten Society.

The summary history of the Van Bunschooten Bequest is as follows:

> At a meeting of the General Synod in New York City on 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 pious youth for ministry.
>
> On January 10, 1815, in his seventy-seventh year, Dominie Van Bunschooten went home to his reward and was buried in the church yard of First Reformed Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey. In his last will and testament he added more than $3,000 to his former donation, making a total of more than $17,000—a princely sum for those days.
>
> 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 a 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 2004*, pp. 187-188).

In honor of Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten, the Van Bunschooten Society was formed in the Reformed Church in America to honor those who have arranged a life income plan or included the Reformed Church in America in their will.

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON THE RCA ARCHIVES

The RCA Archives exists to serve as the memory of the church. The corporate memory of what we have done and who we have been constitutes our heritage as we seek to serve our Lord faithfully in mission throughout the world. The RCA Archives preserves records from congregations, classes, regional synods, the General Synod, and staff offices in order to document how we have followed the call to mission since a strong future is built upon a solid understanding of the past. The primary goal of the archives in this process is to offer stability and relevance to the long term mission of the church.

The archivist has to make decisions about what should be kept and what may be disposed without serious consequence so a faithful record exists of who we are and what we have

been about. In order to see where we can go, we must first understand where we have been. Researchers, synod committees and agencies, denominational staff offices, and others who seek to understand the rich heritage of the RCA as it grows into the future actively make use of this record. This past year, the archivist answered more than 238 queries for information about the RCA, research questions, and assistance with records management issues, including 27 individuals who visited the archives to undertake research.

REPORT OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COUNCIL

The African American Council (AAC) celebrated forty years of ministry and work within the Reformed Church in America during its Annual Caucus gathering in October 2009. The celebration was highlighted by reflections and analysis of its work and ministry since 1969, where the council has been a voice for people of the African Diaspora within and without the denomination. Many speakers noted the challenging and ongoing prophetic ministry of trying to get the RCA to reach out and be inclusive of blacks. They also noted the council's role of providing leadership in the birth of other racial/ethnic councils, commissions, and task forces that continue to remind the denomination of its obligation toward becoming a truly multiracial church.

The caucus gathering took place at the New York LaGuardia Airport Marriott Hotel, now a black-owned franchise. The theme for this event was "Forty Years and Forward: Remembering, Reflecting, and Resourcing." In addition to experiencing one of the highest attendances in its history, including the moderator of the GSC and other RCA officials, attendees experienced workshops on church growth and health in the spirit and mandate of Our Call. Video highlights of some of these activities can be viewed at www.rca.org/racialethnic. Further, an interactive youth and young adult conference also ran concurrently with the caucus.

In 2009, the council conducted the following meetings and events:

1. The executive committee and council met continually to assess the work and ministry of the council.
2. Regional meetings of the council were held to organize and assist with the overall mission and vision of the council and the denomination.
3. The council was elated to experience the election and installation of James Seawood as the second black president of the General Synod. It looks forward to working with him as he seeks to carry the same prophetic voice of the council to the wider denomination.
4. The election of officers: Wilbur Jones (chairperson), Jo Anna Lougin (first vice chairperson), Jimmie Stevenson (second vice chairperson), Shawn Gibson (secretary), C. J. Grier (treasurer), and Annie Lee Philips (immediate past-chair).
5. At Caucus 2009 the council honored Raymond Timms upon his retirement as pastor of Faith Chapel Reformed Church in Patterson, New Jersey, and Kenneth Bradsell, for his many years of assisting the ministry of the AAC.

While the AAC once again joins in jubilant celebration of praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God for the historic election and installation of Barack Obama as the first black President of the United States of America, it remains cognizant of the fact that this is not an indication of what many are calling a "post racial" society. The council remains concerned about the many aspersions and remarks being made by talk show radio and TV hosts, along with others, questioning the president's place of birth, in addition to outright

racist remarks about him and his family. The members of the council are even more shocked by the silence of the Christian church in relationship to these issues. It wonders why President Obama is being judged by his race and not his work and merit, or, as the late Martin Luther King Jr. stated, "the content of his character."

The council calls on the General Synod and the General Synod Council (GSC) to be more proactive in their stance against these forms of evil as they address the issues of institutional and internalized racism, especially as they affect people of the African Diaspora. It urges GSC to be more proactive in seeing that all commissions, committees, General Synod delegates, and task forces are inclusive of members of the AAC and its related churches, which have a track record in addressing these sins. Further, it calls on GSC to be inclusive of the council and its members as it seeks to carry out the sixth dimension of Our Call—a multiracial future freed from racism.

The AAC continues to be appreciative of the work of its director, Glen C. Missick, who also serves as director for African American/Black Ministries. He has worked tirelessly in identifying and building up the leadership in our council member churches. While he remains focused on Our Call, he also understands the importance of the black church and its ministry from a holistic context. He has been quite successful in finding pastoral leadership for existing churches. He has also been instrumental in the development of two new church starts in 2009: The Well of Hope Church (formerly Hope Reformed Church) in Orlando, Florida, and Faith and Hope Church (formerly Hope Community Church) in Los Angeles, California. Consequently, his commitment to the work of the council is extremely important as he seeks to help council member churches grow spiritually and numerically, and to be prophetic voices, addressing issues of racism, injustice, and other ills that affect black and other communities.

The council remains concerned about the disconnect between the General Synod, the regional synods, and the classes. It especially is concerned about the disparity and "benign neglect" by many classes of the work and ministries of RCA black churches. It has empirical evidence and data that show that too often classes only deal with council churches when they have reached the point of total failure. The council requests GSC to consider a plan to remedy this injustice by hosting within the next year a dialogue with classes on the issue of neglect of black churches within their bounds so that the whole church can move toward spiritual healing as well as racial, social, political, and economic parity.

* * * * *

Note: At its March 23-26, 2010, meeting the General Synod Council responded to the AAC with appreciation for its deep concern about the perceived mistreatment of African American/black congregations in some RCA classes. It believes the concern can best be addressed by direct dialogue with the classes in which there is a perception of "benign neglect" and commits itself to supporting this type of intervention on the part of its staff. Further, it believes that the recommendation in its "Final Report on the Decade Freed from Racism," particularly the goals in the recommendation titled "Promote systems changes" and "Expand training for the RCA's multiracial future," will address this ongoing concern.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES

This year the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) begins its thirty-first year of service and mission in the Reformed Church in America. Its primary focus is to lift up the needs and gifts of the CPAAM community; represent Pacific and Asian Americans before the assemblies of the RCA; empower CPAAM churches and pastors to be full participants in the RCA goals and vision; and advocate for full inclusion of Pacific and Asian Americans in all areas of denominational life. We are grateful for the work of the CPAAM coordinator, En Young Kim, who since coming on board in October 2008 has dedicated herself to caring for CPAAM churches and pastors; representing the CPAAM community at RCA staff and other denominational meetings; and advocating for CPAAM and the RCA at ecumenical gatherings. Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean, Asian Indian, and Southeast Asian churches are represented in the CPAAM community.

It is becoming increasing clear that CPAAM must play a prophetic role in interpreting and applying Our Call to the specific context of Asian American congregations. For example, Earl James, coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice, gave a presentation on the Belhar Confession at the October 2009 CPAAM executive committee meeting. However, many CPAAM churches are struggling to establish and maintain their churches in immigrant communities and have little time to examine, much less apply, the Belhar to their particular situation. On the other hand, Asian American churches and pastors often are unaware of the many resources available to them through the RCA. Therefore, informative and educational contact from denominational staff is needed and appreciated. At the 2009 Consultation in May at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Ken Eriks, director of congregational mission, introduced and explained the staff, programs, and resources available to CPAAM churches through his office and urged CPAAM pastors to utilize these resources.

To facilitate communication with the CPAAM community there is an ongoing need for translation of RCA materials into Asian languages, particularly Korean, as well as translation services at meetings so that Asian participants can be fully included. Also, the ways in which traditional Asian culture affects Asian immigrants, as well as second and third generation Asian Americans, needs to be understood by the dominant culture. To that end En Young Kim would like to set up an Asian Resource Center that would not only have books and scholarly research materials, but would also sponsor gatherings of Pacific Asian Americans discussing various issues and topics that would help non-Asians better interact with the CPAAM communities.

Church multiplication is another area of vital concern to CPAAM. Although many first generation pastors are successful church planters, in the past two years there has been no significant growth of new CPAAM church plants. In recent years, there have been many adoptions—Asian churches asking to join the RCA—but very few real church starts as defined by the church multiplication team. Some of this is due to the fact that the requirements and assessments for a church planter need to take into account the cultural differences in how Asian churches are started. To stimulate more church growth, the 2010 Consultation has invited Tim Vink, coordinator of church multiplication, to be the keynote speaker, addressing the opportunities and obstacles in planting new Asian churches.

In terms of leadership and discipleship, CPAAM must address how to increase outreach to young people, especially women. The Korean community has shown initiative in sponsoring conferences for its young people; often the conferences are interdenominational. It is planned that in the future other Asian-language groups will be invited, as English is the common language of the 1.5 and second generation. Because Asian cultures are tradition-

ally male oriented, it is necessary to intentionally lift up young Asian women who seek to lead and serve in the local church. Respect for values of the elders is important, but adapting to current trends in American society must be facilitated if we are to overcome the present ratio of less than 10 percent of current CPAAM pastors being women. Another question of leadership for the new generation is the ability and accessibility of Asian American pastors to lead non-Asian (i.e., Caucasian, African American, and Latino) churches.

Many CPAAM churches have been around long enough to encounter the need for revitalization. In these churches there is often tension between the older, first generation that wants to maintain the culture and identity of their country of origin, and the young people, who are more assimilated and want changes that seem incompatible. Sometimes this may lead to establishing a more multicultural perspective as that generation intermarries and develops friendships and contacts outside the immigrant culture. Pastor coaching networks that have worked well with American churches may need to be contextualized for Asian pastors for whom transparency and asking for help are not seen as positive qualities.

And finally, mission remains of utmost importance to CPAAM. Although many churches struggle to become fully established, organized churches, and many members are still adapting and integrating into American society, there is a very high participation in financially supporting mission to home countries as well as short-term missions to Native Americans, to South America, and to Egypt and other countries. It is most encouraging to hear that at a recent interdenominational East Coast conference for Korean young adults, one thousand of them committed to do some kind of mission work and out of that group, sixty indicated that they would like to be full-time missionaries.

As we begin a new decade, CPAAM looks forward to helping its members more fully understand and participate in all areas of Our Call. Often in the past, it has been like water rolling off a duck's back where the values and ideals of Our Call are not fully penetrating into the heart and soul of Asian congregations. We hope that by clearly communicating the uniqueness of Asian culture and personality to the larger denomination, we can be more effectively engaged in bringing the love of God to the lost and broken world that needs to hear God's message of hope and salvation. Moreover, we also long to see the arrival of the peaceable kingdom where justice will flow like waters and we can walk hand and hand with all our brothers and sisters of the faith. To that end, it is envisioned that CPAAM will more actively meet with the African American Council, the Council for Hispanic Ministries, and other racial commissions to move forward toward our common goal of a multiracial future freed from racism.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES

The Harvest Is Plentiful but the Laborers Are Few

The work of all the departments of Hispanic ministries, together with the whole denomination (RCA), stand for the expansion of the kingdom of God in the territory that God has provided us.

Although we have much in common, as we have the same type of ministries, but in different languages, it seems to us that the common point that stands out for the church in general is the lack of workers.

The seminaries are not producing workers according to the demands of church growth, and we are forced to use workers who are not fully prepared, despite the fact that they really want to follow the movement of the Spirit in the growth of the church.

In our Hispanic ministry, we are working to train our workers by means of a special program for commissioned pastors under the center Sola Fide and accreditation of Miami International Seminary.

Our center Sola Fide has established a video conferencing system that is helping us to connect students from different latitudes, and utilizes teachers from the comforts of home so that they can show their skills in theology and ministerial development. That's why we want to encourage the classes that are interested in training Hispanic ministers to communicate with us to help them become training schools for commissioned pastors.

Many of our commissioned pastors are interested not only in remaining as commissioned pastors, but are determined to continue on the road to full ordination. Our hope is to train and develop leaders that will have a clear vision of this goal. As stated in last year's report, Western Theological Seminary, the Hispanic Council, and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency have put a program together for training Hispanic leaders in RCA standards in their own language. This is just the beginning of a long-term program for the benefit of our leaders. The establishment of courses taught in Spanish is one great step toward having future Hispanic faculty in our seminaries teaching using Spanish curriculums. To God be the glory!

But as we said in the beginning, our main challenge is getting workers for the vineyard of the Lord. If we succeed, we have work for them.

Evangelism, Church Growth, and Discipleship

The call of our Lord in Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19 is of utmost importance to our Spanish speaking community, because we believe that this mandate has a special and collective application to our daily lives. If we do not preach the gospel, we do not really believe God's plan for the salvation of souls.

We understand that many have different gifts but also believe that the church has been given the gift of evangelism, and through that gift, we are discovering that the fields "are white for harvest" (John 4:35, NASB). The Hispanic Council is totally convinced that our mission starts with our neighbors, and these are the reasons we emphasize the preaching of the gospel.

In preaching the true Word of God, we emphasize the purity of the gospel, believing that by doing so we pass the torch to a new generation in the same spirit as the Reformers, the generation who continued to carry this message, so that today we have a Heidelberg Catechism, written for young people to learn biblical doctrine. But today we are aware that our youth are being bombarded by humanism and secularism, and it is very difficult for them to discern clearly the present situation, and thus the lack of interest in ministry is notable.

One of the tools God has given us as a means to spread the truth of Christ in all ages is communication, whether it be verbal, written, televised, or any other medium available for expansion of thought. That's why we emphasize the proper use of the media to our Hispanic churches, so that they may reach as many people at one time as possible to plant the seeds of the gospel. Many of our churches have been founded as a result of radio broad-

casting, a good tool to begin new missions, publicize Reformed theology, and establish a Reformed identity in the city or nation.

Similarly there are other churches that are exploring the cyber-field to reach youth and to maintain communication with local members. One of our pastors once left to visit his country in South America, and from more than 11,000 km (6,835 miles) away, sent a pastoral blessing to his church at the end of the worship service on Sunday. This is a sign of his concern about what is happening in his ministry and his congregation, and also shows the care that he has with each one of his people even in his time overseas. Via the Internet he is present with his congregation and may greet and dismiss them. We need our classes to understand this part of our strategy and support our efforts in achieving this community.

Church Growth

In recent years, Hispanic Ministries has focused much of its effort on starting new churches, which has been part of the RCA's ten-year goal. We intend to plant and establish fifty new churches or ministries by 2013, thanks to the efforts of the Church Multiplication Team, in joint effort with the classes and synods.

We have moments of great joy every time a new ministry is born, but we experience moments of frustration when we try to be instruments of blessing by establishing a new ministry and are trapped by bureaucracy. We understand that sometimes we are breaking old paradigms, but we also love the church and want to see her triumph, for the glory of God.

Today Hispanics are the largest ethnic group in the United States. This poses a tremendous challenge for the Reformed Church. The church must realize that close to 89 percent of Hispanics learn to speak Spanish first, making congregations that worship in Spanish essential if the RCA is to make an impact in evangelism. That is why training and discipling are priorities.

As we reported to General Synod last year, the Hispanic Council has undertaken a mission which is unprecedented—establishment of the Dominican Reformed Church (IRD). The Hispanic Council, along with Global Mission and the Dominican Reformed Church's leadership, is working feverishly for this. Our fellow pastors in the Dominican Republic are developing a vision that will unite our hearts for the purpose of reaching a world engulfed in the grip of sin.

That is why after the earthquake in Haiti, IRD has been a faster vehicle for helping our brothers and sisters to alleviate their suffering. With the support of compassionate brothers and sisters from RCA, more than three hundred families in eighteen churches have been helped.

The Synod of Iglesia Reformada Dominicana also started their first classis, called "Clasis del Ozama," or Classis of the Ozama. It covers the following areas: Boca Chica, Santo Domingo Este, Santo Domingo Norte, Santo Domingo Oeste, Los Alcarrizos, Pedro Brand, San Antonio de Guerra, and Distrito Nacional.

With a population of over 253,437, more IRD classes will be created later on. The new classis was established with nine churches in all the mentioned areas and four mission fields.

It is our hope that this new model can be replicated in other areas where possible ministries can be started and be a dynamic force in the future. Trained coaches and leaders are at pres-

ent helping to train fifty pastors and lay leaders to establish a church that will be theologically and structurally sound.

RESOLUTION

Upon the retirement of David Roe, president of Central College since 1998, the General Synod Council offers the following resolution:

R-16
BE IT RESOLVED that the two hundred and fourth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Northwestern College, in Orange City, Iowa, in the month of June 2010, offers thanks to God for years of inspired and faithful service to Central College and to the Reformed Church in America by Dr. David and Betsy Roe, whose commitment to the integration of faith and learning, emphasis on community, devotion to strengthening global awareness, and dedication to helping students discover their calling and grow in wisdom have left their enduring marks upon students, colleagues, and congregations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the two hundred and fourth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, expresses to David and Betsy Roe its gratitude, admiration, and affection and offers its prayers for years of health, love, and joy in continuing service to Christ and his church. (ADOPTED)

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO GENERAL SYNOD 2008 REFERRALS

Response to *MGS 2008,* R-37, p. 130, Alternative Funding Strategies

The 2008 meeting of the General Synod adopted the following recommendation:

> To encourage the General Synod Council to continue to find ways to explore alternative strategies for funding the church's work (*MGS 2008,* R-37, p. 130).

This recommendation from General Synod allows us to talk about how best to fund the mission of the church and to bring awareness about challenges we have in our work together.

One of the ways we work to fund the church is through cost management. Reductions in staff in Global Missions, consolidation of two director positions into one, the move of the finance office to Grand Rapids, cost reductions made in 2009, and the annual conversations about strategic and long-term budgets have helped staff focus on cost containment. Even with those changes, per-member assessment request amounts have increased in eight of the last ten years. These increases have generally been at the rate of inflation or have included new initiatives approved by General Synod. General Synod assessments have

averaged only about 2 percent of total congregational income. Despite this low percentage and the cost containment measures put into place, there are many valid questions and communication challenges about where the funds are going and how best to communicate the effects of the costs of Our Call on the per-member assessment, supporting the work of General Synod, new initiatives, and losses in total membership.

Another funding source for the work of the denomination comes from a portion of the net income from the Church Growth Fund (CGF) that is provided to the GSC to be used in church multiplication work. The CGF board has accepted the challenge of analyzing the potential growth in the fund and its impact on profits available to be distributed. The RCA's Church Growth Fund is unique among denominational funds in its close link to sharing its net income with the denomination. In order for the CGF to achieve greater potential, support from churches, individuals, classes, and regional synods will be needed. CGF will need to assess the willingness of RCA individuals and organizations to invest in savings certificates and the need of local congregations to borrow funds for building projects.

Fundraising efforts of the denomination have gone through several transitions in the last ten years. This department is now being led by Laura De Vries, who brings a deep understanding of the work on the denomination, a passion for the ministry of the Reformed Church in America, and a thorough knowledge of development work. Laura has created a solid base for our long-term fundraising efforts.

We are just over two-thirds through the ten-year goal to multiply new congregations and revitalize existing congregations, undergirded by discipleship leadership and mission. In 2008 the General Synod added an additional end focused on a multiracial future freed from racism. Tim Vink's report to GSC and General Synod refers to the invisibility of the new church plants in our data. Measuring progress toward the goal is impeded by the way we count the data. Collecting additional assessments from new churches is also greatly affected by this challenge.

Most of the work done by staff about *MSG 2008* R-37 has focused on the data in the Consistorial Report Form and what it could mean for alternative methods for calculating assessments. A task force including Bruce Bugbee (Regional Synod of the Far West), Jon Norton (Regional Synod of New York), Harold Delhagen (Regional Synod of Albany), Tim Vink, Charlie White, and Barbara Boers was given the responsibility of finding a formula that would have an acceptable amount of change for those regional synods most affected by moving to a percentage of income formula. This group discovered that there are considerable challenges to finding a simple formula that would mitigate the large swings, especially in two of the regional synods, which would result from a straight percentage of income. Conversations about this specific topic have begun throughout the denomination as evidenced by the Synod of the Far West addressing in meetings in early 2010 a potential change in formula. Staff was also aware of the possibility of overtures coming to General Synod 2010 about this topic.

The challenges with the current assessment system are multiple. Since 1993, twenty-one reports and sixty overtures related to assessments have gone to synod with little or no action. Assessments seem to be regarded by classes and congregations more like a tax than as first fruits. The current system does not recognize that churches are not financially blessed equally. As a percentage of income, some churches are paying over 11 percent of their income in assessments and some are paying less than one-half of one percent. Measuring membership for supporting the work of the church and for measuring the growth of the church in a time of church planting, and with a generation that does not value membership, creates a false negative in our understanding of our denominational health.

Membership is no longer the sign of faith, discipleship, and stewardship. There are generational, pastoral, and financial reasons membership has not increased, while our churches, income, and attendance have increased. We face both pastoral problems, and potential issues of integrity, when membership rolls are viewed as determining the cost of assessments rather than celebrating lives committed to be part of the body of Christ.

Data from our Consistorial Reports is being used more consistently and is helping us understand who we are and ask ourselves some challenging questions. Despite declining membership numbers, total giving to RCA congregations has grown slightly more than the rate of inflation. In many cases there seems to be a pattern of membership decline and increasing contributions, which frankly raises questions about how membership data is being compiled and interpreted.

Even a brief conversation about assessments will raise the questions of why should we pay for them? What do we get in return? Wouldn't it be better to just let the churches keep the money for local ministry and mission? These are questions about our call, purpose, vision, and relationships. Without the clarity of our common commitments and agreed upon strategies, funding is difficult, no matter what the means or formula. This is what Our Call has been providing—a strong missional understanding and clarity of purpose and priority. The challenge is to move us toward a more biblical and focused approach in the support of our classes, regions, and denomination.

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEES ON FUNDING OUR MISSION TOGETHER

The all-synod advisory committees met to discuss and reflect on the endeavors of the RCA's congregations, classes, regional synods, and General Synod to work together, and to consider the implications of those collective endeavors in light of the recommendations and overtures currently before General Synod.

As we entered the discussion, we reflected upon many programs and support ministries undertaken by the larger denomination that impact local congregations.

- Our Call
- Natural Church Development
- Youth ministry
- Task forces and commissions
- Pastoral networks
- Consistory enrichment and leadership development
- Missionary support
- RCA wellness programs
- Emerging leaders groups/gatherings
- Theological education, candidate care
- Assistance for pastoral search process
- Diaconal ministry
- Discipleship/Sunday school materials
- Study guides
- Homosexuality dialogue
- Education seminars
- The RCA website and electronic resources

The committees' reactions to assessments as one means of support for the work of our classes, regional synods, and General Synod included:

- Some people "bristle" at the thought of assessments: "We don't like it, but we pay it."
- A need to change the mindset from "necessary evils" to "opportunities to fund the ministry of the church at large."
- A change in mindset from "what do we get" to "what does it support."
- "I personally reacted somewhat negatively [to assessments] until I came to General Synod."
- There is a need to communicate better with churches about how assessments are used.
- A perception that "assessments equal taxes" creates a negative impression in our churches.

We also discussed the current method of assessments that's based on the number of confessing members. This is what we heard:

- Assessments are a heavy burden on smaller churches.
- The system presents a temptation to underreport or reclassify confessing members, and adherents may not be encouraged to become members.
- The current system reflects our covenant values, allowing all to contribute.
- The per-member assessment system is simple, easy to budget, and has worked in the past.
- Does the current system discourage receiving people who are poor, disabled, or undocumented into membership?

The advisory committees provided advice on the following recommendations and overtures. Conscious of the concerns expressed about assessments, the advisory committees' writing team strongly urges that all task forces formed by General Synod utilize cost-saving electronic meeting technology whenever possible.

Upon the advice of the all-synod advisory committees the synod voted:

R-17
To instruct the moderator of the General Synod Council in consultation with the GSC to form a task force <u>of no more than seven members, representing at least three racial-ethnic groups, small, medium, and large churches, and at least five regional synods,</u> whose objective is to observe and analyze the practices used in each classis and regional synod to determine assessments, in order to bring awareness regarding the current realities and disparities in these assessment systems. These conversations are to include a discussion of the values surrounding our work together and what values might best inform our decisions about denominational funding<u>; and further,</u>

<u>to explore alternate funding systems,</u> with final report and recommendation to the 2011 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. A diverse composition would ensure that the concerns of all churches would be represented.
2. The advisory groups recommended a broader and more creative spectrum of funding alternatives for the church's work, in accordance with R-37 (*MGS 2008*, p. 130): "To encourage the General Synod Council to continue to find ways to explore alternative strategies for funding the church's work."

We reviewed the feedback from the advisory committees and encountered wide concern regarding the four-year time frame for organization in the original overture. However, there was overwhelming support for the proposed funding formula, with particular attention paid to the integration of new church starts into the life of the RCA. See the response of the committees to overtures 9 and 16 on pages 166-167 and 177-178.

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO GENERAL SYNOD 2009 REFERRALS

Response to *MGS 2009,* R-39, p. 133—Baptism Survey

To direct the General Synod Council to engage in an anonymous survey focused on 1) churches started in the RCA in the last ten years, and 2) a representative sample of other churches in the RCA. Questions should focus on the following:

a. Is infant baptism an area of disagreement within the church? If so, where do the disagreements occur?
b. Does the church practice infant baptism?
c. How many infants were baptized in the last five years? How many adults?
d. Has the church rebaptized anyone in the last five years?
e. What percentage of parents in the church have not brought their infant children for infant baptism over the last five years?
f. Has the church dedicated any infants in the last five years? If so, what percentage, in comparison to infant baptisms?
g. Does the church allow baptized children to partake of the Lord's Supper before making a public profession of faith before the congregation?

and further, to instruct the General Synod Council to refer the survey results to the Commission on Theology for study and report back to the earliest possible General Synod.

*The anonymous survey on baptismal beliefs and practices in the RCA is well underway. As of March 6, 152 responses to the digital survey had been received, providing a fairly good cross-section of the entire denomination. It was felt that a somewhat wider sampling would deepen the statistical reliability of the results, particularly when it comes to newer churches (a focus of the R-39 recommendation [*MGS 2009*, p. 133]). So on March 10, a second invitation to churches to participate in the survey was emailed. The final deadline for all submissions was March 31. Preliminary results show a noteworthy diversity in baptismal beliefs and practices in the RCA.*

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-47, p. 225—Print and Online Publication

To instruct the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the *Church Herald* Editorial Council, to offer a print and online publication combining the best of the *RCA Today* and the *Church Herald*, within existing budget constraints.

Working with the Church Herald *Editorial Council as well as input from RCA members through print and online surveys, the first issue of* RCA Today *that brings together the best of the* Church Herald *and* RCA Today *was distributed in April.*

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-48, p. 226—Enhancing RCA Online Offerings

To instruct the General Synod Council to explore ways to enhance current online offerings, especially by promoting online conversations by means of an open blog and increased use of online social networks, inviting current writers from the *Church Herald* to participate.

The Church Herald *blog continues to be an active blog on the RCA website. All of the past* Church Herald *blog writers were invited to participate and many have continued to participate. We have also invited past writers of the* Church Herald *to write for the print and online* RCA Today *magazine. Most accepted the offer, including Lou Lotz. The* Church Herald *Editorial Council requested that the name of the blog remain "The* Church Herald *blog" and to this point, we have honored that request. We realize some individuals would prefer the name be changed and we are considering an appropriate time to do so.*

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-49, p. 226—Readership Review of *RCA Today*
To instruct the communications staff to conduct a readership review of *RCA Today* to determine the quantitative level of actual readership as well as the levels of satisfaction with the qualitative issues of content and layout, in time to report to the General Synod of 2011.

This survey will be started well into 2010 in order to offer RCA members an opportunity to review several issues of the new format.

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-52, p. 228—BOBS Increase of Assessments
To increase the per-member assessment for classes in which consistories are in arrears in the payment of benefits required in Formulary 5 (Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament) for all of its ministers serving full-time in congregations under call or contract, unless the minister is covered through the Canadian portion of the RCA plan or the plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held (*BCO* 1.II.12.Sec. 3 and 1.I.2.Sec. 7); and further, that the 2010 assessment be set for each classis in which there are consistories in arrears based on the amount of the current arrearage for the consistories in that classis.

Recommendation 52 was addressed by delegates to the 2010 General Synod in a plenary presentation and within all-synod advisory committees.

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-54, p. 237—Continuing Homosexuality Dialogue Report
To affirm the value of continued dialogue and discernment on the topic of homosexuality within the church, to state that our dialogical and discerning work is not done, and that legislative and judicial steps are not a preferred course of action at this time; and further, recognizing the appropriate authority of assemblies, to encourage assemblies, when possible, to refrain from disciplinary proceedings as a way of dealing with minority viewpoints on this controversial issue, to be monitored by the GSC, for report to the 2011 General Synod; and further, to recommend that officeholders and ministers avoid actions in violation of the policies of the earlier statements of General Synod on ordination and relevant state laws on marriage, with sensitivity to the pastoral needs of all involved.

The GSC appointed two of its members to develop a monitoring strategy for continued dialogue and discernment.

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-65, p. 300—Classis Boundaries Discussion Report
To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the RCA seminaries and the General Synod professors of theology, to offer a church-wide discussion on the issue of "bounds" as it is used in the *Book of Church Order*, particularly on the issue of classis boundaries; and further, that this church-wide discussion event be one that is self-funded.

An invitational event cosponsored by the Reformed Center (NBTS) and Journey (WTS) was held on February 22-23 at Western Seminary. It was a "round-table" conference of professors, pastors, representatives from the Church Multiplication Team, and other

church leaders for a focused discussion on the issue of "bounds" and related issues. The planning team is now considering how to engage the entire church in the discussion.

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-72, p. 319—GSC to Make Use of Belhar in Implementation of Our Call
To approve the document "Belhar and Our Call" and to commend the document to churches, classes, and synods for use in considering the adoption of the Belhar Confession; and further, to direct the General Synod Council to make use of "Belhar and Our Call" in its attempts to integrate the Belhar Confession into the implementation of Our Call.

The Belhar Confession is currently informing strategies in all aspects of Our Call.

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-73, p. 324—Women's Training Event
To instruct the General Synod Council to develop and hold a training event for all RCA staff that addresses issues of gender and power, assumptions about women as leaders, the use of language with regard to gender, and specific ways to fully include women in the life of the church; and further, to encourage the regional synods and classes to hold similar events, with the intention of increasing advocacy for women.

The RCA's personnel director continues to actively explore options for a training event for RCA staff that would meet the scope of the recommendation's requests.

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-74, p. 324—GSC Plan for Office for Women
To direct the GSC to develop a plan for a future Office for Women that would not be charged with raising its own support, enabling the RCA to live out its stated commitment to the full inclusion of women at all levels of the church's leadership and ministry; and further, to have a staff member in place by January of 2010 or as soon as possible thereafter.

The general secretary, with the GSC moderator, hosted a consultation on the Office for Women in September 2009 at which a wide range of participants came to enthusiastic consensus around moving forward with "experiential learning communities" as a model for RCA women's ministries. A thorough search process ensued and Ms. Claudette Reid has been hired as the RCA's new coordinator for women's ministries; she began her work on June 1, 2010.

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF THE STATISTICAL REPORT OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA FOR THE YEAR ENDING 12/31/2009

		2007	2008	2009	2008-2009 Increase or (Decrease)
1.	Churches	931	933	935	2
2.	Church Households	105,367	104,774	101,623	-3,151
3.	Confessing Members	166,043	161,272	158,529	-2,743
4.	Inactive Members	39,387	39,545	40,122	577
5.	Baptized Members	65,238	59,303	57,627	-1,676
6.	Total Membership	270,668	260,120	256,278	-3,842
7.	Adherents	50,498	51,448	54,158	2,710
8.	Average Worship Attendance	171	176	166	-10
9.	Received on Confession	7,040	6,536	6,673	137
10.	Received on Certificate	2,989	2,977	2,981	4
11.	Transferred	3,060	2,930	2,650	-280

12. Deceased	2,580	2,711	2,499	-212
13. Other Removals from Roll	5,034	5,816	5,118	-698
14. Infants Baptized	3,351	3,141	3,087	-54
15. Adults Baptized	1,404	1,476	1,770	294
19a. RCA Assessments	12,682,289	12,535,989	12,676,910	140,921
19b. RCA Contributions	14,178,366	15,005,604	12,085,997	(2,919,607)
19c. Other Contributions	19,036,289	20,132,770	19,459,695	(673,075)
20. Congregational Purposes	326,472,199	289,315,922	263,988,246	(25,327,676)
TOTAL	372,369,143	336,990,285	308,210,848	(28,779,437)

Church Plants with a Denominational Plan
115 church plants have an average worship attendance of 84.

Organized/Received/Adopted
Highbridge Community Church, Bronx, New York (1/09), Classis of New York
Iglesia Cristianna Emmanuel de Sacramento, Sacramento, California (1/09), Classis of Central California
Crossroads Church, Norwalk, Iowa (4/09), Classis of Central Iowa
Oak Hills Church, Clovis, California (5/09), Classis of Central California
The Orchard Church, Brentwood, California (5/09), Classis of Central California
Podonamoo Reformed Church, Bergenfield, New Jersey (7/09), Classis of Greater Palisades
The Crossing, Sioux Falls, South Dakota (7/09), Classis of Dakota
Jusarang Church, Sugar Hill, Georgia (9/09), Classis of Zeeland
New Alliance Christian Church, Mississauga, Ontario (11/09), Classis of Ontario
New Life Community Church, Muskegon, Michigan (11/09), Classis of Muskegon

Disbanded/Released/Transferred
Reformed Chuch of the Boght, Cohoes, New York (11/07), Classis of Albany
Franklin Fellowship Church, Franklin, Tennessee (1/09), Classis of North Grand Rapids (released)
New Concord Reformed Church, Chatham, New York (3/09), Classis of Columbia-Greene
Hope Community Reformed Church, Orlando, Florida (3/09), Classis of Florida
First Reformed Church, Harriston, Ontario (4/09), Classis of Ontario
Fellowship Reformed Church, Lombard, Illinois (6/09), Classis of Chicago
Community Reformed Church, Newton, Iowa (8/09), Classis of Central Iowa
Umo^{n}Ho^{n} Reformed Church, Macy, Nebraska (11/09), Classis of Central Plains (transferred)

RESPONSE TO GENERAL SYNOD 2007 REFERRALS

Response to *MGS 2007*, R-86, p. 301

Report of the General Synod Professors Task Force

(Final report on R-86, *MGS 2007*, p. 301)

A task force was appointed in early 2008 by the president of General Synod to engage in a thorough review of the way in which the office of General Synod professor of theology functions in the life of the church, and the manner in which the office is addressed in the *Book of Church Order*.[1] The full mandate is as follows:

1. To clarify the processes of accountability, appeal, and pastoral care for General Synod professors of theology currently outlined in the *Book of Church Order*, including any needed revisions to the *Book of Church Order*;
2. To coordinate the development of relevant policies and practices within the seminaries and/or commissions or agencies of the church that do not require changes to the *Book of Church Order*, but that relate to the role of General Synod professors within the seminaries and within the life of the church; and further,
3. To review the nature of the office of General Synod professor;
4. To review the criteria for eligibility to that office;
5. To clarify the responsibility of the office of General Synod professor of theology to the General Synod;
6. To examine means by which the General Synod professors could be established as an ongoing body within the order of the church.

Although the original mandate given to this task force requested a final report in 2009, for a variety of reasons, the task force has waited until 2010 for its final report. The attached *Book of Church Order* changes represent the result of its labors.

This report accompanying the proposed *Book of Church Order* changes seeks to articulate some of these principles, in the hope of clarifying the reasons for the many changes proposed for the *Book of Church Order.*

The members of the task force began their work by seeking to define theologically and ecclesiologically exactly what a General Synod professor is or should be, from the perspective of Reformed theology and polity. Their first consideration focused upon the structural relationship between the seminaries and the General Synod. The task force believes that much of the current *Book of Church Order* language is a holdover from a time when the General Synod exercised much more direct oversight over the seminaries of the Reformed Church in America. This is reflected, for example, in the way the office is defined as a "full-time associate or full professor at one of the seminaries of the Reformed Church."[2] Yet the operation or direct oversight of the seminaries is not explicitly granted to the General Synod by the *Book of Church Order*. In fact, since the dissolution of the old Board of Theological Education in 1993, General Synod's constitutional oversight of the seminaries is restricted to the approval of appointments to their respective boards.[3] On the other hand, the *Book of Church Order* does explicitly assign to the General Synod the oversight of the standards for the certificate of fitness for ministry, as well as "original authority over all matters pertaining to doctrine and denominational polity as they relate to the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church."[4] But if the General Synod no longer has direct oversight over the seminaries, then this new reality must be more fully reflected in the way in which General Synod professors are defined in the *Book of Church Order*. This led the task force to propose defining General Synod professors not in terms of teaching at the seminaries, but rather in terms of the distinctive form of ministry which identifies this office. The task force recognizes, from the existing formulary for the appointment of a General Synod professor, that General Synod professors are "teachers of the church at large."[5] In addition, the task force notes the centrality of the involvement of General Synod professors in preparing candidates for ministry, and in the awarding of the certificate of fitness for ministry.

As a result, the task force is proposing the following definition of General Synod professors, for inclusion in the *Book of Church Order*:

> The office of General Synod professor is to offer, collectively and individually, the ministry of teaching within the Reformed Church in America as a whole, and to represent

the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry.

These changes would allow for the appointment of General Synod professors who are not full-time teachers at one of the seminaries, but who play a major role in teaching the whole church and in preparing candidates for ministry and granting the certificate of fitness. It would also open the possibility of General Synod professors who are not in one of the Reformed Church in America seminaries, but who exercise major teaching and oversight responsibilities within the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

A second major working assumption being developed by the task force focuses not so much on structural considerations (i.e., the relationship between the General Synod and the seminaries), but upon the theological and ecclesiological definition of the office of General Synod professor of theology. The task force has come to the conclusion that, even though General Synod professors are not *ordained* to their office, their ministry does represent an office of the church, in the sense that they represent, in a special and focused way, the teaching ministry of Christ to the whole church. In one sense, this teaching ministry is part of the ministry of Word and sacrament, and General Synod professors are in fact peers and partners with other ministers of Word and sacrament. The professorate is thus not a separate *magisterium* with teaching authority over or apart from the ministry of Word and sacrament. Yet in both scope and focus, there is also a distinct nature to this office. General Synod professors are teachers of the *whole* church, who assist the whole church in its understanding of and obedience to Scripture as interpreted by the Standards. This broader scope is critical and essential to the office as it has been exercised in the Reformed Church in America. Moreover, General Synod professors are devoted in a special and focused way to the ministry of teaching, and in this sense as well represent a distinct vocation and office in the life of the church.

It is particularly this wide *scope* of the office, as well as the distinctive role played by General Synod professors in preparing candidates for ministry and in recommending the certificate of fitness for ministry, that supplies the central rationale for their distinctive participation in the life of the General Synod. Currently General Synod professors are members of the General Synod. This membership in the General Synod exists for a specific purpose: to ensure that the preparation of candidates for ministry does not reflect a narrow theological or ecclesiological perspective of one region of the church, but rather is an expression of the unity, apostolicity, and catholicity of the whole church. They participate regularly in the life of the General Synod[6] so that they may use their teaching gifts in the service of the whole church, and also because they are called to be agents of the General Synod in a critical task that can only be done at the General Synod level—preserving the unity, catholicity, and apostolicity of the whole church in its theological reflection and in its preparation and certification of candidates for ministry.

Yet problems have emerged in the ability of the General Synod to exercise appropriate pastoral care and discipline of those General Synod professors who are among its members. The *Book of Church Order* requires that the General Synod "shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled professor and the professor's immediate family."[7] The General Synod has struggled to fulfill this mandate, and currently has no process or structure in place to fulfill it. Moreover, pastoral care is not the only problem. In the 2005 Kansfield trial and its aftermath, the difficulties the church has experienced in exercising continuing pastoral care and discipline in this case have shown that the General Synod is ill-equipped to engage in direct oversight over individuals. Because the membership of the General Synod turns over almost completely each year, it is almost impossible to establish the continuity in relationships that exists, for example, at the classis level, where such discipline and pastoral care normally takes place in our polity.[8]

Clearly this is one of the major concerns that led to the mandates given to this task force. One approach the task force considered to address these problems consisted of establishing new and ongoing structures to strengthen the ability of the General Synod to fulfill these responsibilities of oversight and discipline. Yet the task force has decided to pursue a different approach in solving these problems. It has instead decided to reconsider whether General Synod professors should continue to be *members* of the General Synod. As an alternative to membership in the General Synod for General Synod professors, the task force proposes the following approach:

- General Synod professors will be members of the classis in which they reside.
- General Synod professors will continue to be either regular or corresponding delegates to the General Synod as they have been in the past, in order to allow them to continue their ministry of teaching to the whole church, and to keep them in close contact with the synod in their crucial tasks of preparing and certifying candidates for ministry in the Reformed Church in America.
- General Synod professors will be amenable to the General Synod *only in matters of doctrine*, but in every other respect shall be amenable, as are all ministers of Word and sacrament, to the classis in which they hold membership (in this case, the classis of residence).
- In this more focused amenability to the General Synod, the only discipline that the synod will exercise will focus upon the office of General Synod professor. Its disciplinary options include admonishment, rebuke, or removal from the office of General Synod professor. Any other discipline that may be needed will be the responsibility of the classis, which will address the accused not as a General Synod professor but as a minister of Word and sacrament.

Why is the task force taking this approach? The task force believes that the essential reason General Synod professors have been members of the General Synod in the past has been to preserve the doctrinal unity of the church. Current practice is (correctly) based on the assumption that the preparation and certification of candidates for ministry should reflect the doctrinal convictions and perspective of the whole church, and not just a particular region. Yet amenability to the synod in matters of doctrine does not inherently require *membership* in the General Synod. Consequently, the task force believes that a better way forward is to posit a more focused amenability of General Synod professors in matters of doctrine to the General Synod, and to leave the rest of pastoral care and discipline in the hands of the classis, which is better equipped to carry out these tasks in an ongoing way. The General Synod is ill-equipped to exercise a wider range of discipline or pastoral care over its professors, and the attempt to do so may also create conflicts between the synod and the seminary boards. Therefore the task force is proposing that General Synod professors retain membership and some amenability in their classes of residence, while continuing their involvement with the General Synod, and their amenability to the synod in matters of doctrine.

This approach has the additional benefit of allowing part-time faculty who are teaching in the seminaries or in the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, but who also function as ministers of Word and sacrament under the oversight of a classis, to be considered for nomination as General Synod professors.

The task force is also addressing the collegiality and corporate identity of General Synod professors. Because of the broad Reformed conviction that the Spirit's work in guiding the church expresses itself most fully within the church corporately, and not just in individuals, the task force believes that it may be helpful to recognize in our church order a corporate role for General Synod professors within the life of the church. This role should first of all concern oversight of the standards for the certificate of fitness for ministry, and the professors should work together to receive referrals from the General Synod with respect

to the standards, and to formulate periodic reports and recommendations to the synod regarding the standards. Similarly, the professorate may be a useful resource to the General Synod from time to time, not replacing any of the existing commissions, but in some cases, receiving appropriate referrals from the General Synod, or offering reports to the synod on matters which touch upon the specific responsibilities granted to the professorate by the General Synod. The *Book of Church Order* changes implementing this corporate structure are included in this proposal.

The task force also has proposed a number of changes to the existing order that are shaped by a common concern—to get the synod out of the employment business, and more clearly and fully to delegate the details of employment, contracts, and the like to its agents: the seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board. Hence the task force recommends the removal of language about retirement age and disability for General Synod professors from the *Book of Church Order* (1.IV.8.10, 11). The task force has done this, not because these are unimportant questions (they are very important), but so that church order more consistently locates final responsibility for these matters with its agents, rather than with the General Synod itself, a body ill-suited to addressing such technical employment issues.

The task force has also proposed eliminating the right of appeal against dismissal for General Synod professors (*Book of Church Order* 1.IV.8.5). The language of "appeal" has always been problematic, since the *Book of Church Order*'s definition of appeals in 2.III.1.1 speaks only of appealing the decisions of lower *judicatories*, not *agents* of the General Synod, such as seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board. The process required for such an appeal of an action of a seminary board has always been ambiguous, and perhaps even in conflict with the authority elsewhere delegated to seminary boards. The task force considered the option of recommending changing the *appeal* to a *complaint*, but this also would be problematic, in terms of the *Book of Church Order* definition elsewhere of complaints (2.II.1.1). In the end, the task force decided to recommend the elimination of this language altogether, believing that the right of dismissal is best left in the hands of the agents of the General Synod, with the normal legal and procedural safeguards established by those agents for the rights of employees.

Finally, the task force proposes to change the option of a *second trial* for General Synod professors[9] into the option for an *appeal* to the next General Synod. This poses some challenging issues in terms of church order, but the task force believes it can be done, and will better serve the church.

The task force has translated these principles into a full set of proposed changes to the *Book of Church Order*, which involves many detailed considerations. That document, which is found below in both strikeout and revised form, is presented to the General Synod for its adoption and recommendation to the classes.

The Church Order and Governance Advisory Committee recommended the inclusion of the following Chapter 2 changes to R-18. They have also been inserted into the strike out underline text for clarity.

Chapter 2, Part III, *Article 1. Nature of an Appeal*

Sec. 2. An appeal may also be a transfer of a charge against a General Synod professor on whom a judgment has been rendered. The appeal shall be made to the General Synod immediately following the synod that rendered the original judgment. In an appeal of this nature, any reference in this Part to a "lower judicatory" shall be deemed to refer to

the General Synod that rendered the original judgment and any reference in this Part to "higher judicatory" shall be deemed to mean the General Synod to which the appeal is made.

(Subsequent sections to be renumbered.)

Chapter 2, Part III, *Article 2. Process for Appeals*

Sec. 5 In an appeal of a General Synod professor, the clerk of the General Synod shall notify its Executive Committee, which will promptly appoint a new committee to consider the appeal. The committee will call a meeting at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The committee shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The committee shall promptly advise the several parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The committee may request further written responses or arguments.

(Subsequent sections to be renumbered.)

Reasons:

1. These sections are necessary to include in the Appeal part of the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures chapter of the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) in order for this process to work for the case of an appeal of a charge against a General Synod professor on whom a decision has been rendered (see new Chap. 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 4c on p. 91).
2. The task force intended these sections to be included in its recommendation but they were inadvertently omitted.
3. With this amendment, the advisory committee supports the adoption of R-16.

The task force recommends:

R-18
To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

Preamble (*BCO*, p. 1)

The four basic or focal governmental units in the Reformed Church in America are the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the General Synod. The consistory is divided further into a board of elders and a board of deacons. The board of elders, the classis, the regional synod, and the General Synod exercise judicial as well as legislative powers. A governmental unit exercising its judicial powers is called a judicatory, and at all other times the governmental unit is known as an assembly. Deacons exercise a legislative function only in the circle of the whole consistory. Three offices are employed in the governmental functions of the Reformed Church, namely, the minister of Word and sacrament (hereinafter referred to as "minister"), the elder, and the deacon. A fourth office, that of the General Synod professor, is a teacher of the church with particular responsibilities for the preparation and certification of candidates for the ministry. ~~A fourth office,~~

~~**that of the General Synod professor of theology (hereinafter referred to as "professor of theology"), is employed in the seminaries of the church for the training of students for the ministry.**~~

The Government, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8 (*BCO*, pp. 68-69)

Article 8. The Office of General Synod Professor ~~of Theology~~

***Sec. 1*. <u>The office of General Synod professor is to offer, collectively and individually, the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole, and to represent the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry.</u> ~~The office of professor of theology is to teach one or more branches of theology in a theological seminary; to administer the academic functions of a seminary, subject to the rules established by the General Synod and supervised through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary; and to exercise general supervision over the students.~~**

***Sec. 2*. <u>All active professors of the General Synod shall together constitute the professorate.</u>**

***Sec. 3~~2~~*. The <u>General Synod</u> professor ~~of theology~~ shall be a minister <u>of Word and sacrament</u> in good standing, sound in the faith, possessed of <u>a recognized</u> ability to teach, have the confidence of the churches, and shall have made recognized contributions to the church <u>and to scholarship. When a Reformed Church minister who exhibits these qualifications exercises a substantial and continuing role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing RCA candidates for ordination and in the process of recommending the certificate of fitness for ministry,</u> ~~When a Reformed Church minister has completed three years as a full-time associate or full professor at one of the seminaries of the Reformed Church,~~ the board of trustees of an RCA seminary <u>or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board</u> may nominate that <u>minister</u> ~~professor~~ to the General Synod as candidate for the office of <u>General Synod</u> professor ~~of theology~~. A <u>General Synod</u> professor ~~of theology~~ shall be elected by the General Synod by a majority vote of the members present.**

***Sec. 4*. When an election of a <u>General Synod</u> professor ~~of theology~~ has been effected, the president of the General Synod shall authorize a service of installation for the newly elected professor. ~~At the installation and before signing the *Form of the Declaration for Professors of Theology*, the professor-elect shall present a letter of dismission to the General Synod from the classis of membership. Before entering upon the duties of the office, the~~<u>During the service of installation, the General Synod</u> professor ~~of theology~~ shall subscribe to the *Form of the Declaration for General Synod Professors (*see Appendix 7).**

***Sec. 5*. A <u>General Synod</u> professor ~~of theology~~ shall be amenable**

in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod, but the professor will be subject to all the policies and procedures of employment or service established by the seminary boards or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency ~~except that a professor of theology shall have the right of appeal to the General Synod against dismissal from a position at one of the seminaries~~.

~~Sec. 6. The General Synod shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled professor and the professor's immediate family. Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the synod deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the synod annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The synod shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Formulary #5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its full-time professors of theology.~~

Sec. 6. A General Synod professor shall hold membership in the classis of residence. The professor shall be amenable in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod, but in every other matter is amenable to the classis as a minister of Word and sacrament.

~~Sec. *7*. A professor of theology shall not be the installed pastor or minister under contract of any congregation, but may preach and administer or assist in administering the sacraments in any church as a minister upon request of the pastor or consistory of that church.~~

Sec. 7 ~~*8*~~. A General Synod professor ~~of theology~~ shall continue in office so long as he or she continues to exercise a substantial role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing RCA candidates for ordination and in the process of granting the certificate of fitness for ministry, or until death, resignation, dismissal from service by the seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, declaration by the General Synod as professor emeritus, or removal from office by the General Synod.

Sec. 8 ~~*9*~~. When a General Synod professor ~~of theology~~ resigns the office elected to by the General Synod, ~~or is no longer in full-time service at a Reformed Church seminary, the professor shall receive a certificate of dismission from the General Synod to a classis or other ecclesiastical body, unless declared a professor emeritus.~~or no longer exercises a substantial role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing candidates for ordination and in the process of granting the certificate of fitness for ministry, the professor shall either be removed from the office by a declarative act of the synod, or be declared professor emeritus by the synod. The appropriate classis shall be notified of this action.

~~Sec. *10*. Upon reaching the age of seventy years, a professor of theology shall elect to be declared professor emeritus, or to be dis-~~

~~missed to a classis or other ecclesiastical body.~~

~~Sec. *11*. The professor of theology may be retired from office by the General Synod because of permanent disability.~~

Sec. ~~11~~ 12. ~~Removal from office shall occur if after due process and trial the professor is found to be unsound in faith or is guilty of such misconduct as is deemed a violation of the obligations entered into at the time of installation.~~ **The General Synod may remove a General Synod professor from that office if after due process and trial at either the General Synod or the classis, the professor is no longer a minister in good standing in the classis or is found by the General Synod to be unfit to fulfill the office. Any additional discipline is the sole responsibility of the classis. The classis shall notify the General Synod of any disciplinary action taken against a General Synod professor.**

The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3 (*BCO*, pp. 76-77)

Sec. 3. Discipline of a Minister of Word and Sacrament

a. Ministers are under the care of the classis and are subject to its government and discipline.

b. The consistory has the right to close the pulpit to a minister who has been accused of any notorious or scandalous offense which would render appearance in the pulpit inappropriate. Proceedings of the consistory in such a case are at its peril, but are undertaken to prevent scandal. This action is not to be considered a trial. The consistory must report its action to the classis immediately.

c. The classis shall have exclusive jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a minister with the single exception noted below. If the charge is proven, the minister may be suspended or deposed from office, suspended from the privileges of membership in the church, and/or excommunicated.

d. In the case of charges against a minister who is also installed as a General Synod professor, charges concerning doctrine must first be considered by the General Synod. Either the accused or the classis may request the General Synod to review a charge, in order to determine whether the case concerns doctrine and thus must be heard at the General Synod. The classis shall stay further judicial action until the General Synod has made its determination over jurisdiction and completed any other appropriate judicial work related to the charge. The decision of the General Synod on jurisdiction is final. Once the General Synod has completed its judicial work, any further or remaining charges are the responsibility of the classis.

Sec. 4. Discipline of a General Synod Professor ~~of Theology~~

a. General Synod professors are amenable to the General Synod for their ministries of teaching and of certification of candidates for ministry, and in these ministries are subject to its government and discipline. The General Synod shall have original jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a General Synod professor only if that charge concerns matters of doctrine. If the Commission on Judicial Business determines that the charge concerns matters of doctrine and has merit, the General Synod shall hear the case, but shall render judgment only on matters of doctrine. In all other cases, the General Synod shall either dismiss the charge or, if appropriate, remand the charge for consideration by the classis in which the General Synod professor holds membership as a minister of Word and sacrament.

b. If the General Synod hears the case, the vice president of the General Synod shall not participate. If the charge is proven, the General Synod professor may be admonished, rebuked, or removed from the office of General Synod professor. Any other discipline shall be determined by the classis in which the General Synod professor holds membership.

c. When a charge against a General Synod professor is proven and discipline is imposed by the General Synod, the professor may appeal the decision, within sixty days of the conclusion of the original trial, to the next regular session of the General Synod. The General Synod Executive Committee shall appoint a committee to consider the appeal, which shall report its recommendation to the General Synod. The General Synod's action on the committee's recommendation shall be the final disposition of the case. All members of General Synod who participated in the first trial shall recuse themselves from consideration of the appeal.

~~a. Professors of theology are under the care of the General Synod and are subject to its government and discipline. The General Synod shall have jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a professor of theology. If the charge is proven, the professor of theology may be suspended or deposed from the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology or the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament or both, suspended from the privileges of membership in the church, and/or excommunicated.~~

~~b. When a charge against a General Synod Professor of Theology is proven and discipline is imposed by the General Synod, the professor has the right to a new trial at the next regular session of the General Synod, the determination of which will be the final disposition of the case.~~

(Subsequent sections in Article 3 to be renumbered.)

Appeals, Chapter 2, Part III, *Article 1. Nature of an Appeal*

Sec. 2. **An appeal may also be a transfer of a charge against a General Synod professor on whom a judgment has been rendered. The appeal shall be made to the General Synod immediately following the synod that rendered the original judgment. In an appeal of this nature, any reference in this Part to a "lower judicatory" shall be deemed to refer to the General Synod that rendered the original judgment and any reference in this Part to "higher judicatory" shall be deemed to mean the General Synod to which the appeal is made.**

(Subsequent sections to be renumbered.)

Appeals, Chapter 2, Part III, *Article 2. Process for Appeals*

Sec. 5. **In an appeal of a General Synod professor, the clerk of the General Synod shall notify its Executive Committee, which will promptly appoint a new committee to consider the appeal. The committee will call a meeting at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The committee shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The committee shall promptly advise the several parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The committee may request further written responses or arguments.**

(Subsequent sections to be renumbered.)

APPENDIX
The Formularies of the
Reformed Church in America

6. Appointment of a General Synod Professor ~~***of Theology***~~ (*BCO,* p. 125)

To the Rev.
_____:

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, reposing confidence in your piety, learning, and talents, has elected you a General Synod professor, to offer the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole, and to represent the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry. ~~**professor in their theological seminary at _____ and as a teacher of the church at large. The branch of theology in which you are to instruct the theological students committed to your charge is_____, with such modification as the General Synod may hereafter direct.**~~
May the Head of the church make your labors useful and pleasant.

Signed by the order of the synod,
_____, President

Done in General Synod this _____ day of _____, 20_____.

7. Declaration for a General Synod Professors ~~of Theology~~ (*BCO,* p. 126)

(This declaration shall be made in the presence of the Christian community at the time of installation. It shall be made orally by the person being installed. The newly installed professor shall sign a book containing the declaration.)

I, _____, in becoming a General Synod 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 will submit myself in matters of doctrine and the exercise of my office 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.

Three related changes:

The Government, Chapter 1, Part IV

Article 1. General Synod Defined (*BCO*, p. 63)

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; five General Synod professor delegates, drawn from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; ~~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. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

***Article 3. Delegates* (*BCO*, pp. 64-65)**

Sec. 4. **The delegates from the professorate of the Reformed Church in America shall be selected by the General Synod professors from their own number. ~~The delegates from the theological seminaries shall be elected by the General Synod Professors of Theology in each school from their own number.~~**

The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, *Chapter 2, Part I*

Article 5. Trying a Charge[17] (*BCO*, pp. 78-81)

Sec. 12. Procedural Rules for Trying a Charge against a General Synod Professor

a. A charge that a General Synod professor teaches doctrine contrary to Holy Scripture or the Standards of the Reformed Church in America may be submitted to the General Synod by a member of the synod. If a charge is brought against the professor at the classis level, either the professor or the classis may request the General Synod to hear the case.

b. The charge shall be referred by the synod to the Commission on Judicial Business, which shall determine whether there is sufficient merit to the accusation that it be heard by the full synod.

c. If the charge goes forward, it shall be heard by the synod.

d. The executive committee of the synod shall establish administrative rules for the hearing.

e. The burden of proof shall be on the accuser, who is responsible for moving the charge forward.

f. The accused shall have the right of cross-examination of adverse witnesses.

g. Affidavits may not be used, but written evidence may be introduced, provided proper foundation has been laid. Written evidence may include arguments that support the accuser's charge as well as arguments from the accused.

h. Either party may invite expert witnesses to testify on their behalf. Each party shall have the right to place questions to any expert witnesses.

i. The charge shall be considered as sustained with the vote of two-thirds of the synod. The vote shall be by written ballot.

j. The synod shall state its reasons for its decision.

k. Should the charge be sustained, the synod shall impose discipline. The decision on discipline shall take place in such a manner that at least one calendar day shall have expired following the decision on the charge. (ADOPTED)

(Subsequent sections to be renumbered.)

In addition to the above changes to the *Book of Church Order*, the task force also recommends the following change to the bylaws of the General Synod.

R-19
To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order,* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 6 and Article 8, for approval by the synod and to be voted for ratification at the next General Synod (additions are underlined and deletions stricken out):

The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order

Chapter 3, Part I, Article 6 (*BCO*, p. 111)

Article 6. The Professorate

Sec. 1. Membership

All active General Synod professors shall be members of this body. It shall meet at least annually to execute its responsibilities.

Sec. 2. Responsibilities

a. The professorate shall engage the church in reflection on theological matters that in its judgment are central to the life and ministry of the church.

b. The professorate shall consider any matter referred to it by the General Synod.

c. The professorate may initiate and consider studies on behalf of the entire church and shall submit them to the General Synod for consideration.

d. The professorate shall, upon request, offer advice and council to the various agencies and commissions of the General Synod.

e. The professorate may originate and shall review any proposed changes in standards for theological education to the General Synod.

f. The professorate may provide assistance to RCA agencies and assemblies in the preparation and evaluation of candidates for ministry.

g. The professorate shall establish a process for selecting five of its members to attend General Synod each year as voting delegates. It shall ensure that each year's delegation includes at least one professor from each of the seminaries, and at least one professor who serves as a teacher or certification committee member under the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

h. The professorate shall elect a moderator with a defined length of term.

(Subsequent articles to be renumbered.)

Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8. (*BCO*, p. 112)

Article 8. Corresponding Delegates

Sec. 1. General Synod Professors ~~of Theology~~

A General Synod professor ~~A professor of either of the theological seminaries~~ who is present at the session of the General Synod, but who is not a regular delegate from the professorate ~~a seminary~~, shall be recognized as a corresponding delegate. (ADOPTED)

Endnotes

1 For more details on the mandate of this task force, see R-86 in the *Minutes of General Synod 2007*, pp. 300-301.

2 See *Book of Church Order* 1.IV.8.3.

3 It must also be recognized that the General Synod is the "sole member" of the corporation that legally constitutes each of the seminaries. Yet this relationship between the seminaries and the General Synod is not to be confused with *oversight*, which the General Synod exercises only indirectly, through approval of appointments to the seminary boards.

4 *Book of Church Order* 1.IV.2.7.

5 See Formulary 6: *Appointment of a General Synod Professor of Theology*.

6 Each year, two General Synod professors from each seminary currently attend General

Synod as regular delegates (1.IV.1), and all General Synod professors who are in attendance at General Synod are recognized as corresponding delegates (3.I.8.1).

[7] *Book of Church Order* 1.IV.8.6.

[8] It is worth noting that many classes have also found it difficult to fulfill the mandate which the *Book of Church Order* gives to them regarding the pastoral care of their enrolled ministers (See *Book of Church Order* 1.II.12.3).

[9] See *Book of Church Order* 2.I.3.4.b.

General Synod Professors Task Force *Book of Church Order* Recommended Changes

For informational purposes only, below is how the BCO *text related to General Synod Professors will read if the proposed* BCO *changes are ratified by the classes*.

Preamble (*BCO,* p. 1)

The four basic or focal governmental units in the Reformed Church in America are the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the General Synod. The consistory is divided further into a board of elders and a board of deacons. The board of elders, the classis, the regional synod, and the General Synod exercise judicial as well as legislative powers. A governmental unit exercising its judicial powers is called a judicatory, and at all other times the governmental unit is known as an assembly. Deacons exercise a legislative function only in the circle of the whole consistory. Three offices are employed in the governmental functions of the Reformed Church, namely, the minister of Word and sacrament (hereinafter referred to as "minister"), the elder, and the deacon. A fourth office, that of the General Synod professor, is a teacher of the church with particular responsibilities for the preparation and certification of candidates for the ministry.

The Government, **Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8** (*BCO*, pp. 68-69)

Article 8. The Office of General Synod Professor

Sec. 1. The office of General Synod professor is to offer, collectively and individually, the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole, and to represent the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry.

Sec. 2. All active professors of the General Synod shall together constitute the professorate.

Sec. 3. The General Synod professor shall be a minister of Word and sacrament in good standing, sound in the faith, possessed of a recognized ability to teach, have the confidence of the churches, and shall have made recognized contributions to the church and to scholarship. When a Reformed Church minister who exhibits these qualifications exercises a substantial and continuing role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing RCA candidates for ordination and in the process of recommending the certificate of fitness for ministry, the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board may nominate that minister to the General Synod as candidate for the office of General Synod professor. A General Synod professor shall be elected by the General Synod by a majority vote of the members present.

Sec. 4. When an election of a General Synod professor has been effected, the president of the General Synod shall authorize a service of installation for the newly elected profes-

sor. During the service of installation, the General Synod professor shall subscribe to the *Form of the Declaration for General Synod Professors (*see Appendix 7).

Sec. 5. A General Synod professor shall be amenable in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod, but the professor will be subject to all the policies and procedures of employment or service established by the seminary boards or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

Sec. 6. A General Synod professor shall hold membership in the classis of residence. The professor shall be amenable in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod, but in every other matter is amenable to the classis as a minister of Word and sacrament.

Sec. 7. A General Synod professor shall continue in office so long as he or she continues to exercise a substantial role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing RCA candidates for ordination and in the process of granting the certificate of fitness for ministry, or until death, resignation, dismissal from service by the seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, declaration by the General Synod as professor emeritus, or removal from office by the General Synod.

Sec. 8. When a General Synod professor resigns the office elected to by the General Synod, or no longer exercises a substantial role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing candidates for ordination and in the process of granting the certificate of fitness for ministry, the professor shall either be removed from the office by a declarative act of the synod, or be declared professor emeritus by the synod. The appropriate classis shall be notified of this action.

Sec. 9. The General Synod may remove a General Synod professor from that office if after due process and trial at either the General Synod or the classis, the professor is no longer a minister in good standing in the classis or is found by the General Synod to be unfit to fulfill the office. Any additional discipline is the sole responsibility of the classis. The classis shall notify the General Synod of any disciplinary action taken against a General Synod professor.

***The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3** (*BCO*, pp. 76-77)

Sec. 3. Discipline of a Minister of Word and Sacrament

a. Ministers are under the care of the classis and are subject to its government and discipline.

b. The consistory has the right to close the pulpit to a minister who has been accused of any notorious or scandalous offense which would render appearance in the pulpit inappropriate. Proceedings of the consistory in such a case are at its peril, but are undertaken to prevent scandal. This action is not to be considered a trial. The consistory must report its action to the classis immediately.

c. The classis shall have exclusive jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a minister with the single exception noted below. If the charge is proven, the minister may be suspended or deposed from office, suspended from the privileges of membership in the church, and/or excommunicated.

d. In the case of charges against a minister who is also installed as a General Synod professor, charges concerning doctrine must first be considered by the General Synod. Either the accused or the classis may request the General Synod to review a charge, in order to determine whether the case concerns doctrine and thus must be heard at the General Synod. The classis shall stay further judicial action until the General Synod has made its determination over jurisdiction and completed any other appropriate judicial work related to the charge. The decision of the General Synod on jurisdiction is final. Once the General Synod has completed its judicial work, any further or remaining charges are the responsibility of the classis.

Sec. 4. Discipline of a General Synod Professor

a. General Synod professors are amenable to the General Synod for their ministries of teaching and of certification of candidates for ministry, and in these ministries are subject to its government and discipline. The General Synod shall have original jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a General Synod professor, only if that charge concerns matters of doctrine. If the commission on judicial business determines that the charge concerns matters of doctrine and has merit, the General Synod shall hear the case, but shall render judgment only on matters of doctrine. In all other cases, the General Synod shall either dismiss the charge or if appropriate, remand the charge for consideration by the classis in which the General Synod professor holds membership as a minister of Word and sacrament.

b. If the General Synod hears the case, the vice president of the General Synod shall not participate. If the charge is proven, the General Synod professor may be admonished, rebuked, or removed from the office of General Synod professor. Any other discipline shall be determined by the classis in which the General Synod professor holds membership.

c. When a charge against a General Synod professor is proven and discipline is imposed by the General Synod, the professor may appeal the decision, within sixty days of the conclusion of the original trial, to the next regular session of the General Synod. The General Synod Executive Committee shall appoint a committee to consider the appeal, which shall report its recommendation to the General Synod. The General Synod's action on the committee's recommendation shall be the final disposition of the case. All members of General Synod who participated in the first trial shall recuse themselves from consideration of the appeal.

Appeals*, Chapter 2, Part III, *Article 1. Nature of an Appeal (*BCO*, pp. 87)

Sec. 2. An appeal may also be a transfer of a charge against a General Synod professor on whom a judgment has been rendered. The appeal shall be made to the General Synod immediately following the synod that rendered the original judgment. In an appeal of this nature, any reference in this Part to a "lower judicatory" shall be deemed to refer to the General Synod that rendered the original judgment and any reference in this Part to "higher judicatory" shall be deemed to mean the General Synod to which the appeal is made.

(Subsequent sections to be renumbered.)

***Appeals*, Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2. Process for Appeals** (*BCO*, pp. 88))

Sec. 5. In an appeal of a General Synod professor, the clerk of the General Synod shall notify its Executive Committee, which will promptly appoint a new committee to consider the appeal. The committee will call a meeting at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The committee shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The committee shall promptly advise the several parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The committee may request further written responses or arguments.

(Subsequent sections to be renumbered.)

APPENDIX
The Formularies of the
Reformed Church in America

6. Appointment of a General Synod Professor

To the Rev. _____:

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, reposing confidence in your piety, learning, and talents, has elected you a General Synod professor, to offer the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole, and to represent the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry.

May the Head of the church make your labors useful and pleasant.

Signed by the order of the synod,

_____, President

Done in General Synod this _____ day of _____, 20_____.

7. Declaration for a General Synod Professor

(This declaration shall be made in the presence of the Christian community at the time of installation. It shall be made orally by the person being installed. The newly installed professor shall sign a book containing the declaration.)

I, _____, in becoming a General Synod professor 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 will submit myself in matters of doctrine and the exercise of my office 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 Government, Chapter 1, Part IV

Article 1. General Synod Defined

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; five General Synod professor delegates, drawn from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

Article 3. Delegates

Sec. 4. The delegates from the professorate of the Reformed Church in America shall be selected by the General Synod professors from their own number.

The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, Chapter 2, Part I

Article 5. Trying a Charge

Sec. 12. Procedural Rules for Trying a Charge against a General Synod Professor

a. A charge that a General Synod professor teaches doctrine contrary to Holy Scripture or the Standards of the Reformed Church in America may be submitted to the General Synod by a member of the synod. If a charge is brought against the professor at the classis level, either the professor or the classis may request the General Synod to hear the case.

b. The charge shall be referred by the synod to the Commission on Judicial Business, which shall determine whether there is sufficient merit to the accusation that it be heard by the full synod.

c. If the charge goes forward, it shall be heard by the synod.

d. The executive committee of the synod shall establish administrative rules for the hearing.

e. The burden of proof shall be on the accuser, who is responsible for moving the charge forward.

f. The accused shall have the right of cross-examination of adverse witnesses.

g. Affidavits may not be used, but written evidence may be introduced, provided proper foundation has been laid. Written evidence may include arguments that support the accuser's charge as well as arguments from the accused.

h. Either party may invite expert witnesses to testify on their behalf. Each party shall have the right to place questions to any expert witnesses.

i. The charge shall be considered as sustained with the vote of two-thirds of the synod. The vote shall be by written ballot.

j. The synod shall state its reasons for its decision.

k. Should the charge be sustained, the synod shall impose discipline. The decision on discipline shall take place in such a manner that at least one calendar day shall have expired following the decision on the charge.

The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order

Chapter 3, Part I, Article 6

Article 6. The Professorate

Sec. 1. Membership

All active General Synod professors shall be members of this body. It shall meet at least annually to execute its responsibilities.

Sec. 2. Responsibilities

a. The professorate shall engage the church in reflection on theological matters that in its judgment are central to the life and ministry of the church.

b. The professorate shall consider any matter referred to it by the General Synod.

c. The professorate may initiate and consider studies on behalf of the entire church and shall submit them to the General Synod for consideration.

d. The professorate shall, upon request, offer advice and council to the various agencies and commissions of the General Synod.

e. The professorate may originate and shall review any proposed changes in standards for theological education to the General Synod.

f. The professorate may provide assistance to RCA agencies and assemblies in the preparation and evaluation of candidates for ministry.

g. The professorate shall establish a process for selecting five of its members to attend General Synod each year as voting delegates. It shall ensure that each year's delegation includes at least one professor from each of the seminaries, and at least one professor who serves as a teacher or certification committee member under the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

h. The professorate shall elect a moderator with a defined length of term.

Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8

Article 8. Corresponding Delegates

Sec. 1. General Synod Professors

A General Synod professor who is present at the session of the General Synod, but who is not a regular delegate from the professorate, shall be recognized as a corresponding delegate.

RESPONSE TO GENERAL SYNOD 2008 REFERRALS

Response to *MGS 2007*, R-16, p. 101-102 and *MGS 2008*, R-13, p. 94

Report of the Reformed and Missional Task Force

Luke's Gospel draws to a rousing conclusion with two disciples making the seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. They walk in shadow—not just shadow cast by the setting sun but a larger, more foreboding shadow in the shape of a Roman cross. They talk quietly as they walk, about all the things that have taken place in Jerusalem. Terrible things. Puzzling things. The One they had hoped would redeem Israel strung out on a scandalous cross, buried in a borrowed tomb. And then just this morning, three days later…startling news from women who had visited the tomb at the crack of dawn and found it empty! The erratic pace they keep as they walk toward Emmaus, speeding up and then slowing down, reflects the fits and starts that stir within their own hearts—a whirlwind of hope and despair and confusion all at once.

And then a stranger appears. In the shadows, he walks beside them. They don't recognize him at first. The stranger interprets for them all that was revealed about Jesus of Nazareth in the Scriptures. As he does, their hearts burn within them. And when they reach the village of Emmaus, they convince the stranger to remain for a meal. He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. *And their eyes are opened.* They see him. Through the opening of the Scriptures and the breaking of bread, they encounter Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord. Bursting with joy and a sense of urgency, they get up and make the journey back to Jerusalem and announce to the other disciples, and in turn the whole world, the good news: "The Lord has risen indeed!"

Eugene Peterson once commented that in all of his years as a pastor, he is convinced that the dominant question looming in every person's mind when they enter the sanctuary on a

Sunday morning, whether or not they are aware of it, is this: *Is there a story? And am I in it?*

The answer to both questions is a resounding yes! There *is* a story, and it is the best story the world has ever known and will ever know. And yes, we are *all* in it. This story in Luke's Gospel, often referred to as "The Walk to Emmaus," is the story *we find ourselves in* (along with the rest of the grand, sprawling biblical narrative). As the RCA enters the final stretch of its ten-year goal (Our Call) and waits on God to reveal what's next, this story gives shape and focus to our lives as Reformed Christians called to participate in God's mission in and for the world.

The Walk to Emmaus includes all the essential dimensions of the community of faith—the risen Christ meeting us in our struggles, opening the Word to us, nourishing us with his presence in the breaking of bread, inspiring dejected disciples to be ambassadors of hope in their mission back to Jerusalem. The walk to and from Jerusalem is one that we make over and over again—walking in the shadow of the cross, being sustained by the Word and sacraments, and being sent out into the world to announce and embody the good news. As Jesus would later say to his disciples, so he says to the RCA at this crucial point in our history: "You are witnesses of these things! And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised…" (Luke 24:48-49).

But what does that look like in today's complex and rapidly changing world? More specifically, what does it mean to bear witness to Christ as *Reformed* Christians in a North American context that is steadily becoming more religiously pluralistic, postmodern, post-denominational, and post-Christian? How does the RCA bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that is both anchored in its rich Reformed heritage and open to the fresh ways that God is at work in the world?

These questions, and others like them, are urgent and difficult ones. They strike at the heart of the RCA's identity and vocation in a new time and changing social context. What theological commitments and practices will define and unite us as a denomination? How will we carry out our work with faithfulness, humility, urgency, and creativity?

Over the past three years, the Reformed and Missional Task Force has sought to facilitate a denomination-wide dialogue around questions like the ones raised above. The dialogue has been framed this way: *What does it mean to be both Reformed and missional? And how is this being lived out with faithfulness and innovation in particular contexts across the diverse landscape of the RCA?*

Both of these words—"Reformed" and "missional"—are difficult to define. They are slippery words, and by nature even the best definitions leak. "Reformed" refers to the seedbed of the sixteenth century European Reformation from which the RCA sprang forth and it describes the tradition that gives shape to our theology, ecclesiology, liturgy, and polity among other things. "Missional" is a newer word that has become widely embraced not just throughout the RCA but the larger church. While it remains somewhat ambiguous, "missional" refers to the biblical conviction that the church does not exist simply for itself but has been sent to participate in the Triune God's mission (*missio Dei)* in and for the world.

Are these two words, Reformed and missional, at odds with one another? To embrace one, must we disregard the other? For those who have not only discovered that these two words are complementary, but that to embrace a core Reformed identity invariably leads to missional engagement, *what does it look like specifically*? And what are the *barriers* that prevent local congregations and ministries from taking more risks and following Christ in

mission?

This report is the final summary of the Reformed and Missional Task Force. It aims to give a brief account of the background for the dialogue, describe the process, share key observations and learnings, and make recommendations for how the RCA might continue to move into a more missional future that remains distinctively Reformed.

Background

At the 2007 General Synod, the Missional Structures Task Force recommended two proposals that essentially called for a radical restructuring of RCA assemblies in order to equip congregations for stronger missional engagement. The General Synod voted not to adopt the recommendations on grounds that it seemed like the cart was being placed before the horse, and what was needed first was a wider dialogue about what it means to be Reformed and missional along with data collection to determine whether the current structures of the assemblies are in fact the primary obstacle to missonal engagement. In connection with the report of the Missional Structures Task Force, the General Synod did adopt the following recommendation (*MGS 2007,* pp. 101-102):

> R-16
> To…continue the denomination-wide dialogue and data collection with written survey and other means on the missional purpose and work of the Reformed Church in America, its assemblies and congregations; and further,
>
> with all regional synods, all classes, consistories, and other bodies, to facilitate this conversation in order to gather wisdom, share ideas, and encourage experimentation, so that the RCA might discover new means by which to more effectively equip congregations for mission and ministry with measurable outcomes; and further,
>
> to share the results of these actions with the General Synod no later than 2010, in order to determine what future steps, if any, might be undertaken.

The officers of the General Synod asked Carol Bechtel, General Synod vice president at the time, to assemble a task force of representatives from the various regional synods to determine how to carry this recommendation forward. This task force became known as the Reformed and Missional Task Force (see list of names at the end of the report). The task force built its work on the structure and learnings from the major issue advisory process at the 2007 General Synod and on the themes identified in wider conversations with RCA members in prior meetings. The task force identified key themes that included the following:

- A widespread desire to learn from multiple perspectives about what the missional purpose and work of the Reformed Church means.
- How this missional purpose and work is presently being lived out in various ministry contexts and how it might be lived out in the future.
- The relationship between our ecclesiology, our polity, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our ministry.

The task force recognized that the church was asking it to build bridges and to engender trust, to include as many voices as possible, to consider the varied contexts of RCA ministry, and to always ask how these discussions enhance and equip the ministry of our congregations.

A Two-year, Denomination-wide Dialogue Is Launched

General Synod 2008 served as the foundation and launching point for a two-year, denomination-wide dialogue on "the missional purpose and work" of the RCA by deeply exploring understandings of and commitments to being both Reformed and missional. It was agreed that the dialogue was to be informed by Scripture, by Reformed tradition and order, by current contexts for and experiences in ministry, and by various understandings of how the Holy Spirit is calling us forward in mission.

The Reformed and Missional Task Force aimed to facilitate this denomination-wide dialogue by three avenues: 1) A DVD resource, 2) the RCA Story Project, and 3) an electronic survey.

DVD and Leader's Guide

General Synod 2008 provided the setting for three keynote presentations by Richard Mouw along with a panel discussion (with a select group of RCA scholars, pastors, and missionaries) on what it means to be both Reformed and missional. Delegates were given the opportunity to engage in small-group discussion around the presentation, and provided feedback to the task force through the moderators.

A DVD resource featuring Mouw's presentation and a leader's guide was produced in multiple languages so that the dialogue could be extended throughout the church. The purpose of the DVD project is summarized in this way: "To provide a brief and inspiring resource that will (continue to) frame the discussion, guide the conversation, and nurture trust." The DVD resource consists of six sessions and is designed to be flexible so as to help facilitate a conversation around what it means to be Reformed and missional in a variety of groups and settings. The DVD and accompanying study guide are available both on the RCA website and in print. Spanish and Korean translations of these resources are also available.

The task force received feedback from several classes and consistories throughout the denomination that have used the DVD in a classis gathering. The feedback has been both affirmative and constructive in nature. It indicates that the DVD is serving its purpose of facilitating a lively conversation in environments made safe for dialogue so that learnings and insights might be collected for the benefit of the whole church. The task force listened to the various "voices of the church" through the feedback of those who utilized the DVD, which proved helpful in shaping their recommendations for the future.

Even though the two-year dialogue has officially come to an end, the task force believes it is necessary and important for the conversation to continue. The DVD resource is a very helpful tool to educate and facilitate dialogue, and both local congregations and classes are strongly urged to utilize this resource in whatever settings deemed appropriate.

RCA Story Project

The second avenue by which the task force sought to facilitate the dialogue was through the "RCA Story Project." This project is modeled loosely on National Public Radio's StoryCorps project and the book *Listening Is an Act of Love* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007). The purpose of the RCA Story Project is summarized this way: "To help the RCA to share and to hear authentic and compelling stories of how God has worked and is working among us in our various missional contexts."

Stories have an inherent power. They are containers for truth that draw us in, engage us as

whole persons, challenge our assumptions, and enlarge our imaginations. Daniel Taylor puts it this way:

> Stories are the single best way humans have for accounting for our experiences…Our stories tell us who we are, why we are here, and what we are to do. They give us our best answers to all of life's big questions, and to most of the small ones as well. Stories engage me as a whole person—intellect, emotion, spirit, and body—and, when healthy, encourage me to be and do everything for which I was designed. Stories also bring you and me together. We not only exchange stories, we are characters in each other's stories, and therefore none of us can live our story alone.[1]

Given the transformative power of story, it's no wonder that the primary medium the Triune God has chosen to reveal God's self is story—the Holy Scriptures and most decisively, the story made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus himself most commonly taught about God's kingdom through stories, parables that connected with the everyday life of people and had the capacity to catch them by surprise and open their eyes to a new way of seeing.

Convinced that one of the best ways to "gather wisdom, share ideas, and encourage experimentation" about what it means to be Reformed and missional is through the telling and hearing of stories, the task force has intentionally been collecting the stories, hopes and dreams of RCA members from across our denomination. Two- to three-minute edited snapshots of these stories can be heard on the RCA website (under the "Resources" tab choose "Denominational Discussions"). In addition, a CD sampling of ten stories selected by the task force accompanied the 2010 General Synod Workbook.

The task force has directed the General Synod Council to use the Office of Communication and Production Services as well as the RCA Archives to continue to find ways to urge members of the RCA to record and submit their stories. Beyond just collecting these stories to be shared on the website (and utilized in other mediums), the goal of the RCA Story Project is to equip and inspire local congregations to cultivate a culture of "story telling" and share their own stories with each other and the community into which they have been sent to join God in mission.

As the task force listened to the many different stories and reflections throughout the denomination, the following themes represent a remarkable consensus that emerged around what it means to be Reformed and missional:

- To be missional is to embrace both global and local mission.
- We are missional because we are Reformed.
- At the heart of being Reformed is to acknowledge God's sovereignty and grace.
- That the church joins itself to God's mission, already present in the world.
- The success of that mission is not dependent on our work but on God's faithfulness.
- To be missional means that we are concerned about the wholeness of people—meaning their physical, emotional, and spiritual health.
- To be missional means that the church is committed to both individual and corporate actions.
- We are called to be faithful in our mission and in our partnership with others.
- The others include those of other Christian traditions and sometimes those of other faiths.
- Being missional is part of the DNA of the Reformed Church, part of who we are more than of what we do.

- We are called to be a blessing to others and often discover that God blesses us through others.
- Other people are not objects of our mission but subjects of our love.
- We seek broad participation in mission within congregations.
- The church serves others without strings attached in obedience to God's call.
- New churches are seen as an extension of our mission—not primarily as a way to grow the RCA, but to serve the world in new communities of faith.

The task force believes that the RCA Story Project can become a catalyst for cultivating a Reformed and missional imagination at the congregational and classis levels—revealing wisdom, encouraging innovation, inspiring faithfulness, and reminding us that we're in this together and that "none of us can live our story alone." All of our stories, in all their complexity and simplicity, in all their diversity and similarity, are gathered up into and find their ultimate meaning in the larger biblical story of God's mission in and for the world.

Reformed and Missional Survey

Thirdly, the task force worked in partnership with Megan Mullins at Hope College's Frost Research Center in Holland, Michigan, to draft a written survey that was distributed electronically via email in the spring of 2009.

The purpose of this survey, as mandated in R-16, was to assess how the structures (committees, task forces, and teams) that support the work of the four assemblies (consistories, classes, regional synods, and General Synod) of the RCA can better equip congregations and churches to fulfill their purpose of joining God's mission in the world. Additionally, we hope the survey adds to the wider, ongoing discussion within the RCA on what it means to be Reformed and missional.

The survey sought to investigate five general areas: 1) the types of conversations occurring in churches about what it means to be Reformed and missional, 2) how church structure assists or hinders the development of the life of the church, 3) how church structure assists or hinders participation in the mission of God, 4) dreams for Reformed and missional work within churches, and 5) how, if at all, the DVD resource is being used. Following General Synod 2009, the task force met to begin the exciting work of discussing the findings and discerning what recommendations, if any, might assist in the completion of the dialogue.

Respondents were randomly selected from the RCA membership database. A total of 882 individuals participated, yielding a response rate of 29.4 percent (a very acceptable response rate for this type of survey according to the Frost Center).[2] Regarding respondent characteristics:

- 20.7 percent were deacons, 31.2 percent were elders, and 48.1 percent were pastors (28.2 percent of whom were currently serving in an RCA congregation)
- 74.8 percent were male and 25.2 percent were female
- 92.7 percent were Caucasian
- Nearly half came from the Great Lakes or Heartland regional synods (29.4 percent and 16.6 percent respectively)
- 60.1 percent were between 45 and 64 years of age
- 98.2 percent were currently attending a church

The survey revealed that the greatest obstacles preventing churches from developing their internal life and engaging missionally in the world were:

- Lack of human resources (congregational participation) (29.9 percent "much" or "very much" an obstacle)
- Lack of financial resources (26.7 percent "much" or "very much")
- Lack of training for missional engagement (27.5 percent "much" or "very much")

When asked to identify the level of support each of the assemblies provides to the church for developing its internal life and missional engagement:

- 68.0 percent said the consistory supports their church "very much" or "much"
- 27.5 percent said the classis supports their church "very much" or "much"
- 26.9 percent said the regional synod supports their church "very much" or "much"
- 20.8 percent said the General Synod supports their church "very much" or "much"

Respondents said committees, task forces, and teams of the assemblies could better support their church in developing internal life and missional engagement through:

- Training for those involved in missions (50.5 percent)
- Encouraging more cooperation across congregations in common missions (49.9 percent)
- Prayer for missions (45.2 percent)
- Financial resources for mission (32.9 percent)
- Analysis of community assets for support (27.9 percent)

Respondents were asked to identify, if there were no obstacles, their dreams for the missional life of their congregation. Themes from respondent comments indicate that they dream of:

- More funding, engagement, and outreach in mission
- More development of future church leaders and leadership mentoring
- A culture of mission that is developed within the church
- More multicultural or nontraditional congregations
- Reaching out of churches to schools, neighborhoods, and people in need
- A passionate and growing membership
- The church seen as an example to the community
- A uniform understanding of church mission
- The ability to partner/pool resources with other churches in the community

While the survey sought to investigate several areas (see above), the task force was especially attentive to what the survey revealed regarding the role of structures and assemblies in hindering or assisting "the missional purpose and work" of the RCA. Among the most significant findings of the survey was that, according to those who participated in the survey, current structures and assemblies themselves were not identified as a primary barrier to missional engagement. The primary perceived obstacles are lack of human resources, financial resources, and training for missonal engagement. There is, however, a high level of frustration with how the structures and assemblies are functioning, especially at the classis level. The survey reveals that the largest sense of dissatisfaction is with the classis and its support (or lack thereof) of local congregations and ministries.

Ironically, although the classis is the assembly in our polity that is most suited to empower local churches in fulfilling their mission and ministry, it seems that the classis often lacks the resources to equip congregations and ministries for missional engagement. The task force rediscovered that the missional calling of the classis and its congregations is already articulated in our polity. In Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 2 of the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*), one of the responsibilities of classis is described as follows:

> *The classis shall regularly consider the nature and extent of ministry within its bounds in obedience to Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the world within which the classis ministers.* The classis may form such entities as may be needed for the ministry of the church, provided such bodies do not infringe upon the prerogatives of other classes, consistories, or synods (italics added).

This responsibility of a classis to "regularly consider the nature and extent of ministry within its bounds in obedience to the Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the world within which the classis ministers" is often overlooked and gets eclipsed by the responsibility of the classis to exercise a general superintendence over its ministers and congregations (Article 2, Section 1). The task force wants to draw out this missional calling explained in Article 2, Section 2 and give it greater emphasis. This finding in particular was significant for the task force in discerning what to recommend to General Synod.

Key Observations and Learnings from This Entire Process

For the majority of people who participated in this dialogue, Reformed and missional are not mutually exclusive terms. In fact, to embrace a Reformed theology and ecclesiology invariably calls us to be missional, turning our faces outward to participate in the Triune God's mission in and for the world. In other words, to be Reformed is to be missional.

While the majority of people believe they have a firm grasp on what it means to be Reformed and missional, and see them as complementary, tension points do exist. Examples of these tension points include baptismal theology, views on church membership, and definitions of what "success" looks like. The task force acknowledges that all of these tension points cannot immediately be resolved, and that there is great benefit in simply being able to identify the tension points and continuing to have vigorous dialogue about them.

Although not all tension points can be resolved immediately, it is important not to dismiss theology and doctrine as we seek to identify and fulfill the missional purpose and work of the RCA. Two pitfalls must be avoided as we move forward. The first is to cut ourselves off from our historical tradition and capitulate to the pragmatism of our day, which says "do whatever works." While it is true that to be Reformed is to be missional, it is not necessarily true that to be missional is to be Reformed. We must keep wrestling with what it means to be missional from a distinctively Reformed perspective. The second pitfall that must be avoided is to make theology an abstract exercise that has no relevant bearing on the lives of people and local congregations. From the beginning, the task force has said that the purpose of this dialogue is not just to hear ourselves talk. Theology at its best is *lived*. It has everything to do with the way we live out our identity and vocation in a particular context. One of the loudest cries the task force heard from people all across the denomination was a cry for help to assist them in finding practical ways to be Reformed and missional in their unique contexts. In other words, what does it look like? There was less concern over nailing down precise definitions of words like "Reformed" and "missional" and a far greater concern for the practical dimension of helping them to do it, and also assisting with resources that make it possible.[3]

The majority of congregations and Christian leaders desire to be faithful and to engage in mission with their communities and world. The challenge is feeling overwhelmed and ill-equipped in a rapidly changing world as well as having limited resources. They are asking for help in terms of what it looks like to be missionally engaged, opportunities for training and leadership development, and assistance with resource needs. And they are looking for these things particularly at the classis level.

The primary obstacle to missional engagement among the majority of congregations is not the current structures of the assemblies but the way the assemblies are functioning. This is especially true at the classis level. If we are to better equip and resource local congregations and ministries for a missional future, it is imperative that we "re-imagine" the classis and place higher priority on the role of the classis to focus on the world and its needs "within its bounds" (and not solely on the supervision of congregations within the classis). Another way to say this is that classis needs to be re-imagined so that it can move beyond "maintenance" to "missional."

Many congregations have identified "lack of resources" as a key barrier to missional engagement. This reality has only been heightened by the difficult economic situation. While the task force believes this is a legitimate concern that must be addressed creatively, it also seems that there is a strong "theology of scarcity" that is permeating so many of our congregations instead of a "theology of abundance" (not to be confused with the health and wealth gospel). When Peter and John were on their way to the temple to pray in Acts chapter 3 and they encountered the beggar at the gate called Beautiful, they responded to his need with a theology of abundance. They said, "We can't give you money, but what we do have we give you!" And that of course was the healing presence of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Theologically, we believe that every congregation has what it needs to be faithful to God's calling: first and foremost the Holy Spirit; and second, unique gifts and resources given by God as an extension of Christ's body. What if the assemblies and congregational leaders worked at helping people and faith communities discern what they do have, and then doing missional engagement out of that place of abundance? We need to help our congregations and local ministries discern God's presence and activity among them so they can live out the gospel in their own unique context. If the focus is primarily on what we lack, we will miss out on what we do have and how God is already at work among us.

There is a strong desire among leaders, congregations, and local ministries for greater communication within and among classes, regional synods, and the denomination as a whole, as well as a desire to foster better partnerships, work collaboratively, and build trust.

The RCA Story Project has enormous potential to strengthen relationships in the RCA, to nurture the ongoing dialogue about what it means to be Reformed and missional, and to educate and inspire. The task force believes it must be a top priority to continue to cultivate a culture of storytelling at all assembly levels, and to ensure that there are avenues for these stories to be shared and heard.

Conclusion

From the beginning, the task force has been careful to avoid predetermined outcomes and instead trust the Holy Spirit's guidance through good process. The task force found its work to be both overwhelming and invigorating, and it has been a joy to cultivate deeper relationships with each other as team members and learn from each other's differing perspectives.

As it concludes its work, the task force believes that the Holy Spirit has guided and is guiding our work—our work both as a task force and as a denomination. The task force believes more than ever that this conversation matters. We give God thanks for the fruit that has already come from this dialogue, and we are hopeful of the fruit still to come.

So we all continue to find ourselves in God's story. We take our place on that journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, walking in the shadow of the cross in our various unique contexts

but also walking together, united with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and thus bound to one another. As the RCA looks to "what's next," for the task force this much is clear: God is at work in some remarkable ways throughout our denomination. There remain significant challenges and steep hills to climb. But our hope and confidence has always resided in something, or rather Some*one*, beyond ourselves. We are claimed by the Triune God, who created this world and sustains it, who chose us before the foundation of the world and has redeemed us and daily renews us in the Spirit, and who sends us out in gratitude to participate in God's mission to renew the whole creation. The success of this mission does not ultimately depend on us. God is the one who in sovereign grace and freedom initiates the mission and will bring it to its glorious completion. We are simply invited to participate in what God is already doing. We are not our own but we belong—in body and soul, in life and death—to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. And because we belong to him…

Yes, because we belong to him…he makes us wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

"Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. *You are witnesses of these things*. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised…" (Luke 24:45-49, italics added).

In light of all the above considerations and three years of prayerful work, the Reformed and Missional Task Force makes the following recommendations:

R-20
To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

> ***Sec. 2.*** **The classis, in consultation with its congregations and its partners in mission, shall regularly consider the nature and extent of ministry within classis ~~its~~ bounds in obedience to Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the world within which the classis ministers. The classis may form such entities as may be needed for the ministry of the church, provided such bodies do not infringe upon the prerogatives of other classes, consistories, or synods.**
> **(ADOPTED)**

Reasons:
1. The Preamble of the *BCO* declares that "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*" (italics added). This revision emphasizes the RCA's missional calling at the classis level to embrace "the total life of all people" in the scope of its mission. Further, this revision provides a more faithful and creative way for the classis to ascertain the "state of religion" and serve the needs of the world as required in Article 16, Section 1.
2. This revision responds to one of the primary learnings of the work of the Reformed and Missional Task Force, namely the desire among church leaders and congregations for the classis to give greater priority and resources to train and equip congregations for missional engagement.

3. This revision allows for the inclusion of other voices that need to be heard if the classis is to accurately discern the needs of the world within its bounds and foster more creative collaboration among its churches and mission partners in ministering to those needs.

R-21
To reverse the order of Section 1 and Section 2 under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2 of the *Book of Church Order* in order to emphasize the missional call and responsibility of a classis and its congregations. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The current Section 2 under *Responsibilities of the Classis* tends to be overlooked and neglected in comparison to the other responsibilities of classis that are listed. This would draw it out and give it greater emphasis.
2. While all the responsibilities listed under Article 2 are important, reversing the order of Sections 1 and 2 would make a strong statement acknowledging our missional calling and the conviction that to be Reformed is to be missional.

R-22
To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

> ***Sec. 2.*** **The consistory shall regularly consider, in consultation with its classis and its partners in mission, the nature and extent of the ministry of the congregation in obedience to Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the local community and the world. The consistory may institute and recognize such ministries that express the congregation's faithfulness to the ministry to which Christ calls the church, provided the consistory does not infringe upon the prerogatives of other consistories, classes, and synods. (ADOPTED)**

Reasons:
1. The Preamble of the *BCO* declares that "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*" (italics added). This revision emphasizes the RCA's missional calling at the classis level to embrace "the total life of all people" in the scope of its mission. Further, this revision provides a more faithful and creative way for the classis to ascertain the "state of religion" and serve the needs of the world as required in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 16, Section 1.
2. To provide consistency with *BCO* changes made to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 2.

R-23
To reverse the order of Section 1 and Section 2 under Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2 of the *Book of Church Order* in order to emphasize the missional call and responsibility of a classis and its congregations. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The current Section 2 under *Responsibilities of the Consistory* tends to be overlooked and neglected in comparison to the other responsibilities of classis that are listed. This would draw it out and give it greater emphasis.

2. While all the responsibilities listed under Article 2 are important, reversing the order of Sections 1 and 2 would make a strong statement acknowledging our missional calling and the conviction that to be Reformed is to be missional.
3. To provide consistency with *BCO* changes made in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2.

R-24
To direct the General Synod Council to gather and share annually, during the first five years after the adoption of these *Book of Church Order* amendments, the creative and faithful ways consistories, congregations, classes, and their partners in mission are fulfilling these responsibilities. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. To have a way to measure progress and practice accountability in terms of the above *BCO* changes.
2. To provide an avenue for sharing best practices and stories of faithfulness and innovation in terms of how the above amendments are being adopted.

R-25
To direct the General Synod Council to make the collecting and sharing of stories on being Reformed and missional a priority, especially through the Office of Communication and Production Services and the RCA Archives; and further, to encourage congregations and classes to nurture a culture of storytelling in order to gather wisdom, share ideas, and inspire the body of Christ for mission and ministry. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Story is the primary mode of revelation (Holy Scripture) by which God has revealed God's presence and activity in the world. Jesus himself chose story as his preferred way to preach and teach about the kingdom of God.
2. Telling and hearing stories has an inherent power to teach, inspire, illumine, unite, cultivate understanding, and foster relationships of trust and respect.

R-26
To direct the General Synod Council to sustain the Reformed and missional focus of this dialogue throughout the denomination, making use of the DVD resource and the RCA Story Project, in order to strengthen relationships, engender trust, inspire faithfulness and innovation, and guide our shared task of discernment as to the future direction of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The Reformed and Missional Task Force sees its work not as an end but as a means to ongoing conversations, continual theological reflection about our identity and vocation as Reformed Christians, and further discernment as to how God is at work in the world and where God is leading the RCA in the future.
2. The DVD resource and RCA Story Project are helpful tools to facilitate dialogue, learning, and discernment at all assembly levels.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Reformed and Missional Task Force:

Eddy Aleman (Synod of the Far West)
Carol Bechtel (Synod of the Great Lakes and moderator of the General Synod Council)
Carson Culp (Synod of Canada)
Dan Eisnor (Synod of Mid-America)
Brian Keepers (Synod of the Great Lakes and team moderator)
Denise Kingdom Grier (Synod of the Great Lakes)
Jan Hoffman (Synod of Albany)
Marianne Lin (Synod of New York)
Gregg Mast (Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)
Curry Pikkaart (Synod of the Great Lakes)
Bob Rook (Synod of the Heartland)
Dennis TeBeest (Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)

Endnotes

1 Taylor, Daniel. *Tell Me a Story: The Life-shaping Power of Our Stories* (Bog Walk Press, 2001), pp. 2-4.

2 Visit the RCA website to view the full executive summary of the survey.

3 For a thoughtful theological and biblical reflection on the words "missional" and "Reformed," see the paper "Exploring Mission as a Fourth Mark of the Church" on pages 342-363.

Response to *MGS 2008,* R-16, p. 109

Report of the Fresh Wind Task Force

The Fresh Wind Task Force had a productive year and, based on its learnings, urges the General Synod to establish a permanent body—a Consistory Empowerment Team.

The Year's Work

Originally established in 2008, the Fresh Wind Task Force was given another year to finish its work and reporting by the 2009 General Synod Council. The task force continued its prior quest for ways to enhance the development of vibrant, Spirit-filled, non-clergy leaders, especially elders and deacons. This year's milestones included:

- Developing an abbreviated version of the Fresh Wind Letter, which has proven too long for easy use in several of its intended ways.
- Developing a "Vibrant, Spirit-Filled Leaders Checklist."
- Having each task force member interview local church leaders regarding "best practices" and suggested improvements in current practices, and sharing the results.
- Reviewing our findings and broadening the context and number of churches.
- Distributing resources (Purposeful Living, Resources for Consistory Members, Pathways to Renewal).
- Reviewing Paul Fries's paper on the office of the deacon, in which he advocates including deacons as representatives in our assemblies in a missional church era.
- Approving and initiating a Training Survey for Elders and Deacons (see below).
- Moving forward with discussions about establishing a Consistory Empowerment Team when the task force finishes its work.
- Drafting recommendations for a training plan and resources after analyzing responses to the Training Survey for Elders and Deacons.

The Training Survey for Elders and Deacons, a Survey of New Clergy, and Their Implications

Results of the Training Survey for Elders and Deacons are both an indicator of the depth of interest among current elders and deacons and a wake-up call to the denomination (if one is needed) on how far we have to go.

The survey was sent by email to 3,351 active elders and deacons in the RCA and 1,087 of them answered it—a strong response rate of over 32 percent within about a month.

Of most interest to the task force was that despite the fact that ample resources are readily available, only about three of every ten elders and deacons received an orientation to office that fully explained their duties and responsibilities; fewer than two of every ten had received any formal training for the office before being ordained; and only about one out of every three felt fully prepared to fulfill all their responsibilities as ordained leaders. Responses to the remaining questions made it clear that this was not the situation most preferred.

A review of the detailed answers to the questions only makes the overall results clearer.

For example, over and over in the survey, even those elders and deacons who received initial training for their positions indicate that they had no follow-up training. Does the world stand still? Do our responsibilities change? Do responsible elders and deacons face new challenges just as congregations and clergy do? We think the answers are obvious.

The concern regarding equipping and empowering leadership on the part of elders and deacons is mirrored in comments from RCA ministers who have graduated within the last five years from Western Theological Seminary (WTS), New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), and non-RCA seminaries (with their education overseen by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency [MFCA]). The survey was initiated by WTS, conducted by the Carl Frost Center for Social Science Research for the Cooper Leadership Team at WTS, and was based on 130 interviews (a 53 percent response rate) conducted from November 2008 to January 2009.

Only about four in ten of the WTS graduates and six in ten of the NBTS and MFCA graduates strongly agreed that they identify, train, and empower lay leaders according to their gifts—a key aspect of leadership. Only 16 percent of WTS graduates and 26 percent of NBTS and MFCA graduates considered themselves "very effective" at "empowering and equipping teams to oversee and carry out purposes and goals." A comment by one participant summarized what we think is all too common: "I don't find that pastors are trained to equip others. They are trained to lead others and themselves. Pastors assume that preaching equips others, but [that] doesn't equip others in a practical way."

Other survey results suggest that these pastors are already faced with some conditions that have caused burnout among many clergy in mainline denominations. Most notably, about 69 percent of WTS graduates and 75 percent of NBTS and MFCA graduates said they had gone through significant organizational change at their current workplace. Over 60 percent of WTS graduates and over 50 percent of NBTS and MFCA graduates experienced organizational conflict either more than once a month or two to three times per six months.

The task force believes strongly that long-term improvements in clergy effectiveness, a diminution of clergy burnout, and more effective ministries by churches will not occur without more effective identification, training, and empowering of elders, deacons, and other lay leaders. Both clergy and the elders and deacons know what they need. While

there are lots of resources to draw on, these clearly have not addressed most of the problems. It is time to put together a continuing body premised on what we already know to work on what we know we need.

After considering the survey results and the insights drawn from two years of work the members of the Fresh Wind Task Force drew the following conclusions:

1. Our current system produces many leaders of churches but far too few leaders of church ministries.
2. Even with recent changes in seminary education, few pastors are prepared to handle a major part of their job in a vibrant church: training elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders to actually do ministry. Most training is still done at the local church level despite the clear advantages to a two-pronged approach—training in local congregations supplemented with training in larger groups allowing interaction across congregational lines.
3. Most elders and deacons believe they need and want more training.

Indeed, we have come to believe that all five of the objectives our task force explored—to select, equip, empower, encourage, and nurture growth in leaders throughout the RCA—would be enhanced by enhancing the quality, amount, and nature of training of elders and deacons.

Training clearly is designed to equip leaders for their work, and without continuing training, it is much harder to nurture growth in leaders. (The worlds of business, nonprofits, and government spend a great deal of time and money routinely training most of their employees for similar reasons.) Training encourages elders and deacons to think of themselves as leaders of the church's ministries and empowers them to do the work involved in these well. Current elders and deacons who would prefer not to spend the time and effort required for training to do and lead ministry are probably not leaders we should have selected in the first place, and an expectation that being an elder or deacon will involve such training is likely to lead to better choices of congregational leadership in some cases.

Why a Consistory Empowerment Team?

Past General Synods have been reluctant to continue to renew task forces for work over a period of years for good reason: a task force is likely not to be a body designed to implement changes and make continuous improvements over a period of time. When a task force has identified key priorities, it makes more sense to establish a team that includes varied members and continuing staff support and can do its work within the context of Our Call. We believe that the process of better selecting, equipping, empowering, encouraging, and nurturing growth in elders and deacons across the RCA is understood well enough that it is time to establish a team at the denominational level. We suggest calling it the Consistory Empowerment Team because the aim is to empower consistories—which include mostly elders and deacons—to better lead ministry in and by their congregations and in some cases, in and by their assemblies. The training is a major part of that empowerment.

Accordingly, the following recommendation was offered and amended from the floor:

R-27
To thank the Fresh Wind Task Force for completing its work over the past two years and formally disband it effective July 1, 2010; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the general secretary, to form a Consistory Empowerment Team, using funds already in the Ministry Services budget, to ~~oversee~~ offer training and other initiatives to develop and train vibrant, Spirit-filled elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders; and further,

to include a progress report of the Consistory Empowerment Team to the General Synod annually. (ADOPTED)

Response to *MGS 2008,* R-28, p. 125

Report of the Task Force to Review the Constitutional Inquiry Questions

The 2008 General Synod voted:

> To direct the president of the General Synod to appoint a task force to review the constitutional inquiry questions (*BCO* 1.II.7, Section 1) for their contemporary theological and ecclesiological relevance, practical usefulness, and missional focus, for report to the General Synod of 2010 (*MGS 2008*, R-28, p. 125).

The following persons were appointed to the task force: Mitchell Kinsinger from the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, Curry Pikkaart from the Reformed and Missional Task Force, Lisa Tice from the Commission on Christian Worship, David Timmer from the Commission on Theology, Lori Walber from the Commission on Church Order, and Allan Janssen, at-large, convener. The task force met in New York City on February 18 and 19, 2010.

The task force began by reviewing the purpose of the constitutional inquiries. It noted that this matter has been addressed most recently by the Commission on Theology in a report to the General Synod in 2000 (*MGS 2000*, 145-148):

> Historically, the purpose of the constitutional inquiries has been two-fold. The questions have provided a means by which classes can exercise pastoral authority over their congregations and a means by which individual congregations can live in responsibility to the greater church.
>
> The primary concern reflected in the questions has been for the spiritual well-being of congregations. Spiritual well-being is developed through the faithful preaching of the Word of God, sound teaching based upon the confessional standards of the church, the exercise of spiritual discipline, the nurture of young people, and the responsible exercise of office. In asking congregations to respond to these questions, classes are providing pastoral oversight of congregations. The questions provide guidelines for congregations in the development and maintenance of their well-being, both spiritually and materially (pp. 146-147).

The task force affirmed this expression of the purpose of the inquiries. In so doing it noted that the inquiries function in two ways. The first is to bring to mind for the consistory yet again the shared mission of the church and the congregation's life as an expression of that mission. By asking the questions of the ministers and elder delegates, the body with immediate pastoral oversight of consistories reminds its constituent churches of their task. Secondly, the classis itself becomes cognizant of the life of its congregations, not only that

it might provide aid and encouragement to the churches, but that it might engage in a deeper fellowship. The classis exercises not only its episcopal function (*episcope* = oversight), but its life as *koinonia*, as well as its task of *diakonia*.

As the task force reviewed the questions as stated in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*), it did so by paying close attention to:

1. The marks of the church: the pure preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the discipline of the church. The marks as expressed in the Belgic Confession remain foundational for a Reformed understanding of the church.
2. The three local offices of the church: minister of Word and sacrament, elder, and deacon. The ministries of these offices are united in the consistory and as such direct the ministry of the church, specifically as exercised by the consistory.
3. The responsibilities of the consistory as set out in the *BCO*.
4. The task force took special notice of the missionary task of the church. Conversations from the Reformed and Missional Task Force and discussions within the Commission on Theology (see the report of that commission exploring the question of a fourth mark of the church, pp. 342-363) suggest that a Reformed understanding of the nature of the church includes what has been called a "missional" focus. (We note that we are using the term "missional" in a broad sense, and not in a restrictive sense. That is, the RCA does not align itself with a particular theological movement, however it might be valued.) The presence of the Word (the Incarnate One) as preached will shape the church to follow God's task for it both in itself and in the world. Furthermore, the task force notes that the Preamble of the *BCO* includes this sentence under the rubric of *The Nature of the Church on Earth*: "Gathered by the Spirit around Word and sacrament, the church fulfills its call within the expectation of the reign of God as it participates in mission, in calling all persons to life in Christ, and in proclaiming God's promise and commands to all the world" (p. 2).

As the task force closely reviewed the relevant section of the *BCO*, it noted at the outset that the section (1.II.7.1) opens with the prescription that the "president of the classis, at the same meeting at which delegates to the synod are appointed, shall address the following inquiries to the minister and elder delegates of each church." To our knowledge few if any classes follow this procedure. Most ask minister and elder delegates to answer the questions in writing. The task force is of the judgment that on the one hand it is bad policy to retain a prescription that is ignored and so brings all such prescriptions of the *BCO* into disrepute. On the other hand, the original notion that the classis takes time at a stated session to exercise mutual oversight retains value. The task force will recommend that the opening sentences of the section be amended to read:

> The classis shall annually engage the minister and elder delegates in a review of the ministry of the separate congregations by addressing the following questions. The answers shall be recorded in the minutes of the classis for the information of the synods.

The change allows the classes to use the manner they find most helpful. However, in the interest of mutual accountability, the task force encourages classes to discover new ways by which ministers and elders can share the information. Such times might include witness from the various churches regarding old and new initiatives in mission.

Furthermore, in reviewing the current set of questions, the task force noted that absent are questions concerning worship, mission, and discipleship. In addition, because the questions have been added over time and have addressed differing concerns, they are not uniform in style or type.

The words from the Preamble cited above remind the church that it is ever in the rhythm of gathering and sending: "Gathered by the Spirit around Word and sacrament… [the church] participates in mission…" The *BCO* includes guidelines for the consistory as it oversees the worship of the congregation. We recommend adding a question:

> Does the consistory provide for worship, including the celebration of the sacraments, in accordance with the requirements of the *Book of Church Order* (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11)?

The *Book of Church Order* was amended in 2002 specifically to include the missionary task of the church under the responsibilities of the consistory. Among the consistory's responsibilities is to "regularly consider the nature and extent of the ministry of the congregation in obedience to Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the local community and the world" (1.I.2.2). Thus, the task force recommends adding the following question:

> Has your consistory considered the nature and extent of the ministry of the congregation in accordance with Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2 of the *Book of Church Order*?

A current question that addresses the missionary task of evangelization in particular is the one that asks whether the church is engaged in activities which "faithfully witness to the gospel." The task force recommends retaining the question with some slight changes that align it more closely with a Reformed theological understanding:

> Is your church engaged in significant, regular activities which faithfully witness to the gospel and which encourage others to respond to God's Spirit in commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

The questions also intend to disclose the congregation's commitment to mission by asking whether the congregation fulfills its "stewardship obligation" by contributing "annually and significantly" to the mission programs of the church. In the opinion of the task force, this question could be better put in such a way that it includes not only monetary gifts, but contributions in service and prayer as well. Moreover, those contributions are to the Reformed Church in the ministry of all its assemblies. Thus, the task force recommends a new question:

> Does your church contribute annually and significantly in its prayers, gifts, and service to the mission of the Reformed Church in America?

The congregation is engaged in discipleship as well as in worship and in mission (indeed all three are interwoven). The responsibilities of the consistory include that "The consistory shall provide services of worship and other activities and organizations in the church's life for the spiritual benefit and growth of Christ's people" (1.I.2.10). The task force recommends adding the following question:

> Does the consistory regularly review the activities of the church in order that the congregation and those whom it serves may become more faithful in their walk as disciples of the Lord Jesus?

The current set of questions asks whether "the education of the young people in the essential truths of the Word of God" is being attended to. The wording of the question includes the term "catechising," which presents confusion within the question itself. On the one hand, the practice of catechesis is a venerable one within the church. However, it is a

generic term that is often read as though the question were being asked specifically about the Heidelberg Catechism. Moreover, since the question itself asks about attending to the requested education in a broad sense, the task force recommends a simplification:

> Is the education of the young people in the essential truths of the Word of God faithfully attended to in your congregation?

The task force noted that the existing questions are directed to the elders. They also include a question concerning the "performance review" of the elders and the deacons. The *BCO* is clear that the deacons play a significant role in the missionary task of the church. Thus, the task force recommends adding a question on the task of the deacons. It also recommends changing the question concerning elders to include a description of their task within the question itself:

> Does the board of deacons fulfill its responsibilities in mercy, service, and outreach as set forth in the *Book of Church Order,* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 6?

> Does the board of elders fulfill its responsibilities of supervision and discipline as set forth in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5?

Current questions concerning "performance reviews" provide difficulty for many consistories. The notion is taken from the world of commerce where personnel experts regularly review the performance of employees. Ministers, elders, and deacons are office-bearers with responsibilities within the church. The task force agrees that office-bearers are responsible to each other within the assemblies where they serve. The questions posed above include elders and deacons. In addition, ministers of Word and sacrament are also active in the ministry of the congregation and share in their responsibilities. This should be, we judge, a time of mutual encouragement and reflection. The conversation would include the minister's function within the congregation, but it would be a *mutual* reflection, thus acknowledging that the office-bearers are engaged in a shared ministry. Thus, the task force recommends a new question:

> Does the consistory regularly engage its minister/s in a mutual reflection on the ministerial needs and challenges of the congregation?

One question asks specifically about the salary and compensation of the minister/s of Word and sacrament. The task force recommends retaining this question. It, too, reflects the consistorial responsibility to provide minister/s for a congregation and reminds the consistories of the constitutional nature of the instrument of the call.

A further question asks whether the consistory considers persons within the congregation who might be gifted for the ministry of Word and sacrament. The task force found this an important question. However, ministry is broader than simply that of Word and sacrament. The congregation includes a variety of ministries, and indeed a variety of gifted persons within it. Thus, the task force recommends changing the question to read:

> Has the consistory prayerfully considered persons within the congregation, particularly young people, in order to identify with them their spiritual gifts, especially the gift for ministry of Word and sacrament; to encourage the development of these gifts; and to pray for those individuals on a regular basis?

Finally, but no less significantly, the task force acknowledges the centrality of the first questions, viz., those concerning the gospel and the importance of the Heidelberg Catechism. Those questions get to the heart of Reformed identity. The task force recom-

mends only minor changes in the words that clarify the questions. For example, if the doctrines are preached in conformity with both the Word of God and the standards, they would be considered "pure." Moreover, the phrase "from time to time" in the second question adds nothing to the question and can be eliminated. The first question would then read:

Are the doctrines of the gospel preached in your church in conformity with
i. the Word of God?
ii. the Standards of the Reformed Church in America?

Are the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism explained in your church as required by the *Book of Church Order*?

The task force recommends the following wording changes be sent to the Commission on Church Order so that they may consider these changes within the context of the government of the Reformed Church in America, especially in regard to any inconsistencies that may be found, before sending them to the classes for approval.

R-28
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to edit the following proposed changes to Chapter 1, Part II of the *Book of Church Order* with regard to any inconsistencies it finds in the Government of the Reformed Church in America, before presenting it to the General Synod for approval in 2011.

Article 7. Superintendence of the Churches

Sec. 1. **The ~~president of the~~ classis~~, at the same meeting at which delegates to the synods are appointed,~~ shall ~~address the following inquiries to the~~ annually engage the minister and elder delegates ~~of each church~~ in a review of the ministry of the separate congregations by addressing the following questions. The answers shall be recorded 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
the Word of God?
the Standards of the Reformed Church in America?

b. Are the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism explained in your church ~~from time to time,~~ as required by the ~~Government of the Reformed Church in America~~ *Book of Church Order*?

c. Has your consistory considered the nature and extent of the ministry of the congregation in accordance with Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2 of the *Book of Church Order*?

~~j.~~ d. Is your church engaged in significant, regular activities which faithfully witness to the gospel and which ~~challenge~~ encourage others to respond to God's Spirit in ~~a faith~~ commitment to Jesus Christ as ~~personal Savior and~~ Lord and Savior?

~~i.~~ e. Does your church contribute annually and significantly in its prayers, gifts, and service to the mission of the Reformed Church in America?

~~Is your church fulfilling its stewardship obligation by contributing annually and significantly to the mission programs of~~
~~i. the denomination?~~
~~ii. the regional synod?~~
~~iii. the classis?~~

f. Does the consistory provide for worship, including the celebration of the sacraments, in accordance with the requirements of the *Book of Church Order* (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11)?

g. Does the consistory regularly review the activities of the church in order that the congregation and those whom it serves may become more faithful in their walk as disciples of the Lord Jesus?

~~e.~~ h. Is the education of the young people in the essential truths of the Word of God ~~carried on by catechising, or is it otherwise~~ faithfully attended to in your congregation?

~~d.~~ i. Has the consistory prayerfully considered persons within the congregation, ~~especially the~~ particularly young people, in order to identify with them their spiritual gifts, especially the gift for ministry of Word and sacrament; to encourage the development of these gifts; and to pray for those individuals on a regular basis?

~~f.~~ j. Does the board of elders fulfill its responsibilities of supervision and discipline as set forth ~~the requirements contained~~ in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5~~, Sections 3 and 4~~?

~~e.~~ k. Does the board of deacons fulfill its responsibilities in mercy, service, and outreach as set forth in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 6?
~~Is care and visitation faithfully performed in your congregation by~~
~~i. elders?~~
~~ii. deacons?~~
~~iii. minister/s?~~

~~h.~~ l. Does the consistory regularly engage its minister/s in a mutual reflection on the ministerial needs and challenges of the congregation?
~~Does the consistory regularly review the performance of~~
~~i. the consistory?~~
~~ii. the board of elders?~~
~~iii. the board of deacons?~~
~~iv. the installed minister/s?~~

~~g.~~ m. Do the salary, housing, arrangements for professional development, and all other benefits received by the minister/s meet the terms of the original call or contract, subsequent revisions thereof, and the minimum standards of the classis? (ADOPTED)

R-29
To instruct the General Synod Council to make the contents of this report and the report of the Commission on Theology on "Constitutional Inquiry Questions" available to consistories and classes to assist them in responding to the questions. (ADOPTED)

Response to *MGS 2008,* R-66, p. 264

Final Report on the Decade Freed from Racism

Background

General Synod, in 1998, resolved that the Reformed Church in America would engage in an initiative it called "The Decade Freed from Racism" and designated the years 2000-2010 as the decade's time period. The Commission on Christian Action, at the African American Council's request, provided the grounds to adopt the declaration in its 1998 report titled "Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism." That report (www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=1613) along with a 2009 progress report (www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=6162) provided an excellent and compelling case that has guided efforts made through the decade. The Commission on Race and Ethnicity, along with other groups and individuals, has provided seminal leadership throughout the decade.

In 2008 the General Synod approved a recommendation to instruct the General Synod Council to request and receive from the assemblies and institutions reports on their progress during the decade and to report that progress to the 2010 General Synod.

> To instruct the General Synod Council to strongly urge regional synods, classes, consistories, and RCA colleges and seminaries to study the "Progress Report on the Decade Freed from Racism" together with the original 1998 paper "Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism," and to evaluate and, if necessary, revise their policies and practices to ensure that they are consistent with the denomination's goal of becoming a multiracial denomination freed from racism; and further, to instruct the General Synod Council to prepare guidelines to be distributed with the two papers named, and to request and receive responses from the assemblies and institutions named above, for report to the General Synod of 2010 (*MGS 2008*, R-66, p. 264).

Progress reports received from assemblies and institutions are summarized beginning on page 129 of this report.

Achievements from the Decade Freed from Racism and Distance Yet to Go

Some of the most strategic outcomes achieved in the Decade are as follows:

1. Establishment of training for the Reformed Church in America's multiracial future as a key strategy (various General Synods).
2. Establishment of a staff position to "be responsible for intentionally and strategical-

ly moving the denomination toward its goal of being freed from racism" (*MGS 2006*, R-44, p. 145).
3. Addition to Our Call of a sixth dimension entitled "Multiracial Future Freed from Racism" (*MGS 2008*, R-67, p. 267).
4. Declaration that "racism is sin because it is an offense to God" (*MGS 2009*, R-70, p. 311).
5. Provisional adoption of the Belhar Confession as the Reformed Church in America's fourth standard of unity (*MGS 2007*, R-82, p. 276), and recommendation that classes approve amending the *Book of Church Order's* Preamble to include the Belhar Confession as a doctrinal standard (*MGS 2009*, R-55, p. 247).
6. Increase of the number of voting and corresponding General Synod delegates who are people of color (as well as delegates who are women and young adults) (*MGS 2009,* R-14 and R-15, pp. 90-92). (Adoption by classes to amend the *Book of Church Order* with this resolution is pending.)
7. Amendment of the constitution of New Brunswick Theological Seminary to identify it as an intercultural institution, and the adoption of their strategic plan which commits the seminary to be an anti-racist institution.
8. The development of multiracial/cultural committees in several regional synods and classes.
9. In various areas of the Reformed Church in America, conversations and buy-ins are transitioning toward the RCA becoming freed from racism.

The following paragraphs are from the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) 2008 report to General Synod about overall progress during the Decade and the distance yet to go.

> During the "Decade Freed from Racism" various General Synods have approved far reaching recommendations, and a good number of them have been implemented or are in the process of development. These are good tactical steps that evidence the denomination's desire for racial justice. But how well has the Reformed Church in America in its administration and grassroots life progressed toward being freed from racism? As we are now in the eighth year of the decade, can we say that personal and institutional racism and all their consequences have been eight-tenths eliminated, and that in another two years we will be freed from racism, thank God, freed indeed?
>
> Eight years into the "Decade Freed from Racism" CORE observes that:
> - RCA churches in changing communities continue to move to racially homogeneous communities.
> - The RCA has few strong "minority" churches that take leading roles in the denomination.
> - There are not many "multiracial" congregations in the RCA (the accepted standard being a church that has at least 20 percent membership of people belonging to a different race than the majority of the congregation).
> - Until a year ago (which was the seventh year into the "Decade Freed from Racism") all staff and employees of the denominational office in Grand Rapids were white, and many people in the denomination appeared to be comfortable with that.
> - Various General Synods have voted for the establishment of antiracism training workshops for members of the RCA, but little has been done to make them available at regional and local levels.
> - If the General Synod itself is a true microcosm of the denomination at large, the racial makeup of its delegates reflects that the RCA is still a denomination with only a token presence of minorities, and we have made insufficient progress in changing this.

- Multicultural competency training for RCA clergy, staff, and lay leaders is not a major objective of most of our assemblies.
- Sunday morning is still the most segregated time in America, and the RCA is not an exception.

CORE makes these points not just out of the blue, but in the context of the RCA being in its eighth year of the "Decade Freed from Racism." These are the kinds of issues on which the church ought to be making great progress during this specially designated decade. There are many good things going on the RCA, but CORE believes that the commitment to a "decade freed from racism" has not received the energy, resources, and sense of urgency it deserves.

The members of CORE recognize that the 1998 commitment to a "Decade Freed from Racism" was in itself an expression of naïve enthusiasm. Eliminating racism and its consequences will not be accomplished in a decade. It requires intentionality, commitment, education, vision, passion, allocation of resources, and structural and attitudinal changes at all levels of church life. CORE believes that beyond the "decade" the RCA must be perpetually committed to a multiracial future freed from racism (*MGS 2008*, pp. 264-265).

This assessment contains many features that continue to exist. The positive progress that has been achieved to date can be viewed as foundational for substantial and significant work to come as the Reformed Church in America transitions to become freed from racism.

A key way to frame the challenge going forward is to ask: "*How do we best embed the values and goals of being multiracial and freed from racism in the RCA's mission and ministry?*" The recommendations to GSC listed in Part 3, when taken together, represent a comprehensive approach to effecting denominational transition to being both multiracial and freed from racism.

Recommendations

The General Synod Council, in conjunction with the participants of the February 2010 Multiracial Strategy Coalition, encourages the Reformed Church in America to commit to a new initiative that continues the focus on becoming a denomination freed from racism. That initiative will build on many of the achievements of the Decade. Recommended goals for a new initiative are listed below.

1. **Promoting systems changes** (to identify and reduce or eliminate systemic and structural barriers that inappropriately limit access to the blessings and benefits of belonging to the RCA).
2. **Developing multiracial congregations** (to develop 100 RCA multiracial congregations, 25 percent of which are reproducing).
3. **Multiplying congregations of color** (to increase the percentage of congregations of color from the current level of about 17 percent of all RCA congregations to 25 percent).
4. **Expanding training for the RCA's multiracial future** (to increase cultural sensitivity and anti-racism capacities within 200 assemblies, congregations, institutions, and agencies, including GSC and the commissions).
5. **Revitalizing congregations through church-based community development** (to assist the development of 50 local community development efforts that bring transforming life to congregations and their communities, including the forging of creative, transformative, cross-racial relationships).
6. **Learning with the global church** (to increase the RCA's knowledge of and con-

tributions to developing multiracial and freed-from-racism societies and churches through engagements with the global church).

7. **Developing leaders of color** (to increase the number of pastors and other leaders of color who are knowledgeable about Reformed theology and skillful in the implementation of the RCA's polity).

Descriptions of the Importance of the Recommended Goals

1. **Promoting systems changes that reduce or eliminate institutional racism.** If we can assist ten people by working with them on a one-to-one basis, we should be able to assist hundreds by 1) changing systems that limit or restrict them or 2) helping them access and use existing systems.

   Key strategies for implementing this goal include:
   a. Helping GSC and the racial-ethnic councils develop their relationship to the levels mandated in the denomination's bylaws and rules of order. The bylaws identify the councils as "constitutional bodies of the Reformed Church in America" (*Book of Church Order* 3.I.3.2b). As such, the councils are to gather and 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."
   b. Increase access to Our Call resources for people and congregations of color.
   c. Increase the opportunities for issues concerning people of color to be considered by General Synod through the overture process, making requests of commissions, etc.
   d. Help assemblies and institutions address challenges they face relative to racial/ethnic diversity.
   e. Encourage hiring practices that ensure diversity targets in employment are achieved.

2. **Developing multiracial congregations.** In earlier times, to minister to the world required a global ministries partner. Not so now. In effect, the people of the world are among us here and now. We know from Revelation 5 and 7 that Jesus has been at work through the fact of his death to guarantee that the church's future, among other things, is multiracial. Demographic changes and transitions greatly expand opportunities to pioneer here and now congregations that reflect life in that Jesus-guaranteed future.

   Key strategies for implementing that goal include:
   a. Resourcing and learning from existing multiracial congregations.
   b. Nurturing current and future leaders of multiracial congregations and ministries.
   c. Expanding the number of Reformed Church in America multiracial congregations.
   d. Fostering local efforts to learn from and develop multiracial congregations.

3. **Multiplying congregations of color.** Congregations of color can add much value to the Reformed Church in America with its commitment to become multiracial and freed from racism. They have the ability to:
   a. Provide meaningful places of worship where cultures and traditions are held in high regard.
   b. Ensure psychological and emotional comfort and healing from wounds received from experiences of being people of color living in the United States and Canada.
   c. Speak prophetically to the wider Reformed Church in America.
   d. Assist the wider Reformed Church in America to know, understand, and blend

with the rhythms of life and grace embedded in the experiences of people of color.

e. Stimulate the Reformed Church in America to become more trustworthy and trust-filled as a multiracial and freed-from-racism family.

Diversity alone might naturally lead to increased social distrust and segmentation. Diversity led by the cross of Christ promotes unity, reconciliation, and justice that in turn can lead to what Martin Luther King Jr. and others called "The Beloved Community." Congregations of color can serve as "leaven in the loaf" toward that end.

Important long-term strategies to pursue while implementing this goal include:

a. Increase the number of congregations of color from about 17 percent of all Reformed Church in America congregations to at least 25 percent of the total.
b. Encourage church multiplication in both the United States and Canada.

4. **Expanding multiracial awareness training.** Training for our multiracial future, for many, allows short-term increases in both knowledge and dialogue opportunities with persons of other races. When accompanied by post-training, intentional, persistent relationship building; work events; and compatible systems change, training can help us engage lifestyles that are more multiracial and freed from racism.

Key strategies for implementing this goal include:

a. Partner with regional synods to ensure, where feasible, at least two of the Reformed Church in America cosponsored training experiences occur annually.
b. Encourage new GSC delegates and commission members to complete at least one training event.
c. Help regional, classical, congregational, and institutional leaders develop opportunities for people to have multiple multiracial training experiences for increased knowledge and life gains.

5. **Engaging in church-based community development**. Reformed thinking teaches us that:
   - The world belongs to God.
   - The world has fallen because of sin.
   - God is at work reconciling the world to God.
   - The church is a partnering agent in that great reconciliation work. Congregations can assist in the holistic restoration of communities.

Experiences have shown that as congregations help transform communities they themselves can find new life through:

- New relationships with people in the community being served.
- New matters to pray about.
- Fresh reasons for worship.
- Renewed zeal to link worship with justice as required by God in Isaiah 58.

Additionally, a fruitful and developmentally focused church-based community ministry might be the only way members of many white congregations can grow meaningful relationships with people of other races. If done well, these will be honorable peer relationships that do not fall into paternalistic, power-oriented patterns.

Key strategies for implementing this goal include:

a. Establishing several pilots in the Reformed Church in America focused on church-based community development principles and strategies, and sharing results and learnings.

b. Developing a relationship with the national Christian Community Development Association, and sharing results and learnings.

6. **Learning from the global church.** The prophet Isaiah wrote that God "sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in" (Is. 40:22). Isaiah meant that God is not local or tribal, concerned largely with one swath of land or its people. Rather, God is engaged globally, keeping the whole planet in view, making serious judgments and decisions about it.

   God's world is multiracial and multiethnic, and its peoples' struggles for unity, reconciliation, and justice are profound, persistent, and contextual. God knows this and is actively engaged in these very human challenges. The Reformed Church in America should be in some of those places, learning what God is doing there and sharing what God is teaching us here.

   Two key strategies for implementing this goal:
   a. Collaborate with Global Missions to identify, learn from, and contribute to resolution of several inter-racial/ethnic struggles engaged in by Reformed Church in America's partner denominations and ministry partners.
   b. Engage with ecumenical groups that add to our learning and contributing consistent with this goal.

7. **Developing leaders of color.** Too often, pastors of color who join the RCA receive inadequate teaching and coaching sufficient to help them and the ministries they lead thrive in the RCA. Too often, congregations of color appear not to be expert in RCA polity, especially in terms of their rights, privileges, benefits, and responsibilities provided for in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*). Too often, leaders of color feel they are outsiders in their classes and appear to lack confidence that meaningful relationships among equals can be established in their classes and other leadership circles.

   Key strategies for implementing this goal are:
   1. Establishing processes for developing the knowledge and skills of leaders of color in the use of the *BCO* and in the methods of amending it.
   2. Encouraging pastors of color and white pastors of multiracial congregations and congregations of color to participate in coaching and network relationships.
   3. Helping regional synods and classes consider the development of "farm systems" for identifying and nurturing the development of potential future pastors and leaders in their congregations, and developing in those potential leaders support and passion for the values and goals of being multiracial and freed from racism.

Summary of Reports Received Regarding Progress during the Decade Freed from Racism

General Secretary's Office

Congregational Missions Cluster
- Continuation of coordinators for African-American/Black Ministries, Hispanic Ministries, and Pacific and Asian American Ministries who provide liaison responsibilities to their respective racial/ethnic councils.
- Hired a black person as coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice.
- Approximately 39 percent of new congregations are of color or multiracial.
- Seven cluster coordinators and the director participated in a "Sankofa" experience and continue to process the effects on their lives and ministry.

- Many of the cluster's administrative and coordinator staffs and the director participated in and grew from the "Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey" training, which provided awareness of the effects of historical racism on how we were socialized and on identity formation.
- We are asking ourselves new questions as a cluster and are finding answers that are more inclusive.
- The annual reports to GSC from each racial-ethnic council are available online in the *Minutes of General Synod*.
- Provide training for our multiracial future in partnership with three organizations: Evangelical Covenant Church (for Sankofa), Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation (Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey), and Chicago Urban Reconciliation Enterprise (The Breakfast Club).
- Development of Multiracial Congregation Team which, among other things, supports a conference on multiracial congregational development sponsored by Middle Collegiate Church and seeks to coach pastors engaged or interested in multiracial congregations.
- Collaboration with Western Theological Seminary's Journey program on a two-year development of a learning community focused on multiracial/cultural matters. The seven participating pastors are from six regional synods, and make up a racially diverse group.
- Will launch in May 2010 a new collaboration with Western Theological Seminary's Journey program and the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. The collaboration focuses on growth of a two-year learning community for regional congregations and some RCA-rooted nonprofits on developing multiracial congregations and transforming communities through church-based community development..
- Have made significant staff contribution to the denomination's discussion of the Belhar Confession.

Global Missions Cluster

- Ministry focus is almost entirely multiracial/ethnic.
- Hired Latino as director of Global Missions.
- Continue to have a diverse group of field supervisors.
- Working toward using learning experiences such as Sankofa as a tool for increased historic and cultural understanding among people served in other countries.

Operations Cluster

- Hired a black Latina as coordinator of personnel, who guides and supports from a significant position the entire range of matters involved in leading a sizable diverse work force located in many parts in North America and the world.
- Continue to have a diverse cluster team, including at the manager level.

Communications Cluster

- Increased the translated material on the RCA website from just a few resources to hundreds. These resources are translated in Spanish, Mandarin, and/or Korean.
- Using translated material on the front-end of projects, rather than as an afterthought.
- Long term, the RCA website is becoming a resource for Reformed material that is being used by individuals and churches around the world.
- Continue to expand articles and visuals on website and in *RCA Today* that highlight the RCA's goal of a decade freed from racism.
- Material that was unavailable in the past is now available through a number of communication media.
- The communication department's goal is to continue to increase resources on the RCA website and through our print pieces so that the culture is to look for and find resources through RCA communication.

Regional Synods

Regional Synod of Albany

- A number of congregations have used the Belhar study guide and related materials to address issues of racism they face.
- Some leaders have participated in training for our multiracial future.
- One pastor, with regional support, is participating in a learning community developed through collaboration between Western Theological Seminary's Journey program and GSC's office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice.

Regional Synod of Canada

- A new ministry in Calling Lake, Alberta, led by a Woodlands Cree pastor. This ministry, begun by the Athabasca Reformed Church, has connected RCA people in Alberta with First Nations as many have built relationships with the pastor and been involved in VBS and other ministry activities.
- A number of Ontario churches have received awareness teachings about the abuses and injustices First Nations have faced in the past and their current situation.
- One pastor, with regional support, is participating in a learning community developed through a collaboration between Western Theological Seminary's Journey program and GSC's Office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice.

Regional Synod of the Far West

- A vision of the Central California Classis focused on effective recruitment and training of Hispanic pastors. That ministry transferred to a church where it is replicated in City Classis.
- Establishment of City Classis, which multiplies congregations in urban, racially and ethnically diverse communities.
- Placement of a Hispanic pastor in a growing biracial congregation.
- Several leaders participated in multiracial future training sponsored or co-sponsored by the Reformed Church in America.

Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

- Moved from five to approximately twenty-six ministry leaders of color in the last ten years.
- Approximately twenty congregations are either intentionally committed to a multiracial future or are distinctively ethnic congregations.
- Starting eight multiracial churches.
- Holds annual conference called "Better Together" that gathers and networks congregations and others from around the region committed to racial and ethnic diversity.
- Many congregations and leaders, especially in the Grand Rapids and Holland areas, participate and/or lead in area-wide anti-racism summits, trainings, and networks.
- Region contains several RCA-rooted non-profit community development organizations that engage in diverse communities.
- Launching a partnership with Western Theological Seminary and the RCA's office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice that develops a learning community for regional congregations and nonprofits around growing multiracial congregations and church-based community development, engaging with diverse neighborhoods.
- Several leaders have participated in RCA-sponsored training for our multiracial future.
- One pastor, with regional support, is participating in a learning community developed through collaboration between Western Theological Seminary's Journey program and GSC's office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice.

Regional Synod of the Heartland

- Has two multicultural churches (more than 20 percent of the attendees are of a race different from majority members), three Native American ministries, six Hispanic ministries, and one Laotian ministry.
- Revised the synod's mission, vision, and goals to include multicultural diversity dimension to celebrate a cultural and racial mix of congregational members that closely resembles the community they serve.
- Regional synod coordinator participated in a Sankofa experience and two of staff members attended the RCA dialogue and training on understanding racism.
- Synod coordinator wrote a summary of his Sankofa experience and posted it on the Synod of the Heartland website. He has shared it with classis, consistories, pastors, leadership groups, asking the attendees to intentionally build a new relationship with a person of a different color.
- One of the regional ministers hosts a retreat for the Hispanic church planters.
- All seven classes are working hard on educating the churches on the Belhar Confession.
- Synod is committed providing an impactful training experience that equips the synod and its classes and congregations especially for deeper ministry among Hispanic peoples.
- Two classes in this region reported:
  West Sioux:
  - Supports a Spanish speaking ministry whose leadership has talked to our classis at a regular meeting. Also, many individual congregations support that work, as well as others among the Spanish speaking community in this area.
  - Salem Reformed in Little Rock, Iowa, supports a Spanish speaking ministry in two nearby communities.

  Pleasant Prairie:
  - Began a ministry to the Hispanics in the Belmond, Iowa, area four years ago, calling a pastor and gathering a group for Bible study and later for worship. It has been supported by the classis and a number of our churches.
  - Bridge of Hope, a new church start in Waterloo, Iowa, has a multicultural ministry supported by our classis.
  - The New Life Church in Coralville, Iowa, has a ministry to the University of Iowa and its diverse population.
  - The above ministries have given a broader vision to reach all people for Christ.
- Four congregations in this synod reported:
  Central Reformed Church of Sioux Center, Iowa: In the past seven years we have, through the involvement of the pastoral leadership, strengthened our support of Amistad Christiana, a joint RCA/CRC ministry with and for Spanish speakers. That involvement has come in various ways. The pastor has provided pulpit supply on a couple of occasions. We have participated in joint bilingual services and shared our facilities on various occasions.
  First Reformed of Doon, Iowa: Annual mission trip that exposes members to different races and cultures and has helped to change perceptions.
  Bethel Church of Lester, Iowa: Annual mission trip that exposes members to different races and cultures and has helped to change perceptions.
  Our Savior's Church, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota
  - Multiracial congregation with many of the people of color being Liberians.
  - 2004—six-week small group study of Eric Law's *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*
  - 2005—"Get to Know You" round tables
  - 2008—Adult Sunday school on the Belhar Confession
  - The preceding three activities helped to turn "they" to "we." The Law book helped us understand cultural differences as being just that—differences, not right

or wrong things. We learned to appreciate cultural experience more. For example, rather than seeing arriving late as being discourteous, there is an understanding that it may have been a higher value placed on relationship than time. The round tables helped us share what we have in common, as well as the differences we bring to the table. The Belhar Confession class helped put racial reconciliation and justice issues into our world view.

Regional Synod of Mid-America

- Florida Classis is a very racially and ethnically diverse classis.
- Florida Classis plans to develop twenty new congregations by 2020, with 33 percent of them being multiracial or of color.
- The synod's executive council held a dialogue on the topic of "Multiracial Future Freed from Racism." The council 1) learned the meaning of the new sixth dimension of Our Call, 2) talked about experiences of congregations and classes on multiracial matters, 3) explored how the sixth dimension fits efforts to multiply new congregations and revitalize existing ones through discipleship, leadership, and mission, 4) listened to a congregant of the synod regarding her Sankofa experience and the insights she gained from it, 5) identified Scriptures and demographic trends that intersect with our multiracial future, and 6) discussed how the denomination and regional synod can resource classes in their work of assisting congregations in engaging our multiracial future.
- Several congregations are multiracial.
- Living Springs Community Church has set the pace for developing deeply as a multiracial congregation in terms of their numbers of people of color and white people on staff, as congregational members and adherents, and in terms of how congregational power and influence is shared. Living Springs also has a multiracial ministries team, participates in the denomination's Breakfast Club ministry, and has sponsored a number of trainings for our multiracial future.
- Many congregants have participated in training for our multiracial future.
- One pastor, with regional support, is participating in a learning community developed through collaboration between Western Theological Seminary's Journey program and GSC's office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice.

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

- Synod contains some classes that are quite diverse racially and ethnically.
- Synod has a well developed Multicultural Ministry Team.
- Three classes have formed multicultural ministry teams.
- Greater Palisades Classis has meetings simultaneously translated into Korean and has thirteen Korean congregations which make up about a third of the classis.
- Greater Palisades Classis has a Korean ministry coordinator.
- Passaic Valley Classis has a part-time Hispanic ministry developer.
- Several multiracial congregations in region. Also some of those congregations have bilingual services.
- Several years ago, several congregations participated in multiracial training.
- Several classes and congregations are working on engaging their changing communities.
- Co-developed with the RCA's office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice a video called "Racism Is a Sin because It Is an Offense to God" (the title being a declaration approved by General Synod 2009).
- One pastor, with regional support, is participating in a learning community developed through the collaboration of Western Theological Seminary's Journey program and GSC's office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice.

Regional Synod of New York

- This synod is, perhaps, the most racially and ethnically diverse in the denomination, containing some of the denomination's most diverse classes. Living, working, and worshiping with and among diverse populations are hallmarks of daily life in the synod. In a large number of circumstances, it can be difficult to separate engagement with multiracial and multi-ethnic life and engagement in the normal range of synodical activities.
- A number of synodical officers and synodical area ministers are people of color.
- Regional staff spends a large amount of time working with matters and challenges arising from racial, cultural, and socioeconomic understandings within and between the great diverse populations making up the churches of our synod.
- The synod's volunteer program brings members of churches of several races and cultures together in work groups to repair aged buildings.
- Synod offers an annual retreat for pastors and their spouses entitled "Freedom in Ministry" that brings together people of many races and ethnicities.
- The synod Christian educators committee provides educational experiences that deal with the Belhar Confession and the Accra Confession (of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) that enable educators within the synod to bring these confessions to the local churches.
- The synod's judicial business committee deals with issues of church order and understanding the polity of the Reformed Church in America that are increasingly issues of importance as the synod continues to grow with ever greater numbers of people who come from many cultures and races.
- Much new church development among diverse people groups occurs within the synod.
- Twelve different languages are spoken during worship among the congregations of the synod.
- The synod provides financial support to the Rural and Migrant Ministry of New York State and encourages representation of its churches in its work. This ministry assists migrant workers and their families with better housing, safer working conditions, better education for their children, and better wages.
- One congregation provides key leadership in preserving and protecting a historic African burying ground on its site.
- One pastor, with regional support, is participating in a learning community developed through the collaboration of Western Theological Seminary's Journey program and GSC's office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice.
- Middle Collegiate Church develops and hosts an annual conference devoted to the development of multiracial congregations.

Educational Institutions

New Brunswick Theological Seminary

- General Synod 2009 adopted a new constitutional identity for the seminary that clearly identifies it as an intercultural school of Christian faith.
- The seminary adopted a strategic plan that commits it to developing as an anti-racist school of Christian learning. It formed an anti-racism transformation team to organize the seminary's work to become anti-racist and whose mission statement includes the following features:
  1. To discern, recognize, and dismantle systemic racism in every aspect of NBTS's life.
  2. To confess and repent of our individual and collective complicity in racism, and to give and receive forgiveness.
  3. To embrace curricular practices that celebrate, explore, and sustain the Christian traditions, experiences, perspectives, and cultures of our constituencies.

4. To educate persons and strengthen communities for anti-racist public leadership and ministry.
5. To enable the seminary to embody and bear public witness as God's beloved community.

- The student body, faculty, and administration are very diverse racially and ethnically.

Western Theological Seminary

- Established Certificate for Urban Ministry Program.
- Thirty-three students participated in the Certificate for Urban Ministry Program.
- WTS professor teaches at a church in Muskegon Classis on African American history.
- Some faculty of color.
- Has a Hispanic research effort focused on providing workshops, which provide some of the research base for a future, proposed Hispanic pastoral leadership/educational program.
- There is a diversity committee that is following up on some of the recommendations from a 2008 assessment report.
- Journey program collaboration with the RCA on a multiracial pastoral learning community focused on multicultural ministry and living.
- Journey program collaboration with the RCA and the Synod of the Great Lakes focused on the development of a regional learning community engaged around multiracial congregational development and church-based community development.

Hope College

- Minority student enrollment rose from 4 percent in 2000 to 12 percent in 2010.
- The ratio of minority and international faculty rose from 8 percent to 12 percent from 2000 to 2010.
- For many years, Hope has had its Phelps Scholars program. Phelps Scholars is a rich racial, ethnic, international mix of students, most of whom live in the same residence hall and share a basic curriculum. Its students get first-hand experience in development meaningful relationships with a wide variety of people.
- Since 2000, Hope College has sought several ways in which to educate students, faculty, and staff on matters regarding race. Workshops for every segment of the community have occurred. Consultants, speakers, and special events have sought to address issues of race and campus climate.
- Hope annually hosts the Ottawa County Summit on Racism.
- In 2009, initiated the Anti-Racism Movement Series initiative. The purpose is to explore the culture of Hope College and identify ways in which we can accommodate, encourage, and support differences in efforts to build a more diverse and inclusive campus community.
- Civil Rights Celebration Week. This week is dedicated to all persons and groups who have worked toward the advancement of civil rights and social justice. Over two thousand people are engaged in the week's activities.
- Women of Color Celebration. Four graduating seniors from each ethnic and social class background are selected each year to share their experiences, successes, and challenges while at Hope. Their presentations challenge faculty and administration to evaluate the experiences students of color have on campus and consider ways to allow that information to influence curriculum preparations, presentations, etc.

Northwestern College

- Key student programs
  - Multicultural Awareness Club goes to conferences, movies, books, guided discussions, ethnic church visits, and ethnic restaurants.
  - Ethnic Fair—700-800 people come including community

- Spanish Chapel
- Multicultural meal for faculty, staff, and student leaders where international and minority students speak
- Black History Awareness events in spring 2001
- Play in 2003 "Spinning into Butter"
- 2000 "Color of Fear" viewed and discussed, continued in classes
- Various training programs

- Christian Community Development Association conference.
- Urban plunges
- Faculty/staff programs
  - Multicultural and sensitivity training
  - Mobilize advocates for minority issues from majority and provide training
  - Multiculturalism lecture series: a speaker each year on challenges and rewards in a Christian context
  - Diversity training for supervisors/manager
- Training completed
  - Eight to CCCU Presidential Symposium: Ensuring the Success of Minority Students and Faculty 2002
  - "Color of Fear" viewing and discussion by 150 faculty and staff in 2003
  - Discussion of *Divided By Faith* in 2003
  - Faculty exchange in May 2004
- Structural change
  - President and administration must keep board of trustees informed of efforts to make ethnic diversity and intercultural reconciliation a value for students, faculty, administrators, and staff.
  - Board of trustees should have members from non-traditional backgrounds to increase ethnic diversity and female representation.
  - Added staff: director of International and Intercultural Affairs, Multicultural Affairs coordinator, international student counselor, multicultural interns (4), associate dean of Multicultural and Off-Campus Programs, and Summer Study Abroad coordinator.
  - Development of the Multi-Ethnic Resource Team (MERT), which provides leadership to the college around its ongoing multicultural work.

Central College

- Annual White Privilege conference.
- Coalition for Multicultural Campus—for those interested in developing appreciation on campus and building bridges of communication between cultures. Open to all Central students.
- The International Club serves as a social organization to bring together students of all nationalities who wish to share intercultural dialogue and exchange. It will ease transition of incoming international students to Central College as well as provide a forum for returning study-abroad students. On campus, it will foster an awareness of, and appreciation for, the global community that Central College is part of.
- The Office for Intercultural Life aims to provide leadership to fulfill Central College's mission in appreciation of diversity, with its own objective of providing programming that challenges, educates, and stimulates the Central community to understand, respect, and build connections. The primary goal is to provide individuals with skills to live productively in a multicultural society.

Upon the advice of the advisory committee, the synod voted:

R-30
To direct the General Synod Council to incorporate into its ends

policy "A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism," a continuing initiative that focuses on transitioning the RCA to become freed from racism and that incorporates the following objectives:

1. **Promote systems changes that reduce or eliminate institutional racism**
2. **Develop multiracial congregations**
3. **Multiply congregations of color**
4. **Expand training for the RCA's multiracial future**
5. **Revitalize congregations through church-based community development**
6. **Learn with the global church**
7. **Develop leaders of color (ADOPTED)**

Reason for amendment:
To clarify what kind of system changes are needed.

RESPONSE TO GENERAL SYNOD 2009 REFERRALS

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-37 and R-38, p. 133

Report of the Task Force on Worship Initiatives

Introduction

Have you ever noticed how revitalization and growth go hand in hand with worship renewal, both in the Bible and in the history of the church?

Perhaps the best example of this is the story of King Josiah's reform (see 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chron. 34-35). When the young king orders some repairs on the house of the Lord, workers discover the lost "book of the law." The words of this book (probably what we now know as the book of Deuteronomy) unleash a tidal wave of repentance and reform among the covenant people, culminating in a kingdom-wide celebration of the Passover. As the Chronicler writes, "No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present, and by the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 35:18).

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit sets fire to the early church by way of Word and sacrament (see Acts 2:1-36). When people hear Peter and the believers preaching in their own languages, they are "cut to the heart" and ask, "What should we do?" At Peter's advice, about three thousand of those who welcome the gospel are baptized, devoting themselves "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:37-42).

At the time of the Reformation believers rediscovered the literal meaning of liturgy as "the work of the people." People began to read the Word of God for themselves, in their homes as well as in their sanctuaries. Psalms were set to music and new hymns were composed to encourage congregational singing. The Lord's Supper was celebrated with greater frequency and in new ways. In short, worship renewal was and *is* at the heart of what it means to be "reformed and always reforming according to the word of God."

None of this should surprise us, but it is good to be reminded of it, especially in times of change and challenge.

In her 2009 report to the General Synod, president Carol Bechtel asked the poignant question, "Where's worship?" Her question called attention to the fact that, for whatever reasons, worship has not been a large part of our shared conversation in recent years.

It is the sense of this task force that if the RCA is really serious about renewal and revitalization, we would do well to give more attention to worship renewal. In view of this, we urge this General Synod to engage and help RCA pastors and worship leaders to catch the spark of renewal in worship and to provide for ways in which we can highlight and share our best practices for renewing worship in all RCA congregations.

Background

Based on Carol Bechtel's presidential report, two recommendations with direct relevance to worship were passed at the 2009 General Synod.

> R-37 (Worship as a part of Our Call)
> To affirm that worship is a part of every dimension of Our Call, and therefore to encourage the General Synod Council to incorporate more explicit language about worship into its global end, ends, and sub-ends policies.
>
> R-38 (Worship Initiatives Task Force)
> To instruct the officers of the General Synod to appoint a task force of no more than eight persons to explore the nature of and funding for a major worship initiative in the RCA; and further,
>
> to include on this task force persons with particular expertise and experience in the understanding and practice of Reformed worship, in worship education, in the unique worship needs of new and emerging congregations, and in funding development, so that any proposed initiative (and its aspects) might be multi-generational in scope, multifaceted in approach, and affordable; and further;
>
> to instruct the task force to report back to the next meeting of the General Synod with the results of its work and any relevant recommendations (*MGS 2009,* p. 133).

In response to R-38, a task force was formed and met at City Church in San Francisco on January 11-13, 2010, and again by conference call on March 8, 2010. Present for the meeting of this task force were C. J. Grier, Jean Lemmenes, Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell, Gloria McCanna, Ron Rienstra, Scot Sherman, Dennis TeBeest, and Paul Thè. Carol Bechtel served as chair and Kirsty DePree as staff. This report is the result of their work.

Shared Values

In their time together the Worship Initiatives Task Force reflected upon, gave voice to, and affirmed some shared values about the foundational nature of worship to the life and identity of the church. We invite the General Synod to affirm these same values with us.

- Worship is central to our vocation as the people of God—that we are called to be a people who worship the living God and call others into the worship of that same God.
- Worship is an essential part of each aspect of Our Call—mission, revitalization, church multiplication, discipleship, leadership, and a multiracial future freed from racism. Worship undergirds renewal in each of these areas and each is renewed as worship is renewed.
- From the reforms of Josiah to the Reformation to more recent waves of charismatic

renewal, renewal in the community of faith—biblically and historically—has always been connected to worship renewal. To seek the one while ignoring the other is a mistake we've made for too long.

- Worship is rooted in Scripture—but in a much broader way than simply in preaching. Worship is biblical when it is guided by the Bible's instructions, shaped by its patterns, rooted in its truth, saturated with its language, following its narrative contours, and focusing where it does: on Jesus Christ.
- The character of Reformed worship is shaped by our theology, but can be manifested in a variety of styles.
- Worship shapes us, even as we seek to shape it.
- The sacraments (the Lord's Supper and baptism) form us, feed us, and bear witness to the extravagant grace of God.
- Worship renewal leads a congregation beyond itself to mission—to give itself away to minister to the needs of the local community and the world.
- Worship happens in a series of three concentric circles: individual, small group, and larger gathered communions. All three are important and each is enriched by the other two. Renewal is needed in all three spheres. (This idea comes from a lecture given by John Bell of the Iona Community at Western Theological Seminary in 2004.)
- People learn best (i.e. learn with an eye toward transformation) when they learn:
  - **together** (i.e. in groups of peer learners),
  - **over time** (i.e. not in just an afternoon, but in sustained contact),
  - out of particular **contexts** (connecting to their unique circumstances, gifts, and congregational contexts), and
  - where the learning finds **integration** with the gospel of Jesus Christ (c.f. the Lilly Foundation's work on "Sustaining Pastoral Excellence").

Shared Vision

The task force spent a long time discussing how to engage the whole RCA in a process that would help us pray for, seek, and work toward worship renewal in our congregations and in the lives of our members. We agreed that whatever this process should look like, it would have to:

- help us to learn from one other;
- encourage us to cultivate deeper relationships with one another and with God;
- cross perceived boundaries of generation, culture, economics, and race;
- invite contributions from a wide variety of people and places;
- use art and media in creative and accessible ways that keep the central things central;
- help us think harder and better about what we're doing in worship and why;
- help us appreciate our heritage while looking toward a faithful future;
- involve, invite, and inspire people of all ages; and
- draw others to join us in the worship of the triune God.

In light of the shared values and vision that we affirmed at our meeting in San Francisco, the task force submitted a grant proposal to the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, which was subsequently approved. The nature of this grant proposal is described below.

Grant Proposal

The goal of this grant is to help foster worship renewal in RCA congregations through the sharing of resources for congregational, small group, and individual settings. The reason for this range of resourcing is rooted in John Bell's insight that worship happens in a series

of three concentric circles: individual, small group, and larger gathered communions. All three are important; each is enriched by the other two. More and more, RCA members are relying on worship in larger gatherings to "accomplish" what is better spread among all three categories. In the proposed initiative there is recognition of the importance of nurturing worship at all these levels.

We firmly believe that the best approach for this kind of initiative would be to work collaboratively across the denomination. We want to attract people to participate in this initiative, to create a kind of "buzz" and to invite people to offer their gifts. Recognizing that nobody has all the gifts, we desire to design an initiative that will encourage surprising relationships throughout the denomination, offering us all opportunities to learn from one another.

To this end, we want to see what congregations across the denomination (and elsewhere) are doing, and see how we might learn from them. We believe that this resonates with the missional impulse and its rhetoric, as we can identify things congregations are doing in worship that are richly contextualized in their own cultures and communities, and link what happens on Sunday morning with what the church is and does Monday through Saturday.

We believe that one way to capture "best practices" is to film key worship moments on video. Such video would need to focus on very specific moments. For example, we would not be looking to film "the Response" entirely, but rather only "the prayers of the people"; not "Communion" but "the distribution of the elements at communion"; not the whole small group prayer time, but a unique part of one group's approach to it; not the whole quiet time in an individual's devotion, but someone going online to get the psalm of the day. The more specific the focus, the more likely we would be to get at the heart of things and the more we could highlight a variety of congregational, small group, and individual practices.

In our proposal, clips of worship would then be paired with footage of pastoral reflection and readings from a common book. The key pastoral voice (the lead pastor, or worship leader, for example) would reflect on the origin of the practice (for example, how did the congregation come to do the prayers of the people in this way?), its meaning within the congregation, its role as a catalyst in revitalizing the broader ministry of the church, etc. Footage could also include others within the RCA reflecting on the practice. The questions spurring this conversation could be a fixed set of questions about contextuality, aesthetics, mission, and other theological dynamics.

This list of questions and other prompts to discussion and action could be provided to groups of people across the church who share a hunger to learn and grow and foster worship renewal. Such groups, or networks, might gather based on congregational membership, geographic proximity, or some other shared interest (e.g. church planters, music pastors, etc.)

Finally, the task force hopes that the grant will also provide seed money to facilitate the formation of groups across the RCA for reflection, brainstorming, and work in re-contextualizing the best practices for their own communities. The hope is that these study groups could themselves in the future contribute videos of their own "best practices" followed by their own reflections to share across the denomination.

Conclusion

Church revitalization and growth are intimately connected with worship renewal. Worship renewal is most effective when it happens in every "circle" of the community of faith—congregational, small group, and individual, and widespread prayer and participation are essential for renewal to take place. In light of this and of the possibility of the new and exciting worship renewal initiative within the life of the RCA, we propose the following:

> **R-31**
> **To encourage the whole General Synod, congregations of the RCA, and its pastors and leaders to pray for and participate in the Worship Renewal Project. (ADOPTED)**

The Worship Renewal Project may, by the grace of God, renew the RCA's worship life in ways we as a church want to continue and encourage. But it may not be the only means by which we as a church can work to revitalize worship in the RCA. The maximum value of this project will only be realized if there is an evaluation and reflection process built into it. With this in mind, the task force proposes:

> **R-32**
> **To instruct the RCA Worship Initiatives Task Force to reconvene in order to evaluate the Worship Renewal Project, summarize learnings, and make whatever further recommendations they deem necessary to the General Synod of 2012. (ADOPTED)**

We as a task force would like to express our gratitude for this opportunity to seek out new and exciting ways we as a church can offer up to God a "more profound alleluia" (see the book by that title edited by Leanne Van Dyk [Eerdmans, 2005]). It is our deep conviction that worship is key to the way we relate to God, each other, and the world, and that no lasting renewal of the church at large can happen apart from it. It shapes us even as we shape it. Perhaps this is what Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel was getting at when he wrote that "worship is a way of living, a way of seeing the world in the light of God" (*Man's Quest for God* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954], p. xii). It is our prayer that this initiative will help the RCA do just that.

Respectfully submitted,

The Worship Initiatives Task Force:

C.J. Grier
Jean Lemmenes
Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell
Gloria McCanna
Ron Rienstra
Scot Sherman
Dennis TeBeest
Paul Thè

Carol Bechtel (chair)
Kirsty DePree (staff)

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-41, p. 135

Report of the Commissioned Pastor Task Force

The 2009 General Synod approved a recommendation from the president to create a task force to review the role of the commissioned pastor in the Reformed Church in America. The mandate reads as follows:

> To direct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the officers of the General Synod, to appoint a task force of not more than fifteen members consisting of one member from the Commission on Theology, one member of the Commission on Church Order, one member of the General Synod professors of theology, three members of the RCA Multiplication Team, one member of each regional synod who is actively using commissioned pastors, and any additional members as deemed necessary up to a maximum of fifteen, to review the training for and clarify the role of commissioned pastors in the RCA, and to bring a report and whatever recommendations they deem necessary to the next meeting of the General Synod (*MGS 2009*, R-41, p. 135).

The task force met January 18-20, 2010, in Chicago. Membership included Gregg Mast (chair), Janet Benitez, Burt Braunius, Jim Brownson, Ella Campbell, Tom DeVries, Michael Hayes, Allan Janssen, Randy Kooy, Keith Korver, Karl Overbeek, Phyllis Palsma, Irving Rivera (absent), Cora Taitt, Dirk VerMeulen, and Don Poest.

It was noted that Braunius, Brownson, Kooy, Korver, and Overbeek are also members of the RCA Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team.

In reviewing the mandate, the task force affirmed the rich diversity of gifts, contributions, and formation models that have surrounded the commissioned pastors approach and the ways it is strengthening the denomination, bearing fruit for the kingdom, and opening opportunities for ministry that would not have been opened otherwise.

The commissioned pastor approach is showing itself to be a significant way of making disciples, equipping the saints, and entrusting those who are called and gifted by the Holy Spirit to go and train others for the ministry of the church. The commissioned pastor designation is a contextualized and empowering training approach to leadership development for church multiplication and revitalization.

The task force recognizes that there are 99 commissioned pastors and 71 commissioned pastor candidates in the RCA as of January 31, 2010. The task force also recognizes that many valuable contributions to the church's ministry have been brought by commissioned pastors. These include individuals such as Janet Benitez, task force member and commissioned pastor candidate at People's Park Reformed Church in Paterson, New Jersey; Jason Elam, pastor of Gray Hawk Reformed Church in Kentucky; and the commissioned pastors who lead two of the largest churches in the Classis of California, with a combined worship attendance of more than seven thousand people. Denomination-wide, commissioned pastors include at least 42 church planters, 22 solo or lead pastors, and 35 individuals who are serving in staff, chaplaincy, or other positions.

The task force hopes that increased attention will be given to collecting and telling the stories of commissioned pastors as examples of ways in which commissioned pastors are supporting our Reformed identity and the accomplishment of our shared mission and vision. Concern was expressed about a lack of communication regarding the contributions of commissioned pastors throughout the denomination.

The task force affirms the variety of the approaches being used to assist candidates in achieving and demonstrating the required ministry competencies. Approaches to training range from courses being offered by Western and New Brunswick Theological Seminaries, personalized training plans developed through the Synod of the Great Lakes that include e-portfolios and verification and documentation of accountability to classes, VantagePoint[3] curriculum and core courses used by the Synod of the Heartland, and commissioned leader and commissioned pastor training resources developed by the Synod of the Far West. While inconsistencies have been identified, these should not overshadow the wealth of training resources that have emerged and are being used for leadership development.

In preparation for the task force meeting, members read the remarks of president Carol Bechtel to the 2009 General Synod. The task force also reviewed original documentation beginning with the call by president Carol Mutch (General Synod 2001) for a summit to study the concept of lay pastoral ministry, as well as the notes and reports from annual Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team meetings, 2005-2009.

Regarding the state of the denomination, president Bechtel said, "…almost all of the concerns I heard expressed in this [ministry area] had to do with confusion and inconsistency around the role of commissioned pastors" (*MGS 2009*, p. 28). She continued, "I am not suggesting that we undo the decisions of previous synods [with regard to commissioned pastors]," but asked that "we take a careful and prayerful look at how we can evaluate and regulate this process more responsibly" (ibid, p. 29).

The task force took president Bechtel's concern to heart and, in doing so, also noted many areas of strength and causes for celebration. This report will make recommendations for improving evaluative and regulative processes as requested. At the same time, the task force has not attempted to overly systematize an emerging approach to ministry leadership that is an expression of diversity, spiritual calling and giftedness, and particularized empowerment—one that is making significant contributions to church multiplication and revitalization.

Four areas of need had been identified in the 2001 summit. These four areas have been a constant and consistent frame of reference and are viewed as foundational rationale for the commissioned pastor designation. The areas are:

- Openings in congregational settings which are not being filled by the current supply of ordained ministers of Word and sacrament.
- Lack of trained clergy to expand areas of new church starts, youth ministry, staff positions, and others.
- People clearly called by God to lead their church but unable to complete formal theological training for various reasons.
- Potential leaders in our midst who are called by God to serve but have no clearly attainable pathway to receive training.

The task force discussed hopes for and worries about the commissioned pastors. Members hoped for greater consistency in measuring the formation of candidates for ministry, a more clearly identified relationship between the office of elder and commissioned pastors, and a continuation of Word-centered RCA congregations. Concerns were expressed about the need for consistency in the supervision of commissioned pastors by their classes, about commissioned pastors and their churches maintaining an RCA identity, and about many in the denomination who may be missing out on the good news or positive stories of the fruitfulness of this kind of ministry.

The task force reviewed *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14 and asked, What "brushes up against" the experience with commissioned pastors in the *BCO* as currently stated? Representative responses included:

- When taken seriously it is a "ton of work" for a classis. The regions that are utilizing the designation with intentionality have assumed some level of responsibility for coordination/oversight and/or training.
- Some classes ignore Article 14 stipulations (i.e., training and supervision responsibilities).
- The question should be asked, "Where is the 'enemy' at work attacking the commissioned pastor process and potential?"

After discussions, the task force reached the following conclusions. These are described under the headings below, which include recommendations and requests.

The Word

Concern was expressed about accountability for ensuring that the interpretation and preaching of Scripture by commissioned pastors be in accordance with Reformed doctrinal standards. It was positively noted that some classes require commissioned pastors to read and affirm a classis-created declaration similar to that of minister of Word and sacrament.

A related issue has to do with exactly what sorts of ministry qualify for the designation of "commissioned pastor." In particular, the question was raised whether staff positions, which may not involve regular or weekly preaching or administration of the sacraments, may be considered under the commissioned pastor designation. To help to clarify this question, the task force believes that the phrase in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 1, "the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments," should be defined for commissioned pastors in accordance with Section 4, b and c, of *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10.

The task force, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, recommends to the General Synod the following "formulary" ("declaration") for commissioned pastors.

R-33
To adopt the following addition to the Appendix (*The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America*) of the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval:

Declaration for Commissioned Pastors

(This declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the presence of the classis at the beginning of each commissioning approved by the classis. The newly commissioned pastor shall then sign a book containing the declaration.)

I, _____, in becoming a commissioned pastor in the Reformed Church in America, within the Classis of _____, 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.

In this commission, 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 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 myself in this commission 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. (ADOPTED)

In addition, the task force brings before the General Synod the following:

R-34
To direct the Commission on Christian Worship to create a liturgy for the commissioning of commissioned pastors to be developed in consultation with the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team. (ADOPTED)

Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team

The task force reviewed annual reports from the commissioned pastor advisory team (2005-2009) and discussed its role in providing communication and coordination of commissioned pastor matters throughout the denomination. The task force concluded that the role of the team should be expanded and strengthened.

The task force identified the need to address the alignment of the *BCO*'s ten "competencies" and the General Synod Council's eight "standards" for commissioned pastors, and for the role of the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team to be clarified by the General Synod Council.

The task force strongly encourages the General Synod Council to work with the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team to address the issue of consistency between the *BCO*'s ten competencies and the GSC's eight standards so they may be brought into alignment; and further, that the GSC work with the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team to also be aware of the differences between the nine competencies for ministers of Word and sacrament and the ten competencies for commissioned pastors.

The task force encourages the assigning of GSC staff to support the team and facilitate a subcommittee of the team to draft changes prior to the scheduled fall meeting of the team.

The task force strongly encourages GSC to clarify and confirm the mandate, composition, funding, and staffing of the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team.

The task force encourages GSC to continue to facilitate the appointment of constituent representatives to the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team from their sending bodies that include commissioned pastors, at-large representation, representation from the Church Multiplication Team, and racial/ethnic and gender diversity.

The task force strongly encourages GSC to ensure the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team includes among its responsibilities the facilitation of the peer review of classes concerning call, formation, and supervision of commissioned pastors. (This concern is addressed in the recommendation below.)

The task force requests that the Commission on Church Order consider a change to the Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6, the "responsibilities" of the GSC, by adding a section mandating GSC to have the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team, articulating its purposes and responsibilities.

The task force discussed the many areas of classis responsibility for commissioned pastors. These are identified in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14 and include training, commissioning, and supervising (Sec. 1); approving and supervising a training plan (Sec. 3); employing standards established by the General Synod Council in determining a candidate's ministerial competence (Sec. 4); authorizing the ministry, approving the contract, and commissioning the candidate (Sec. 5); assigning a mentor for the period of training and ministry (Sec. 6); evaluating the performance of the commissioned pastor at least annually (Sec. 9); and being responsible for the discipline of the commissioned pastor (Sec. 11). Some of these functions are in need of clarification and strengthening. The task force brings the following recommendations to address theses areas:

Classis Accountability

Upon the advice of the Church Order and Governance Advisory Committee, the synod voted:

> **R-35**
> **To direct the Commission on Church Order to propose an addition ~~add to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14 of~~ to the *Book of Church Order* ~~a provision for~~ that provides for the regional synod to annually review the processes used by its classes ~~annual review by peer classes of the process used~~ for commissioned pastor selection, preparation, commissioning, and supervision.**
> **(ADOPTED)**

Reasons:

1. Classes are not accountable directly to each other within the RCA's structure, except through the regional synod.
2. Placing an informal review process within our church order is not appropriate.
3. An annual regional synod review could provide additional resources for classes considering these processes.
4. This proposal is compatible with what several regional synods are currently doing.

Voting Rights

The Classis of California asked for clarification on whether or not commissioned pastors count toward a quorum at classis meetings. According to the *BCO*, commissioned pastors

are temporary members of classes and have voting rights. The current order, however, does not seem to allow for commissioned pastors to count toward a quorum. The task force believes that this is an oversight and that it was apparently the original intent that they count toward a quorum.

Discipline

In reviewing the commissioned pastor's relationship to the classis with regard to discipline, the task force noted that commissioned pastor sections of the *BCO* state that the commissioned pastor is amenable solely to the discipline of the classis. However, in reviewing the *BCO* Disciplinary Procedures (Chapter 2, Part 1, Article 3), the task force noted that "commissioned pastor" is not included in that section.

The task force requests the Commission on Church Order to make necessary changes to the *BCO* Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3 (Disciplinary Procedures) to include commissioned pastors in Section 3a (Discipline of a Minister of Word and Sacrament).

Church Multiplication

The task force heard from Tim Vink, coordinator for church multiplication, about the importance of commissioned pastors serving as church planters. The task force affirms and seeks to facilitate church planters and potential planters who will benefit from the commissioned pastor designation. The task force makes the following recommendation that relates specifically to church multiplication.

The task force affirms that a church in the classis should be allowed to ordain elders to serve in a church plant, including the commissioned pastor who will serve as the church planter being elected and ordained by a church in the classis. This would likely require a change to a congregation's bylaws, to be approved by the classis. The General Synod office requested fifteen minutes to address the clerks at the 2010 meeting regarding this issue.

R-36
To direct the Commission on Church Order and the Commission on Christian Worship, in consultation with the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team and the General Synod Council's Church Multiplication Team, to develop appropriate changes to the Constitution (*Book of Church Order* and Liturgy) to allow classes to elect and ordain elders for new congregations (not yet formally organized). This may include the commissioned pastor who will lead a new ministry.

Upon the advice of the Church Order and Governance Advisory Committee, the synod voted :

R-37:
To refer R-36 to the Commission on Theology for further study and review of the appropriateness of classes ordaining elders with report to the 2011 General Synod.

Reason:
This proposed change requires more study before proceeding.

Compensation and Benefits

R-38
To strongly urge classes to establish clear and just guidelines for compensation and benefits (e.g., insurance products and retirement benefits) for commissioned pastors and ensure those contracts adhere to the guidelines established by the classis.
(ADOPTED)

Housing Allowance

The task force asks the General Synod Council to direct the general secretary to appoint a staff person to make widely available the legal opinion regarding the housing allowance in the U.S. and Canada (e.g., website, information to classis clerks, etc.).

> The task force asks the Commission on Church Order and the Task Force to Review the Constitutional Inquiry Questions to consider changes to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1g to include commissioned pastors.

This report has responded to the request that "we take a careful and prayerful look at how we can evaluate and regulate this process more responsibly." The task force has given due diligence to examining the ministry of commissioned pastors. The task force agrees that the commissioned pastor process, like that of most ministries, can benefit from careful, prayerful, and responsible evaluation and management and suggests the proposed recommendations as significant contributions to this process.

The hope of the task force is that the recommendations of this report will be blessed by the Holy Spirit's guidance so as to magnify the interpretation and preaching of Scripture, strengthen the role of the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team, and clarify the relationship of classes to commissioned pastors in the areas of accountability, voting, church multiplication, discipline, compensation and benefits, and housing allowance. The task force looks forward with much expectation and a little anxiety (casting it upon Jesus) in eager anticipation of contributions being made to the church by her commissioned pastors.

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-71, p. 313

Task Force to Restore the Voices of Native American/First Nations Congregations and Ministries

In response to R-71 (*MGS 2009*, p. 313) calling for urgent action in light of reports of disconnectedness and brokenness, a task force was formed to explore the current relationship of the RCA with Native American/First Nations congregations and communities, and to craft a plan on how to restore these voices to the life, work, and ministry of our denomination.

> R-71
> To urgently direct the General Synod Council 1) to explore the current status of the relationship between the Reformed Church in America and Native American/First Nations congregations and communities, 2) to create a plan to restore the voices of Native American/First Nations congregations in the life, work, and ministry of the RCA, and

3) to consult with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity by February 2010 with its conclusions, intentions, and involved costs; and further,

to ensure the success of this project, the project leaders will include a Native American and a First Nations person who are familiar with the goals and objectives of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity on this matter; and further,

to encourage all the regional synods to implement plans to enrich and strengthen their relationships with existing Native American/First Nations congregations and ministries in their regions, and encourage new church development among Native American/First Nations peoples.

The task force's conclusion is that, in fact, the relationship is broken and severely wounded. An intended Unified Plan for Native American Ministries in the year 2000 was never developed (one of many such plans never implemented). Staffing was never found for the then-new Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC), the primary voice for Native American/First Nations members of the RCA. In fact, the council has not met since 2000. Council funding (some $30,000) designated for Native American/First Nations leadership development was reallocated to other purposes without the consent or knowledge of Native American/First Nations congregational leaders. Native American/First Nations representatives do not consistently serve on RCA commissions, boards, or other task forces. The former RCA congregation in Macy, Nebraska, on the Umo^{n}ho^{n} (Omaha) reservation, has been transferred to the Omaha Nation Baptist Church, bringing from six to five the number of predominantly Native American RCA congregations.

Within the last fifteen years, the RCA discontinued its support for ecumenical urban Native American ministries in Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska. And, during an era of increased attention to urban ministries overall, corresponding with a growing Native American/First Nations urban population, the RCA has not worked to develop appropriate culturally relevant urban ministries. While historical documents show that the RCA did many positive things for Native American ministries, the current status is that the RCA now has less presence among Native American/First Nations communities than a mere decade ago, when the RCA celebrated the centennial of Native American ministries and mission, and what relationship exists is strained and broken. The voices the task force heard indicate that our Native American/First Nations brothers and sisters feel unheard, ignored, not trusted, disregarded, and therefore, hurt.

The task force took note that the 2009 General Synod "urgently" directed the General Synod Council to take corrective action. The task force agrees that this is a matter of urgency. Not to take action is to give tacit approval to the disconnectedness and brokenness of the current status. This is inconsistent with the RCA's current emphasis on a multiracial future freed from racism. Inaction will also lead to a deepening of the divide and only make it that much harder to move to restoration and a healthier relationship.

Developing a plan to restore Native American/First Nations voices to the life, work, and ministry of the RCA will require listening, equality, and respect. The RCA needs to move beyond divisive third person language of "us" and "them" that makes the other party an object, and use second person language of "you" and "us" that more genuinely shows relationship, uniting, and restoring dignity between conversation partners. The RCA needs to demonstrate a more supportive willingness to let native voices genuinely direct the structures and vision of such ministries. This is essential to restoring the trust and the voices of Native American/First Nations members of the RCA. Such willingness, indicated by both spiritual and financial support, will signal a renewed partnership and a healing of the relationship between the RCA and Native American/First Nations members.

It will be important to take more time than this task force had to hear the voices of RCA Native American/First Nations members. A wider sampling of the traditional base of the five RCA Native American/First Nations congregations is needed to hear how more effectively Native American/First Nations voices can be integrated into the life, work, and ministry of the RCA. This process will begin at the Native American Leadership Conference in April. Ina Montoya and Keith Ross will attend the conference to listen to Native Americans' voices. A stronger effort needs to be made to hear the voices of Native American/First Nations people in other RCA congregations, and in places where the RCA might consider beginning new related ministries.

It is also important that the specific plan to restore the voices of Native American/First Nations congregations and communities be developed solely by members of those congregations and communities. The history, both long-term and more recent, of decisions being made for this constituency but not by this constituency has led to this broken relationship. The RCA needs to stand behind Native American/First Nations members as we do with all other ethnic groups in our membership.

Therefore, the Task Force to Restore the Voices of Native American/First Nations Congregations and Ministries recommends:

R-39
To direct the General Synod Council to form a task force entirely of Native American/First Nations people, consisting of up to two representatives from each of the RCA Native American/First Nations congregations, who will consult with resource persons familiar with the history of the RCA and Native American Indian Ministries to create a restoration plan; and further,

that the task force be funded to continue its work for up to two years; and further,

that the task force provide a report to the General Synod Council at its fall 2011 meeting. (ADOPTED)

Upon the advice of the Advisory Committee on Our Multiracial Future Freed from Racism, the synod voted:

R-40
To direct the General Synod Council <u>to work in consultation with the Native American/First Nations Task Force</u> to create venues for the denomination to be more intentional about listening to the voices of Native American/First Nations congregations and communities. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
The GSC needs substantive input from this task force to develop plans for reconciliation efforts that will succeed.

Response to *MGS 2009*, R-79, p. 336

Report of the Task Force on the Theological Education Assessment

In the last third of the 1700s, a Dutch Reformed minister named John Henry Livingston petitioned the Classis of Amsterdam to allow for the training of ministers in the fledgling United States of America, rather than across the sea in Amsterdam. That petition was approved.

A theologically trained clergy has from its founding been a hallmark of the Reformed Church in America, and remains so today. And though the places and forms of that training have changed and adjusted with the times, in some ways dramatically, one factor of theological education has remained constant literally over the centuries: the challenge of adequate funding for theological education.

That's not to say the church has not been generous with the funding of theological education; indeed, for theological education to have been so highly valued over the years also means it has been highly supported over the years. But new times bring new challenges in theological education, both for its delivery and for its funding. Last year, the board of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) asked the General Synod to look more deeply into particular issues of funding, especially around the increasing pressure on the MFCA budget due to the increasing number of students and the growing variety of ways in which they are coming to ministerial leadership.

In response to this MFCA report, the General Synod approved the following recommendation:

> To appoint a task force consisting of three members nominated by the General Synod Council, two members nominated by the New Brunswick Theological Seminary board of trustees, two members nominated by the Western Theological Seminary board of trustees, and two members nominated by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board of trustees. Their mandate is to evaluate the size of the current theological education assessment and the formula for dividing it with report back to the next meeting of the General Synod. Expenses for members are to be covered by their respective constituents (*MGS 2009*, R-79, p. 336).

The original mandate of the recommendation was later expanded at the request of the four parties (NBTS, WTS, MFCA, and the General Synod Council [GSC]) and by action of the GSC, resulting in the addition of a number of at-large participants to the discussion. Participants were nominated by the sending institutions and invited by GSC. Former RCA staff member Jeff Japinga was asked to assist in the planning and facilitation of the meeting.

MFCA:	Cor Kors and Bart Strong
NBTS:	Gregg Mast and Bradley Lewis
WTS:	Leanne Van Dyk and James Brownson
GSC:	Carol Bechtel, Jon Brown, and Stephanie Doeschot
At-large:	Chad Pierce, Kathleen Edwards Chase, Scot Sherman (unable to attend), Beverly Bell Winslow (unable to attend), Denise Kingdom Grier (unable to attend)
Ex officio:	Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
Staff:	Jessica Bratt, Ken Bradsell, Ken Eriks

Shared Background

The mandate of the meeting was funding of theological education, but not all funding; the mandate was to evaluate the size of the current theological education assessment and the formula for dividing it.

For nearly two hundred years, funding for theological education in the RCA was built on three sources: primarily, the gift-support of churches and individuals; more recently, the use of endowment income; and finally, tuition paid by students. (For most of our history, students did not pay tuition for a seminary education.) The two RCA seminaries, while receiving the full support of the denomination, received no formal denomination-wide funding until the establishment of the assessment for the administration of theological education in 1987. For most of our history, churches and individuals made corporate and individual choices to support the work of the seminaries.

In 1968, the RCA established the Board of Theological Education to oversee the work of the two seminaries, and provided funding for the meetings of that board. In 1984, in response to a General Synod mandate "to investigate the inauguration of Reformed Church theological education in the Far West," the General Synod approved the establishment of the Theological Education Agency (TEA), with the responsibility of "direct supervision of all RCA ministerial candidates attending Fuller Theological Seminary, and indirect supervision of all RCA ministerial candidates attending seminaries other than New Brunswick, Western, and Fuller." In doing so, the committee commended the new agency to the church, asked the church to support it financially, asked the denomination's fund-raising staff to support that effort, but committed no denominational dollars. TEA did garner some financial support from churches, but never what it required to cover its costs.

The difficulty in funding the newly developed Theological Education Agency was symptomatic of a wider issue in the RCA through the 1980s and 1990s—a desire on the part of the church to expand its ministry in a variety of areas, but without a firm and consistent funding base for staff and program to support the work. The church had historically "asked" for congregational support of the vast portion of its efforts—usually all program and mission-related work—and "assessed" only for certain major administrative tasks. Even that distinction, however, was not always clear. As early as 1959, the Particular Synod of New Jersey asked for "a definitive denominational policy regarding assessments," a request that would be repeated over the next decade. In 1968, a General Synod committee reported that it was unable to distinguish those denominational efforts that were "assessable," "non-assessable," "administrative," and "benevolences."

In 1987, as denominational programs in Christian discipleship and church planting and development expanded at the request of the church beyond the means to fund them simply through benevolent gifts, General Synod took action. It approved assessments to support staffing for the offices of church planting and development and Christian discipleship, including the offices of the racial-ethnic councils; the cost would begin at $2.43 per member. Similarly, the Board of Theological Education, the oversight committee for the two seminaries and for TEA, came to the church with a request for administrative funding; the following is an excerpt:

> The BTE has carefully considered this growing practice of funding by assessment. Few RCA agencies can claim to be more essential to church life and witness than those institutions and agency charged to prepare the church's ministers of word and sacrament. The BTE believes the historic distinction between administrative costs by assessment and program costs through voluntary contributions has served the RCA well in this century, and urges that this precedent and practice be applied to the costs to theological

education. It is appropriate and fair for the General Synod to pay the costs of those persons who administer the church's resources for education under the supervision of the BTE. A per-member assessment for these costs would be consistent with General Synod practice in providing for other essential administrative costs by assessment. The seminaries and TEA would continue to encourage and rely upon the voluntary gifts of churches and individuals to fund the academic programs, faculty salaries, and facilities costs, which constitute the major portion of expense for RCA theological education.

The BTE recommends

R-12.
To provide unified funding for the administration of RCA theological education through an additional assessment of $1.80 per active communicant member. (ADOPTED)

The per-member assessment ($1.80 x 213,000 active communicants) would total $383,400 in 1988. The unified fund for theological education would be apportioned as follows:

NBTS: $160,000 to cover salary, benefits, and a portion of office expense for the president, academic dean, and business manager

WTS: $160,000 to cover salary, benefits, and a portion of office expense for the president, academic dean, and business manager

TEA: $60,000 to cover salary, benefits, and a portion of office expense for the director

The unified fund by assessment would provide equity for theological education as an essential mission of the General Synod and a tangible demonstration of unity under BTE supervision, while funding significant sums to improve faculty and program quality in RCA theological education.

(*MGS 1987*, p. 270)

The assessment for theological education approved by the General Synod in 1987 is, essentially, the assessment that the task force was given its mandate to evaluate. Over the years, the amount of the assessment and the formula for distribution has been altered by the General Synod, but not the assessment itself or, apparently, any rationale for the assessment. For example, what was in 1987 an assessment pegged to the actual salary costs of certain administrative personnel was, in 1995, fixed by the General Synod Council to reflect a specific percentage (13.4%) of the overall denominational assessment in place at that time, providing both a floor of support for the agencies and a cap against inflation for the churches. The formula for distribution was changed as well, first to 40%-40%-20% split (the original dollar figures produced about a 42-42-16 split) between New Brunswick, Western, and TEA, and a few years later, to a 33-33-33 split between the two seminaries and TEA, soon to be the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA)—though no clear criteria or reasons for those changes were reported in the *Minutes of the General Synod*.

In 2009, the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (the successor body to the previous Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, which had served the denomination both in a coordinating role and in the role of candidate care for RCA candidates at non-RCA seminaries), raised again the issue of the assessment for theological education in its report. It is perhaps worth noting again, in review, that when the MFCA was birthed as TEA in 1984, it was established without funding and has to date struggled to balance the cost of

its work with the quantity of its work. To the 2009 General Synod, MFCA reported (*MGS 2009*, p. 336):

> The agency continues to rely heavily on the theological education assessment for its operation. The pressures to not only freeze, but perhaps significantly decrease assessments, could jeopardize the viability of the agency. The MFCA board of trustees believes that denominational support of the agency and the two RCA seminaries remains important to the successful implementation of Our Call and providing future leadership. A clearly defined mandate for funding theological education is considered crucial and thus the MFCA board of trustees offers the following recommendation:
>
> R-79
> To appoint a task force consisting of three members nominated by the General Synod Council, two members nominated by the New Brunswick Theological Seminary board of trustees, two members nominated by the Western Theological Seminary board of trustees, and two members nominated by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board of trustees. Their mandate is to evaluate the size of the current theological education assessment and the formula for dividing it with report back to the next meeting of the General Synod. Expenses for members are to be covered by their respective constituents. (ADOPTED)
>
> Reasons:
> 1. Currently the theological education assessment is a percentage of the GSC assessment budget, which is not considered a rational basis for setting the amount.
> 2. Good stewardship of the resources should identify clear goals toward which the funds are allocated along with clear rationales, which do not currently exist.

The Current Practice

This history and pattern of theological education funding was one pillar on which the task force built its work. Similarly, the task force sought also to hear the current narrative of the RCA's theological educational work itself—the ways and means by which New Brunswick, Western, and MFCA are preparing women and men for the important work of revitalization and church multiplication, for discipleship, leadership, mission, in a multiracial future freed from racism, and the challenges all three face in doing so. It is a compelling narrative—three agencies, each with its own strengths, each with its own aspirations and compelling missions, each with its own unique practices and student populations (both RCA and non-RCA, in differing proportions), but all sharing a commitment to the RCA and its mission. It was at once inspiring but also somewhat disconcerting. On the one hand, there was little doubt that each agency is living out in compelling ways its own understanding of its place and call in RCA theological education, and that was inspiring; in fact, the task force heard how each entity has chosen to spend its assessment funds in ways that seemed consistent with its own mission, and these funds seem clearly to have been well used in this context. On the other hand, beneath the inspiration of the stories, the task force uncovered a problematic question: against what criteria are these good efforts to be evaluated *in determining the amount and distribution of assessment funding*?—the question, finally, the task force had been asked to confront. Is an inspirational story, no matter how good any one of us feel about it, enough to justify assessment support, and if so, how much support, especially in comparison to other inspirational stories?

That last question was made more complex by a third piece of the puzzle that quickly became evident: a string of decisions by General Synod, connected to theological education or to one of its agencies, and being carried out, or not, at various levels of implementation and success. For example, General Synod has asked for gatherings of its professors

of theology but provided no money to do so. (When those meetings happened, the cost was often covered by Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency.) Work related to the new Approved Alternate Route for ordination had provided significant new work for MFCA, but with no new financial support. Our Call, the denomination's ten-year goal, has been in effect for seven years without any apparent direct evaluator link to the assessment for theological education. The task force could identify, for example, no systematic study of the number of ministers the church will require in the coming decades, taking into account retirements, likely new church starts, the changing demographics of both clergy and laity, and the size distribution of churches. Yet such study would be necessary to determine how much to assess and where assessment money would be best spent.

Finally, there was a 2007 recommendation approved by the General Synod, asking for a new group to coordinate the overall work of theological formation and education assigned by the *Book of Church Order* to the General Synod in the areas of student care, vocational calling, and standards for theological education (*MGS 2007*, R-57, p. 215). These were, are, and will be key roles for the agencies of theological education, but roles left without a structural home when the "C" in MFCA became "certification" instead of "coordinating" in the 2007 change in its bylaws (*MGS 2007*, R-58, p. 218).

> R-57
> That the General Synod direct the General Synod Council to establish a "Committee for Standards, Call, and Care" with the responsibility to 1) evaluate and recommend standards for ministerial preparation to the General Synod, 2) develop strategies to identify and call forth gifted persons for the ministry of Word and sacrament, and 3) nurture a healthy climate within congregations and classes for ministerial formation; and further,
>
> to direct the General Synod Council to report on the composition, accountability, and progress of this committee at the 2008 meeting of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)
>
> Reasons:
> 1. The General Synod has responsibility to establish and maintain the standards for theological education.
> 2. Clarity concerning how this accountability will be exercised is needed.

Looking Forward

The evaluation of and rationale for assessments can never be a simple mathematical equation, and yet in many ways that is exactly what the assessment for theological education in the RCA had become. Since the mid-1990s, the assessment had been tied directly to the overall General Synod assessment, set at 13.4 percent of that overall assessment. That meant, if the synod chose to add an assessment for an office for women's ministry, for example, or church multiplication, or simply adjust for inflation, the theological education assessment would rise as well. Subtract from the assessment, by ending the every-household distribution of the *Church Herald* or simply being sensitive to economic times, for example, and the theological education assessment would drop. Because the theological assessment was fixed at a percentage of the overall assessment budget, there was an unintended consequence as well—the church did not have to actively consider the importance, the financial need, and the changing trends of theological education on a yearly basis. It made for easier mathematics, but far more problematic accountability and transparency. In short, the means for calculating both the size and distribution of the theological education assessment had lost its relevance. If this task force was to bring to General Synod a clear amount and rationale for an assessment for theological education, it could not do so holistically without also considering the issues raised by calling, care, and standards.

And so additional key questions for the task force became: What does the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) mandate for the General Synod and its agents in regard to theological education? What does it cost to do what the *BCO* requires? And what are the standards and outcomes by which the effectiveness of this work (and thus the effectiveness of the funds allocated to this work) can be measured?

In the end, the task force believes that these are essential questions not simply for the designation of an assessment, but for the overall effectiveness and accountability of the practice of theological education in the RCA. It grew increasingly clear what questions the task force needed to be asking; what we didn't have were common, agreed-upon criteria by which to evaluate our answers and reach equitable funding conclusions. Should these criteria be based on the number of RCA students served in this current year, or over the past ten years? Should they measure the unique contributions, both actual and potential, of each agency to the six areas of Our Call? Or is there, in the words of one task force member, a "parity of importance" among the three agencies, each contributing uniquely, that suggested each agency continue to receive essentially equal funding? How might the crucial but unresolved issues of calling, care, and standards affect any conclusion the task force might reach? And how, in answering all these questions, could the task force balance the crucial long-term needs of the church with the acute short-term financial challenges of MFCA, which in part prompted the mandate of the task force in the first place?

Amid those important questions, there was this common conclusion: that while any particular number and recommendation might technically fulfill the mandate and objective of the task force, that kind of short-term solution would in the long run help neither the church nor the three agencies in being transparent and accountable about the rationale for, the amount of, and the distribution of any theological education assessment. Too much is at stake, both in raising up the kind of leadership necessary for the ongoing and future revitalization and multiplication of ministries in the Reformed Church and in providing a simple, transparent, accountable rationale for the funding and practice of theological education in the RCA.

With those criteria and objectives in mind, the task force makes the following recommendations:

R-41
To maintain the present allocation to the seminaries and to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) at the level approved by the 2009 General Synod ($253,197.04 each to New Brunswick Seminary, to Western Seminary, and to MFCA) for three years, neither increasing nor decreasing the actual dollar amount; and further,

to allocate the proposed increase in the theological assessment voted by the 2010 General Synod in the following manner:

- **i) $55,000 for MFCA to decrease fees for students for enrollment and psychological assessments;**
- **ii) $10,000 to fund the annual gathering and work for the General Synod professors of theology; and**
- **iii) $15,000 for a newly formed coordination and collaboration group, which would address the mandates of care, call, and standards; and further,**

to instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the three agencies of theological education, to develop a "global ends policy" for theological education—a statement of the General Synod Council's expectations for the contributions of the three agencies to the polity and mission of the RCA—against which all future assessments for theological education can be evaluated and determined. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The proposal moves the General Synod away from a nearly automatic grant coupled with the GSC assessment toward a more clearly stated rationale for this assessment.
2. Until clear objectives can be determined and communicated, however, a starting base is necessary. Because there is strong value and importance in how all three agents are contributing to the RCA's mission, the current division of distribution has been maintained. While MFCA receives additional assessment dollars in this proposal, that funding would simply replace current fees placed on students and would not grow the MFCA budget by a single dollar.
3. Assessments should only be for things that are essential. The plan sets in place a means to monitor clearly what the agents do on behalf of the RCA that is essential to the polity and mission of the RCA.
4. The plan creates a table where collaboration can take place, trust can be built, honest conversations can be held, and proposals can be shaped.

The recommendation does not create assessment relief for the church—but that was not what the task force was asked to do. Neither does the plan allocate more total revenue to the agencies—similarly, that is not what the task force was asked to do. Rather, the plan directly addresses short-term funding needs and puts in place the structure and parameters by which the whole church—the General Synod, the General Synod Council, and the three agencies—can collaborate on a clear and transparent long-term rationale for any future assessments: one built not necessarily on a mathematical percentage, nor on the desires and preferences of a few people gathered around a table for two days, but on the mission and vision of the RCA for the whole church, in all its diversity, and on the mandates of the *Book of Church Order*.

While the task force sees the additional $80,000 asked for in the first recommendation to be an assessment borne by the whole church, it does not necessarily see this as an additional assessment above and beyond current amounts. There may be other means by which those funds can be identified; the task force acknowledges that setting assessments is finally not its work, but the work of the General Synod Council.

Additionally, to fulfill adequately the mandate of the task force, including the unaddressed mandate of 2007 around the care, calling, and standards for theological education in the RCA, a second action is necessary—one addressed financially in the first recommendation but not practically: the establishment of a collaboration committee that will bring together representatives from New Brunswick, Western, MFCA, the General Synod Council, and the whole church, in ways that are currently not practiced.

R-42
To establish the "Call, Care, and Standards Collaboration (CCSC) Group," with accountability to the General Synod Council (GSC) and funding through assessment, for an initial period of three years, and according to the following membership criteria:

- **Two representatives appointed by each of the seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency;**
- **Four at-large members appointed by GSC, reflecting experience in the RCA's processes of call, care, and standards;**
- **The composition of the group shall reflect the rich diversity envisioned by "Our Call"; and**
- **At least two members shall be General Synod professors;**

and further,

to place with this group the following responsibilities connected to the practice and accountability of theological education in the Reformed Church in America:

- **In consultation with the professorate, coordinate regular review of the standards, and propose needed revisions to the General Synod through the report of the General Synod Council.**
- **Facilitate appropriate resources, support, and sharing of best practices among congregations and classes in their discernment of the call of ministerial candidates and in their care of ministerial candidates in the ordination process.**
- **Provide a forum for collaboration among the seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency regarding ministerial formation as it relates to RCA church order and the mission of the church.**
- **Assist GSC in formulating and updating an ends statement that focuses the use of the assessment for theological education.**
- **Assist GSC in conducting a triennial review of the overall assessment for theological education, considering both the total amount and its division, in light of RCA church order and the mission of the church, as expressed through appropriate GSC ends statement(s).**
- **Coordinate the evaluation of overall effectiveness of the seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency in assisting candidates to meet the standards established by the RCA. (ADOPTED)**

Reasons:

1. There is currently no group with a broad enough grasp of theological education to make key determinations on funding or allocation.
2. The recommendation takes the action of the 2009 General Synod about assessments and the action of General Synod in 2007 about call, care, and standards and brings them together into a unified proposal.
3. This group will be best equipped to measure the full leadership needs of the RCA in the decades to come.

This newly formed group shall focus its energies on those aspects of ministerial formation directly related to the General Synod and its responsibilities and mission, not infringing on those responsibilities given to the classes or consistories. While the task force does not have the authority to set an initial agenda for the group, it envisioned these possible questions and tasks, based on its broad conversations about the support and obstacles currently faced by persons seeking vocational call as ministers of Word and sacrament in the RCA:

- Should RCA church order be changed to allow classes to receive candidates for ordination who are not yet members of an RCA congregation? If so, how?
- How can the RCA provide a more gracious and faithful welcome to and equipping of licensed candidates and ordained ministers from other denominations who do not yet fully meet RCA requirements?
- How can the seminaries and the MFCA collaborate in the mission of the RCA so as to inspire voluntary contributions toward ministerial formation?
- How effectively are the processes of ministerial formation in the RCA nurturing a Reformed identity among candidates, and how can the RCA do even better?
- Should the RCA develop a list of approved seminaries? If so, what steps should be taken?
- How can RCA ministerial formation be more welcoming to women and ethnic minorities?
- How can appropriate data be gathered on the needs and trends affecting ministerial formation and service in the life of the RCA in the present and in the future? Such areas might include projections on retirements and vacancies, ministerial effectiveness and satisfaction, rate of church planting, trends in racial and gender diversity in pastoral leadership, etc.

Overall, this report is simply part of a larger story of the practice of theological education in the Reformed Church in America, one that began with John Henry Livingston in the 1700s, continued with the establishment of a second seminary in the 1800s and a new agency in the later 1900s, and extends into a future the church does not yet know. It does not firmly and finally answer all the questions the task force considered, nor does it settle for simply "kicking the can down the road." Rather, it attempts to fill crucial and immediate gaps, makes strong and firm commitments, and sets in motion a means by which to address essential questions about the formation of future leadership of the RCA. And it does so in a structure that, finally, will make the rationale for RCA assessment funding for theological education clear and straightforward—not simply a good idea, but an essential task for the life and ministry of the church.

OVERTURES

Process for Approving Doctrinal Standards

1. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct its Commission on Theology, working with its Commissions on Church Order and History, to develop a process for approving additions to and updates in translations of our Doctrinal Standards which would allow the classes to actually approve the new text being amended to the Constitution, for report no later than the General Synod of 2012.

Reasons:

1. The current process has resulted in confusion and flawed results. Translations have been approved by the General Synod, sometimes with some difficulty (*MGS 1990*, p. 448). On at least one occasion, this process resulted in confusion over whether or not new translations had been approved (*MGS 1991*, pp. 452-464). This process also failed to catch an irregularity with the 1963 translation of the Heidelberg Catechism (see reports to the PCUSA General Assembly at www.witherspoonsociety.org/2008/2008%20GA%20Heidelberg%20Catechism.htm #elwood&bos), which introduced material on homosexuality not in the original text.
2. More involvement by all the classes will tap a broader pool of expertise and yield more ownership of the changes. Ministers are called upon to affirm the Standards as "historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God" (see the forms of declaration for licensed candidates, ministers of Word and sacrament, and professors of theology) and to use them to inform preaching (*BCO*, 1.II.7.1. a. and b.). This requires a familiarity with the actual texts and means that any change in the actual texts changes the standards to which all ministers are held.
3. Clarifying the process will help the church take seriously the role of the whole of the standards in our polity. The amendment which was sent to the classes regarding the inclusion of the Belhar Confession in the Constitution included only the name of the confession in the Preamble, even though the entire text of the confession is becoming part of the Constitution. It is as if the classes were being asked to amend the Standards by title. This is very different from how we amend the Liturgy, which is also constitutional.
4. The current process will be tested again in the near future. There is a task force at work to create a common translation of the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort for use by the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the RCA (*MGS 2008*, p. 277). There are, however, differences of substance between the two denominations' confessions currently in use, so there is the potential that any shared translation will constitute a doctrinal shift for one or both groups. Since these are covenantal documents, the whole covenant community should have a chance to discuss such changes.
5. The RCA needs a process where such [sic] the standards may be thoughtfully considered in a timely manner by the whole church.

In response to Overture 1, the Advisory Committee on Theology recommended:

R-43
To instruct the Commission on Theology to examine the current process of adopting standards and new translations, and to clarify theological questions about the current process, in consultation with other commissions as appropriate. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The current process sometimes has resulted in confusion.
2. This is an important issue since ministers are called upon to affirm the Standards as "historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God" (see the forms of declaration for licensed candidates, ministers of Word and sacrament, and professors of theology) and to use them to inform preaching (*BCO*, 1.II.7.1, a and b).
3. Clarifying the process will help the church take seriously the role of the Standards.
4. The current process may be tested again in the near future.

Non-RCA Ministers Applying for Admission to a Classis

2. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to amend the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 4 as follows, and then to forward this amendment to the classes for their approval:

Sec. 4.

a. When an ordained minister of another denomination wishes to ~~be considered for a call from a congregation in the RCA,~~ apply for admission to the classis, that minister shall furnish the stated clerk of classis with the following:
1. **a written statement from the body holding the minister's credentials attesting that the minister is an ordained minister in good and regular standing;**
2. **a completed Minister's Profile form;**
3. **copies of academic degrees;**
4. **a seminary transcript;**
5. **names, addresses, and telephone numbers of five persons who are qualified to comment on the applicant's ministry;**
6. **a statement from the applicant which 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.**

Reasons:
1. The current section is limited to one circumstance under which an ordained minister from another denomination might wish to serve within a classis's jurisdiction. The assumption is made that the desire of the potential applicant could only be the consideration of a call from a congregation.
2. Ordained ministers who wish to serve in specialized ministries within the bounds of a classis may also wish to apply for admission to that classis.
3. Ordained ministers who wish to serve a congregation on a contractual basis in a church within the bounds of a classis may also desire to apply for admission to that classis.
4. The current section can be strengthened and the required procedures clarified by stating that this section applies to any ordained minister of another denomination who wishes to apply for admission to a classis, whether the intended ministry is within a congregation (by call or contract) or through a specialized ministry.

In response to Overture 2, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

R-44
To deny Overture 2. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
The requested amendment has already been approved (*MGS 2009*, R-62, pp. 296-297) and the declarative vote was taken at this synod in R-4 (p. 44).

Clarification on Superseding a Consistory

3. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct its Commission on Church Order to amend *BCO* 1.II.7 to clarify the process for superseding a consistory while making it clear that only a consistory is the governing body of a local church.

Reasons:
1. The 2009 General Synod approved and sent to the classes proposed amendments to *BCO* 1.II.7 that clarified the process for classes to supersede consistories. Overall, we felt the changes were very helpful and much needed. Unfortunately, this amendment also included, at 1.II.7. Sec. 13a., the replacement of the phrase "consistory of that church" with "governing body." This part of the amendment is unnecessary and confusing, since this is the only place in the section that uses any reference other than consistory, and since the consistory is the only governing body of the local church (*BCO*, 1.I.1, Sec. 1).
2. This defect caused the Classis of Albany to vote to deny the amendment. If enough other classes did likewise, then a new amendment must be prepared, and the phrase "consistory of that church" should be retained. If the amendment passes, then the phrase "consistory of that church" needs to be restored to prevent confusion.

In response to Overture 3, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

R-45
To deny Overture 3. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
The moderator of the Commission on Church Order has committed to bringing this issue to the commission for further review.

Commissioning and Ordaining of Undocumented Residents

4. Classis of the Southwest overtures General Synod 2010 of the Reformed Church in America to request its Commission on Church Order to provide guidance for the congregations and classes of the RCA regarding commissioning and ordaining of undocumented residents of the United States to the offices of the church, and to report such findings to the General Synod of 2011.

Reasons:
1. Undocumented residents, some for as long as ten years or more, are members of RCA congregations. They exhibit Christian character and have gifts for ministry. Some have been nominated for the offices of elder or deacon.
2. Undocumented residents are pursuing studies in the "track" of commissioned pastor and will soon present themselves to their classes for commissioning.
3. It is a possibility that some of these undocumented residents will be asked to fill paid positions offered by the church or an agency of the church.
4. Office-bearers in the RCA are also commonly officers of their congregations or classis as civil corporations and are therefore responsible for signing legal documents on behalf of those corporations. This may be illegal—or if not illegal, extremely risky—for an undocumented resident to do. The corporation, whose documents such a person might sign, might later learn that the documents have no legal force.
5. Informed estimates indicate that approximately 40 to 60 percent of the undocumented entrants into the United States who cross the Mexico–United States border are people

from Chiapas state in Mexico. In the Classis of the Southwest, 60 percent of the worshipers in one of the congregations have roots in Chiapas. (This is not to imply that any immigrant from Chiapas is necessarily undocumented. Many are legally in the United States.) Because of the RCA's strong history of mission work in Chiapas, the RCA has a strong interest in the continued spiritual growth of many of these people.
6. The RCA has a responsibility to minister to all who come, some of whom currently and recently arrive [sic] illegally. The classis wonders whether legal residency status is a precondition for ministry to, and with, gifted believers.
7. The RCA's church multiplication aspirations are linked explicitly to the expectation that growth among non-Anglo population groups will be strong. In order for that to become a reality, indigenous leadership must be encouraged, cultivated, and supported.

In response to Overture 4, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

> R-46
> To direct the General Synod Council to provide guidance for the assemblies, classes, and congregations of the RCA regarding commissioning and ordaining of undocumented residents of the United States to the offices of the church, and to report such findings to General Synod 2012.

A motion was made to amend the recommendation as follows (additions are underlined):
…undocumented residents of the United States and Canada to the offices of the church…

> **R-46**
> **To direct the General Synod Council to provide guidance for the assemblies, classes, and congregations of the RCA regarding commissioning and ordaining of undocumented residents of the United States and Canada to the offices of the church, and to report such findings to General Synod 2012. (ADOPTED)**

Reasons:
1. Undocumented residents, some for as long as ten years or more, are members of RCA congregations. They exhibit Christian character and have gifts for ministry. Some have been nominated for the offices of elder or deacon.
2. Undocumented residents are pursuing commissioned pastor studies and will soon present themselves to their classes for commissioning.
3. It is possible that some of these undocumented residents will be asked to fill paid positions offered by the church or an agency of the church.
4. Officeholders in the RCA are also commonly officers of their congregations or classes as civil corporations and therefore are responsible for signing legal documents on behalf of those corporations. This may need to be explored in regard to legal ramifications.
5. Informed estimates indicate that 40 to 60 percent of the undocumented entrants into the United States who cross the Mexico-United States border are people from the state of Chiapas in Mexico. In Southwest Classis, 60 percent of the worshipers in one congregation have roots in Chiapas. (This is not to imply that any immigrant from Chiapas is necessarily undocumented; many are in the United States legally.) Because of the RCA's history of mission work in Chiapas, the RCA has a strong interest in the continued spiritual growth of many of these people.
6. The RCA has a responsibility to minister to all who come. It seems that legal residency status should not be a precondition for ministry to, and with, gifted believers.
7. The RCA's church multiplication aspirations are linked explicitly to the expectation that growth among non-Anglo population groups will be strong. In order for that to become a reality, indigenous leadership must be encouraged, cultivated, and supported.

Union with Reformed Denominations

5. The Classis of Schenectady overtures the General Synod of the RCA to direct the president of the General Synod to appoint a task force to explore the long-range possibilities for union with one or more other Reformed denominations and report with specific recommendations to the 2012 General Synod.

Reasons:
1. The family of Reformed churches increasingly celebrates the diversity and inclusion of many cultures in God's realm.
2. Local mission efforts and congregations can better support and utilize the gifts of a larger body.
3. The cost of operations for a national denomination and its associated publications and personnel continues to rise; there are advantages to be had with a larger body.
4. The desire for organic unity with other Reformed bodies has been a historic pursuit of our denomination.

In response to Overture 5, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-47
To deny overture 5.

Reasons:
1. Organic union with other denominations is not at the top of the RCA's ecumenical agenda.
2. Organic union is not the only option for creating a more fiscally viable organization and, in fact, would be very costly to accomplish.

Eliminating the Covenant of Care Contribution

6. The Classis of California respectfully overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to immediately end the mandatory Covenant of Care contributions program and any past or future plans to collect delinquent Covenant of Care contributions from Reformed Church in America churches.

Reasons:
1. The Covenant of Care contribution plan places an undue burden on the finances of congregations.
2. The amount of contributions in arrears (approximately $466,000) is an indication of a true flaw in the plan that needs to be addressed.
3. Any attempts to collect delinquent and future contributions through added assessments for classes with non-compliant congregations would set a precedent in that these assessments would be penal in nature and not in keeping with the real purpose of assessments.
4. The Covenant of Care contribution plan is not a voluntary contribution but a mandatory payment for non-participation in the plan.

In response to Overture 6, the All-synod Advisory Committee on the Board of Benefits Services recommended:

R-48
To deny Overture 6.

Reasons:
1. The overwhelming feedback from the advisory committees is to deny this overture.
2. If approved, this overture would require all churches with a minister serving full-time under call or contract to pay the full cost of premiums for RCA medical insurance for their ministers and the minister's family.

7. The Classis of Mid-Hudson respectfully overtures the General Synod of the RCA to immediately eliminate the mandatory Covenant of Care contribution and any past or future attempts to collect so-called "delinquent" contributions from congregations; and further, to appoint an independent task force comprised of experts in the field of health care insurance (exclusive of any RCA Board of Benefits Services representation) who are tasked with the objective assessment of the viability of the RCA's medical insurance program, reporting back to the 2011 General Synod.

Reasons:
1. The Covenant of Care contribution puts an undue and discriminatory burden on many congregations.
2. The Covenant of Care contribution in reality is not a truly voluntary contribution. Instead, it is a billed obligation that suppresses any sense of benevolent giving.
3. The reported denominational total of Covenant of Care contributions thus far in arrears (approximately $466,000) is indication of widespread objection to this model of "mandated benevolence." That objection suggests that this model, along with the RCA's medical insurance program as a whole, is in need of major review, if not elimination.
4. Any attempts to collect so-called "delinquent" contributions through added assessments to classes which may include one or more "non-compliant" congregations would create a new and totally undesirable precedent of allowing assessments to be penalizing in nature.
5. The failure to collect Covenant of Care contributions points out that no matter what the General Synod might approve, our polity does not allow for the General Synod or General Synod Council to collect required fees from congregations except when said congregations have requested and received services from the synod. The General Synod is where classes—not local congregations—relate to one another.
6. A truly independent task force of experts in the field of health care insurance would bring an unbiased perspective in assessing the RCA's medical insurance program, with timely attention to the U.S. government's current health care deliberations.

In response to Overture 7, the All-synod Advisory Committee on the Board of Benefits Services recommended:

R-49
To deny Overture 7.

Reasons:
1. The overwhelming feedback from the advisory committees is to deny this overture.
2. If approved, this overture would require all churches with a minister serving full-time under call or contract to pay the full cost of premiums for RCA medical insurance for their ministers and the minister's family.

Explore Joint Health Care Plans

8. The Classis of the Greater Palisades overtures the General Synod to instruct the Board of Benefit Services to enter negotiation with partner denominations to explore joint health care plans.

Reasons:
1. Full participation avoids the adverse selection that inhibited such negotiations. The change in the church order requiring full participation has made such explorations possible. Indeed, many supported full participation with the prospect of just such an outcome.
2. The increasing cost of insurance to congregations and ministers makes it imperative that the board explore all avenues of cost reduction.
3. Participation in the Formula of Agreement provides the occasion and foundation for such explorations. We urge initiatives to Formula churches.

In response to Overture 8, the All-synod Advisory Committee on the Board of Benefits Services recommended:

R-50
To deny Overture 8.

Reason:
The content of this overture is addressed in R-76.

Schedule of Assessments for Newly Organized Churches

9. The Classes of East Sioux, Dakota, Minnesota, West Sioux, and the Synod of the Heartland, RCA, overture General Synod to adopt the following formula for the organization of new churches and the schedule of their assessments as follows: A classis shall plan to organize a worshiping congregation as a church (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 11) within four years of the start of its public ministry. The classis shall be required to pay assessments based on a formula where newly organized churches will pay 20 percent of the full assessment amount the first year of organization, 40 percent in its second year, 60 percent in its third year, 80 percent in its fourth year and 100 percent in its fifth and subsequent years, and further, that the General Synod encourage regional synods and classes to apply the same formula when they calculate the assessments to support ministries of those assemblies.

Reasons:
1. The cost of paying full assessments is causing some new churches to hold off on becoming organized congregations.
2. A graduated scale of assessments will allow new churches to have a stronger cash flow base in their early years.
3. New churches will organize more quickly and feel more connected to the Reformed Church in America.
4. All levels of the RCA would receive assessments more quickly.
5. Increased membership from newly organized churches will more accurately reflect kingdom growth happening in the RCA.
6. Any new church can decide to exceed these guidelines.

In response to Overture 9, the Advisory Committees on Funding Our Mission Together recommended:

R-51
To direct the General Synod Council to adopt the following formula for determining assessments for newly organized churches: the classis shall be required to pay assessments based on a formula where newly organized churches will pay 20 percent of

the full assessment amount the first year of organization, 40 percent in their second year, 60 percent in their third year, 80 percent in their fourth year, and 100 percent in subsequent years; and further,

that the General Synod encourage regional synods and classes to apply the same formula when they calculate assessments to support ministries of those assemblies. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
The advisory committees reviewed the feedback and encountered wide concern regarding the four-year time frame for organization in the original overture. However, there was overwhelming support for the proposed funding formula, with particular attention paid to the integration of new church starts into the life of the RCA.

[*All overtures with the same wording were combined into one overture, now listed as Overture 9.*]

Conversation with the ELCA on Clergy Practicing Same Gender Sexual Relationships

10. The Classis of Cascades overtures the General Synod to open a conversation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, expressing our regret and disagreement concern [sic] with their 2009 decision regarding clergy who practice same gender sexual relationships, and further; to ask the Commission on Christian Unity to consider how the ELCA's decision and their response to our expression of concern requires our response in a relationship that is based on "mutual affirmation and admonition." The commission is asked to report back to the General Synod in 2011.

Reasons:
1. The 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) voted to allow partnered gays and lesbians to serve in the ministry, saying that they "recognize, support and hold publicly accountable life-long, monogamous, same gender relationships." This action changed their position on this issue, as they previously allowed people who are gay and lesbian into the ordained ministry only if they remained celibate. This change brings the ELCA practice and the RCA's stated practice into disagreement on the ways to minister to and with people of homosexual orientation.
2. In 1997 when we approved the Formula of Agreement, the United Church of Christ (UCC) allowed same-sex marriages. When the Formula was endorsed, the General Synod made the decision to enter into dialogue with the UCC on the "single issue of homosexuality." With the ELCA's recent decision, it is appropriate to have a similar dialogue.
3. The language of the Formula of Agreement stresses that the principle of "mutual affirmation and admonition" will be at the heart of the relationship between the Reformed and Lutheran churches. In this spirit, we would lovingly share our unchanged understanding of God's will for human sexuality and holiness.
4. When the Formula of Agreement was signed, there was a statement that there were no "church-dividing" issues preventing our full communion (*MGS 1997*, R-2, paragraph 5, p. 186):

   WHEREAS *A Common Calling*, the report of the Lutheran-Reformed Committee for Theological Conversations reaffirmed a consensus reported in previous dialogues that there are no "church-dividing differences" precluding full communion among these four churches;

Other denominations and fellowships that have recently changed their stance on homosexual clergy have faced serious issues. The worldwide Anglican communion has been unable to maintain unity as it changed its stance on this issue. There are already churches leaving the ELCA over this issue, beginning new denominations and joining other movements.

5. The fact that we remain in fellowship with the UCC does not restrict us from expressing our disagreement with the ELCA.

(See R-52 and R-53, pp. 174-175.)

Statement of Grave Concern to Formula Partners on Sexual Immorality

11. The Classis of Minnesota overtures the General Synod to direct the general secretary to publish and present a statement of grave concern to those denominations included in the Formula of Agreement which have determined to ordain to church office persons living in sexual immorality *(e.g. adultery, homosexual behavior, and sex outside of marriage…marriage defined as a life-long covenant between one man and one woman)* warning that endorsement of such behavior imperils pure gospel preaching, compromises clear biblical teaching, and threatens the full communion the RCA has enjoyed with those churches since approving the Formula in 1997; and further, that this statement and any relevant responses be published on the RCA website, and finally that, absent a change in these denominations' position, the RCA will be forced to consider dissolving this Formula.

Reasons:
1. Scripture gives dire warnings to those engaged in unrepentant sexual immorality, including homosexual behavior (Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3). From the beginning, God's plan for marriage has been one man and one woman as one flesh in the covenant of marriage (Genesis 2:18, 21-25). Jesus reaffirmed this original design (Matthew 19:4-6).
2. The RCA has spoken clearly and lovingly that sexual immorality, including homosexual behavior, is contrary to Scripture. While we have been engaged in a multi-year dialogue on the issue, our official position remains:

   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).

3. Certain signatories of the Formula have spoken clearly that some forms of sexual immorality, including homosexual behavior, are not contrary to Scripture.
   a. The ELCA summarizes its action:
      i. **Resolution 1:** Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.
      ii. **Resolution 2:** Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.
      (http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/ELCA-Governance/Churchwide-Assembly/Actions/Voting.aspx)

b. The UCC has stated:
   i. The Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirms equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender and declares that the government should not interfere with couples regardless of gender who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of legally recognized marriage.
   [*and in their 18th General Synod the denomination stated that the denomination:*]
   ii. Urgently calls upon local churches, Associations, Conferences to engage in a disciplined dialogue in which the biblical and theological foundation for congregations to be open and affirming of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons are prayerfully discussed in light of the teachings of Jesus Christ…our Christian vocation to live as communities of grace and reconciliation…Calls upon local churches, Associations and Conferences to extend their welcome and support to openly lesbian, gay and bisexual students in-care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified lesbian, gay and bisexual candidates.

4. We do not believe it is possible to have true communion with those who, by changing the grace of our God into a license for immorality, have departed from the faith once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3-4), denying God's redemptive work to those trapped in sexual sin (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In light of the decisions these denominations have enacted, it is difficult, if not impossible, to affirm the language of the Formula which states we "recognize each other as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached" and are able to "make provision for the orderly exchange of ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament." In fact the "principle of complementarity" outlined in the Formula is tragically compromised by these denominations' decisions which amount to outright contradiction of basic principles. Realistically, one of the central points of theological consensus (i.e., a common theology of ministry) has been abrogated by their decision.
5. As those who have enjoyed communion with said denominations, we believe it is our sacred duty to bring exhortation and, in cases like these, correction to those denominations which threaten true unity through a denial of biblical truth (2 Timothy 4:1-3).
6. Our world is desperately confused when it comes to matters of sexuality. It is imperative that the RCA maintain a clear, uncompromising position with regard to biblical sexuality.
7. We realize there are other forms of sexual immorality we have not explicitly mentioned, like pedophilia, pornography, and unbiblical divorce and remarriage. These are also displeasing to God. In mentioning the sins we have, we are not excusing others. The reason we specifically mention certain sins, like homosexual practice, is due to the urgent need in our time to speak clearly on issues which threaten the integrity of our denomination and because these other forms of sexual immorality have not been specifically endorsed by said signatories of the Formula of Agreement.

(See R-52 and R-53, pp. 174-175.)

Suspend Our Relationship with Formula of Agreement Partners

12. The Classis of Illiana overtures the General Synod to immediately suspend our relationship with Formula of Agreement partners the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The UCC has for several years allowed practicing homosexuals/lesbians to serve as pastors and church leaders in their denomination and the ELCA has recently approved allowing the same.

As a first step in calling the UCC and ELCA to faithfulness to the Scriptures and compassionate ministry to those struggling with these alternative lifestyle choices, we

would urge them to reverse their decisions and walk in repentance and faithfulness with the Church at large throughout history by upholding Scripture's clear teaching against the practice of homosexuality. We further ask that representatives of the Reformed Church meet with appropriate representatives of these denominations to explain our action and, with truth and grace, urge them to repent of their actions. Should they repent, we look forward to reversing this suspension of our relationships and walking in partnership with them as we seek to proclaim God's grace in a broken world so loved by God. However, should they refuse to repent, after two years the suspension of our Formula of Agreement with these denominations would become permanent.

Reasons:
1. The truth of Scripture compels us to speak to those who affirm homosexuality as an appropriate, biblical expression of human sexuality.
2. Homosexual behavior is so repeatedly and clearly forbidden in Scripture that to encourage homosexuality calls into question the role of Scripture in the life of a denomination that accepts it.
3. Commending homosexuality involves the core of the gospel because it urges us to celebrate a behavior from which the Bible calls us to repent (1 Corinthians 6).
4. The New Testament tells us that sexual deviance is a matter for discipline (1 Corinthians 5), separation (2 Corinthians 6:12-20), and an example of perverse compromise (Jude 3–16) (all Scripture refers to the New International Version*)*.
5. Promoting homosexuality is a violation of the catholicity of the Church, which throughout history and around the world has held homosexual behavior to be contrary to the teaching of Holy Scripture.
6. We are called as God's people and as churches together to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6: 8).
7. Love for a broken world compels us to speak to those who perpetuate that brokenness in the area of sexuality. While acknowledging the reality of sexual sin and how difficult struggles in the area of human sexuality can be, we also affirm the reality of God's forgiving grace and His promise to minister mercifully to those who struggle: a bruised reed He will not break (Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 12:20). By affirming homosexuality, churches and denominations actually cut themselves off from compassionate ministry to those struggling with this sin.

(See R-52 and R-53, pp. 174-175.)

Dissolve the Formula of Agreement

13. The Reverend Classis of Ontario, Inc., respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council, its officers, and employees to reconsider and dissolve the Formula of Agreement that the Reformed Church in America has with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ (USA), and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Reasons:
1. The Reformed Church's stated biblical position is that homosexuality is against God's will and Scripture calls us to have no fellowship with those who rebelliously ignore God's Word in this regard (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 5:11).
2. Now that the ELCA has voted to ordain non-celibate homosexuals in lifelong monogamous marriages to full ministry there is more need than ever to separate ourselves from these denominations that can no longer claim to rightly preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The statements made by director of communication Paul Boice when he said, "The official stances of our two churches differed, and continue to differ today, as with the ELCA…[but] the difference on this ethical issue did not involve the core of the gospel; in other words we still recognized one another as churches," show that there is a dangerous shift taking place in our leadership that reflects a growing acceptance of this sin which is more than an ethical issue and cuts directly to the core of the veracity of God's Word.
(http://www.christianpost.com/article/20090903/reformed-body-says-lutheran-gay-vote-does-not-impair-partnership/index.html)
4. If the GSC continues to do nothing about this it will only give those who favor ordination of homosexuals more fuel in their efforts and raise contempt of the leadership from those who hold to our historical and biblical stance.

(See R-52 and R-53, pp. 174-175.)

Meet with the ELCA on the Topic of Homosexuality

14. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures the General Synod to direct the General Synod Council to form a committee to meet with a representative committee from within the ELCA and to begin what would hopefully be a one-year process of conversation and clarification, under the provisions of the Formula of Agreement, meeting no less than two times and affirming the RCA's basis in biblical teaching on the topic of homosexuality and that this committee should keep the RCA informed about the results of these meetings and that this committee report back, if possible, to the General Synod of 2011 the results of these meetings, i.e., whether the ELCA indicates a willingness to restore biblically faithful teaching on this issue.

Reasons:
1. The appointment of a committee to meet with the ELCA is called for because the ELCA has adopted a position on homosexuality that is in clear contradiction of Scripture and the RCA's own clear and loving position on this issue:
   a. The ELCA summarizes[1] its action:
      i. **Resolution 1:** Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.
      ii. **Resolution 2:** Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.
   b. Scripture gives dire warnings to those engaged in unrepentant sexual immorality, including homosexual behavior. For instance: *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion* (Romans 1:24-27, NIV; see Notes[2] for further examples). From the beginning, God's plan for marriage has been one man and one woman as one flesh in the covenant of marriage: *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."…So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken*

out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:18, 21-25, NIV). Jesus reaffirmed this original design: *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate"* (Matthew 19:4-6, NIV).

c. The RCA has spoken clearly and lovingly that sexual immorality, including homosexual behavior, is contrary to Scripture. Our position remains: 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). Indeed, we have published a number of clear statements on this matter. For instance, Heterosexuality is not only normal; it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality.[3] For further examples, consult the notes at the end of this recommendation.[4]

d. While the RCA has completed a three-year dialogue on the topic of homosexuality, this has not been for the purpose of changing our position. The dialogue drew a clear distinction between dialogue, which "provides opportunities to hear the viewpoints and experiences of others," and deliberation, which "invites opposing speeches, and…settles issues by voting." We have affirmed that "dialogue does not yield policy decisions."[5] Our willingness to dialogue as a church body does not change the fact that we have clearly spoken on this issue.

2. The appointment of a committee to meet with the ELCA is called for because the RCA and ELCA, as fellow signatories of the Formula of Agreement, are bound by the biblical call to mutual admonition.

a. The Formula both celebrates and binds us to the call of admonition. It defines the term "full communion," stating the signatories: "pledge themselves to living together under the Gospel in such a way that the principle of mutual affirmation and admonition becomes the basis of a trusting relationship in which respect and love for the other will have a chance to grow."[6] Likewise, in celebrating five years of full communion with the ELCA, we reaffirmed our commitment to *joint ministry, witness, and service, as well as mutual accountability in making decisions about church life*.[7]

b. Scripture clearly teaches that true love must exercise confrontation for the purpose of restoration (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1).[8] Likewise, true worship dwells side by side with admonition (Col. 3:16).[9] Furthermore, as a biblically centered body, we must not forget that the Bible has been given to us "for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" so we can be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV). If, indeed, God has called us to pursue shared mission (i.e., "good work") with the ELCA, we cannot ignore the task of correction and reproof.

Notes

[1] See "A Brief Summary of Actions," a summary of actions taken at the Eleventh Churchwide Assembly, August 17-23, 2009, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Also available here: http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/ELCA-Governance/Churchwide-Assembly/Actions/Voting.aspx.

[2] Further examples:
1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV): "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the king-

dom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

Galatians 5:19-21 (NIV): "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Ephesians 5:3 (NIV): "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people."

[3] www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=501

[4] The following can be found at www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=501:

In 1978, the General Synod voted to make a paper presented by the Commission on Theology available to RCA congregations. The paper stated that:

- When Paul rejects homosexual acts on the grounds that they are "against nature" he expresses and reaffirms the clear sense of Scripture: Human sexuality was created for heterosexual expression…When the subject of homosexuality is raised, the majority of modern opinion still seems to be: "People weren't made to be that way." If such opinion is expressed with fear, loathing, or recrimination, as is often the case, it must be pitied and resisted. When the same statement is made in humility and with compassion, it may be considered biblical.
- Heterosexuality is not only normal; it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality.
- The homosexual invert [one who does not decide to become homosexual, but for whom genetic, hormonal, or psychosocial factors have influenced his or her sexual orientation] is no more to be blamed for his/her condition than a retarded child. It follows, then, that the church's ministry to the invert may best begin with the attempt to lift a burden of guilt that need not be carried. Inverts may not idealize their orientation as a legitimate alternative, but neither should they blame themselves for their sexual orientation.
- While we cannot affirm homosexual behavior, at the same time we are convinced that the denial of human and civil rights to homosexuals is inconsistent with the biblical witness and Reformed theology (*MGS 1978*: 233-239).

A report entitled "Christian Pastoral Care for the Homosexual," presented to the General Synod in 1979, listed three areas of congregational life with which the church must come to terms if it is to witness effectively to the homosexual:

- Elimination of the double standard of morality applied to the homosexual. It often seems as though the church places certain sins, homosexuality among them, beyond its own responsibility for ministry and, by implication, beyond the reach of God's grace.
- The church should acknowledge its sins against the homosexual. Homosexuality is neither to be celebrated nor persecuted. Homophobia must be replaced by a sense of common humanity, the desire to understand, and the determination to put away the sins commonly committed against the homosexual, including stereotyping, caricaturing, and enjoying disparaging humor at the homosexual's expense.
- The church should make a genuine effort to understand homosexuality. The church must be willing to understand and deal with the concrete life situation in which [the homosexual] finds himself. There is much we do not know about homosexuality, but we do know that it is a complex phenomenon (*MGS 1979*: 130-131).

In 1980, General Synod voted to approve the overture:

> To bring to the awareness of RCA members, congregations, classes, and synods competent programs and persons which can successfully help the practicing homosexual and lesbian, minister or layperson, overcome his or her homosexual behavior (*MGS 1980*: 97)

The 1990 General Synod voted to adopt an official position on the issue of homosexuality, as some classes felt there was confusion within the church as to the status of the 1978 report on homosexuality. The advisory committee recommended:

> To adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to scripture, while at the same encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings (*MGS 1990*: 461).

[5] http://images.rca.org/docs/mgs/2009MGS-GSC-Referrals.pdf#page=23; in context:

> Dialogue is a form of human interaction which provides opportunities to hear the viewpoints and experiences of others and to understand how they, being different from ourselves, understand issues about which both of us care. Reciprocally, participants also enjoy the opportunity to be heard and understood. Dialogue differs from deliberation. Deliberation invites opposing speeches, and it settles issues by voting; the church's assemblies such as classes or General Synod engage in deliberation.
>
> This is consequently not a position paper; it is a report on a process. The dialogue coordinator and steering committee designed and directed a dialogue program of several sessions for the purposes of listening and encounter within the RCA on the emotionally loaded subject of homosexuality and church life. The sessions brought about increased understanding of the issues involved and increased acceptance of differences among participants. In that sense, the dialogue sessions "worked."

[6] www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=434

[7] www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=440

[8] Matthew 18:15-20 (NIV): "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Galatians 6:1 (NIV): "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

[9] Colossians 3:16 (NIV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

In response to Overtures 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-52

To direct the Commission on Christian Unity to initiate and engage in a dialogue with representatives from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in the spirit of "mutual affirmation and admonition" called for in the Formula of Agreement, in order to discuss and explore with them the recent social statement ("Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust") adopted by the ELCA and to express the RCA's concern over the ELCA's action to allow the possibility of service in church office by persons

in "publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships"; to report on the progress of this dialogue to General Synod 2011; and to make a final report to General Synod 2012. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA in 2009 adopted resolutions that the ELCA commit itself to "finding ways for persons to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships," and that "the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church."
2. General Synod 1990 declared that a "practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture," (*MGS 1990*, R-11, p. 461), and RCA General Synods have consistently reaffirmed this declaration.
3. The Formula of Agreement commits us not to make unilateral declarations to our partners concerning their actions but rather to raise our concerns in a process of "mutual affirmation and admonition," as we did in a process of dialogue with the United Church of Christ in 1997-99, after which the General Synod acted to limit our relationship to that church within the terms of the Formula (*MGS 2000*, p. 113).

R-53
To direct the Commission on Christian Unity to invite the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the Christian Reformed Church to join the RCA to engage in a consultation on the interpretation and use of Scripture in moral discernment and ethical decision making, and to report on the progress of the consultation to General Synod 2011; and to make a final report General Synod 2012. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Probing of the biblical witness in common exegetical and hermeneutical work is one of the most important tasks challenging the church today.
2. Our traditions owe it to each other and to the whole Christian family to strengthen the theological usage of Scriptures, especially with regard to Christian moral decision-making.
3. Questions of how and why churches of Reformation heritage, each honoring and reading the same Scriptures, can come to such different conclusions is a critical challenge to church unity.

Amending the BCO Regarding Homosexuality

15. The Classis of Zeeland overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to amend the *Book of Church Order* at the proper place as follows:

No minister of Word and sacrament, elder, deacon, commissioned pastor, professor of theology, professor of an RCA sponsored institution, church, consistory, or classis may reject the authority and clarity of God's revealed will in Scripture by endorsing a practicing homosexual lifestyle (LGBT), by teaching, blessing a same-sex union, or officiating at a same-sex marriage ceremony. Such persons and/or entity found guilty of refusing to submit to the teaching of God's Word by endorsing a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual relationship in the manner described will be placed under biblical church discipline in accordance with the Bible and the *BCO*.

Reasons:

1. In 2005 eight overtures presented to the General Synod, asking for a clear standing on the authority of God's Word regarding this matter, were dismissed with the following reasoning: "1. The RCA's position on these issues is sufficiently clear; 2. The judicial precedent of the recent trial replaces the need for constitutional action; 3. Further constitutional struggles over homosexuality would distract from mission" (*MGS 2005*, pp. 99-100, 101, 102-103, 106). In addition, the following reasons were presented: "1. The synod has disciplined a professor of theology; 2. The General Synod cannot discipline ministers of Word and sacrament, who are amenable to classes" (*MGS 2005*, p. 104). This reasoning has proved to be incorrect, insufficient, and unclear.
2. The real issue is not homosexuality but the authority and clarity of God's Word (Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 18-20). Jesus commanded us to teach everything he commanded us (Matthew 28:20). We contend, along with the Belgic Confession, that the Bible and the books contained therein, and these only, are holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith (Belgic Confession, Article 5).
3. Furthermore, when the sufficiency of Scripture is challenged or twisted, God's people must "prove the spirits whether they are from God." If they are not, we must not receive them into our house (Belgic Confession, Article 7). The spirits declaring LGBT relationships being a gift from God are not from God. Further dialogue continues to undermine the authority of Scripture as our only rule for life and faith (Titus 1:9-11; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 5:6).
4. The RCA's position on these issues is not clear:
   a. Ministers of Word and sacrament in the RCA are endorsing same-sex marriages with little or no repercussions.
   b As recently as December 9, 2009, the RCA website highlighted the ministry of Greenpoint Reformed Church, whose co-pastors are professing and practicing lesbians.
   c A pastor whose church had taken a public stand endorsing LGBT and same-sex relationships was invited to lead General Synod worship in 2007.
   d. 2009 marked the conclusion of the three-year dialogue process. No clarity [was] provided, rather there was an affirmation of further dialogue.
   e. We continue to be a part of the World Council of Churches and National Council of Churches where some of its members clearly stand against biblical truth regarding the matter of LGBT relationships.
   f. We maintain formulas of agreement with the UCC and ELCA despite their public and stated endorsement of same-sex marriages and LGBT relationships.
   g. The judicial precedent of the trial in 2005 of Norm Kansfield has not brought clarity. This issue therefore now requires constitutional action.
   h. Because there is no constitutional clarity, we continue to struggle over homosexuality. Both sides appeal to the scriptures in their arguments; therefore, it is necessary to bring clarity, truth, and love through a constitutional amendment. It is true that a professor of theology has been disciplined, and that General Synod cannot discipline ministers of Word and sacrament. However, the lack of discipline in these matters, as well as a General Synod instruction in 2009 to not pursue disciplinary procedures during this time of dialogue, implicitly endorses the actions of those requiring discipline. "The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel: it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it…" ("Marks of the True Church," Belgic Confession, Article 29).
5. Because some have not recognized or accepted the clarity of God's Word on this issue, we are being distracted from our mission. There is no biblical unity when one congregation bearing the RCA name condones or approves a lifestyle contrary to God's Word,

while another congregation bearing the same name condemns that lifestyle as contrary to the Word of God (2 Timothy 4:1-5; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

6. Discipline is not a distraction from the church's mission. First, biblical discipline is at the heart of the gospel message and the church's mission: repent and believe the good news or perish (Matthew 4:11; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:16). Second, the OT and NT clearly teach that discipline is at the heart of God's love for his people and therefore must be at the heart of his church. He disciplines those he loves. Those who are not disciplined are not true children but illegitimate (Psalm 94:12; 119:75; Proverbs 3:12; Revelation 3:19; Hebrews 12:1-12, 8). Third, discipline is not a distraction but a word of encouragement to God's people (Hebrews 12:5). Fourth, God himself calls us to submit to his discipline (Hebrews 12:9; Revelation 3:19). Finally, according to our own standards "church discipline for correcting faults" is a mark of the true church of Jesus Christ (Belgic Confession, Article 29).

In response to Overture 15, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

R-54
To deny Overture 15. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) nowhere tries to interpret Scripture. That is not its purpose.
2. The *BCO* states, "The Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice in the Reformed Church in America" (Preamble). However, no interpretation is offered.
3. The *BCO* declares the doctrinal standards but does not state doctrine. This is not the purpose of the *BCO*.
4. Ministers, in their declaration, state, "I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses of the Word of God." But the *BCO* does not require ministers to promise to follow any specific dogma beyond what is stated in the Standards.
5. If these types of things are included in the *BCO*, there is almost no limit to what needs to be declared. Why would we pick this one as the only one to list?
6. Regardless of one's conviction regarding the issue, the *BCO* is not the place to address it.

Method of Calculating Assessments

16. The Regional Synod of Albany respectfully overtures the 2010 General Synod to change the method for calculating annual assessments of classes from the current per-member basis to a percentage of current congregational income (to be established annually by the synod and calculated from congregational income and paid quarterly), for implementation (phased in, if necessary) beginning no later than January 2012; and further, to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare appropriate changes to the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2p to reflect this change.

Reasons:
1. Percentage giving is biblical: Leviticus 27:30 and Deuteronomy 14:22 both refer to God's commandment to tithe, and define that as one-tenth of the produce, a percentage. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul writes of each of us giving according to our abundance. Nowhere do the Scriptures refer to giving solely on a per capita basis without accounting for differing levels of income.

2. The per-member assessment is unfair to poorer classes: in 2008—the most recent year for which statistics are available—the General Synod Assessment was 3.7 percent of all congregational income. However, the percentage of congregational income per classis varied from 1.3 percent to 7.7 percent.
3. An assessment of current congregational income is biblical: we are called to bring an offering of the first fruits of our labor (Exodus 23:19), and to live by faith that God will provide sufficiently. This is how our congregations already live, and an assessment on a set percentage of current congregational giving will model better stewardship for members of local churches. The current assessment formula, even if we equate number of members with monetary blessings, is based on blessings received a year to twenty-four months beforehand.
4. A per-member assessment discourages congregations from counting "all who believe and are baptized," as mentioned in the liturgies for baptism and profession of faith. Membership becomes equated with a financial burden for the congregation.
5. Since 1993, there have been twenty-one reports and sixty overtures to the General Synod related to the assessment, but the problem persists. More and more people within the church have come to realize that the current formula does not work.
6. *BCO* 1.I.7. Sec. 2p, which discusses union churches, is the only place that refers to per-member assessments.
7. This change in calculation may be significant for many classes, and so it may need to be phased in to avoid creating undue economic hardships.

In response to Overture 16, the Advisory Committee on Funding Our Mission Together recommended:

R-55
To deny Overture 16. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The mandate for the task force recommended in R-17 includes considering alternate funding systems.
2. There is confusion over what constitutes "congregational income."

Insurance Program Task Force

17. The Regional Synod of Albany respectfully overtures the 2010 General Synod to appoint a task force completely independent of the Board of Benefit Services, comprised of experts in the field of health care insurance and no members or staff of BOBS, whose task it will be to assess the ongoing viability of an RCA medical insurance program and to report to the 2011 General Synod.

Reasons:
1. The Covenant of Care contribution puts an undue burden on congregations.
2. The amount of contributions in arrears (approximately $466,000) indicates that the issue is truly systemic and is critically in need of attention. Moreover, it demonstrates that the RCA medical insurance plan is broken and in need of overhaul or cessation.
3. The practice of collecting delinquent contributions through added assessments for classes with non-compliant congregations does violence to a proper understanding of assessments, for it turns assessments into a penal instrument. To levy such penalties, currently or in the future, necessarily sets a precedent that warps our theology of congregational stewardship.
4. The Covenant of Care "contribution" is not a truly voluntary contribution but a required payment for non-participation in the RCA plan.
5. A truly independent group of experts in the field of health care insurance can offer wis-

dom and counsel in light of recent and pending health care reform initiatives in the United States.

In response to Overture 17, the Advisory Committee on the Board of Benefits Services recommended:

R-56
To deny Overture 17.

Reasons:
1. The Board of Benefits Services bylaws mandate the inclusion of members with experience in health care, financial management investing, and law who are elected by the General Synod.
2. A task force independent of the Board of Benefits Services will require additional financial resources.
3. The Board of Benefits Services currently engages in ongoing evaluations regarding the viability of the RCA medical insurance program, particularly in light of U.S. legislation set to take effect in 2014.

Working Group on Peace and Justice in Israel and Palestine

18. The Regional Synod of Albany and the Regional Synod of New York respectfully overture the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Action and the Commission on Theology, to form a Peace and Justice in Israel and the Occupied Territories working group to develop resources and provide action suggestions for the denomination, its congregations, and members for supporting Christians and others in the Middle East who are working for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and to instruct the working group to make an initial report to the General Synod of 2011.

Reasons:
1. The Commission on Christian Action report to the 2008 General Synod, "The Shrinking Christian Communities of the Middle East" (*MGS 2008*, pp. 228-229), called attention to the plight of Christian communities in the Middle East and encouraged congregations and individuals to support Middle Eastern Christians in their struggles (p. 229).
2. Christians in the Middle East have asked for our help. In December 2009 an ecumenical group of Palestinian Christians issued the Palestine Kairos document "A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering." The document requests the international community to attend to the situation of the Palestinian people who are suffering discrimination, oppression, and displacement. The Palestinian Christians are asking all churches and Christians around the world to stand against injustice, urging them to work for a just peace.
3. Among the challenges faced by Palestinian Christians are certain theological understandings among some in the churches of North America and Europe that have been used to legitimize the injustices suffered by the Palestinian people. The Reformed Church can play an important a role in helping Christians reexamine those theological understandings and to affirm that God is not the God of one people against others, but the Lord of all, who loves all, and who requires of all that they do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.
4. Palestinians living under the occupation face four options:
   a. Immigration—Leaving their homeland in search of a better life. Indeed, large numbers of Christians have already left the area. See "The Shrinking Christian Communities of the Middle East" (*MGS 2008*, pp. 228-229).

b. Resignation—Giving up hope for any real change and continuing to suffer.
c. Reaction—Which often means resorting to acts of desperation and violence.
d. Action—Creative, non-violent resistance to injustice and seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The "political space" for the latter is becoming increasingly narrow and the window of opportunity may soon be closed. In this critical moment for Christians as well as others in the Middle East, it is important that we stand with those who are working for a just and non-violent resolution to the conflict.

In its consideration of this overture, the regional synods believe the working group could carry out its assignment via electronic communication and, therefore, would not need special funding.

In response to Overture 18, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-57
To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Action and the Commission on Theology, to form a Peace and Justice in Israel and the Occupied Territories working group to develop resources and to suggest actions for the denomination, its congregations, and members for supporting Christians and others in the Middle East who are working for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and to instruct the working group to make an initial report to General Synod 2011. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The Commission on Christian Action report to General Synod 2008, "The Shrinking Christian Communities of the Middle East" (*MGS 2008*, pp. 228-229), called attention to the plight of Christian communities in the Middle East and encouraged congregations and individuals to support Middle Eastern Christians in their struggles.
2. Christians in the Middle East have asked for our help. In December 2009 an ecumenical group of Palestinian Christians issued "The Palestine Kairos Document: A Moment of Truth—A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering." The document asks the international community to attend to the situation of the Palestinian people who are suffering discrimination, oppression, and displacement. Palestinian Christians are asking all churches and Christians around the world to stand against injustice, urging them to work for a just peace.
3. Some North American and European churches have used theological justification to legitimize the injustices suffered by the Palestinian people. This presents a difficult challenge for Palestinian Christians. The Reformed Church can play an important a role in helping Christians re-examine those theological understandings and to affirm that God is not the God of one people against others, but the Lord of all, who loves all, and who requires of all that they do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.
4. Palestinians living under the occupation face four options:
   a. Immigration: Leaving their homeland in search of a better life. Indeed, large numbers of Christians have already left the area. See "The Shrinking Christian Communities of the Middle East" (*MGS 2008*, pp. 228-229).
   b. Resignation: Giving up hope for any real change and continuing to suffer.
   c. Reaction: Often this means resorting to acts of desperation and violence.
   d. Action: Creative, non-violent resistance to injustice and seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The "political space" for the last option is becoming increasingly narrow and the window of opportunity may soon be closed. In this critical moment for Christians and others in the Middle East, it is important that we stand with those who are working for a just and non-violent resolution to the conflict.

Response to the Report of the President

In response to the General Synod president's proposal P-1, pages 23-24, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

> R-58
> To direct the General Synod Council, through its Global Mission program, to explore an expanded Reformed Church in America mission partnership in Haiti.

Reasons:
1. This responds to the devastation from the 2010 earthquake and helps to equip congregations and church leaders with knowledge, skills, and tools to build community and overcome poverty.
2. This recognizes the General Synod president's passionate concern and personal experience when visiting Haiti that brought this to our attention.

A motion was made to amend the recommendation as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

> To direct the General Synod Council, through its Global Mission Program and in conjunction with the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana, to explore and implement an ~~expanded~~ expansion of Reformed Church in America mission partnerships ~~in Haiti~~ with Haitian churches, Haitian organizations, and other ecumenical partners, with focus on responding to the devastation from the 2010 earthquake and equipping congregations and church leaders with knowledge, skills, and tools to build community and overcome poverty.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment.

A motion was made to further amend the recommendation as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

> …and overcome poverty and protect orphans.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment.

A motion was made to further amend the recommendation as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

> …and overcome poverty and protect orphans, with report to the General Synod of 2011."

VOTED: To adopt the amendment.

VOTED: To adopt the recommendation as amended.

R-58
To direct the General Synod Council, through its Global Mission program, and in conjunction with the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana, to explore and implement an expansion of Reformed Church in America mission partnerships with Haitian churches, Haitian organizations and other ecumenical partners, which focus on responding to the devastation from the 2010 earthquake and equipping congregations and church leaders with knowledge, skills, and tools to build community, overcome poverty, and protect orphans with report to the General Synod of 2011. (ADOPTED)

In response to the General Synod president's proposal P-2, page 26, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-59
To refer P-2 to the Commission on Christian Action with a progress report to General Synod 2011. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. This responds to the need for justice domestically and around the world.
2. This allows the commission to process the intent of this recommendation while considering its fiscal impact.

In response to the General Synod president's proposal P-3, page 27, the Advisory Committee on Our Multiracial Future Freed from Racism recommended:

R-60
To not take up P-3 at this time. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. There is considerable overlap between P-3 and R-28, R-88 (P-4), and R-89 (P-5).
2. There was insufficient time for the special advisory committee to measure the added value of P-3 in addition to the initiatives outlined in R-28.

In response to the General Synod president's proposal P-4, page 28, the Advisory Committee on Our Multiracial Future Freed from Racism recommended:

R-61
To urge the RCA's regional synods, classes, and consistories, the theological seminaries, the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA), and affiliated colleges to develop ongoing ministry teams that champion for them the values, goals, activities, and relationships needed to become more multiracial and freer from racism; and further,

to direct the General Synod Council to develop and/or identify suitable resources for the development of such teams and collaborate with synods, classes, theological seminaries, the MFCA, and affiliated colleges interested in exploring, initiating, and empowering such teams in their respective areas. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The addition of ministry teams can be an important element in making the transition to a multiracial future more effective.
2. A specific framework for the RCA's agencies and institutions will enhance current efforts toward a multiracial future freed from racism.

In response to the General Synod president's proposal P-5, page 28, the Advisory Committee on Our Multiracial Future Freed from Racism recommended:

R-62
To direct the General Synod Council to assist interested regional synods, classes, congregations, theological seminaries, the MFCA, and affiliated colleges in the development and/or identification of suitable resources for anti-racism training; and further,

to urge all RCA classes, regional synods, congregations, theological seminaries, the MFCA, and affiliated colleges to participate in anti-racism training. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. To encourage and equip all of our assemblies and institutions in taking a proactive approach to becoming freer from racism.
2. This enables all assemblies and institutions to develop and/or identify contextually appropriate material.

In response to the General Synod president's proposal P-6, page 29, the Advisory Committee on Our Multiracial Future Freed from Racism recommended:

R-63
To commend *Taking the Jesus Road*, by LeRoy Koopman, to RCA congregations, RCA-affiliated colleges, RCA seminaries, and the MFCA for further study. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. A history of Native Americans in the RCA is already available in this book of the RCA Historical Series.
2. To encourage education on the history of Native American and First Nations people.

R-64
To direct the General Synod Council to study and explore what other denominations are doing in current ministries to rectify harm done in and among Native American and First Nations people, and to implement appropriate recommendations in consultation with the Native American/First Nations Task Force. The study should focus on:

1. Reconciliation efforts undertaken.
2. Efforts Native American and First Nations people identify as restorative, blessing, and beneficial. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
To determine best practices in efforts to achieve restoration and reconciliation.

Response to the Report of the General Secretary

In response to the General Secretary's proposal P-2, page 39, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

R-65
To instruct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, to consider a provision in the *Book of Church Order*, in the article "Supervision of Students of Theology" (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8), that under certain circumstances a candidate may apply directly to a classis to be enrolled as a candidate for the ministry for report to the 2011 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. While the advisory committee basically agrees with the proposal, it needs more study and consideration.
2. This gives the Commission on Church Order more latitude to work on this issue than specified in the original proposal.
3. The committee recognizes that one "circumstance" that could involve a candidate applying directly to the classis might be that prior membership in an RCA church may not be possible.

Report of the General Synod Council on Church Multiplication

"But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together" (John 4:35-36).

Appreciating the effectiveness of church planting and its biblical precedent in the book of Acts, the Reformed Church in America has committed itself to church multiplication. And the heart of church multiplication is a passion for changed lives.

God's people across the RCA are imagining new ways to show and tell the good news of life in Christ. In renewing their commitment to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), many congregations and church leaders are discovering new life and energy—and plenty of challenges—as they plant new churches in their neighborhoods and communities.

New churches reach new people. In fact, the most effective way to reach spiritually lost people is by starting a new church. The ministry of a new church looks and feels different from that of an established church. A new church naturally attracts people across cultural boundaries and in rural, urban, and suburban settings.

GSC MULTIPLICATION ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring, the RCA's general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for church multiplication follows.

GSC Global Ends Policy

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

Church Multiplication Ends Policy

The RCA will foster a sustainable movement of church multiplication through starting new congregations.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

Overall goal: To begin four hundred new congregations by 2013 with one-third of these churches to be multicultural plants or racial/ethnic congregations different than the Anglo majority culture.

This represents a ten-fold increase of church planting from 2003, when approximately ten new congregations were birthed each year in the RCA, as witnessed by our ninety-eight by '98 decade challenge. In 2013, we seek to start ninety-eight new congregations in one year. Our present work of creating the sustainable movement of church multiplication is going well.

Inner-City Church Connects with Its Community

The Urban Church in East Oakland, California, began meeting four years ago in an elementary school. At that point, the church consisted of six people—planter Ron Nunez and his wife, their three-month-old daughter, Nunez's sister, and two recent college graduates. "We broke every rule of church planting," says Nunez. "We didn't have a budget, core team, launch team—we just felt we should rent a local elementary school and start hosting worship."

Today, the Urban Church gathers 85 to 110 people for Sunday worship. It counts among its worshipers many former drug and alcohol addicts—as well as some who are still struggling with their addictions.

Nunez describes the Urban Church as a "hip-hop" church, partially because they use Christian hip-hop music in worship. However, he says, the hip-hop identity goes deeper than just music. "It's the culture of hip-hop in terms of way they dress and act," says Nunez. "If you walk in on Sunday, it almost looks like a gang gathering—guys with dreadlocks and baggy pants, hats backwards. It's not just music; it's a culture, a way of life for them."

The Urban Church treats every worship service as a community outreach. Each Sunday, the church serves a free lunch for anyone who wants to come. Volunteers pass out flyers during the week to get the word out about Sunday's menu. "Most people come in because of the food," says Nunez, "but now they're members. Some are even in leadership."

Goal for church planting: Approve forty-three New Congregation Plans in 2010.

Outcomes:

- Every church plant is born with an intentional plan and accountability to reproduce.
- Triple the number of emerging planting leaders in the "pipeline" (named and nurtured there over years) as compared to the number of plants we are starting each year.
- Exponential funding: creative financial and resource results grow every year so that they multiply with the movement's rate of expansion.
- Classes organize new RCA congregations that reach self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating ability in a specific amount of time (three to five years). Working with RCA classes, our goal is for 80 percent or more of church plants that submit a New Congregation Plan to become an organized RCA congregation.
- Gospel movement dynamics are deployed in planting and parenting environments for long-term growth and accountability to Jesus.

Strategies:

- The New Congregation Plan that is signed by the planter, classis, and region requires commitment to the RCA value of churches planting churches.
    - Training for planters is offered at both the launch stage (Thrive) and after two to three years of development (Sustain). This explicitly raises this expectation and outcome.
    - Stories highlight the value of reproduction even in new congregations that have not yet organized or purchased a facility.
    - Coached multiplying networks provide a learning environment where planters can begin to envision starting new congregations and new sites.
    - Reproduction at the micro level—with disciples, leaders, Life Transformation Groups, small groups, and house churches that learn to multiply—feeds reproduction at the macro level of the congregation and movements.

- Cultivate relationships in seven "fishing pools" for female and male qualified planters (among high school students, college students, commissioned pastors, seminary students, existing RCA ministers of Word and sacrament, equipping leaders from other denominations, and international leaders).
  - Sustain a prayer movement that obeys the Lord Jesus, who says, in light of crowds of people still needing gospel transformation, to "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:38).
  - Create and support an excellent five-step assessment process to give personal and practical insight to emerging planting leaders, to help them discern their call, character, and competencies for being a lead planter in a new mission context.
  - Develop with established leaders, churches, classes, and seminaries the capacity for exponential leadership development structures, which accelerate the quantity and quality of leadership needed for the multiplication movement.
  - Support our current church planters for risks undertaken in mission with excellent coaching, training, support structures, counseling, marriage retreats, and new placement opportunities as needed.
- Develop a diversity of funding streams for church multiplication that include centralized and decentralized, direct and indirect, and additional and exponential methods in the RCA.
  - Several initiatives are already in play: direct donor work for planters following training, PIM shares for planters under the Global Mission partnership, a Pentecost offering for the birth of new churches, direct appeal letters, donors that underwrite specific training or evangelistic initiatives (like Thrive), cause-related marketing efforts, strategic stewardship training, Fresh Start training that captures and re-deploys kingdom assets through a classis, fasting and prayer for supernatural provision and breakthroughs, gifts in kind for rental space for plants, a golf tournament, grant writing, budget reductions for savings and reprioritization, ecumenical partnerships, and a portion of RCA assessments.
  - Multiplication has had a strong relationship with the RCA Church Growth Fund since 1999. The RCACGF gives dollars annually from its net profits for start-up matching grants with qualifying New Congregation Plans. Currently this funding stream is indexed at 25 percent of annual net gains, and intentional expansion by millions of dollars for the Church Growth Fund is underway.
- Encourage and promote best practices for Church Multiplication Teams, compelling classis vision, strategic leadership, and missional structures for the forty-six classes of the RCA.
  - Cultivate personal and empowering relationships with the "Top 40" leaders throughout the RCA classis structures for multiplication.
  - Partner with revitalization initiatives to create health and growth in churches, which then can be candidates for starting new churches (e.g., Churches on the Grow).
  - Troubleshoot difficult situations with planters, parent churches, and classis structures so that a rate of more than 85 percent survival for all church plants inspires trust and further investment (e.g., New Wave Network in Florida Classis).
  - Urge the timely organization of new RCA congregations (within four years of public launch dates) by addressing alignment and identity issues and incentives.
  - Build bridges for planting across regional and classis barriers and distinctions.
- Seek first the kingdom of God and demonstrate gospel movement dynamics in the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - Our Call grows out of our mission and vision: "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…" The RCA's embrace of Our Call has provided a wide and compelling vision of a preferred future in terms of church multiplication and revitalization. Working in and through this particu-

lar calling of our Trinitarian God provides energizing focus, unity in primary objectives, and broader tolerance of secondary and tertiary issues in the RCA.

- Initiatives include renewal of gospel-saturated preaching; teaching that gives New Testament definition to the gospel of the kingdom itself; discipleship formation in a strong evangelistic method of the New Testament as we become more like Jesus in his continuing healing and deliverance ministry; prayer mobilization; equipping leader networks; and leadership selection criteria that emphasizes sound Reformed doctrine and piety, including the steady evidence of the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

Data:

The chart below details the year-by-year projections made by the Church Multiplication Team concerning the number of new congregations needed each year to reach the goal of four hundred new congregations begun by 2013:

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
12	8	11	15	20	25	33	43	55	80	98

- The RCA ended 2009 with 174 new congregations entering the RCA since January 2003. This includes six churches who were received or adopted, our current number of New Congregation Plans approved, and forty-five congregations that have organized since 2003. All this church multiplication activity has exceeded the 124 projected New Congregation Plans for the first seven years of Our Call.
- Currently, regional synods report worship attendance numbers for more than 225 new congregations in the U.S. and Canada. So far, 162 New Congregation Plans have been filed, representing 75 percent of these new plants. Some observations on why that percentage is not higher include: classes that are slow to turn in official documentation due to structural or attitude issues, some racial/ethnic plants (such as Korean) that tend to use their own process and move right to organization, some second campus or multi-site congregations that the parenting church reports but does not seek funding for, etc.
- The total number of people worshiping in new churches exceeds 13,500, with an average of more than sixty people in worship per new congregation. The worship attendance in our new congregations ranges from thirty-five to 350 people each week.
- The Church Multiplication Team approved twenty-six additional New Congregation Plans in 2009 in spite of the recession. The goal was thirty-three for the calendar year; this was the first time in Our Call that the RCA did not match or exceed our annual target.
- Ten churches organized in 2009. The average size of a church at organization is ninety-one confessing members, from Our Call figures. Currently, we average a four-year gap from starting a congregation to organizing a successful RCA church, so with fifteen congregations started in 2006, we would hope for the organization of twelve or more churches this year. By 2013, we would hope to be organizing twenty-five a year or more, based on an 85 percent survival rate (which is very high).
- Currently more than one hundred emerging leaders are in the "planter's pipeline," with new assessments done each week to identify qualified planters.
- More than one-third of our new congregations continue to be multiracial or ethnically or racially different than the previous RCA Anglo majority.
- Conversion growth remains in the 40 to 90 percent range, with many adult baptisms per plant.

- Over $5 million has been raised and/or released from individuals, churches, classes, regions, and the RCA for planting this year.
- Hundreds of miracles and healings have occurred in our new congregations, including several RCA-led healing conferences around North America.

Congregations Organized

Podonamoo Reformed Church, Bergenfield, New Jersey; Hyok Tschoe, pastor; organized July 2009.
The Crossing, Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Seth Sundstrom, pastor; organized July 2009.
Jusarang Church, Sugar Hill, Georgia; Byung Il Go, pastor; organized September 2009.
New Alliance Christian Church, Mississauga, Ontario; Humberto Lopes, pastor; organized November 2009.
New Life Community Church, Muskegon, Michigan; Todd Bush, pastor; organized November 2009.
Home Church Frasier Valley, Langley, British Columbia; James Moerman, pastor; organized February 2010.
New Hope Community Church, Shelby, Michigan; vacant; organized February 2010.

New Jersey Church Will Plant "Legacy Church"

Trinity Reformed Church in North Plainfield, New Jersey, is pursuing a new church plant. The existing congregation is dwindling and aging, and we have a serious lack of manpower. Couple that with a large building in need of significant maintenance, and we were feeling very overwhelmed.

Our focus was being diverted from the work of the Lord to the work of the building. After much discussion in the spring of 2009, Trinity Reformed formed a task force with representatives from the church and the classis to determine the best course of action for our congregation.

We met for several months, discussing a number of different directions, then came across a church plant model which really seemed to be calling us. So we as a church have decided to plant what's called a "legacy church," the idea being that as the mother church (the existing congregation) dies out, we foster a new congregation to service our community and hopefully take over use of the building. We have a beautiful facility in the middle of North Plainfield that is not being used to the fullest for God's work.

For the past six months, we have been actively pursuing a new church plant by doing research into local demographics, community needs, and budgetary requirements. As we currently stand, our consistory and classis have approved funding over the next four years. The New Ministries Commission of New Brunswick Classis has agreed to oversee the church plant and is formulating a planned structure to do so, and we are in the midst of interviewing potential church planters.

We hope to have a church planter signed on soon, at which point we will start putting together a specific plan for the start of a new Reformed congregation in the North Plainfield area that will cater to the needs of the community.

Goal for parenting churches: Double the number of parenting churches for planting in the RCA (as primary initiating and directive partners) every two years, starting with twenty in 2004, thirty-eight in 2006, seventy-five in 2008, (projected) one hundred fifty in 2010, three hundred in 2012, and six hundred in 2014.

Strategies:

- Through well-designed multiplying networks and direct coaching, continue to train for deep impact and high capacity parenting churches across the RCA.
- By leveraging classis and conference training opportunities, increase the number and commitment level of parenting churches in the RCA. (e.g., "Exponential 2010" event with 120 participants learning about parenting and multiplying, in partnership with the Christian Reformed Church.)
- With classis vision, leadership, and structures, cultivate a culture that supports new and experienced parenting churches, resourcing them and sustaining them through the challenging cycle of reproduction of new churches.
- Unbind assemblies of the RCA to seek church planting opportunities cross-culturally and cross-geographically, as led by the Lord Jesus in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God (e.g., CMT Conviction, City Classis formation, etc.).

Data:

- Over 75 percent of new RCA congregations have an identifiable relationship with a parenting congregation.
- Reproduction capacity continues to grow among our experienced parenting churches, interest from other existing RCA churches to parent, and the rapid movement toward planting again by our new congregations in their first two to five years. This is all in partnership with strong classis support and accountability to the classis assembly.
- Over 110 RCA churches have become parenting churches since 2003.

New Congregational Plans in 2009

	Name	City	State/Province
1	One Body Ministries	Mississauga	ON
2	Station 444	Alton	IA
3	Antioch	Scottville	MI
4	Embody Christ Fellowship	Holland	MI
5	Laotian Community Church	Tulare	CA
6	Remedy	Kohler	WI
7	South Valley Hispanic Ministries	Tulare	CA
8	Highbridge	Bronx	NY
9	City Church of Compton	Compton	CA
10	Iglesia Alas de Aguila-Allentown (#3)	Allentown	MI
11	Lighthouses of Philadelphia (#2)	Philadelphia	PA
12	Living Stones	Utica	NY
13	The Bridge	Portage	MI
14	Patmos	Sioux Falls	SD
15	Center Point Community Church	Anaheim	CA
16	City Church	Anaheim	CA
17	Emmaus	Redlands	CA
18	Infusion	Escondido	CA
19	New Day Christian Fellowship	Riverside	CA
20	Revolution	Long Beach	CA
21	The Promise	Hemet	CA
22	Mosaic Life Downtown	Grand Rapids	MI
23	River Rock	Sheboygan	WI
24	New Vintage	Kalamazoo	MI
25	Rock Harbor	Hudsonville	MI
26	The Bridge	St Charles	MO

Report of the Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc.

The Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc. (CGF) supports the work and witness of the RCA by making loans to RCA churches, classes, and other agencies and affiliates so they can purchase, construct, or improve church property or facilities. The CGF also provides funds for Church Growth Fund matching grants. Loans of up to $25,000 are made on an unsecured basis. Larger loans (up to the current loan limit of $2 million) are secured.

Detailed information regarding the CGF (such as the amounts that can be borrowed, the purposes for which funds may be borrowed, the requirements that must be satisfied in order to borrow funds, and how one may invest in the CGF) is available through the RCA's website (www.rca.org/cgf). Following this report is a list of all churches that are borrowers from the CGF (or for whom loans have been approved) as of the end of fiscal year 2009.

Proceeds to fund loans made by the CGF come from gifts and bequests from members and friends of the RCA, the sale of savings certificates, and earnings on CGF assets. Savings certificates are offered in fixed maturities of one, two, five, and ten years. The certificates are securities, and therefore are offered for sale through an offering circular. The offering circular is available on the RCA website, www.rca.org/cgf, under "How to invest in RCACGF savings certificates." Presently the CGF offers savings certificates for sale in nineteen states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The rates of interest paid on savings certificates are established periodically by a subcommittee of the CGF board, and are posted on the RCA website.

As of the end of fiscal year 2009 the total amount invested in savings certificates with the CGF was nearly $9.95 million. This is a slight ($350,000) decrease from the end of fiscal year 2008, but still significantly higher than the amounts for fiscal years 2007 and 2006, when the total amounts invested were $9.28 million and $8.28 million, respectively. These increases are the result of sales of savings certificates to new investors as well as "rollovers" of maturing savings certificates into newly issued savings certificates. The CGF believes that the higher level of investments in recent years is due to a number of factors, including the interest rates offered, the purposes for which the funds are used, the CGF's strong balance sheet, and—more generally—the overall manner in which the CGF continues to operate.

The CGF's total assets, net assets, savings certificates outstanding, loans outstanding, and loan commitments issued for fiscal year 2009 (with comparisons to fiscal year 2008) are as follows:

	FY 2009	FY 2008
Total Assets	$46 million	$45.27 million
Net Assets	$35.94 million	$34.84 million
Saving Certificates Outstanding	$9.95 million	$10.30 million
Loans Outstanding or Committed (#)	124	128
Loans Outstanding or Committed ($)	$36.16 million	$36.65 million
Loan Commitments Issued (#)	8	7
Loan Commitments Issued ($)	$1.886 million	$2.13 million
Total Funds Disbursed	$1.6 million	$2.04 million
Total Funds for New Ministry Grants	$370,000	$200,000

Of the eight loan commitments issued in fiscal year 2009, three were for short-term unsecured loans, and the others were for larger, secured loans. The CGF prays that the facilities that are purchased, built, or remodeled will enable the congregations to fulfill their call to ministry in their communities.

The CGF continues its efforts to attract more funds through the sale of savings certificates and the receipt of charitable contributions. Ads are running in *RCA Today*, and development staff include the CGF in their presentations to prospective donors and investors. The CGF covets your prayers as it seeks to maintain an adequate level of funds for loans to RCA churches that are renewing and expanding their ministries, and encourages each RCA member to consider how he or she and his or her church, classis, and regional synod may support the CGF financially through gifts or investments.

As noted above, the CGF continues to provide resources to fund matching grants for new RCA ministries. Since the inception of this program in 1999 and continuing through the end of fiscal year 2009, grants totaling $2,697,500 have been funded to 115 separate ministries. The CGF was pleased to nearly double the total amount funded through this grant process in 2009, and is encouraged by the reports it receives regarding the effect that church plants supported by such grants are having in the lives of individuals. Here's just one example provided by a member of the RCA's church multiplication staff:

> Your partnership to plant new churches through vital grants at the fragile beginnings of a church plant is extraordinary. Here's one story from one such church plant in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:
>
> > "I don't want to live like this anymore!" Arms raised, tears streaming down her face, Marietta gave her life to Jesus that day. It was an unlikely progression over a few days. Fresh out of a painful divorce, this woman in crisis had never been to a church before.
> >
> > She visited with church planter Heidi Butterworth at the northeast campus, and soon found herself visiting a house church as well. Her brokenness was turning to curiousness as the pain poured out in questions. "Why do such bad things happen in this world?" Our RCA planters shared before the time of prayer how "our God is a living God, who hears, acts, and cares about you. God is not just on a page in a book but alive." Ultimately, as she entered prayer together, it was the peace of God and the presence of God directly that overwhelmed her heart of pain.
>
> I want to testify that the investment the CGF board made at the end of last year in Church Multiplication has been put to immediate Kingdom work. We have been able to catch up on over a year-long waiting list for RCA congregations to receive the RCA start-up grant. This makes us current for the 2010 challenge to plant 43 new congregations, an unprecedented number in our 380-year history.

The CGF rejoices that it has the privilege of playing a part in supporting such ministries.

Finally, we would be remiss if we didn't also acknowledge that the economic downturn has taken its toll on members of many congregations and, by extension, on churches as well. Some of those churches have loans with the CGF. The CGF is working with them—seeking to help them through their difficulties while at the same time striving to remain faithful to the commitments made to investors and donors. It's not been easy, but we remain confident in God's faithfulness and hopeful that the RCA's churches will continue to be places where hurts are healed, the lost are found, the hungry are fed, peace heals brokenness, hope replaces despair, and the love of Jesus Christ transforms lives.

As in prior years, much has been accomplished, and yet much remains to be done, all for the purpose of equipping 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.

As the CGF continues its work, the board of directors and staff ask for the continued support and prayers of the people of the RCA.

CANADA
Alberta
Christ Community Church, St. Albert, Alberta
British Columbia
Powell River Reformed Church, Powell River, British Columbia
Manitoba
Elmwood Community Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Ontario
Drayton Reformed Church, Drayton, Ontario
Forestview Community Church, Grimsby, Ontario
Classis of Ontario (New Life Reformed Church), Toronto, Ontario
Classis of Ontario and Christ Community Church, Welland, Ontario

UNITED STATES
Arizona
New Hope Community Church, Gilbert, Arizona
Desert Haven Community Church, Mesa, Arizona
Hope Community Church, Scottsdale, Arizona
California
Canyon Lake Community Church, Canyon Lake, California
Cornerstone Community Church, Chowchilla, California
New Hope Community Church, Fremont, California
CrossWinds Community Church, Hesperia, California
Park Hills Community Church, Los Angeles, California
Living Faith Community Church, Modesto, California
Palm Canyon Community Church, Moreno Valley, California
Lincoln Avenue Community Church, Pomona, California
East Hills Community Church, Riverside, California
Sunrise Community Church, Tulare, California
Colorado
New Hope Community Church, Aurora, Colorado
Springs Community Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado
Christ Community Church, Denver, Colorado
Florida
West Broward Community Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
Classis of Florida (Korean Choong Hyun Church), Orlando, Florida
Christ Community Church, Palm Springs, Florida
First Reformed Church, Tampa, Florida
Rolling Hills Community Church, Zellwood, Florida
Georgia
North Atlanta Community Church, Roswell, Georgia
Idaho
Valley Life Community Church, Meridian, Idaho
Illinois
Christ Community Church, Lemont, Illinois
Bethel Reformed Church, Sterling, Illinois

Indiana
Christ's Community Church, Fishers, Indiana
Christ's Community Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana
Community Reformed Church, Lafayette, Indiana
Iowa
Classis of Central Iowa (Bridgeway Church), Ames, Iowa
Crossroads Community Church, Estherville, Iowa, and East Sioux Classis
Hope Reformed Church, George, Iowa
Classis of West Sioux and Rejoice! Community Church, LeMars, Iowa
Crossroads Church, Norwalk, Iowa, and Classis of Central Iowa
Good News Community Church, Okoboji, Iowa
First Reformed Church, Prairie City, Iowa
Classis of West Sioux (New Hope Community Church), Sioux City, Iowa
Hope Reformed Church, Spencer, Iowa
Westview Church, Waukee, Iowa
Kansas
Crossroads Church, Overland Park, Kansas
Harvest Community Church, Wichita, Kansas
Maryland
Monocacy Valley Church, Ijamsville, Maryland
Michigan
RiverTree Community Church, Byron Center, Michigan
Wayfarer Community Church, Caledonia, Michigan
CrossWinds Community Church, Canton, Michigan
Open Door Reformed Church, Dorr, Michigan
Classis of North Grand Rapids and Clancy Street Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Common Ground Community Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Knapp Street Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Third Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Grace Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan
Crossroad Chapel Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan, and Classis of Holland
Twin Lakes Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Within Reach Ministries, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Martin Reformed Church, Martin, Michigan
Laketon Bethel Reformed Church, Muskegon, Michigan
Covenant Community Church, Muskegon Heights, Michigan
Rockford Reformed Church, Rockford, Michigan
Community of Joy, Traverse City, Michigan
LifeTree Community Church, West Olive, Michigan, and Classis of Holland
Minnesota
Riverside Reformed Church, Bloomington, Minnesota
Church of the Savior, Rochester, Minnesota
Missouri
Christ's Church, St. Peter's, Missouri
Nebraska
Hope Community Church, Lincoln, Nebraska
Papio Creek Church, Papillion, Nebraska and Classis of Central Plains
New Jersey
Blawenburg Reformed Church, Blawenburg, New Jersey
Han Sung Church, Cresskill, New Jersey
Peace Korean Reformed Church, Fair Lawn, New Jersey
Old Bergen Church, Jersey City, New Jersey
The Reformed Church in Kinnelon, Kinnelon, New Jersey
Ocean Community Church, Manahawkin, New Jersey

Trinity Reformed (Dutch) Church, Newark, New Jersey
First Reformed Church, Rocky Hill, New Jersey
New York
Fordham Manor Reformed Church, Bronx, New York
Community Reformed Church of Colonie, Colonie, New York
Greenbush Reformed Church, East Greenbush, New York
Siloam Church, Flushing, New York
Helderberg Reformed Church, Guilderland Center, New York
Fair Street Reformed Church, Kingston, New York
Levittown Community Church, Levittown, New York
Pitcher Hill Community Church, North Syracuse, New York
Arlington Reformed Church, Poughkeepsie, New York
The Reformed Church, Poughkeepsie, New York
Pultneyville Reformed Church, Pultneyville, New York
Queens Reformed Church, Queens Village, New York
The New Church of Greater New York, Roslyn Heights, New York
Niskayuna Reformed Church, Schenectady, New York
First Reformed Church, Scotia, New York
First Reformed Church of Bethlehem, Selkirk, New York
Grace Christian Church, Staten Island, New York
Community Church of Wurtsboro, Wurtsboro, New York
New Hope Reformed Church, Yonkers, New York
North Carolina
First Reformed Church of Cary, Cary, North Carolina
North Dakota
Red River Reformed Church, West Fargo, North Dakota
Ohio
New Hope Reformed Church, Powell, Ohio
Pennsylvania
Newtown Reformed Church, Newtown, Pennsylvania
The Reformed Church, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania
Tennessee
Franklin Fellowship Church, Franklin, Tennessee
U.S. Virgin Islands
St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas, U. S. Virgin Islands
Washington
Trinity Reformed Church, Kent, Washington
Church of the Good Shepherd, Lynnwood, Washington
East Valley Reformed Church, Yakima, Washington
Wisconsin
Bethany Reformed Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
Hope Community Reformed Church, West Bend, Wisconsin

Report of the General Synod Council on Revitalization and RCA Congregations

[Jesus said,] "*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"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

That command of our risen Lord calls the Reformed Church in America to renewed obedience in a new day. It recalls us to our deep, historical commitment to constantly reform according to the Word of God, which is also the foundation for our deep, historic commitment to church revitalization. The Great Commission calls every congregation to reform its ministry and mission by God's grace and with God's direction.

What is a revitalizing congregation?

A revitalizing congregation is a body of believers, responsive to God's call, developing a faithful and fruitful life through new mission, new ministries, and new members.

Each congregation brings this call to renewal to life in its unique setting as it:

- Nurtures a missional mindset resulting in externally-focused ministry.
- Multiplies new disciples, new leaders, new teams, new mission, new ministries, new worship services, new sites, and new congregations.
- Intentionally develops a growing community of servant leaders who are equipped and empowered for ministry.
- Grows deeper in its love of God and wider in its love of the people among whom God has called it to serve—living by grace; practicing radically inclusive love; showing Christ-like hospitality; embracing the gifts of every person, race, and culture; seeking to become increasingly diverse as a reflection of the kingdom of God; and intentionally developing a growing community of servant leaders who are equipped and empowered for ministry.

The result is that lives are transformed by the love of Jesus Christ, the hungry are fed, the broken are made whole, hurts are healed, and hope overcomes despair. Neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities become healthier, more just, and more gracious for all people as they experience God's expanding realm of grace, mercy, love, and justice.

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Grant from the Lilly Endowment Supports Revitalization Efforts

In November 2003 the RCA was notified that it was the recipient of a grant through the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Initiative of the Lilly Endowment, Inc., in Indianapolis, Indiana. In January 2004 the denomination received the $2 million grant.

The major components of the grant are:

- Formation of pastoral networks (now called coached revitalizing networks) for pastoral renewal, congregational revitalization, and increased ministry and mission effectiveness.
- Intentional interaction between pastors in networks and the leaders of the congregations the pastors serve.
- Grants: up to six hundred RCA pastors will receive a $1,000 Sustaining Pastoral Excellence grant. Grant proposals must demonstrate a partnership between the pastor and congregation and indicate how the grant will be used in the congregation's

revitalization efforts. The intent is to encourage the pastor and consistory to discern congregational needs and opportunities together.
- Training of coaches throughout the RCA, both Natural Church Development coaches and network coach/facilitators.
- An RCA staff position, coordinator of leader renewal and networks, and partial funding for the coordinator of church health and coaching, along with administrative support for this office and all other attendant costs.

In November 2008, the RCA received a $1 million continuing funding grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc. for the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program. This grant will support the program and allow it to continue through 2013.

Working Together to Revitalize Existing Congregations

Initiatives designed to encourage, resource, equip, and empower congregational revitalization have begun in a number of key areas.

Natural Church Development

The Natural Church Development (NCD) process is like an annual physical that results in a change in eating habits, exercise commitments, or sleep patterns. It isn't like a diet to achieve a short-term goal; it's an ongoing, long-term process.

After carefully studying 32,000 congregations, pastor and researcher Christian Schwarz identified eight "quality characteristics"—eight factors that affect the life, effectiveness, and growth of congregations. Each characteristic also reflects an important dimension of how the Bible describes a fruitful church. The eight characteristics are:
- Empowering leadership
- Gift-oriented ministry
- Passionate spirituality
- Functional structures
- Inspiring worship
- Holistic small groups
- Need-oriented evangelism
- Loving relationships

Research shows that if any of these eight quality characteristics is underdeveloped, it limits the fruitfulness of the congregation. After a congregation takes the NCD survey, it forms a church health team and works with an NCD coach to use its strengths to address its lowest-scoring characteristic in an organic and systemic way. The goal is to use the NCD process or another health assessment tool to release the potential God has implanted in the congregation.

A Vision for Revitalization

Seven years ago, as Sunnybrook Community Church in Sioux Center, Iowa, was searching for a new pastor, they reached a turning point. "They were a good church, but one without a heart for the lost, without a real desire to reach out," says Jeff Moes, the church's current senior pastor. "In that year or two without a pastor, the leadership team got together and wrote a vision statement—that was the catalyst to begin revitalization."

Sunnybrook Community went through the Natural Church Development process and discovered that its minimum factors were need-oriented evangelism and inspiring worship.

Church leaders attended several Willow Creek conferences and read *The Purpose Driven Church*, by Rick Warren. "The leadership developed a vision statement, then made the decision to call a pastor who fit that vision. That's where I came in," says Moes.

Moes began to work with leaders in the church to determine where God was leading Sunnybrook. "As soon as we began to implement changes, when the vision came off the page, it became quite volatile. At one point, we had 100 to 150 people meeting in the gym to criticize the direction of the church." Two years into the revitalization process, a group of parishioners left to start their own church. "That was a hard low point," says Moes.

Despite the rocky start, Sunnybrook has more than doubled in size since the beginning of the revitalization process. In the six years that Moes has served as senior pastor, worship attendance has grown from 500 to nearly 1,200. "We really focused on small groups—80 percent of our church is involved with a small group," Moes says. "Small group ministry drives this church in many respects."

Church leaders encouraged the congregation's members to propose and organize new ministries that fit with the church's vision of reaching out. "We try to spend as many dollars outside the church as we do inside the church," Moes says. "What can we do to make sure we're working the front half of the great commission, 'Go and make disciples,' as much as the back half, 'teaching them to obey'?"

Coached Revitalizing Networks

A coached revitalizing network is a way to involve four to seven pastors in developing deep, sustaining friendships that will help them live on the front lines of ministry. A network offers a safe community where pastors receive encouragement, coaching, and accountability to help them:

- Grow deeper in Christlike character.
- Gain increasing clarity and focus in their calling.
- Develop new leadership and ministry competencies.
- Lead their congregations with courage.

Three elements that help sustain pastoral excellence are essential to coached revitalizing networks:

- ***Transformational learning*** in relationship with peers under the guidance of a network facilitator provides an essential foundation for the lifelong learning required of pastoral leaders today.
- ***Covenantal accountability*** helps pastors translate good intentions into concrete action, apply new learning in their own lives and the lives of congregations, and integrate their sense of calling into their calendars.
- ***Collegial support*** by a pastor's peers builds trust and creates a safe space for pastors to pray for one another, care for and encourage one another, raise questions, express doubts, celebrate God-given successes, and learn from failures.

Coached revitalizing networks are places where pastors clarify their personal mission and are equipped with knowledge and skills to serve their congregations as transformational leaders. When pastors participate in a coached revitalizing network, we expect that both pastors and congregations will:

Deepen their discipleship through intentional spiritual formation.

Grow more passionate about new mission, new ministry, and new disciples as they become more externally focused.

Develop increasing competence as transformational leaders and intentionally multiply leadership.

It's called a "coached" network because coaching is central to coached revitalizing networks. An ongoing coaching relationship built around regular coaching sessions helps pastors address their specific opportunities, challenges, and issues with the assistance of a trained coach. Through coaching, pastors and congregational leaders are empowered in their ministry, are helped to discern how God is calling them to serve their community and world, and are equipped to multiply new disciples, leaders, ministries, mission, and congregations.

Coaching

Coaching is a central discipline within Our Call. Trained coaches support and enhance coached revitalizing networks by empowering congregational leaders for ministry and helping them discern how God is calling them.

Trained Natural Church Development coaches work with a local congregation's church health team to help them receive the maximum benefit from the NCD process. Other coaches are trained to work with networks as coach/facilitators.

Across the RCA people are being identified who have the passion and the aptitude to coach. Once they are identified, the coordinator of church health and coaching trains them in coaching skills and skills related to networks or to NCD. Other coaching applications will also be developed as the RCA continues on the journey of revitalization. You can learn more about coaching in the leadership section of the GSC report to the General Synod.

Accepting the Challenges of Deep Change for the Sake of the World God Loves

At the heart of congregational revitalization is the reality that missional engagement with the world God loves requires challenging choices and deep change. This is why pastors and congregational leaders are encouraged to come together for learning, accountability, and support in networks and to enter into the deeper reflection and more intentional action that comes through a coaching relationship.

The revitalization journey is challenging, but the stories that emerge from that journey are exciting.

Community Involvement Brings Revitalization

First Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan, has been working hard to increase its community involvement over the past few years. "We have started to build a more missional mindset in our church," says pastor Christopher Wolf. "We are seeking to engage each congregation member as an ambassador or missionary wherever they are."

In addition to running Maple Tree Preschool, a longtime ministry of the church that serves mainly community children, First Reformed facilitates the Grandville Community Leaders Forum, a group of more than 40 community leaders from schools, city government, local police, social service agencies, faith communities, and businesses. The church also partners with ACCESS of West Michigan, a mobile food pantry, and the Grand Rapids Domestic Crisis Center to help supply food to the hungry. It partners with the local chapter of Young Life to help teach young people about Christ. In the spring, the church plans to start a community garden to further increase contact with its neighbors.

"Our community awareness and involvement has added a sense of urgency and purpose for congregation members. It has awakened a thinking that all of us—not just pastors and missionaries—are called and gifted to seek and reveal God's kingdom work in our midst."

GSC REVITALIZATION ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for revitalization follows:

GSC Global Ends Policy

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

Revitalization Ends Policy

The RCA will be a fellowship of externally focused congregations where lives are being transformed and communities are being renewed.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

This ends policy calls the GSC staff to collaborate with congregations, classes, and regional synods in ways specific to each region to make a difference among three distinct recipients:

- Help congregations become healthier and more missionally focused.
- Empower healthy, missionally focused congregations to be a means by which lives are transformed.
- Support healthy, missionally focused congregations as they work with a wide variety of partners to renew their communities.

This ends policy is focused on a long-term time horizon—2013 and beyond. It is my responsibility as general secretary to ensure that measurable outcomes for 2013 are established and yearly benchmarks between the years 2008 and 2013 are developed and monitored. To that end I have established the following goals, outcomes, and strategies.

Goal for congregational fruitfulness: By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations already existing in 2005 will:

- **Exhibit missional fruitfulness through stories of transformed lives.**
- **Show clear evidence of impact on their communities.**
- **Employ statistical criteria that confirm that they are making more and better disciples.**
- **Further, among these five hundred congregations:**
  - **i) At least 40 percent will celebrate a cultural and racial mix of congregational members that closely resembles their communities.**
  - **ii) At least three hundred will have made a commitment to congregational multiplication.**

Outcomes:

- Between 2008 and 2013 the number of adult confessions of faith and adult baptisms per one hundred confirmed RCA members will increase by 25 percent in at least five hundred congregations and by 10 percent in the RCA as a whole.
- Between 2008 and 2013 new ministry and new mission activities as reported in the annual consistorial report will increase by 30 percent in at least five hundred RCA congregations and by 10 percent in the RCA as a whole.

- By 2013, at least 20 percent of RCA congregations (existing and new) will meet the generally accepted criteria of "multiracial."
- By 2013, at least 75 percent of all RCA pastoral leaders will be multiculturally competent.
- By 2013, at least three hundred RCA congregations that existed in 2005 will have either already planted a church or are actively involved in the multiplication movement and are ready to be a parent church.

Strategies:

- The strategies that will lead to these fruitful outcomes are described in the goals and strategies for revitalization below and in the GSC leadership ends monitoring report, so they won't all be enumerated here.
- In partnership with our racial/ethnic and multicultural ministry staff we will develop a variety of means to help RCA pastoral leaders gain a deep biblical grounding in the multiracial, multicultural future God is bringing to the RCA and to equip them to be multiculturally competent.
- We will work with the coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice and the Multiracial Congregation Team to develop training processes in cultural competence.
- In partnership with Global Mission we will draw on the experience and expertise of our mission partners in cross-cultural ministry.
- The other key strategy will be to continually ask appreciative questions about what is happening when we are at our best and to develop ways to measure our outcomes so we learn and adapt our activity as we go.

Data:

- The aggregate data for the RCA from 2000 to 2008 for the number of professions of faith, reaffirmations, and adult baptisms per one hundred RCA members is as follows:
  - 2000: 5.59
  - 2001: 6.05
  - 2002: 6.63
  - 2003: 6.51
  - 2004: 6.47
  - 2005: 6.64
  - 2006: 6.73
  - 2007: 6.27
  - 2008: 6.56
- Baseline data for RCA congregations from the consistorial report form, part II, has now been established. By the 2011 GSC Ends E-3 monitoring report we will be able to begin reporting trends.
- Fifty-one congregations that were in existence in 2005 are actively parenting a new RCA congregation. In many cases these congregations have planted multiple congregations.

Goal for congregational faithfulness: By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations already existing in 2005 have clear and compelling statements of mission, vision, and values and are prayerfully orienting their congregational lives and imaginations toward faithful and collaborative participation in the mission of God.

Outcomes:

- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations will be engaged in ministry partnerships aimed at community impact with other RCA congregations, other Christian

congregations, and faith groups or other community partners God provides.
- By 2013, congregational members in at least five hundred RCA congregations will be equipped to engage in incarnational ministries through which they serve people who aren't yet disciples of Christ and are trained to engage in spiritual conversations with them.
- By 2013, at least one hundred previously declining RCA congregations will have become "turn-around congregations."
- By 2013, at least fifty RCA congregations will have chosen to enter into a "Fresh Start" and initiated a new era of ministry and mission in their community.
- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations will be active, vital houses of prayer.

Strategies:
- Collaborate with the coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice to help congregations develop plans for ministry in their communities:
  - Develop processes that will equip congregations to see their communities through God's eyes, to creatively join Jesus in ministry in their communities, and to remain open to new opportunities the Holy Spirit will reveal to them.
  - Where appropriate, to develop a 501(c)3 organization.
- Collaborate with the coordinator for discipleship to develop a variety of ways to help deepen discipleship among congregational leaders and members and help them grow in their ability to engage in spiritual conversations.
- Develop and empower processes that will equip congregational and pastoral leaders to discern their congregation's mission, vision, and values and to develop the missional imaginations and faithfulness needed to be vital outposts of the reign of God.
- Collaborate with the Church Multiplication Team in the development of "Fresh Start" training and offer that training to classis teams throughout the RCA.
- Collaborate with the H.O.P.E. Team to develop and support more RCA congregations becoming houses of prayer.
- Initiate an online assessment to identify pastors with the gifts, passion, and drive for "turn-around" or "redevelopment" ministry with a goal of identifying one hundred such current and emerging pastoral leaders.
- Develop a training process for turn-around pastors and congregational leadership teams similar to "Thrive."
- Encourage classes to evaluate their life together in light of our shared mission, in order to discern how God is calling them to work together to renew lives and transform their communities.

Data:
- The coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice has formed a partnership with Christian Community Development Association and is working with clusters of RCA congregations to explore Christian community development more fully.
- Ongoing cooperation continues with the coordinator for discipleship to deepen discipleship in RCA congregations and develop disciples who make disciples.
- This is explored more fully in the leadership ends monitoring report.
- The director of congregational mission has been a partner, along with the Church Multiplication Team, in the development of a "Fresh Start" initiative.
  - Two "Fresh Start" training events have been held with members of eight classes in attendance.
  - Some of the material developed for "Fresh Start" is being used to help congregations determine whether they are a candidate for a turn-around or a fresh start.
  - This process is being used to assist congregations and to strengthen the oversight and care role of classes.

- More than three hundred RCA congregations have an identified prayer coordinator. The H.O.P.E. Team is working with congregations across the RCA to form networks of congregations that desire to become houses of prayer.
- In collaboration with a group of ecumenical partners and the Gallup organization, an online assessment for people with the gifts to be "re-developers" ("turn-around pastors") was launched in early 2009.
  - It has had limited usage to this point and an overall process for utilizing this tool will be designed collaboratively with the director of congregational mission, the coordinator of leader renewal and networks, and key leaders from the Synod of the Heartland.
  - The new process will be in place by fall of 2010.
- Stories are being collected of classes that are examining their life and ministry through the eyes of mission, and various models are being shared as requested. Many classes are restructuring for mission.

Goal for pastoral networks: By 2013, at least five hundred ordained or commissioned pastoral leaders of congregations will participate in a coached revitalizing network for at least five years as a way to equip them to lead revitalizing, missional congregations.

Outcomes:
- Five hundred pastoral leaders will have developed a personal calling statement that informs and guides their ministry.
- Five hundred pastoral leaders will have a coach helping them live out the mission, vision, and values God revealed to them in their personal calling statement.
- Five hundred pastoral leaders will be in clear and explicit covenantal partnership with congregational leaders for missional engagement.
- Five hundred pastoral leaders, in covenant partnership with their congregational leaders, will be committed to do what is needed to place participation in God's mission at the center of their personal and congregational life and ministry.

Strategies:
- Seven hundred pastoral leaders will participate in networks for at least one year in order to retain five hundred who participate in a coached revitalizing network for five years.
- One hundred twenty-five high-quality network coach/facilitators will be trained, supported, and held accountable for their work. To date, 185 network facilitators have been trained.
- One hundred twenty-five additional pastors will be trained to share the coaching in networks.

Data:
- Currently, 445 pastors are involved in seventy networks that are being led by RCA-trained and supported facilitators.
  - This leaves us behind schedule for the goals mentioned.
  - We continue to promote networks and coaching.
  - Two new affinity networks have been added in 2009: one around urban ministry, and one around transition from seminary to first call. This brings us to four official affinity networks to date.
  - Approximately seven hundred copies of *All Things New*, a fable written to promote pastors networks and coaching, were distributed in 2009.
    - This led to many interesting opportunities, including a guest spot on a Christian radio broadcast in the southeastern U.S.

    - The book can be downloaded for free at www.all-things-new.org.
    - A second fable is being written to promote congregational renewal with some focus given to multiracial and gender reconciliation. It will be complete in 2011.
- To date, 197 people have been trained to serve as pastors network facilitators.
  - Twelve of these were trained in 2009 using a new design which integrated a greater degree of experiential learning.
  - This group included five pastors willing to start multiracial affinity networks in the future.
  - One facilitator forum was held using web-conferencing technology.
    - The topic was "Best Practices for Facilitators" and the guest speaker was Steve Smallegan.
    - Another is planned for 2010 around pastors' health.
    - A third cohort group of six network facilitators completed the six-month Leadership Development Journey course in March of 2010. This brings to nineteen the number of facilitators who have completed this course, which exposes them to leadership concepts that can be applied and passed along in their networks.
- Four hundred fifty people have received an orientation to coaching through foundational coach training and approximately 150 others have received coach training in earlier versions of coach training.

Goal for Natural Church Development (NCD): By 2013, two hundred RCA congregations will have completed two cycles of a coached NCD process and 150 churches will have completed three or more cycles of a coached NCD process. (This goal is significantly revised from a general church health goal to a goal concerning NCD. This change comes through what we have learned and because NCD is the specific church health process the RCA is equipped to support.)

Outcomes:
- By 2013, two hundred RCA congregations will have completed two cycles of a coached NCD process.
- By 2013, 150 RCA congregations will have completed three or more cycles of a coached NCD process.
- By 2013, at least three hundred of the RCA congregations that were in existence in 2005 have become healthy enough to be a parent congregation and at least two hundred have multiplied or have begun the process to plant a congregation.

Strategies:
- Continue to train and retrain NCD coaches so all congregations engaging in NCD for the first cycle have a well-trained NCD coach and all second-cycle congregations have access to a coach if they desire one.
- Partner intentionally with the regions in recruiting high-quality coaches and share in the costs of training and supporting those coaches.
- Offer high-quality coaches inter-regionally when regional coaches are not available.
- Tell NCD stories of greater health resulting in increased missional faithfulness and God-blessed fruitfulness.
- Compare and contrast the data from the annual consistorial reports between congregations improving in NCD scores and those not participating or not showing improvement.
- Offer opportunities for trained NCD coaches to refresh and continue to develop their coaching and content skills.

Data:
- Between 2001 and 2004, 107 churches took the survey more than once:

  - Eighty-six churches took the survey two times.
  - Nineteen churches took the survey three times.
  - Two churches took the survey four times.
- Since 2004—when the RCA standardized the NCD coach training process—fifty-eight congregations have taken the survey more than once:
  - Forty-six have taken the survey three times.
  - Eight have taken the survey four times.
- The NCD training material has been rewritten to make it more accessible to coaches and congregations. Training occurs in a workshop format which allows for more relevant and timely interaction with other participants and trainers and is "hands on."
- Intentional conversations with regional staff regarding the use of NCD and the development of quality coaches has begun, as well as sharing the cost of training.
- NCD stories are being told through *RCA Today*, the RCA website, RCA communication resources, and video clips at General Synod.
- IT staff and revitalization staff are developing a plan for accessing data that will correlate NCD scores with responses to certain questions in Part I and Part II of the annual consistorial report.

Goal for direct impact and learning with specific congregations: By 2012, forty RCA congregations that were plateaued or declining (growing less than 10 percent in five years or declining less than 10 percent in five years) will enter into covenantal partnership with staff from the congregational mission cluster and will be growing spiritually, missionally, and numerically through their participation in Churches on the Grow.

Outcomes:
- By 2013, forty RCA congregations participating in Churches on the Grow will have clear focus for their participation in God's mission and will have developed and implemented processes to measure their outcomes.
- By 2013, forty RCA congregations participating in Churches on the Grow will have developed processes to deepen their discipleship and develop leaders, resulting in greater missional capacity.
- By 2013, forty RCA congregations participating in Churches on the Grow that were previously plateaued or declining will be growing numerically.
- By 2013, forty RCA congregations participating in Churches in the Grow will be equipped to share some of what they have learned with other congregations.

Strategies:
- Staff in the congregational leadership cluster will serve as point persons in relationships with at least forty RCA congregations to help guide the Churches on the Grow initiative, with thirteen or fourteen new relationships initiated per year.
- The RCA staff point person, the consistory, and the pastor enter into a comprehensive covenantal relationship for the duration of the initiative.
- Staff from the congregational mission cluster offer services, equipping, and expertise as determined by the missional engagement of the congregation and at the request of congregational and pastoral leadership.
- Churches on the Grow congregations are invited into this process by RCA staff (usually in consultation with regional synod staff), with a goal of participating congregations in all eight regional synods.

Data:
- As of February 25, 2010, eleven covenants have been initiated with eleven congregations and their Grow teams are actively engaged.

Report of the All-Synod Advisory Committees on Multiplication and Revitalization

When P-1 from the Report of the General Secretary was presented to synod, the all-synod advisory committees were presented with the following tasks:

- To discuss what we are noticing and how we are growing in our intentional efforts as congregations to revitalize our existing churches.
- To discuss the proposal on revitalization that comes from the general secretary in his annual report to the General Synod.
- To discuss understandings about new congregations and explore the utility of featuring data on new church starts and its impact on the denomination.
- To discuss the interconnectedness of these two parts of Our Call.

The multiplication and revitalization writing team presented the following statement:

As we listened to the groups' discussions of the general secretary's proposal (P-1), we heard:

- Setting goals facilitates intentionality and focus, but numbers don't tell the whole story of love for God and love for neighbor.
- There is an acknowledgment that the three current revitalization strategies (coached networks, coaching, and NCD) have not been effective for some congregations, and there is a desire for other resources to be made more widely available (such as the Ridder Leadership Initiative, Appreciative Inquiry, spiritual direction, or mentoring).
- Given the varied size of classes, setting a goal based on a specific number of churches seems inappropriate (for instance, five churches is half of some classes); likewise, ministry, revitalization, and appropriate goals may look very different in various ministry settings.
- Revitalization has moved us toward embracing mission, but this has not necessarily had an impact on numbers.
- There is value in partnering with other churches, parachurch organizations, and ecumenical agencies, and it is up to each classis/congregation to engage these partnerships.
- Virtually every group acknowledged the value of sharing stories and knowledge, and some groups wanted to also facilitate opportunities for mutual learning (for instance, what worked, what didn't work, and lessons learned).

Taking this feedback into account, we make the following recommendation regarding the general secretary's proposal P-1, page 38:

R-66
To urge each classis to:
1. Partner with its congregations to develop intentional revitalization goals appropriate to specific ministry contexts, grounded in the three dimensions of the Great Commandment and Great Commission: our love for God, our love for neighbor (missional impact), and our commitment to making and nurturing disciples;

2. Engage and support at least 25 percent of its congregations in a specific commitment to become revitalizing churches;

3. Share stories of revitalization and missional impact with the wider church through the General Synod Council; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council to provide opportunities for collaborative learning and to include information on the classes' progress toward these goals in *RCA Today*, the RCA website, and its annual report to General Synod during the last three years of Our Call, 2011, 2012, and 2013. (ADOPTED)

Although less time was devoted to multiplication, there was overwhelming support and encouragement for the church multiplication process and the fruits of its labors. Some observations include:

- Healthy revitalization encourages multiplication; conversely, multiplication often leads to revitalization.
- More effective mechanisms are needed to fully include new church starts within the assemblies of the church.
- Existing membership categories do not adequately reflect the current reality.
- Our assessment structure seems to be a disincentive to organizing.
- There is a need to foster a Reformed identity (worship, theology, polity, etc.) in our new church starts and leaders.
- There is a lack of diversity in age and gender among leaders in the multiplication process.

Report of the General Synod Council on Discipleship

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:16-17).

Discipleship changes people, communities, and institutions as disciples commit to making disciples and more people become more like Jesus, embodying his teachings in their daily lives.

GSC DISCIPLESHIP ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for discipleship follows.

GSC Global Ends Policy

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

Discipleship Ends Policy

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations filled with disciples, nurtured inwardly, focused outwardly, becoming like Jesus in all they think, say, and do in order to show the love of God in all circumstances to all people.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

Disciples making disciples is the clearest and most precise way to state the vision and values of the discipleship office. Each disciple of Christ is committed to internalizing the gospel in his or her individual life and it results in a compelling desire to disciple another person. Through empowering, connecting, encouraging, and sustaining, leaders, teachers, pastors, youth, and children will be discipled and will disciple others, and this will result in transformed lives, churches, and communities.

This ends policy is also reflected in the mission statement of the Discipleship Team: "Christian discipleship is the practice of following Jesus Christ, becoming like him in all we think, say, and do, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be the very presence of Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God." The Youth Team, the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, the H.O.P.E. Team, and the Discipleship Team are collaboratively strategizing methods to live into the definition that we have stated.

Disciples making disciples embodies the inward nature of growing in Christ as an individual and it incorporates the outward focus of discipling others. It is relational in its approach, missional in its nature, educational in its practice, incarnational in its witness, and transformational in its outcome, and it is foundational to all we do as the body of Christ. Discipleship is one of the foundations of the ten-year goal and with that comes the urgency and necessity of working with revitalization and multiplication as we work together to equip and empower disciples for faithful and fruitful ministry.

Goal: To implement and provide training for a relational model of discipleship, using reproducing triads and small groups.

We believe that discipleship is relational and done best in community. What are the relational techniques and models that help form disciples that emulate Jesus Christ in all they think, say, and do?

Outcomes:

- By 2013, at least one hundred persons will be trained in the triad approach and in turn provide training in at least three congregations annually.
- By 2013, at least three hundred congregational leaders will have received training in relational discipleship.
- By 2013, at least one thousand congregational leaders will be involved in triads that provide accountability, trust, and biblical engagement as a means to strengthen their discipleship ministry.
- In 2010, regional trainings will be offered via simulcasts sponsored and shaped by the Discipleship Team. These trainings are intentional in helping followers of Jesus to be more like him in all they think, say, and do.

Strategies:

- Design, through the Discipleship Team and Greg Ogden, a training process by which local leaders will be equipped to lead a triad approach to disciple making.
- Train regional leaders, who can in turn work with and train congregational leaders, in a relational model for discipleship.

- After year two, gather the Discipleship Team and regional trainers for evaluation, follow-up training, and a possible revision of the process.
- Offer venues and training for small group leadership.
- Collaborate with Christian Reformed Church Home Missions in providing training and resourcing for small group leaders.
- Continue to use the language and practice of people development versus program development.

Data:

- Discipleship staff has designed the triad training process. In November, people from every region gathered and were trained by Greg Ogden. Approximately thirty people were trained in the triad approach. Four of the regional synods have had triad training seminars offered in their region.
- We have collaborated with CRC Home Missions in offering training and resources for small groups.
- The triad webinar has also been designed and will be offered monthly.
- Discipleship staff has initiated triads in the RCA office, and triads are presently meeting.

Goal: To see our consistories, leadership, and congregations transformed as they are challenged to participate in an intentional form of discipleship that results in life change.

We are focusing on transformation. What does life change look like as a disciple and how is that measured?

Outcomes:

- By 2013, at least 10 percent more RCA congregations and at least 10 percent more non-RCA congregations will provide Children and Worship centers for the nurturing and transformation of young children.
- By 2013, the number of young people exposed to missional leadership opportunities through programs and institutions will be 20 percent higher.
- By 2013, one hundred discipleship leaders will have participated in foundational coach training.
- By 2013, three hundred people will be in networks.
- By 2013, over one hundred pastors or influencers in discipleship will have taken part in the Discipleship Experience in Washington D.C.
- By 2013, Discipleship Experiences will be taking place in every regional synod.
- By 2013, churches will have received “Back to the Basics,” a resource and process to equip and empower the church with discipleship strategies and methods.

Strategies:

- To directly work with forty congregations annually.
- To develop a spiritual assessment tool for leaders to use as a way to examine their life as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- To work with the revitalization staff in developing coaching techniques and strategies for leader-based discipleship.
- To collaborate with the H.O.P.E. (Houses of Prayer Equipping) Team in developing and supporting more RCA congregations as houses of prayer.
- To encourage the leaders in our churches to invest in the lives of youth and children and new believers as they walk with them in a discipling relationship and as they encourage the leaders and teachers in the church who are teaching Sunday school, Children and Worship, vacation Bible school, Wednesday night programs, or mentoring.

- To continue to raise up new leaders who experience transformation and are being called to use their gifts in fruitful and faithful ways.
- To work with the coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice in devising methods and ways to live out our discipleship by seeking justice in our churches and communities.
- To design a Discipleship Experience that focuses on the inward and outward journey.
- The Season of Discipleship Task Force has designed a church-wide process called Back to the Basics. This resource was introduced at General Synod 2010, and will continue until 2013 with further updates and resources.

Data:

- The Discipleship Team has written a spiritual assessment tool around the six key areas of discipleship, which are in alignment with our definition. The tool assesses how churches and leaders are working toward discipleship that is missional, relational, educational, transformational, incarnational, and foundational. This tool has been piloted in eight congregations and is being prepared for use among many congregations. Each church that does the assessment will be coached through the results.
- RCA staff, in collaboration with a discipleship coaching task force, has developed coaching techniques and strategies for leader-based discipleship. The first pilot training event was held in March 2009. We have offered two discipleship coach trainings and anticipate this growing and being an extension of foundational coach training.
- The H.O.P.E. (Houses of Prayer Equipping) team is in a time of transition as they seek new ways to equip and empower people to pray.
- The updated youth website has provided new resources for youth pastors. We now have an annual youth pastor training event. We have encouraged churches to think more broadly about how they incorporate youth and children in worship, service, discipleship, and leadership.
- The coordinator for discipleship has worked with camps and colleges to coordinate efforts on fostering youth leadership in the RCA.
- RCA staff has worked with the R-11 committee in trying to get younger delegates at General Synod. We are also seeking opportunities for further leadership as it emerges from General Synod.
- Networks are growing; presently about 120 people are in networks. We are in the process of forming Youth LYNC (Linking Youth Networks across the Country)—these are specified for youth pastors or staff.
- Discipleship staff has consulted with approximately sixteen churches in 2009.
- Children and Worship has offered training to forty churches in 2009.
- In April, we ran the pilot Discipleship Experience in Washington D.C., with a second one scheduled for the summer.

Goal: To continue to offer Reformed and missional resources for empowering and equipping local congregations.

We are working toward a form of missional discipleship and engaging the question, How are we preparing disciples to make other disciples?

Outcomes:

- By 2009, a fully functioning, three-year online training course (Opening Doors to Discipleship) will be available to all RCA congregational leaders in discipleship.
- By 2010, one hundred churches will be participating in Opening Doors to Discipleship.
- Annually, complete and updated resource lists of curriculum for children, youth, and

adults that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional will be provided.
- By 2013, youth from every region will be participating in Project Timothy.
- The discipleship office will participate in at least two collaborative lifelong learning events with both New Brunswick and Western Seminaries in order to train and empower fifty local leaders who will be models of lifelong learning and a voice of discipleship in their regions.
- By 2013, resource networks will be using discussion forums or blogs so that Reformed disciples may share Reformed and missional resources and best practices that grow disciples, nurture them inwardly, and focus them outwardly.

Strategies:
- To work with Faith Alive and other ecumenical partners on the creation of resources for congregational use that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- To continue to highlight opportunities in the denomination that lead people into mission in a Reformed context.
- To collaborate with volunteer services, Project Timothy staff, and Leaders on the Horizon in order to call youth into mission, service, and leadership.
- To work with revitalization, equipping congregational members to engage in incarnational ministries through which they serve people who are not yet disciples of Christ and are trained to engage in spiritual conversations with them.
- To work with the seminaries in providing lifelong learning opportunities that are both Reformed and missional.

Data:
- Opening Doors to Discipleship (three-year online training) is complete and currently has 248 participants. Year four, based on a discipleship theme, will be launched in June.
- The RCA website has complete and updated resource lists of curriculum for children, youth, and adults that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- The discipleship office has had two successful events in partnership with Journey and Western Seminary. Presently we are working on the youth pastors training event and an annual discipleship training event. We are planning an event in the fall at New Brunswick Seminary.
- The Leaders on the Horizon program had seventy-seven new students in 2009.
- There were thirty-two new participants in Project Timothy in 2009.

Online Training Program Equips Educators

Opening Doors to Discipleship, a free online training program for Christian educators and church leaders, is equipping people for their roles at church.

The program offers courses on teaching skills, Bible background, and Presbyterian and Reformed faith. “It helped rejuvenate my faith in God and gave me refreshed eyes to enhance our programs at Third,” says Ashley Atkins, director of children’s ministries at Third Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Atkins completed the teaching skills course with other children’s ministry leaders at her church.

“It has been helpful in figuring out direction, where our program is seeming to be heading and where we want it to head,” she says. “I liked that it gave you suggestions as well as some reminders of the building blocks of our faith. It was very useful in giving some basics about stages of development and how that looks different with each age.”

Atkins says the course also helped her gain new insight on children’s ministry and determine how to incorporate different learning styles to engage all children.

Opening Doors to Discipleship is an ecumenical partnership between the Reformed Church in America, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Moravian Church in America, and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Goal: To educate and empower our children, youth, and leaders as they seek to grow as disciples of Christ.

We are focused on education and examining how the resources we are presently using are helping us to grow disciples that are nurtured inwardly and focused outwardly. What new and creative resources and methods will help us educate disciples, and what present methods are still effective?

Outcomes:

- By 2010, a training session will be offered in every region for children's ministries and adult discipleship.
- By 2010, training events for *I Wonder* and *Following Jesus* will be developed and implemented so that local Children and Worship leaders will be further equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry.
- By 2011, an online Children and Worship introduction workshop will be offered.
- By 2013, the number of Children and Worship basic trainings, introductions, and enrichment and specialized events will increase by 20 percent in order to strengthen local Children and Worship ministry.
- By 2013, Children and Worship networks will be developed and will use discussion forums or blogs for trainers and local leaders that provide communication and a means for sharing questions and best practices.
- By 2013, there will be a network for discipleship coordinators in each region to keep them connected, revitalized, and sustained.
- By 2010, the Season of Discipleship Task Force will bring a proposal to General Synod outlining how disciples can be fully embraced in the life and mission of the local church.

Strategies:

- To gather data about what methods and curriculum are being used to educate our children, youth, and adults.
- To offer a scope and sequence of what adults, children, and youth should be learning.
- To educate leaders, teachers, and pastors on teaching techniques, methodology, discipleship training, and spiritual disciplines.
- To develop Christ-centered followers, teachers, and leaders that are connected and sustained in community and who live out their faith in all they think, say, and do.
- In an effort to accomplish this goal a Season of Discipleship Task Force has been formed. This task force is creating new resources and methods that will help churches engage in developing disciples of Jesus Christ of all ages.

Data:

- A consortium of experts in the field of education was held to discuss the future and trends in children's ministry.
- In 2008-2009, the discipleship office held training for adult discipleship in every region. RCA discipleship staff work in partnership with Faith Alive for children's ministry, and numerous Children and Worship trainings are offered.
- The Discipleship Team has been empowered to develop a discipleship team in each region.

*The data that is being reported is based on the means and ends that were created for 2009.

Report of the General Synod Council on Disability Ministry throughout the RCA

"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).

In 2007, the General Synod Council initiated conversations with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) about a possible partnership in disability ministry. At that time, the RCA had no formal structure for ministry among people with disabilities, but it recognized both a growing demand for such a ministry and an expertise at work in the CRC since 1982. In 2008, the RCA and the CRC entered into a partnership for disability ministry that expressed a commitment to help RCA and CRC churches "become hospitable, inclusive, and healthy communities." According to a working agreement* endorsed in 2008 by both the GSC and the CRC board of trustees, "the disability ministries of both denominations can be more effective by sharing knowledge, support, and resources; by building a broader network of relationships; and by allowing disability ministry to be yet another step in the increasingly fruitful shared ministries between our two denominations." The working agreement was understood not as an end, but as a beginning, with the intention of eventually creating one integrated disability ministry to serve both denominations.

In response to the spirit of the working agreement, General Synod 2008 approved a new 23-cent assessment for a half-time position in disability ministry, supplemented by a start-up grant from Greater Palisades Classis totaling $25,000 over two years. However, as the resulting position description was created and as candidates were interviewed late in 2008, it became apparent that the $50,000 annual budget for all salary and programming costs was insufficient. With a concern that succeeding in a new ministry with a half-time staff person would be extremely difficult, a hiring decision was postponed. Eventually, the new position was increased to two-thirds time and a candidate was hired in September 2009, with the understanding that additional assessment funding would be sought in 2010 to compensate both for the conclusion of the Greater Palisades Classis grant and the increase from a half-time position to two-thirds time. The total assessment request to cover the cost of this ministry is $0.60 (60 cents) per confessing member (see assessment report, p. 63).

Since the hiring of an RCA staff member, the disability concerns offices of the RCA and CRC have begun to collaborate on a newsletter, website, training, conferences, and web and print resources for use by their congregations. The partnership already has resulted in cost-saving efficiencies and enhanced ministry. The RCA is benefiting from the CRC's programming and experience as it builds a foundation that envisions accessible, inclusive, missional churches that are engaging and engaged by people with disabilities. The CRC has been generous in sharing resources, and it remains eager to grow a lasting partnership that stretches and expands its ministry while together serving the kingdom of God.

New Church Reaches Out to "Special" Believers

HRC Journey, a church plant of Hopewell Reformed Church in Hopewell Junction, New York, has begun its own outreach ministry—a special-needs church called Odyssey. "We have hit into a mother lode of need in our area," says Taylor Holbrook, pastor of Hopewell Reformed. There are many group homes in the area for adults with special needs, but there were no churches intentionally reaching out to the special needs community.

The inspiration for Odyssey came from Hopewell member Chris Snider. "In December, Pastor Mark [Mast, pastor of HRC Journey] challenged us to think of a mission for our

church plant, Journey. I felt the nudge to mention a special-needs ministry," she says.

"The Odyssey ministry is near and dear to my heart," says Snider, whose 27-year-old son has special needs and lives in a group home nearby. "While he was growing up, church services and Sunday school classes always presented a challenge. People had good intentions and tried to include him in church activities, but helping him attain a faith was always an area where I felt I had failed my son."

The special needs in the congregation vary, from intellectual to physical to sensory disabilities. "An added blessing to the Odyssey ministry is the acceptance of people regardless of their disability," Snider says. "Parents who have attended feel a relief that their child's quirks are okay. I know I feel the same relief and am able to worship without distraction from worry."

Odyssey's worship services are carefully planned to connect with people with special needs on a level that they can understand. The service is fast-moving and incorporates plenty of singing, and sermons incorporate visual and tactile elements. After the message, there is a small group time, during which worshipers make a craft or do a service project.

"One of the things they say at Odyssey is that all of us have special needs," says Holbrook. "Odyssey is not a special-needs program attached to a church—it's a church built around people with special needs."

GSC DISABILITY MINISTRY ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for disability ministry follows:

GSC Global Ends Policy

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

Disability Ministry Sub-End Policy

Congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America will reflect God's vision of the kingdom, embracing complete unity reaching all people (every race, tribe, people, and language, every disability and special need, including those living on the margins) with the love and grace of Jesus Christ; actively engaging in love, acceptance, forgiveness, and justice (John 17:23; Revelation 7:9).

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

This sub-end policy calls the GSC staff to collaborate with congregations, classes, and regional synods to the end that our life together within the Reformed Church in America more fully reflects the grace, love, unity, reconciliation, and justice of God.

There is a close connection between this sub-end and GSC E-7, the multiracial future policy. Much of the work that has been assigned to staff is reported on in the monitoring report for E-7. It is my interpretation that the area of disability ministry is not addressed in other

monitoring reports and therefore will be reported here. The overall focus for disability ministry is to develop an increasing number of RCA congregations that are accessible, inclusive, and missional churches that are engaging and engaged by people with disabilities.

Because a staff position for disabilities ministries was just established in October 2009, and it is a two-thirds–time position, this ends policy is focused on a long-term time horizon—2013 and beyond. It is my responsibility as general secretary to ensure that measurable outcomes for 2013 and beyond are established and yearly benchmarks beginning with the year 2011 are developed and monitored. To that end I have established the following goals, outcomes, and strategies, and anticipated data.

Goal: By 2013, establish a volunteer network, consisting of at least one hundred church advocates for disability concerns, to assist RCA congregations to engage and be engaged by people with disabilities.

Outcomes:

- By 2013, at least two congregations in each classis will identify and commission a church advocate for disability concerns.
- By 2013, at least two congregations in each classis will include people with disabilities in a leadership role.
- By 2013, at least two congregations in each classis will eliminate a barrier (physical, attitudinal, communicational, theological, etc.) to facilitate greater participation among people with disabilities.

Strategies:

- Produce and distribute a quarterly newsletter (*Breaking Barriers*) that educates congregations about disability concerns and serve as a resource for church advocates.
- Encourage congregations, through inserts in a quarterly newsletter (*Breaking Barriers*), to identify a gifted member with a deep interest in disability issues to serve as a church advocate in disability concerns.
- Coordinate and host, in partnership with the Christian Reformed Church office of disability concerns, a two-day training event for church advocates in August 2011.

Goal: By 2013, deepen awareness within at least two hundred RCA congregations of issues faced by people with disabilities so that congregations can become more accessible, inclusive, and missional.

Outcomes:

- By 2013, at least three congregations in each classis will engage in an educational or advocacy event that enhances inclusion and creates awareness of issues faced by people with disabilities.
- By 2013, at least two congregations in each classis will eliminate a barrier (physical, attitudinal, communicational, theological, etc.) to facilitate greater participation by people with disabilities.
- By 2013, at least two congregations in each classis will respond to a community/neighborhood issue faced by people with disabilities.

Strategies:

- Produce and distribute a quarterly newsletter (*Breaking Barriers*) that educates congregations about issues of accessibility and inclusion and promotes participation in God's mission, in a neighborhood/community context, among people with disabilities.

- Provide resources that encourage congregations to promote an annual Disability Awareness Sunday that engages people with disabilities and responds to issues faced by people with disabilities.

Endnote
*[Excerpted from the CRC-RCA 2008 Working Agreement]: The leaders of the CRC and RCA disability ministries would have a peer relationship, meeting together as often as necessary in order to benefit from and facilitate shared ministry… Programming priorities within the respective denominations will be established separately by the leaders of disability ministry for each denomination. However, this partnership agreement also assumes and expects cooperative work in the following areas: newsletter, website, training/conferences, and web and print resources for use by congregations. Costs for shared aspects of ministry would be divided between the CRC and RCA ministries as appropriate. Furthermore, both parties commit themselves to early communication of any concerns related to the actions of the other party or to the partnership agreement itself, and to search for solutions that affirm the ministry and personnel of each denomination.

Review: This ministry agreement will be reviewed yearly. Both parties agree to consult the other concerning any strategic changes they are considering that might have impact on the ministry of the other party or on the partnership agreement. If adjustments to the agreement are needed, proposed changes will be brought to the CRC Board of Trustees and the RCA General Synod Council. A major review will take place after year three, with the goal that the ministries will share more deeply in ministry as we continue this relationship.

Report of the General Synod Council on Leadership

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I, send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8).

God is still calling people into relationship and sending them to participate in and witness to the reign of God. By God's grace, the Reformed Church in America is joining in that work by identifying, forming, deploying, nurturing, and renewing people with gifts for leadership. Throughout the denomination, this occurs by:

- Forming a new generation of pastoral leaders.
- Training elders and deacons in their ministry.
- Assisting leaders to discern God's direction.
- Connecting ministers of Word and sacrament and congregations.
- Creating pastoral networks for support and learning.
- Coaching and mentoring pastors in their work.
- Nurturing the unique gifts and ministry of women.

The General Synod Council (GSC) nurtures congregational leadership—deacons, elders, ministers, emerging leaders, and longtime leaders—through programs and ministries around four themes: calling people to ministry, forming people for ministry, nurturing people in ministry, and renewing people for changing ministry.

Calling People to Ministry

The major initiative in this area of focus is Call Waiting, a program that helps men and women discern the call to ministry and nurtures them along the way. Call Waiting includes a cooperative program with RCA camps and conference centers.

Call Waiting has led to the initiation of a fund for ministerial leadership that actively seeks contributions for scholarships to assist RCA members who are called to attend seminary. Call Waiting resulted in the creation of a program of care and nurture for college students who attend General Synod as corresponding delegates, to assist them in their vocational development. It is clear that God's call in the lives of RCA members is at the heart of raising up a new generation of leaders to serve a world in need and a denomination eager to serve.

Call Waiting led to the development of an initiative called "Gracious Welcome." Through this initiative the RCA intends to learn how to most warmly and effectively reach out to and welcome ordained ministers from other denominations as they come to assist the RCA in the revitalization and multiplication of RCA congregations.

Call Waiting Introduces Future Leaders to General Synod

Each year, a group of college students attends General Synod as delegates and participates in Call Waiting, a program to help them discern if God is calling them to ministry.

"This year's group was outstanding and an encouraging witness to the future of the RCA," says program coordinator and pastor Suzanne Hart.

Grace Olson, a student at Hope College, says she went expecting to observe "the dry processes of denominational decision-making," and that instead she was "delighted by how graciously and earnestly we were welcomed. Our thoughts carried as much weight as anyone's."

As a result of several lunchtime and coffee break conversations, she has begun to consider seminary, which she had previously dismissed as unrelated to her plans to be a writer. "Now I see how interrelated words and the Word are, and that regardless of whether I am called to pastoral ministry or not, it is my vocation to use language well and to use it in a way that is faithful to the gospel."

Hope College student Daniel Claus says Call Waiting was a fantastic way to learn how the church operates. "The most interesting part was watching intelligent people gather and discuss the issues of the church. While I was already fairly convinced that I would be rooted in the RCA when I go into ministry, my ties to the denomination have only been strengthened."

Cory Nikkel says he had never heard of General Synod before Central College asked if he wanted to be a youth delegate. He enjoyed learning about how the RCA governs itself. "It was interesting to see all the procedures that had to be done and all the decisions that had to be made for the RCA to be financially and spiritually ready for the next year," he says.

"I've been praying a lot, for a long time, about what God will have my future ministry contain," says Nikkel. "At synod I realized the main thing I need to know is that God will place me in an extended family once I join a denomination as a pastor."

Forming People for Ministry

Consistory Training: Our congregational leaders are hungry for tools that can move their congregations toward health and growth. In response to this challenge, the coordinator for consistory training and ministry services provides support and training to equip and develop the gifts of pastors, elders, and deacons as they move toward a fuller understanding of being faithful consistories.

Specific training is provided for the effective use of an RCA resource, *Companions on the Way*, which supports the ministry of elders as they tend to the spiritual needs of people who are exploring or rediscovering the Christian faith. This model, led by elders, supported by pastors, and adaptable for any congregation, has the potential to enliven the whole faith community.

In some regions of the RCA clusters of consistories come together for learning, shared ministry, and support. These consistory clusters provide a way for consistories to learn from one another how they shape ministries in their various congregations. In addition as they become aware of one another's ministry goals, they pray for and support one another.

Nurturing People in Ministry

A primary way the RCA nurtures people in ministry is through a growing emphasis on coaching. Within the RCA, coaching is understood to be the process of coming alongside a person to help her or him discover God's agenda for her or his life and ministry, while seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance to see that agenda become reality. Coaching helps a person listen to God about where change is needed and then equips and empowers a person to make the necessary changes.

The increased awareness and accountability that comes along with coaching will help leaders be more faithful as they participate in and witness to the realm of God. By God's grace, and through the Holy Spirit's power, the outcome will be more fruitful ministry. This is true for at least three reasons:

1. **Coaching is focused on the present.** Coaches help others understand their present situation in order to discover and implement meaningful actions to address that situation.
2. **Coaching helps people discover their own answers.** Coaches assume that the person closest to the issue typically has the best answers, but that she or he will discover those answers with the help of someone skilled in asking the right questions.
3. **Coaching leads to intentional action.** Coaches help people take inventory of their values and desires by listening to them, asking questions, and speaking the truth, and then helping them develop and take intentional steps toward more faithful action in the future.

Coach training has been offered to pastoral leaders in all the regional synods of the RCA and to some congregational leaders as well. A current goal is to develop the means to train more elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders in coaching skills as a way to nurture existing leadership and develop new leadership in congregations throughout the RCA.

The Call Process within the RCA

The direction of leadership in the office of ministry services has shifted focus in the last year in efforts to improve the entire ministerial call process. Major work continues through conversations and meetings with pastoral candidates and search committees. Every church profile and ministerial profile is personally handled by the coordinator of pastoral services, who works with candidates and search committees until a call is accepted. *Kaizen* is probably the best word to describe the philosophy driving this office. It is Japanese for "continual improvement" and speaks directly to our openness in learning and understanding the needs of pastors and churches and in building levels of excellence into every aspect of the call process.

Chaplains

A large number of RCA ministers do not serve congregations. Their ministry takes place in hospitals, mental health institutions, nursing homes, prisons, and the armed forces. They are endorsed by the RCA to the specialized ministry of chaplain. Every year all who have been endorsed and certified by the ministry services office to exercise the ministry of chaplain by the Reformed Church in America are invited to attend an annual conference. This gathering, which takes place prior to General Synod, provides a nurturing place of mutual support and accountability as well as renewal and networking possibilities for participants. The conference provides a place to experience a variety of learning models through theological reflection, and participants identify the experiences as transformative and challenging. They return to their workplace not only refreshed but better equipped for their various ministries.

Commissioned Pastors

"The vision of the Reformed Church in America in the twenty-first century is to see a new reformation of lay people equipped and inspired to serve Christ and his church." —Report on the summit to study lay pastoral ministry in the RCA, *MGS 2002*, p. 293

A commissioned pastor is an elder commissioned by a classis to serve in a specific role within a congregation, the classis, or a specialized ministry. Commissioned pastors are church planters, Christian educators, youth leaders, and executive pastors and in many other significant ministry roles. They are valuable ministry partners as the RCA identifies, equips, and empowers the leadership necessary to live into Our Call.

The commissioned pastors program works with leaders for whom a seminary education is not practical or possible. A personalized training program is designed around each person's gifts and calling and usually includes mentoring, coaching, college or university classes, distance learning classes through a seminary, and hands-on ministry experiences. The program equips each participant to serve in his or her specific classis. Training programs vary by region and are coordinated and contextualized by classis. Eighty-two commissioned pastors are currently serving in ministry; an additional eighty-six are in training.

The General Synod Council has created a Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team to facilitate the sharing of learning and best practices, oversight of standards, and coordination of efforts.

Specialized Interim Ministers

Interim ministry continues to be a useful specialty within the RCA. Ministry Services maintains a roster of qualified interims, monitors their current availability, and provides their names upon request. The specialized interim ministers are invited to an annual gathering which provides time for strengthening ties, sharing stories and resources, as well as rest and a renewing awareness of God's calling.

Chaplain Practices Ministry of Presence in Japan

During a recent two-week military training in Sendai, Japan, chaplain Hyeon-Joong (Mike) Kim practiced a "ministry of presence" with the soldiers. Kim and chaplain assistant Joseph Huewitt delivered hot soup and coffee to 120 soldiers on the first day of training, which included cold-weather training exercises on a snowy mountain.

"My battalion, an active duty unit which stations in Okinawa, provided logistical support for this exercise," says Kim. "Before this exercise, the soldiers from South Carolina and I had never worked together. I was a total stranger to those whom I was supposed to serve for two weeks. I needed to get to know them fast, so I could provide them ministry properly.

"Passing out the soup and coffee in the field was the perfect plan to serve them and introduce me. The soldiers were happy to have my soup and coffee instead of eating Meals-Ready-to-Eat."

Kim says that his role model for ministry is Jesus Christ. "When people were hungry, Jesus fed them; when people were hungry in spirit, Jesus preached to them. My goal, as a military chaplain, is showing the grace of our Lord Jesus in the very lives of soldiers and their family members as well."

Chaplain (Captain) Kim is deployed to Japan as part of the Logistical Task Force 505th.

Renewing People for Changing Ministry

A major opportunity before the revitalization and leadership staff of the RCA is to listen to God and discern how the powerful and transformative movement of coached revitalizing networks can be extended to more pastors throughout the denomination, and how the benefits of networks be made available to congregational leaders as well.

Already, throughout the Reformed Church in America, elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders are experiencing the benefits of participating in the Purposeful Living process. Purposeful Living is a primary tool being used by pastoral leaders as they develop personal calling statements in their coached revitalizing networks. As an extension of their work in networks, pastors and network coaches/facilitators are guiding congregational leaders through the same process. The result is a growing group of leaders who have a clearer sense of who God created them to be, what God is shaping them to do, and where God is challenging them to go. In this way, renewed leadership contributes to revitalizing existing congregations and multiplying new ministries and congregations.

The Reformed Church in America offers a comprehensive program throughout the denomination that calls, forms, nurtures, and renews ministers, elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders, encouraging them to focus outward in mission toward a world eager to hear and embrace good news.

GSC LEADERSHIP ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for leadership follows:

GSC Global Ends Policy

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

Leadership Ends Policy

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations that are building a healthy, growing future by renewing existing leadership and identifying, calling forth, and training people with gifts for leadership.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

This ends policy calls the GSC staff to collaborate with congregations, classes, and regional synods in ways specific to each region to make a difference in the experience of three distinct recipients in order that:

- Congregations are resourced for their work of leadership development.
- Existing leadership experiences ongoing renewal.
- Emerging leadership (congregational and pastoral) is identified, called forth, and trained to exercise leadership in the life of the congregation in the world God loves.

This ends policy has a long-term time horizon—2013 and beyond—and therefore requires intermediate benchmarks for the years between 2008 and 2013. Those benchmarks must delineate:

- Specific leadership development processes and tools the GSC offers congregations and a means to account for the use of those processes by leaders.
- The number of congregational leaders intentionally seeking renewal and the impact of those efforts on their lives and leadership.
- The number of emerging pastoral leaders identified, the type of leadership that is needed, and the equipping processes employed to develop, nurture, and support these leaders.

To that end, the appropriate GSC staff members have identified the following goals.

Goal for congregational leader renewal: By 2013, congregational leaders (whether in an ordained office or not) in at least four hundred RCA congregations have developed and are guided by a personal calling statement and are drawing on training that helps them lead congregations more faithfully and fruitfully.

Outcomes:

- At least ten to fifteen congregational leaders in each of at least four hundred RCA congregations will have developed their own personal calling statement.
- Consistories and congregational leaders in at least 250 RCA congregations will have a clear plan for nurturing existing leaders, and for identifying, calling, equipping, and supporting new leaders.
- Congregational leaders in 250 congregations, in partnership with their pastoral leaders, have collaboratively led a process through which they discerned their congregation's mission, vision, and values and have taken specific steps to place God's mission at the center of their life and ministry.
- Consistories in at least 250 RCA congregations have adopted a governance model:
  - That is consistent with their discernment concerning God's mission for their congregation.
  - Through which they lead their congregations in missional engagement.
  - That draws on an RCA understanding of the parity of the offices.
- Elders and deacons in 50 percent of RCA congregations, when surveyed, will say that they are equipped for their specific role.

Strategies:

- Use the Purposeful Living process in various settings:

- Equip and empower all facilitators of pastors networks to launch the Purposeful Living process in the congregations of all network members accompanied by a plan to multiply its use in those congregations.
- Introduce the updated Purposeful Living process as part of annual training events for at least four hundred consistories and encourage its use in those congregations.
- Train people in regional synods to lead Purposeful Living retreats for clusters of congregational leaders and/or to coach individual congregations through the process.

- Use existing RCA resources and develop new resources that will assist congregations in identifying, calling, and equipping congregational leaders—especially elders and deacons.
  - Develop a process that will help congregations identify, develop, and elect strong spiritual leaders who will place God's mission at the heart of their work as leaders—especially in consistories.
  - Develop consistory training materials that equip and empower consistories for their role of collaborative leadership with their pastoral leader(s) and that focus on their shared role as representatives of Christ and Christ's mission in and through their congregations.
    - Continue to refine, distribute, and employ existing RCA materials that help deacons and elders claim their distinctive roles.
    - Collaborate with regional synods and classes to provide annual training for consistories and new leaders.
    - Equip and empower consistories to be accountable "coach trainers" who are trained and provided the resources needed to train coaches to serve within various types of congregational ministries.
- Develop congregational revitalization processes that will:
  - Help congregations prayerfully discern God's mission, vision, values, and future story for their congregation in their specific context.
  - Take specific steps to move toward their full redemptive potential.
- Assist congregations as they evaluate existing governance models and employ new ones.
- Survey elders and deacons regularly to assess current levels of training and identify new needs.

Data:

- Updated versions of Purposeful Living—one version for congregational leaders and one for pastors—were produced in 2009 along with a companion facilitator's guide.
  - This material has been distributed to all facilitators of pastors networks.
  - Congregational leadership teams in twelve RCA congregations participating in a joint effort between Western Theological Seminary (WTS) and the General Synod Council have done the Purposeful Living process.
  - Retreats for congregational leaders employing Purposeful Living are being held throughout the RCA.
  - Elders and deacons who have completed the Purposeful Living process and developed their own personal calling statements are being invited to use this resource within their congregations.
- Multiple efforts to equip and empower consistories for their work are bearing fruit:
  - During the last year, regional leadership training events as well as consistory workshops and retreats have provided opportunities for the coordinator of consistory training to nurture and encourage existing leaders throughout the RCA.
  - A training resource for RCA consistories, *Deacons and Elders: Called to Serve*, is widely used to equip deacons and elders to be better prepared to serve as leaders in their congregations.

- The coordinator of consistory training is partnering with the coordinator for discipleship to promote the concept of triad discipleship and discipling as a mutual process of peer mentoring for congregational leaders.

- Specific processes for congregational revitalization are being piloted and evaluated:
  - Churches on the Grow, an RCA initiative designed to help churches achieve both spiritual and numerical growth, launched in 2009 with a pilot group of eleven churches.
    - The process aims to jump-start growth in participating churches by pairing them with a point person who helps them connect with resources and people who can help them reach their goals.
    - Seven GSC staff members are currently serving as point people for the first group of Churches on the Grow, each serving one or two churches. Each works directly with an area of Our Call and brings different resources and areas of expertise to the table.
    - The three-year Churches on the Grow commitment has three major components. First, each participating church must set aside at least 3 percent of its budget to finance any new church initiatives that come out of Churches on the Grow (for example, a new discipleship program or a community outreach program). Second, each church must form a grow team from within its membership. The grow team's role is to facilitate the Churches on the Grow process. Third, the pastor of each church must commit to being coached through the RCA's coaching program.
  - Through a partnership between the RCA, WTS, the Synods of Mid-America and Great Lakes, and seventeen congregations:
    - Twenty pastors have participated in Purposeful Living.
    - Leadership teams from seventeen congregations representing 115 congregational leaders worked through the Purposeful Living process.
    - Pastors and leaders in these congregations are being equipped together to lead long-term, deep, and ongoing congregational transformation.
    - The learning from this initiative is being explored and applied in a trial process for pastors networks in the Synod of the Great Lakes and the Synod of Mid-America. This will be a three- to five-year process that will include new information for congregational leaders, assignments to be completed together, and assessments that ensure a level of quality that will lead to transformational learning and change.
  - The coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice is working with congregations throughout the RCA to engage their communities by developing Christian development organizations as a way to missionally impact their communities and revitalize their congregations.
  - The coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice collaborated with the coordinator for consistory training to develop the Church-Based Community Outreach Resource Guide, which is available on the RCA's website in an updated version.

- The coordinator of consistory training is working with the Fresh Wind Task Force in a process of inquiry and evaluation, listening for best practices that might be shared with others in order to propose ways for the Reformed Church in America to better select, equip, empower, encourage, and nurture growth in leaders throughout the RCA, and to determine the best governance model for their congregations.

- Elders and deacons have been surveyed concerning their current levels of training and what they still require. Results of that survey are included in the Fresh Wind Task Force report.

Network Works Wonders for New Pastors

"Our first year as an affinity group has been a powerful and transformative experience," says Ben Bruins, pastor of First Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin, and facilitator of an affinity network of young pastors.

The group includes seven pastors, from New Jersey to Iowa—Bruins, Dan Eisnor, Jody Habink, Billy Norden, Phil Pratt, Greg Town, and Joel Vander Wal. They connect weekly by blog; monthly by Skype, a free Internet phone service; and in person at an annual retreat.

"Every week a different member of the group leads a blog discussion that ties into one of the main pillars of our group: transformational learning, covenantal accountability, and collegial support," Bruins says. "We continue to seek to reimagine the gospel in our specific cultural contexts."

Last fall, network members met for a retreat in Lake George, New York. "The goal of the retreat was to work through Purposeful Living [a personal renewal process], worship God together, and be renewed through fellowship with one another," says Bruins. "Many in our group already carried deep wounds from our first two years in ministry. We left Lake George reinvigorated for ministry and recommitted to our affinity group.

"We are incredibly excited to continue our growth in ministry together."

Goal: By 2013, every pastor in the RCA who desires a coaching relationship will have available to her/him a choice of coaches who are well equipped and qualified to provide excellent coaching.

Outcomes:

- By 2013, the RCA will have more than 150 well-equipped, qualified, and supported coaches available to come alongside pastors and other key denominational leaders.
- By 2013, more than four hundred RCA pastors will be in a coaching relationship that they will self-identify as helping them be more faithful and fruitful in their ministry.

Strategies:

- A comprehensive coach training process will be developed, evaluated, and continuously refined.
  - The foundational coach training process will be offered two times a year in three geographic areas of the denomination: East, Midwest, and Far West.
  - From the current list of people who have been trained as coaches, twenty-four each year will be selected to become lead coaches.
- The lead coach development process is being instituted to insure that excellent coaches are available to RCA pastors.
  - Lead coaches will form a "pool" of people who are being coached by excellent coaches, are constantly developing as coaches, and are being evaluated in order to provide excellent coaching for others.
  - As requests for coaches come in, the coordinator for church health and coaching matches a trained and coached RCA coach with a person desiring a coach.

Data:

- Coach training and development data:
  - Four hundred fifty people have received an orientation to coaching through foundational coach training.

- One hundred fifty people completed the entire foundational coach training process and are prepared to coach.
- Approximately 150 other people have been exposed to coach training in earlier versions of network facilitator training and Natural Church Development (NCD) coach training.
- Twenty-four people are currently engaged in the lead coach development process.
  - This one-year process is designed for people who have completed foundational coach training.
  - Those invited commit to continued development as coaches, to being assessed as coaches, and to coaching two to three RCA pastors or staff each year.
  - Rodger Price, Ken Eriks, and Vicky Menning are providing coaching and training for this coach development process.
  - Each year an additional twenty-four people will be invited to take part in the lead coach development process.
  - At the present time three of the initial twenty-four coaches have completed this advanced training.

- Since June of 2009, 125 people have been matched with coaches in this new coach development process.
  - Many other pastors throughout the RCA are in coaching relationships through their pastors networks, the NCD process, or through other means.

Goal for development of new pastoral leadership: By 2013:

- **At least one hundred new ordained or commissioned pastoral leaders will be entering the RCA annually.**
- **Every new leader who desires it will be supported during at least the first five years of ministry with a coach and within a coached revitalizing network.**
- **Pastoral leaders with a clear sense of calling to turn-around ministry or church planting will receive specialized training for those roles.**
- **The RCA's pool of new pastoral leadership will include 35 percent racial/ethnic minorities.**

Outcomes:

- By 2013 we will actively nurture openness to God's call into pastoral ministry in the lives of at least five hundred RCA young people from high school through college, and at least 150 of these young people will be racial/ethnic minorities.
- By 2013, of the 150 racial/ethnic minority young adults discerning or answering a call to ministry with whom we are in relationship, at least fifty will come from within the RCA.
- By 2013, every new pastoral leader entering the RCA ministry each year who desires it will have been assessed as a potential church planter, and at least twenty-five of these emerging leaders will have received specialized training, coaching, and experience in church planting as part of their preparation for ministry.
- By 2013, every new pastoral leader entering RCA ministry each year who desires it will have been assessed as a potential "turn-around" or "redevelopment" pastor, and at least fifty new leaders, in partnership with their congregational leadership, will have received specialized training and coaching for leading a congregational "turn-around."
- By 2013 at least 25 percent of the new pastoral leaders entering RCA ministry will have specialized training in multicultural ministry—either as a planter or a revitalizing leader.
- The percentage of RCA pastoral leaders leaving the ministry in their first five years in the ministry will be 10 percent or less than the percentage in 2007.
- Seventy-five percent of pastors who accept a second call after four to ten years will be equipped to discern her or his potential new call through the lens of a personal

calling statement, and with the increased self-awareness that comes through coaching and participation in a network.
- By 2013, classes training commissioned pastors and commissioning them to ministry will have all of the resources they need to do this with excellence in their varied contexts.

Strategies:
- Nurture call in young people:
  - Continue to improve our Call Waiting program and in that way improve our ability to communicate with and pray for people with leadership potential whom God may be calling into ministry, and connect this with initiatives such as Still Small Voice, Leaders on the Horizon, the Youth Team, and others which may emerge.
  - Assist consistories in ways to use the fourth question in the annual constitutional inquiry concerning nurturing call in the lives of young people in more faithful, intentional, and fruitful ways.
  - Strengthen the Seminarian Seminar in order to clarify its unique contributions and build on the relationships begun there in the years following participation in the seminar.
  - Nurture a healthier and more consistent climate for candidate care throughout the forty-six classes of the RCA.
- Discipleship, leadership, and the GSC racial/ethnic ministries staff will collaborate to develop African American/black, Hispanic, and Pacific/Asian youth as current and future leaders in order to develop more pastoral leaders from within RCA racial/ethnic congregations.
- Work with WTS to develop specialized training for church planters and develop specialized tracks for them within the curriculum.
- Work with WTS and New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) to identify turn-around leaders and develop specialized "tracks" for them within the curriculum and embed the skills of leading a revitalizing congregation deeply into the curriculum for all candidates.
- Work with NBTS to more fully develop ministry development tracks in multiracial and multicultural ministry and missional urban ministry
- Sustain pastors through the first five years of ministry—through the first call:
  - Deepen our relationship with WTS and develop fruitful relationships with NBTS and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) through which we continuously improve leadership development during the M.Div. years and proactively support development of new leaders during the first five years of ministry through coaching, networks, and other means still to be developed.
  - Work with the MFCA to include new pastoral leaders in networks and coaching relationships as these leaders enter ministry.
- Strengthen clarity of call and continuously improve the pastoral placement process.
  - Engage pastors in networks, Purposeful Living, and other discernment processes that will deepen self-awareness and lead to increasingly fruitful ministry and second calls.
  - Practice continuous improvement in congregational transitions, pastoral placement, and congregational search services so the percentage of pastoral dissolutions that occur under stress or duress is less than 5 percent.
- Commissioned pastors:
  - Share best practices for training and developing commissioned pastors throughout the RCA and include them in networks and coaching relationships.
  - Work with various partners in the translation and/or program development of commissioned pastor training materials, resources, courses, and processes for people for whom English is not the first or primary language.

Data:

- Call Waiting, Still Small Voice, and Seminarian Seminar have been brought together under the leadership of the coordinator for pastoral services and a more complete database of participants is being constructed.
- The RCA and WTS have conducted an in-depth survey of all RCA graduates in the past five years (from NBTS, the MFCA, and WTS) and are using the information from that survey to shape future leadership development efforts.
- The MFCA, NBTS, WTS, and the RCA funded a pilot effort through a part-time person serving as a regional coordinator for candidate care to study and improve the process of candidate care in ten RCA classes drawn from three regional synods.
  - People involved in care of students in twenty-two classes were brought together for training, sharing of best practices, and mutual resourcing in February 2010.
  - A survey is being conducted now to evaluate the event and determine next steps.
- The director of congregational mission, the coordinator for leader renewal and networks, and the coordinator for church health and coaching are active team members in the Cooper Missional Leadership program and the Ridder Leadership Initiative at WTS.
  - In the fall of 2010, the staff persons identified above will teach an elective course at WTS entitled "Leading the Revitalizing Church in Mission."
- The director of congregational mission and a broad partnership of congregations that call themselves the ecumenical partners have developed an assessment tool for "turn-around pastors" called the "Mission Redeveloper."
  - Pastors throughout the RCA are being invited to take that assessment and conversations have begun with two regional synods about how its use can be implemented.
- The director of congregational mission convenes the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team and has initiated conversations about more complete ways to include commissioned pastors in RCA life and ministry.
  - A Commissioned Pastor Task Force convened in January 2010 as a result of the report of the president of the General Synod in 2009. They brought a report to General Synod 2010 about current practices and suggestions for strengthening this work.

RETIRED MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

During 2009 thirty-seven RCA ministers of Word and sacrament retired from active service. Those who retired were recognized by a display of their photographs and service records as well as by General Synod's endorsement of appreciation for their years of faithful and dedicated ministry in the church.

R-67
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.

David P. Baak
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Arthur Caliandro
New York, New York

William E. Faulkner
West Glenville, New York

James W. Ferrone
South China, Maine

Darrell Franken
Holland, Michigan

Douglas W. Fromm
Mahwah, New Jersey

Philip A. Grawburg
Gainesville, Florida

Donald Healy
Danbury, Connecticut

David M. Hensley
Chandler, Minnesota

Jai Hun Jung
Cresskill, New Jersey

Cornelis B. Koolhaas
Cumming, Georgia

E. Joy Kulvicki
Belle Mead, New Jersey

Sonny Lai
Park Ridge, Illinois

Duane W. Laman
Norwalk, Iowa

Paul S. Lin
Little Neck, New York

Samuel C. Lin
Hicksville, New York

Joseph A. Loux
Hannacroix, New York

Bruce A. Menning
Walker, Michigan

Barbara Morphew
Golden, Colorado

Daniel L. Ogden
Lavallette, New Jersey

A. Rand Peabody
Medford, Massachusetts

Michael Pierce
Wayland, Michigan

R. Alan Plishker
Annandale, Virginia

Dennis E. Redeker
Branson, Missouri

Raymond Rivera
Bronx, New York

Marchiene Rienstra
Douglas, Michigan

Eugene E. Roberts
Plantation, Florida

James R. Schoon
Fremont, California

P. Stephan Sickler
Port Ewen, New York

Vernon J. Sterk
Holland, Michigan

James A. Stralow
Freeport, Illinois

Calvin L. Tysen
Waverly, Ohio

John W. Vander Roest
Zeeland, Michigan

Richard A. Welscott
Byron Center, Michigan

Isaac R. West
Homewood, Illinois

C. Bruce Wierks
Holland, Michigan

Arlene R. Wilhelm
New Paltz, New York
(ADOPTED)

NECROLOGY

Necrology Report 2009

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John Vander Tuin

John Vander Tuin was born on April 14, 1919, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He studied at Calvin College from 1937 to 1939 and at the University of Michigan from 1940 to 1941 and completed his studies at Roberts Wesleyan College in 1957. His theological education was received at Gordon Divinity School, from which he graduated in 1960.

Mr. Vander Tuin was licensed by the Classis of Rochester in 1960 and ordained in 1961. He pastored the following congregations: Grace Congregational Church, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, from 1960 to 1962; Kinderhook, New York, from 1963 to 1970; East Williamson, New York, from 1970 to 1981.

Mr. Vander Tuin died on January 18, 2009, in Middlebury, Vermont. He was eighty-nine years old.

Arnold John Van Lummel

Arnold John Van Lummel was born on September 3, 1921, in Paterson, New Jersey. He began his undergraduate studies at Northwestern Junior College and then studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1945. His theological education began at Western

Theological Seminary and was completed at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1951.

Mr. Van Lummel was licensed by the Classis of Passaic in 1947 and ordained by the Classis of Philadelphia the same year. He pastored Clover Hill Reformed Church in Flemington, New Jersey, from 1947 to 1958 and Grand Avenue Reformed Church in Asbury Park, New Jersey, from 1959 to 1990. Mr. Van Lummel also served as a lecturer at New Brunswick Theological Seminary from 1960 to 1964 and as stated clerk of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics from 1961 to 1990.

Mr. Van Lummel died on February 4, 2009, in Warsaw, New York. He was eighty-seven years old.

William Martin Donkersloot

William Martin Donkersloot was born on December 28, 1947, in Clifton, New Jersey. He began his collegiate studies at Montclair State College and completed them at Northwestern College, from which he graduated in 1972. He attended Western Theological Seminary from 1972 to 1974 and completed his theological education at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1988.

Mr. Donkersloot was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Passaic in 1988. He began his ministry as an assistant pastor at First Reformed Church in Tampa, Florida, from 1974 to 1976; Morningside in Sioux City, Iowa, from 1976 to 1981; and Church on the Hill in Norco, California, from 1981 to 1984. He then pastored the following congregations: Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, from 1985 to 1994; First, Lafayette, Indiana, from 1994 to 2004; and Inwood, Iowa, from 2004 to 2009.

Mr. Donkersloot died on March 10, 2009, in Inwood, Iowa. He was sixty-one years old.

Sylvester Henry Moths

Sylvester Henry Moths was born on December 25, 1923, in Brown County, Wisconsin. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1953. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1956. He also studied at Calvin Theological Seminary in 1962.

Mr. Moths was licensed by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1956 and ordained by the Classis of Muskegon the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Ferry Memorial, Montague, Michigan, from 1956 to 1961; Ada, Michigan, from 1961 to 1965; Bethel, Brandon, Wisconsin, from 1965 to 1971; First, Boyden, Iowa, from 1971 to 1985; and Community, Spring Valley, Arizona, from 1987 to 1991. Following his retirement he served from 1987 to 1994 as a part-time pastor at Spring Valley Community Church in Mayer, Arizona,.

Mr. Moths died on March 17, 2009, in Peoria, Arizona. He was eighty-five years old.

Allene J. (Creighton-Schmalzriedt) Lee

Allene Juliet Creighton-Schmalzriedt Lee was born on April 6, 1928, in Union City, New Jersey. She was adopted by the Rev. Herbert and Alice Schmalzriedt. She studied at Hunter College and then received her nursing degree at St. Luke's Nursing School in New York City in 1955 while also studying at the Biblical Theological Seminary in New York City. She also earned a degree at Beirut University College.

Ms. Lee entered missionary service and served in Oman from 1955 to 1959. She then taught nursery and kindergarten at the American Community School in Beirut from 1964 to 1975.

Ms. Lee died on March 25, 2009, in Madison, Wisconsin. She was eighty years old.

Herman Edward Luben

Herman Edward Luben was born on March 6, 1918, in Coopersville, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1938. His theological education started at Western Theological Seminary and was completed at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1942. He also earned a master of arts degree from the University of Chicago in 1948.

Mr. Luben was licensed by the Classis of Muskegon and ordained by the Classis of South Long Island in 1942. He pastored the following congregations: Community, Baldwin, New York, from 1942 to 1945; Gould Memorial, Roxbury, New York, from 1948 to 1958; Christ Community, Utica, New York, from 1958 to 1970; Saint Thomas, Virgin Islands, from 1970 to 1974; and International Church, Luzern, Switzerland, from 1984 to 1987. He also served as secretary for new life and evangelism for the RCA's General Program Council from 1974 to 1984; executive director, Commmission on Worship and Evangelism, National Council of Churches, from 1987 to 1989; and as administrator, Common Worship and the Arts, National Council of Churches, from 1990 to 1994. He also served an English-speaking church in Athens, Greece, in his retirement.

Mr. Luben died on April 15, 2009. He was ninety-one years old.

George J. Ammerman

George J. Ammerman was born on April 12, 1915, in Clara City, Minnesota. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1939. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1942.

Mr. Ammerman was licensed by the Classis of New Brunswick in 1942 and ordained by the Classis of Monmouth the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Red Bank, New Jersey, from 1942 to 1946; First, Clifton, New Jersey, from 1946 to 1952; and Second, Tarrytown, New York, from 1952 to 1980.

Mr. Ammerman died on May 5, 2009, in Greensboro, North Carolina. He was ninety-four years old.

Henry Vander Schaaf

Henry Vander Schaaf was born on May 18, 1918, in Maurice, Iowa. He began his studies at Northwestern Junior College and completed them at Central College, from which he graduated in 1942. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1945.

Mr. Vander Schaaf was licensed and ordained by the Classis of East Sioux in 1945. He pastored the following congregations: First, Sibley, Iowa, from 1945 to 1951; Prairie View, Kansas, from 1951 to 1957; Steen, Minnesota, from 1957 to 1967; and First, Buffalo Center, Iowa, from 1967 to 1982.

Mr. Vander Schaaf died on June 23, 2009. He was ninety-one years old.

Alvin Eugene Hospers

Alvin Eugene Hospers was born on October 9, 1927, in Hull, Iowa. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1951. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1954.

Mr. Hospers was licensed by the Classis of West Sioux in 1954 and ordained by the Classis of Rochester the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Pultneyville, Williamson, New York, from 1954 to 1959; Bethel, Brandon, Wisconsin, from 1959 to 1964; Central, Oskaloosa, Iowa, from 1964 to 1971; and Second, Grand Haven, Michigan, from 1971 to 1991. He served as interim in Conklin, Michigan, from 1991 to 1992 and as minister for visitation at Eighth, Wyoming, Michigan, from 1993 to 1999.

Mr. Hospers died in Grand Haven, Michigan, on July 23, 2009. He was eighty-one years old.

Robert Neal Peterson

Robert Neal Peterson was born on August 3, 1936, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He studied at Hope College from which he graduated in 1958. His theological education began at Western Theological Seminary and was completed at New Brunswick Theological Seminary from which he graduated in 1961.

Mr. Peterson was licensed by the Classis of South Grand Rapids in 1961 and ordained by the Classis of Columbia-Greene the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Linlithgo, Livingston, New York, from 1961 to 1966; Second, Coxsackie, New York, from 1966 to 1971; Riverside Community, Cleveland, Ohio, from 1971 to 1975; Christ Community, Utica, New York, from 1975 to 1987; and Bethany, Albany, New York, from 1987 to 1999. He also served as the president of the Regional Synod of Albany ifrom 1983 to 1984 and as the stated clerk from 1998-2002.

Mr. Peterson died on July 26, 2009. He was seventy-two years old.

Virginia Turpin Muilenburg

Virginia Turpin Muilenburg was born on February 3, 1919, in Lorman, Mississippi. She studied at the University of California, from which she graduated in 1940. She also attended the Chinese Language School at Cornell University.

Mrs. Muilenberg began her career as a public school teacher in California, where she worked from 1941 to 1944. In 1946 she became a career missionary in the RCA and served with her husband, John, in China from 1946 to 1950 and in the Philippines from 1952 to 1967.

Mrs. Muilenberg died on August 3, 2009. She was ninety years old.

Russell Frank Pater

Russell Frank Pater was born on September 3, 1930, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1952. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1955. He also earned a master's degree in religious education from Union Theological Seminary in 1956.

Mr. Pater was licensed by the Classis of Philadelphia in 1955 and ordained by the Classis of Saratoga in 1956. He pastored First Reformed Church, Wynantskill, New York, from 1956 to 1975 and Brighton Reformed Church, Rochester, New York, from 1975 to 1995. Mr. Pater also served as vice president of the Regional Synod of Albany in 1974 and as stated clerk from 1974 to 1975.

Mr. Pater died on August 3, 2009. He was seventy-eight years old.

Donald Arthur McCabe

Donald Arthur McCabe was born on September 21, 1922, in Richmond Hill, Queens, New York. He studied at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.

Mr. McCabe was licensed by the Classis of Newark in 1953 and ordained by the Classis of Poughkeepsie the same year. He served as a student pastor at Old Brick Church in Marlboro, New Jersey, from 1950 to 1953 and then pastored the following congregations: Arlington, Poughkeepsie, New York, from 1953 to 1957; First, Hackensack, New Jersey, from 1957 to 1961; Community, Feasterville, Pennsylvania, from 1961 to 1972; Locust Valley, New York, from 1972 to 1980; and Readington, New Jersey, from 1980 to 1990. Mr. McCabe was president of the Regional Synod of New Jersey in 1960 and of the Reginal Synod of New York in 1977.

Mr. McCabe died in Quincy, Pennsylvania, on August 7, 2009. He was eighty-six years old.

John Howard Maassen

John Howard Maassen was born on May 3, 1920, in Beaverdam, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1942. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1949.

Mr. Maassen was licensed by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1949 and ordained by the Classis of Rochester the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Palmyra, New York, from 1949 to 1951; Fourth, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1951 to 1955; Zion, Grandville, Michigan, from 1955 to 1961; Hingham, Wisconsin, from 1961 to 1965; and Calvary, Des Moines, Iowa, from 1965 to 1970. He also served as field secretary for the Regional Synod of Chicago from 1970 to 1985 and as associate pastor at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, from 1985 to 1993. Mr. Maassen was president of the Regional Synod of Chicago from 1963 to 1964.

Mr. Maassen died in Venice, Florida, on August 10, 2009. He was eighty-nine years old.

Henry Vander Bilt

Henry Vander Bilt was born on May 10, 1915, in Rocky Valley, Iowa. He studied at the Reformed Bible Institute and was granted a dispensation by the General Synod in 1973.

Mr. Vander Bilt was ordained by the Classis of Dakota in 1973. He served as lay pastor at Hope Reformed Church in Westfield, North Dakota, from 1971 to 1973. Following his ordination, he served Hope as pastor from 1973 to 1978.

Mr. Vander Bilt died in Battle Creek, Michigan, on August 25, 2009. He was ninety-four years old.

George Jacob "Jake" Holler

George Jacob Holler was born on October 6, 1922, in Albany, New York. He studied at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1946. He received a master of arts degree from Western Michigan University in 1957. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951.

Mr. Holler was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Albany in 1951. He served in the mission field for the RCA in the Middle East from 1946 to 1949 and from 1951 to 1970. Following his return from mission work he was dismissed to the Presbyterian Church in 1971 and received back by the Classis of Columbia-Greene in 1981. He then served First Reformed Church in Chatham, New York, from 1982 to 1988.

Mr. Holler died in Dowling Park, Florida, on August 31, 2009. He was eighty-six years old.

Gerald Gene "Ozzie" Osland

Gerald Gene Osland was born on March 28, 1932, in Cresco, Iowa. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1955. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958.

Mr. Osland was licensed by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of West Central the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Montclair, Denver, Colorado, from 1958 to 1962; Pleasant Valley, Holland, Iowa, from 1962 to 1971; First, Sanborn, Iowa, from 1971 to 1992; First, Bristow, Iowa, from 1992 to 1997.

Mr. Osland died in Rochester, Minnesota, on September 3, 2009. He was seventy-seven years old.

Robert James Block

Robert James Block was born on July 5, 1930, in Little Rock, Iowa. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1952. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958. He also earned a master of arts degree in Near Eastern languages and literature from the University of Michigan in 1964.

Mr. Block was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Germania in 1958. He was a short-term missionary at Basrah, Iraq, from 1952 to 1953 prior to his seminary education. Following seminary, he served in Kuwait in 1959, in Basrah from 1959 to 1967, and in Baghdad, Iraq, from 1967 to 1968. He then pastored the following congregations: Plainview, Long Island, New York, from 1970 to 1972; Newton, Iowa, from 1972 to 1985; and Lakeview Heights, Clifton, New Jersey, from 1985 to 1992. Following his pastorates he worked in specialized ministry in Christian-Muslim relations beginning in 1993 and served as contract pastor at English Neighborhood Church in Ridgefield, New Jersey, from 1993 to 1996 and as interim pastor at Shawangunk Church in Wallkill, New York, from 1998 to 1999. He then served as pastor of a congregation in Oman from 1999 to 2000.

Mr. Block died in Orange City, Iowa, on October 23, 2009. He was seventy-nine years old.

Nancy Ruth Herlein

Nancy Ruth Herlein was born in Muskegon, Michigan, on January 19, 1942. She began her undergraduate studies at Muskegon Community College, from which she graduated in 1961. She completed her undergraduate education at Hope College in 1963. She received a master's degree from Western Michigan University in 1975 and completed her theological education at Western Theological Seminary, from which she graduated in 1990.

Ms. Herlein was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Muskegon in 1990. She served as associate pastor at Central Reformed Church in Muskegon, Michigan, from 1990 to 1992.

Ms. Herlein died on November 7, 2009. She was sixty-seven years old.

Larry Dougherty

Larry Dougherty was born in Marshalltown, Iowa, in 1940 and was baptized Roman Catholic. He later made confession of faith at Community Reformed Church in Newton, Iowa, and served as an elder and lay preacher until his retirement. He studied at Dubuque Seminary and for a summer interned at First Reformed Church in Aplington, Iowa.

Mr. Dougherty was ordained by the Classis of Central Iowa and served as contract pastor at Emmanuel, Morrison, Illinois, from 2003 to 2007.

Mr. Dougherty died on November 11, 2009. He was sixty-nine years old.

G. Herbert Schneider

G. Herbert Schneider was born in the Bronx, New York, on July 27, 1910. He began his undergraduate education at Hope College in 1930 and graduated from Rutgers College in 1934. His theological education was completed at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1937.

Mr. Schneider was licensed by the Classis of New York in 1937 and ordained by the Classis of Newark the same year. He pastored Reformed Church of Linden in New Jersey from 1937 to 1943 and Community Church in Ho-ho-kus, New Jersey, from 1943 to 1975.

Mr. Schneider died on November 24, 2009. He was ninety-nine years old.

Harold J. Vande Berg

Harold J. Vande Berg was born in Hospers, Iowa, on April 1, 1919. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1942. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1946. He undertook additional graduate study at the University of Chicago from 1952 to 1953.

Mr. Vande Berg was licensed and ordained by the Classis of East Sioux in 1946. Following his ordination, he served in the mission field for the RCA in India from 1946 to 1969. After leaving India, he served as an instructor at Central College from 1969 to 1970 and as pastor at English Neighborhood Church in Ridgefield, New Jersey, from 1970 to 1977. He returned to the Middle East to serve as pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Bahrain from 1977 to 1982. He then served as pastor at English Neighborhood Church in Ridgefield, New Jersey, from 1982 until his retirement in 1986.

Mr. Vande Berg died on December 29, 2009. He was ninety years old.

Report of the General Synod Council on Global Mission

"Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God" (Colossians 1:6).

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 church, led by the Holy Spirit, is called to bear witness through God's unconditional love to those who are among the poor, who are strangers, and who have become outcasts.

The vision of the Global Mission staff of the RCA is to support congregations and members as they personally, prayerfully, and financially support mission personnel, mission partners, and mission teams to do the following:

- Bring the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard its joyful message.
- Increase the leadership, education, and technology capacities of mission partners.
- Transform the local mission engagement of congregations and members through global connections.
- Respond to disasters and injustice with actions of relief, development, and advocacy.

A Tradition of Mission

RCA Global Mission has engaged in cross-cultural mission for more than 150 years and has a record of excellence that is well known both within the RCA and throughout the ecumenical mission world. Missionaries who sign on for long-term assignments have been the backbone of RCA global missions. These career missionaries make a lasting and sustainable difference in the lives of people, communities, and indigenous churches. Emerging global churches are born, discipled, trained, sustained, and sent in mission through long-term missionaries. The RCA remains committed to long-term mission assignments as the most effective approach to the sustainable development of indigenous churches around the globe.

Volunteers and Mission Teams

RCA Global Mission is also committed to short-term volunteers and mission teams. In the last thirty years, the sending of short-term mission teams both locally and globally has escalated rapidly. RCA Global Mission is committed to facilitating mission trips that accomplish meaningful and sustainable work but, more importantly, that transform the lives of the participants, the people "on the ground," and the sending church.

RCA Global Mission is committed to long-term missionaries and short-term volunteers and mission teams. In today's world of mission, the two approaches are not in conflict. Rather, each contributes a distinctive role in God's mission to reconcile the world to himself in Jesus Christ.

Growing Global Mission Opportunities

As Christians we are called to bring the whole gospel to the whole world. We also believe that focus is critical to effective mission work. All new RCA global mission projects must clearly address one or more of the following critical priorities:

- Evangelizing unreached peoples.
- Empowering global partners.
- Equipping RCA churches and leaders for mission.
- Embracing compassion and justice.

Evangelizing Unreached Peoples

RCA missionaries and funding enable the spread of the gospel to unreached peoples around the globe:

- In Chile with the Christian Presbyterian Church.
- In Honduras with the Moravians.
- In Alaska with the services of Mission Aviation Repair Center.
- In Italy with the Waldensians.
- In Niger with the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger.
- In Kenya with the Africa Inland Church.
- In China with the China Christian Council and the Yanbian and Rajin Foundation.
- In Myanmar with the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.
- Through Scripture translation and dissemination by RCA mission personnel assigned to Wycliffe, United Bible Societies, and Audio Scripture Ministries.

Empowering Global Partners

RCA Global Mission most often works in partnership with indigenous churches. The number one priority of our global partners is leadership development. RCA missionaries and mission grants equip leaders:

- In a doctoral program based in Latin America.
- At Bible schools in Honduras; Chiapas, Mexico; and Niger.
- Through worship and discipling of believers of international congregations in Oman and Bahrain.
- At the Al Amana Centre in Oman.
- At St. Paul's United Theological College in Kenya.
- At the Evangelical Theological Seminary and Reformed Christian Church in Croatia.
- With the Ukrainian Center for Christian Cooperation.
- In Albania with the Albanian Evangelical Alliance.
- At Tokyo Union Theological Seminary in Japan.
- In Estonia with Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia.
- At the Evangelical Seminary of Caracas in Venezuela.
- Through the Quiché Evangelical Church in Guatemala.
- At Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Ethiopia.
- At seminaries of the China Christian Council in Heifei and Shenyang.
- At Tainan Theological College and Seminary and Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary in Taiwan.
- Through the diaconal program of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Dutch Reformed churches of southern Africa.
- Through the church planting center of the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.

Equipping RCA Churches and Leaders for Mission

Mutual mission describes a two-way relationship between mission partners, each of them both sending and receiving. The gifts of the global church are precious treasures for the church in the West as we seek to understand local mission in a racially diverse and religiously pluralistic world. RCA Global Mission facilitates mutual mission in several ways.

For the past several years RCA Global Mission has partnered—first with Western Theological Seminary and later expanding to include the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and New Brunswick Theological Seminary—in providing seminary students with cross-cultural immersion experiences that develop their skills to communicate the gospel effectively across cultural lines. Global Mission also sponsors experiential journeys for RCA pastors to key mission sites around the world.

RCA Global Mission is in a good position to partner in these learning experiences, since that is what it has been doing effectively for over 150 years: crossing cultural lines with the good news of the gospel in ways that are sensitive to cultures and true to the gospel. Working with RCA pastors and seminaries, Global Mission hopes to contribute to the competencies of future church leaders while building a partnership in ministry and mission with them that will last a lifetime.

Embracing Compassion and Justice

Through Global Mission missionaries and grants to mission partners, the Reformed Church in America participates in the compassion and justice proclaimed by Jesus in Luke 4: "Today this scripture [Isaiah 61] has been fulfilled in your hearing."

- The sick are healed in Nicaragua, Honduras, Chiapas, South India, Niger, Mozambique, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Bahrain.
- The broken and oppressed find wholeness and peace in Hungary, Italy, Egypt, South Korea, the United States, South India, Sudan, Palestine, and Malawi.
- Sustainable development supports brothers and sisters in Christ in Niger, Mozambique, South India, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, and South Africa.
- Children are lovingly cared for and educated in Japan; Nicaragua; Malawi; Argentina; Ecuador; Hawaiian Gardens, California; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Staten Island, New York; Mescalero and Dulce, New Mexico; and Jackson County, Kentucky.
- Through Reformed Church World Service (RCWS), RCA members continue a ministry of compassion and hope throughout our lost and broken world. Gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing and in response to crisis appeals provide emergency relief to disaster survivors, grants for rehabilitation, the development of long-term solutions, and advocacy for justice for people who are poor and hungry.

Reconciliation in Sudan

"Last week, the second week of classes, I looked out of the door of my office and saw one of our students, John Tubuwa, a Presbyterian Church of Sudan pastor who is Murle, walk past my office tenderly carrying a little fifteen-month-old toddler who was sleeping in his arms back to the dorm," says missionary Debbie Braaksma. "It is a bit unusual, though not unheard of, in Sudanese culture for men to carry little ones, but what really touched my heart was that the little girl he was carrying was the child of one of our Nuer students, Sarah Nyadech.

"The Nuer and Murle have been engaged in serious inter-ethnic conflict this year which

has claimed between 1,200 and 1,400 lives and included many abductions of children, so how wonderful it was to see that within two weeks' time such trust had developed between them: that this Nuer mother trusted this Murle man with her most precious possession—her little girl.

"We are excited not only about what is going on in the classrooms, which is amazing indeed, but the relationships that are formed between these students, who are leaders in their churches and communities, which are breaking down the barriers of ethnicity and serving as foundations for building peace. This is truly of the Spirit!"

GSC GLOBAL MISSION ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring, the RCA's general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress around various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for global mission follows.

GSC Global Ends Policy

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

Global Mission Ends Policy

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations intentionally crossing boundaries in word and deed with the love of God known in Jesus Christ resulting in:

- Evangelizing unreached peoples.
- Empowering global partners.
- Equipping RCA churches for mission.
- Embracing compassion and justice.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

This policy calls upon the GSC to make a difference through RCA Global Mission by connecting RCA churches and members in mutuality to the global church through mission personnel, projects, and partners. Global Mission is a continuing focus of the RCA. With the support of Global Mission staff, RCA congregations and members will personally, prayerfully, and financially support mission personnel, mission partners, and mission teams to do the following:

- Bring the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard its joyful message.
- Increase the leadership, education, and technology capacities of mission partners.
- Transform the local mission engagement of congregations and members through intentional global connections.
- Respond to disasters and injustice with actions of relief, development, and advocacy.

Data:

Statistics on RCA Church and Member Giving

Churches	2009	2008
RCA church pledges to Global Mission	$6,146,481	$6,084,743
Churches with no pledges	367	357
Average amount of church pledges	$11,054	$12,121
Per member averages through churches	$38.11	$36.65

Individuals	2009	2008
Total GM pledges by individuals	$335,530	$496,462
Total of individuals holding pledges	279	287
Average per person pledge	$1,202	$1,729

Reformed Church World Service	2009	2008
Donations* by individuals	$21,842	$30,673
Total donors	138	166
Average gift per person	$158	$185
Donations* by churches	$182,223	$215,821
Total churches	136	162
Average gift per church	$1,340	$1,332

*Donations do not include contributions designated for specific projects or appeals.

Financial Challenges

Every so often Global Mission finds itself having to face financial realities way beyond its control. On the one hand our staff feels the heat as we scramble to plug holes, rework budgets, and consider what could be trimmed; on the other hand we are challenged to a total dependence on God's concern for the nations and the people that still need to hear the good news of Christ's salvation. The deficit with which we began 2009 caused us to freeze salaries of missionaries and staff, limit travel of supervisors, and hold appointments of new staff. Global Mission has joined many RCA congregations in monitoring revenues and expenses even as we pray for the Lord to provide what is needed.

In spite of this, RCA congregations have been faithful in meeting their mission commitments. Some individuals have given way beyond normal to help make up for what others have not been able to do. And some churches have sacrificially paid a portion of their mission shares understanding that Global Mission has made commitments to our partners. This causes us to rejoice and give thanks.

The challenges are real. The following will help you see how the financial ups and down have affected our Global Mission staff. The review from 2003 to 2009 reflects that our staff is exactly half the size it was six years ago! In the meantime, our budget has shrunk about 20 percent, while our programming (number of missionaries and projects) has remained essentially unchanged.

2003 Executive Staff	Programming and Support Staff
Bruce Menning	Karen Bogerd
Jhonny Alicea-Báez	Zulay Mann
Roger Schrock	Assistant
Deb Braaksma	Assistant

Roger De Young	Judy Kiel
Duncan Hanson	Pete Euler
John Lee	Assistant
Rich Rienstra	Mary Hondorp (half time)
David Dethmers	Mary Hondorp (half time)
Betty Voskuil	Barb Colby
Paul Nulton	half-time assistant
Stan Perea	half-time assistant
Jay Harsevoort	Nancy Ellens
Amy De Kruyter (half time)	Kathy De Kock
13.5 executives	12 programming and support staff
25.5 total staff	

2009 Executive Staff	Programming and Support Staff
Jhonny Alicea-Báez	Karen Bogerd
Roger De Young	Mary Hondorp (half time)
David Dethmers	Mary Hondorp (half time)
Derrick Jones	Sharon Schramel
Jay Harsevoort	Nancy Ellens
Duncan Hanson	
John Lee (quarter time)	Zulay Mann
	Kathy De Kock
6.25 executives	6 programming and support staff
Total of 12.25 staff	

Partnership-in-Mission pledges by congregations and individuals are virtually the only source of revenue to carry Global Mission through these very challenging times. Investment interest income has always been a small source of income and it has slowed to a trickle. With great appreciation for the faithfulness of churches and individuals supporting RCA missionaries, and with every intention to be faithful stewards of the gifts of God's people, the following recommendation is offered.

R-68
To increase the Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) share for 2011 to $6,100; and further,

To encourage all RCA churches—and particularly the 367 RCA churches who do not support RCA missionaries through PIM shares—to take a collection for Global Mission in 2010.
(ADOPTED)

Categories and Numbers of Mission Personnel

RCA mission personnel are appointed by RCA Global Mission for specific ministry. Global Mission establishes their salaries and benefits and supervises these missionaries. **Mission partner personnel** are employed by partner organizations. They are under the supervision of the partner, who also establishes and regulates salaries and benefits, but who are accountable to supervisors for the use of programmatic resources. **Volunteers** are appointed by the RCA Mission Volunteer Program to specific job responsibilities; they generally raise their support and/or receive housing and a stipend from the receiving agency or partner.

Number of Mission Personnel by Category, 1996–2010

Year	Missionaries	Mission Partner Personnel	Volunteers	Total
1996	89	25	30	144
1997	83	24	31	138
1998	80	40	35	155
1999	74	45	34	153
2000	77	52	41	170
2001	85	45	35	165
2002	79	49	41	169
2003	75	41	46	162
2004	69	57	38	164
2005	72	62	31	165
2006	70	54	29	153
2007	74	58	21	153
2008	70	60	17	147
2009	71	56	19	146
2010	66	54	23	143

Mission Personnel Changes

Peter and Patty Ford have been transferred to St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya, to help develop a Christian-Muslim relations program like the one he founded at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Ethiopia.

Mission Partner Personnel

Martha Wanjao, the wife of Joseph Wanjao, of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, died this past January due to complications in childbirth. Martha and Joseph were being considered for assignment with the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Nkhoma Synod in Malawi. At present the appointment is on hold, and all parties are in conversation on how to encourage and support Joseph and the children during these hard times. Your prayers for the family are greatly appreciated.

Samson Maliwa, mission partner personnel who worked with the Africa Inland Church among the Orma people, passed away on August 5, 2009.

Moisés Ocampo-Torres's term of service with the two presbyteries he was accountable to in Chiapas has come to an end. After twenty years of service as the trainer of paramedics for the Tzotzils and Tzeltals in Chiapas, Moisés will return to private practice. Abel Martinez, the other paramedic trainer, who had been working side by side with Moisés among the Chols, will continue the training of paramedics. The medical program is an integral part of the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico's ministry and witness in Chiapas.

Completion of Assignment

Michael and Tena Bos accepted a call to be the pastor and teacher of the West End Collegiate Church in New York City in November 2009. Michael served for eight years as director of the Al Amana Centre in Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman. Douglas Leonard will replace Michael in Oman.

Debbie and Del Braaksma have resigned their appointment with RECONCILE in Sudan so that she could accept the position of coordinator for Africa of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Debbie began her new responsibilities this past January.

Greg and Ruth De Haan will be leaving Kenya this summer. Greg and Ruth went to Gambia in 1999 to serve with the Anglican Diocese, and in 2003 to Kenya to serve with ACROSS to strengthen churches in southern Sudan in the areas of health, food security, evangelism, and education. The De Haans will return to Minnesota to manage the family farm.

New Appointments

Doug Leonard has been appointed to replace Michael Bos as director of the Al Amana Centre in Oman. His work will include staff oversight, vision casting, communication, and developing relationships with partners and supporting organizations as well as fundraising and program design.

Mark and Debra Wilson, along with their son Zachary, will be appointed missionaries to Cambodia. Mark graduated from Western Theological Seminary (WTS) in May 2010. Mark will be assigned to Food for the Hungry Cambodia, and they will share his gifts with the Phnom Penh Bible School and the Theological Education by Extension Association in Cambodia. Before coming to WTS, Mark and Debra worked with Food for the Hungry in Cambodia for ten years.

Young Evangelist Brings Hope to Villages in Myanmar

Tim grew up in a remote village in Myanmar and committed his life to Christ when he was eight years old. Three years ago, when a Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar (RECM) evangelist came to his village, he heard about the church's evangelism training school.

"He has been a faithful and trustworthy student," says the RECM ecumenical officer and RCA mission partner.

During summer break last year, Tim and two other men traveled to remote villages to share the gospel. "There were no roads for cars or bicycles. We had to walk over three or four mountains to reach some of the villages," he says. He adds that in some places people had never heard of Jesus.

In one village, a huge crowd of people gathered and asked them to sing. They performed gospel-centered action songs. The villagers enjoyed them so much that they didn't want them to stop even after the sun went down. They ran to another town to borrow a bigger lamp, and brought back more people with them. They taught young people the action songs well into the night. They ended up spending a full week in that village.

On the way to the next village, they got lost. They sat down and were wondering what to do next, when two girls came walking up. "We have heard about what you are doing. Please come to our village," they said. They introduced the young men to the village chief, who had them spend the night at his house. After sharing the gospel and singing songs, they moved on to the next village.

Mission Volunteer Assignments

Ethiopia: J. Todd Billings

Hungary: Jeffery Lampen, Trazy Richter

Honduras: Nicole Creutz

Japan: Robyn Anderson, Travis and Angie Appelgate, Nathan Blakeslee, Myra Cubos, Tabitha Ekvall, Katharine Herbert, Josephine Kimura, Elizabeth King, Tonya Nelson, Kevin Oosting, Donald Van Antwerpen, Maribeth Voss

Palestine/Israel: Carol Luidens

Deaths

Harold Vande Berg, former RCA missionary to Bahrain and India, passed away December 29, 2009.

The Retirement of Paul and Rebecca Armerding

On January 1, 1988, Paul and Rebecca Armerding, with their daughter Charlotte and their son John, traveled to Bahrain where Paul was to serve as the chief medical officer of the American Mission Hospital. Paul and Rebecca followed on the footsteps of missionaries Samuel Zwemer, Amy Wilkes, and John and Marion Wells Thoms. These giants laid the groundwork for what is now the American Mission Hospital in the Kingdom of Bahrain, one of only three Christian mission hospitals remaining in the Arabian Gulf region, in the heart of the Muslim world.

Paul Ludwig Armerding was born in New Jersey and graduated from Rutgers University in 1969. He received his M.D. degree from Albany Medical College in New York in 1973, and completed his residency in general surgery at the Maricopa County General Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1981.

Rebecca Annete Armerding was born in Utica, New York, and graduated from Barrington College in Rhode Island with a degree in elementary education, and from the State University of New York in Albany with an M.S. in educational psychology.

Before his appointment to American Mission Hospital, Paul had been former commander of the 43rd MASH unit. The Armerdings arrived in Bahrain to head a ministry that many thought would not survive—it was small, and with limited vision and scope of activity.

Today American Mission Hospital is a vibrant institution, accredited, and with a professional staff that provides a myriad of services to the local community in two different sites. AMH supports the training and education of many young Bahrainis in health care fields. More than 40 percent of the hospital's work force is Bahraini, and therefore the hospital provides much-needed full-time career employment for the local population. Over the past ten years, the hospital has instituted twenty-four–hour urgent care services, more than doubled the capacity of the clinics, and introduced new services like dentistry, dermatology, and orthopedic and ear, nose, and throat surgery.

An update on the history of American Mission Hospital was written by Paul in his book, *Doctors for the Kingdom*, published in 2003. George Cheriyan has succeeded Paul as chief medical officer and CEO of the hospital.

R- 69
Whereas Paul and Rebecca Armerding heeded the call of God to ministry and mission by accepting an appointment and being commissioned as RCA missionaries to Bahrain in 1988; and,

Whereas Paul and Rebecca worked diligently in upgrading an

existing institution into a viable ministry, with professional staff, accreditation, and good favor with the citizens of Bahrain; and,

Whereas Paul and Rebecca used their medical, teaching, and relational gifts to encourage, heal, empower, and manifest the love of God to all around them; and

Whereas Paul and Rebecca have sensed God's call and leading to a new chapter in their lives;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the two hundred and fourth session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 10-15, 2010, at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, with gratitude to God for their lives and witness, honors Paul and Rebecca Armerding with a prayer of thanksgiving and a token of our esteem. (ADOPTED)

Retirement of Jack and Susan Dabney

After praying for Albania for twenty-two years, Jack and Susan were hired as RCA missionaries in 2000. This was a joint appointment with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to the Albanian Evangelical Alliance. After engaging in prayer for the country and its people, making trips to get a lay of the land, and making contacts, Jack and Susan saw their dream of reaching Albanians with the gospel come true and their calling to that country confirmed.

John Vincent Dabney, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, graduated from Randolph-Macon College, Union Seminary in Virginia, and Virginia Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. Before his appointment to Albania, Jack was the senior pastor of Our Lord's Community Church in Oklahoma City.

Susan, the mother of nine children, had a strong interest and concern for missions even before her marriage to Jack. In three of their four pastorates both participated in the church's mission programs, encouraging, leading, casting vision, involving the people in hands-on experiences, and engaging them in hosting Albanian exchange students. Not only did Susan and Jack pray for Albania, they opened their homes to Albanians coming to the U.S. as refugees, In one of her visits to Albania, Susan worked daily with Muslim Kosovar refugees. Susan knows how to intercede as she lives out God's heart for the lost.

R-70
Whereas Jack and Susan Dabney faithfully prayed for Albania and made themselves available to God's call to ministry and mission by accepting an appointment and being commissioned as RCA missionaries to Albania in 2000; and,

Whereas Jack and Susan gave of themselves to serve a nation and people divided by ethnic and religious differences, and a Christian minority community surrounded by a Muslim majority; and,

Whereas Jack and Susan's concern for the body of Christ in Albania led them to serve several pastor training schools and be a chaplain and professor at the Center for Christian Leadership, the Albanian Bible Institute, and Evangelical Theological College; and,

Whereas Jack and Susan modeled before the church in Albania a commitment to holistic ministry, integrity in service, and sacrificial love for others;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the two hundred and fourth session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 10-15, 2010, at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, with gratitude to God for their lives and witness, honors Jack and Susan Dabney with a prayer of thanksgiving and a token of our esteem. (ADOPTED)

Global Mission Principles

The 2008 Global Mission consultation recommended that our mission principles be reviewed and reworked to highlight the partnership nature of our mission involvement. The principles were updated and stories were gathered from our partners to highlight how these principles have been lived out in the life of the global church. The new version of the principles follows.

The world has changed dramatically since the early days of the modern missionary movement. Today over 70 percent of all Christians live in the southern hemisphere. North America is increasingly a secular society and increasingly a mission field in need of the good news of the gospel. Nonetheless, though our strategies and tools may change, the mission principles that have served the Reformed Church in America's mission program so well over the past 150 years continue to do so today:

1. **Holistic Mission**: RCA Global Mission serves the Reformed Church in America, an evangelical and ecumenical church committed to sharing and receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ through word and deed. We believe that the gospel transforms individuals through the grace and love of God and must address every facet of life, since Jesus is Lord and Creator of all of life (Matthew 25:31-46). As we share in the biblical vision of God's reign, advocating for peace and justice for God's children (Micah 6:6-8) and for God's creation (Genesis 1:26) are integral to our witness.

2. **Mission Partnerships**: Mission will be most effective when the various parts of Christ's body recognize their interdependence and work collaboratively, where none is valued more highly than another (1 Corinthians 12). RCA Global Mission works together with indigenous and ecumenical partners around the world, including in North America, and recognizes the importance both of sharing the gifts of RCA members, congregations, and agencies through our ministries and of receiving the gifts that global partners have to share. All Christians are called to be the presence of Christ both locally and globally (Acts 1:8).

3. **Long-Term Commitments**: Since all healthy mission is relational and based on an authentic appreciation of respective values and needs, RCA Global Mission commits itself to long-term relationships that enable a substantive understanding of different cultures, languages, customs, and history. Making and becoming disciples and nurturing transforming relationships takes time (Matthew 28:10-20).

4. **Mutual Mission**: Mission is the one task of the whole church to the whole world. The church in every place is called to cross cultures and barriers to share and receive the good news of the gospel. In an increasingly polycentric, multicultural world, all Christians and Christian institutions must recognize the importance of both giving and receiving, teaching and learning, sharing and listening. Because our goal is to

promote the health of the whole body of Christ and to fully develop the gifts of all believers, RCA Global Mission avoids mission placements to roles that can more effectively be carried out by the local partner.

5. **Respectful Witness**: Because Scripture teaches that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, as well as the fullest manifestation of God's revelation, and because we know that God also reveals truth through nature (Romans 1) and other religions (Hebrews 1), we engage all individuals in substantive conversation with respect and humility, trusting God's Spirit to bring a bountiful harvest.

Belhar Confession

Global Mission is waiting for the approval of the Belhar Confession as one our Standards of Unity so that it may encourage use of the confession by our partners. The message of Belhar is needed around the world, but it is critical in areas of conflict and blatant as well as latent discrimination.

While the RCA has been focusing on North America, Global Mission is poised to engage in dialogue with partners in Latin America. Citizens in Chiapas, Mexico, have had to face issues of discrimination and racism due to their Mayan heritage, as well as their religious affiliations. The same is true for the Mayan communities in Guatemala, the Garifuna in Belize, the Miskitos in Nicaragua and Honduras, blacks of African descent in Colombia, and the Mapuches in Chile. While some indigenous groups have attained some representative status in Peru and Bolivia, discrimination continues, while indigenous people groups are still being ignored in Brazil.

Some of our mission partners in Africa are not familiar with Belhar and we need to share the message with them. The need for the Christian community in Africa to be engaged in Belhar was made clear by tribal violence in Kenya and Sudan. Many of our partners in Asia can benefit from the message of unity, reconciliation, and justice—Japan and its Ainu and Korean citizens, the mountain peoples of Taiwan, the Filipinos living in Asian countries, and many indigenous groups that for the most part are ostracized and ignored.

Living Out These Priorities

Reporting of data regarding the Global Mission ends policy includes not only statistics but also narratives. Literally thousands of stories are lived out every day by RCA mission personnel and partners. The following stories related to the four critical aspects of the Global Mission ends policy provide a small yet representative "snapshot," which is the result of the RCA's historic commitment to global mission.

Evangelizing Unreached Peoples

Audio Scriptures: Chad Vanden Bosch has been providing training and consultation to missionaries and national partners involved in media ministries. This story exemplifies the fruit of a concerted effort to minister to the unreached.

> Let me set the stage for you. About a year ago, when Sergio and I were planning our first distribution trip here in Mozambique, we met a pastor working in the most northern province of Mozambique who begged us to visit his area with this project. He shared with us how his area was remote, mostly Muslim, mostly illiterate, and thoroughly lacking in materials for church growth. After hearing his passionate plea we couldn't help but add that location to our list of distribution areas.

Last March we visited this area and, after an amazing warm welcome, distributed about forty audio Bibles in Swahili, which is widely spoken in that area. Since last March we had heard little bits and pieces of stories of how the Lord was really working in that area. This year we made it a priority to visit this location again and we were once more enthusiastically received. This year we brought one hundred audio Bibles, but after seeing the incredible hunger for God's Word there, we added another seventy. Once people heard that these audio Bibles were available they were coming all hours of the night to make sure that they got their player. We even had someone walk from a village and arrive at 3:00 in the morning knocking on the door looking for a player...it was truly amazing. On our third day of distributions we went out to a new church located on a dirt two-track about ten kilometers out in the bush. It was this little church that was our glimpse of God's greatness!

The story goes like this. One of the players we distributed last year made it into the hands of a believer from one of the few local churches. Back in June this man was walking down this dirt road out to his garden and was listening to God's Word as he walked. While he was walking he passed a young man who became curious about this little "radio" this man was listening to. He stopped the man and asked lots of questions about what it was and how he had come to receive it. After listening to the audio Bible for a while and hearing many new and amazing things, the young man begged the believer to let him borrow the player. The believer could not deny him and, after explaining where he could find the local pastor administrating the Bible listening project, he left the player with him. Well, God's Word does not return void, and after a short period of time this man showed up at the pastor's house asking many questions. In the end this young man accepted Christ as his savior and more than that, asked the question as to why there was no church yet in his area. Together these two men went to the local authorities and inquired as to whether they could be allowed to build a church. Surprisingly, since these types of requests are often denied, they were granted permission to start a church. Since June, this church has grown from a single believer and an audio Bible, to now having forty-two brand new and enthusiastic believers! Isn't it amazing to see what the Lord can do through one tiny little audio Bible? I am just so excited to see the amazing things the Lord will do with these eight hundred audio Bibles we are currently distributing! He is so faithful!

Empowering Global Partners

Church of South India: Marylin Bright, a member of Christ Memorial Church in Holland, Michigan, was part of a group that traveled to India to work with Linn Gann. Linn is an RCA ecumenical coworker with the Church of South India, with the goal of equipping leaders for ministry. Marylin writes:

Life altering...that's what the seventeen days away from home have been—seeing life through others' eyes...God's, the people of India, folks standing in long airport lines, and then my own again. I was to "Come and see; go and tell." Here's a "Come and see, go and tell."

1. The leadership conference days, with the theme "Empower and Equip," were blessed by the Lord far beyond our expectations. In Vellore, close to 750 leaders were trained, far above the six hundred expected. You should have seen the day that women leaders were there, all dressed in their beautiful and colorful saris! Their smiles and conversations spoke of the joy they were experiencing! In Madanapalle, about two hundred were trained. As I personally met with women, again I saw and heard the desire to serve the Lord.

2. The Indian followers of Jesus are very grateful to God for the missionaries bringing the story of salvation to them about 160 years ago. We heard many, many stories of families coming to Christ through the work and mission of the early RCA doctors, educators, and ministers.

3. We visited many, many institutions where RCA folks had settled and built hospitals, high schools, nursery schools, colleges, etc.

4. Upon visiting Hope High School in Madanapalle and presenting a gift of four hundred Hope College pencils to the principal there, we heard how one teacher had been praying for two weeks for writing utensils since they had none (a direct answer to her prayer). Another prayer is for teachers. Three of their six teachers (yes, they only have six teachers for all of those students) are retiring at the end of this school year. They will not be able to replace the three retiring teachers with Christian teachers. This is a huge concern for the school.

5. Vellore Christian Medical Center, started by Ida Scudder, now has 2,400 beds (soon to be three thousand) beds, and treats over 4,400 outpatients daily.

6. Side by side, Christians, Hindus, and Muslims are in the same communities, going to the same schools, being treated at the same hospitals.

7. We participated in the cow distribution program (I even stood by and hugged one of the cows). Sixteen cows were given away to sixteen women who could now provide for their families. Often the husbands in these villages are alcoholics and beat their wives. These cows are life to them!

8. Seeing what the Banyan Tree Tailoring Program is to the women and girls. Upon graduation from the sewing program, each person receives a sewing machine (the old-fashioned treadle kind). In turn they are able to make a living by sewing. Amazing work!

Equipping RCA Churches for Mission

Ferry Memorial Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in Hungary: In 2008, pastor Dick Klaver at Ferry Memorial Reformed Church in Montague, Michigan, went on an RCA Global Mission trip with other RCA pastors to visit Reformed churches in Hungary. During the trip he met with leaders from two Hungarian Reformed congregations and formed a prayer partnership with Ferry Memorial. Since then, the pastors of both churches have come to visit Ferry Memorial at their expense. Besides sharing mutual prayer concerns on a weekly basis, they have learned much from each other's faith and practice. Ferry Memorial has sent gifts of prayer shawls, and the Hungarian congregations have sent a communion table cloth and baptismal kerchiefs. Pastor Klaver says, "This relationship based on prayer has been an experience of encouragement and learning for each other."

Embracing Compassion and Justice

Dominican Reformed Church and Haiti: To date, RCWS has received approximately $995,000 in contributions designated for Haiti from RCA individuals and congregations. "The people and churches of the RCA have been remarkably generous," says David Dethmers, coordinator of RCWS. "Even during this time of economic uncertainty in our own economy, folks have dug deep. Events such as those in Haiti certainly encourage all of us to count our blessings."

RCWS also continues to partner with the Dominican Reformed Church (IRD) in response to the Haiti earthquake. An additional grant of more than $15,000 in mid-February enabled the IRD to purchase and distribute food and other basic living necessities to more than 150 Haitian families.

After the delivery Yeral Ogando, secretary of the IRD, wrote, "Special thanks and blessings to all of you from Pastor Yvon and the pastors in Haiti, as well as from the congregations. On my own behalf I just can say thank you so much! You've truly been a blessing to all of us."

Report of Words of Hope

This year Words of Hope's English language radio program celebrates its sixty-fifth anniversary, having begun as *Temple Time* in 1945. As Words of Hope's primary focus shifted to international ministry over the years, the domestic broadcasts continued without much evaluation or refinement. This year, however, saw a major redevelopment of the English program. Together with Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) of the Christian Reformed Church, a new Bible teaching program has been created, using a more dynamic, conversational style to continue Words of Hope's tradition of presenting God's Word from the Reformed perspective. Hosts of the program are David Bast from Words of Hope and Robert Heerspink from BTGMI. The new program, called *Groundwork*, was launched on April 18, 2010. Words of Hope and BTGMI continue to model close cooperation and partnership in mission for their respective denominations.

Broadcasting

Albania: Along with a two-minute daily devotional program and a drama-based program called *Why?*, Words of Hope has extended its daily 15-minute Albanian Bible teaching broadcasts into the country of Kosovo. Although centuries of ethnic tensions with Serbs have tended to alienate most Kosovars from Christianity, Words of Hope's broadcasts, along with widespread appreciation for the U.S.A.'s role in Kosovo's struggle for national independence, are now helping to increase the Kosovars' openness to the saving good news of Christ.

Arab World: Follow-up to the daily half-hour Arabic language programs is carried out by the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF), in partnership with Words of Hope and Back to God Ministries International. Some responses to these gospel radio programs are received by postal mail, but more and more use modern technology—cell phone, text messages, or email. Each contact receives individual follow-up. MERF general director Victor Atallah reports: "The response of listeners to the Arabic broadcasts continues to reflect the same soul searching and disturbing questions young Muslims face. One of the issues that constantly harass their minds relates to the fact that Islam seems to be losing much credibility, prestige, and influence worldwide. We thank God for the opportunities we have to provide them with the gospel alternative."

Iran: Now more than ever, Iranians are yearning for truth—not only about their government but also about their religion. The recent controversy over the June 2009 election has prompted widespread disillusionment with Iran's Islamic government, yielding greater openness to the messages Words of Hope broadcasts by radio every night. Iranian hunger for the gospel alternative has been increasingly evident for the past several years. This has been a motivation for a notable increase in Words of Hope's Persian (Farsi) broadcasting

efforts along with a follow-up strategy to encourage and equip Iranian believers.

South Asia: Back to God Ministries International recently joined Words of Hope and indigenous partner Good Books Educational Trust in ministry partnership to South Asia. Robert Heerspink, BTGMI's executive director, observes: "We are excited about being able to provide that [holistic ministry] through this partnership with Good Books and Words of Hope. Rapid changes in media present the potential of additional ministry streams in India—Internet, CD distribution, cell phone texting. There is a need for programs reaching children and youth as well as programs that teach Scripture from a Reformed perspective."

Sudan: A core Words of Hope ministry principle is to produce programs in close geographic proximity to the target audience. Doing so in South Sudan has been very difficult due to the lack of electricity and the security problems which persist in a country long engulfed by civil war and ethnic conflict. However, Words of Hope, working through Words of Hope–Uganda, has been able to establish a production center and to train staff for Dinka language programs in Sudan. The new center is located in Rumbek, one of Sudan's neediest locations. The holistic programs produced there apply biblical truth to the difficult challenges of daily life in Sudan.

Turkey: Turkey is the only ministry field where both radio and television versions of the Words of Hope program are produced. Words of Hope is encouraged by the merger of TURK-7, an independent Christian TV ministry based in Istanbul, with SAT-7, a Christian satellite television network for the Middle East and North Africa. This will increase the broadcast time and reach of programming to Turkish speakers, an estimated 100 million people. A man in Istanbul writes: "Greetings. Last night I watched the *Words of Hope* program. What the host [Words of Hope's Turkish director Haluk Bilgen] said from the Bible really affected me. My system of belief—the way I've been burdened all my life with living under punishment because of the way religion was explained to me—has been turned upside down. I would be very happy if you could help me on this matter, the matter of finding God."

Uganda: The completion of a new communications center for Words of Hope–Uganda on the campus of Uganda Christian University in Mukono was a highlight of the year. The shift to a modern facility has dramatically boosted operational efficiency and future potential. The new facility has enabled the expansion of the staff and its production capacity. The Uganda leadership team has effectively developed a network of regional production volunteers in a growing number of dioceses. These teams monitor local broadcasts and in some cases produce program content themselves. The Church of Uganda partnership with Words of Hope–Uganda is a strategic opportunity to enhance and enlarge the kingdom throughout East Africa.

Internet Outreach

The year 2009 saw a complete redesign of the Words of Hope website to make it both more attractive and user-friendly. Ongoing features on the woh.org website include *Daily Reflections*, *Read the Bible in a Year*, and links to the English-language radio programs (*Groundwork* and *Spotlight*). The site also features an archive of the weekly Words of Hope radio programs dating back to 1988. The redesign brought some exciting new features that especially focus on Words of Hope's international ministries. Visitors can now learn about each language that is broadcast, as well as see photos, hear program samples, and gather news about each ministry field. A new blog highlights up-to-date stories and news items from the broadcasters in the field. Words of Hope encourages all RCA churches to link to woh.org from their own website for both the faith-building content and an ongoing window on ministry around the world.

Resources Available

David Bast's *Christ in the Psalms* is Words of Hope's newest publication. It offers nine studies on what various psalms prophesy concerning Christ, together with the New Testament passages that quote and interpret those texts. When read through the lens of the New Testament, Christ is depicted in the Psalms in all his various roles—Savior and Priest, King and Lord.

Each quarter Words of Hope publishes 86,000 copies of the *Daily Reflections* meditations for worldwide distribution. Copies, including a large-print edition, are available for individuals and churches. Words of Hope's devotional meditations can be imported by any website interested in daily updated content; the devotional text is automatically updated at the start of each new day. For more information about this free service, send a brief email to woh@woh.org.

Words of Hope also produces a bi-monthly *Update* newsletter. Two of the issues each year are sent in quantity to every RCA congregation for distribution in church bulletins or mailboxes. The purpose of this publication is to share news and stories from the various ministries in which Words of Hope is engaged throughout the world, as well as the information about the world Christian movement that is received from partners in other countries. Electronic distribution of the *Update* is also available as a PDF.

Grateful Thanks

Words of Hope is thankful for the involvement and support of so many friends of Jesus Christ drawn together around the great purpose of sharing the gospel with the world by radio. During 2009 RCA congregations contributed to Words of Hope a total of $619,150. Congregations are encouraged to support the ministry of Words of Hope by adopting one or more project shares designated for a particular ministry field and recognizing the leader of that field as one of their missionaries.

In addition to the faithful financial support, Words of Hope also needs the ongoing prayer support of congregations. Each month prayer concerns from listeners and ministry partners are gathered and distributed to hundreds of individuals and numerous prayer groups. Words of Hope asks that the ministry be prayed for regularly in RCA congregations and worship services. To receive the monthly Prayer Focus, please contact Words of Hope.

Conclusion

Words of Hope recently received a number of letter excerpts from listeners to the Hindi language programs in India. They were not only interesting but also confirmed that people there are being strengthened in their commitment to Christ through these broadcasts. One listener from the State of Chhatisgarh in eastern India wrote:

> This was my first time to listen to your program. The teaching I got from that message was really very helpful for my spiritual growth. The songs were heart touching. Now I listen to it regularly. People say that this is the time of TV, Mobile [phones], and Internet, and the time of radio has gone. Out of my very busy life, I take time to listen to your program every week. Your program is heard very clearly in my area.

Like this man, Words of Hope believes that the time of radio is not yet over, especially in places like rural India and Africa. Thank you for helping to use this means to reach people with the gospel of life and hope in Jesus Christ.

Report of the General Synod Council on the RCA's Multiracial Future Freed from Racism

"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).

The work of the office of multiracial initiatives and social justice is guided by three core principles.

- Scripturally grounded
- Collaboratively strong
- Racially and ethnically equitable

The above core principles support the vision statement of the RCA's office of multiracial initiatives, which is "everyone who wants to experience the RCA as home may experience the RCA as home." As we move into our multiracial future freed from racism, the RCA is called to affirm its commitment to unity, reconciliation, and justice.

GSC MULTIRACIAL FUTURE FREED FROM RACISM ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The report for the RCA's multiracial future freed from racism follows.

GSC Global Ends Policy

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

Multiracial Future Freed from Racism Ends Policy

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations resisting the sin of racism and committing to a multiracial future engaging all of God's people in mission and ministry.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S INTERPRETATION

This ends policy calls the GSC staff to collaborate with each other, regional synods, classes, congregations, and institutions to assist the Reformed Church in America in transitioning to a denomination that is multiracial and freed from racism in all aspects of our mission and ministry. This ends policy has a long-term time horizon—2013 and beyond. It is my responsibility as general secretary to establish goals, outcomes, and strategies needed to effect this transition, including those that follow.

Goal for promoting systems changes: To identify and reduce or eliminate systemic and structural barriers that inappropriately limit access to the blessings and benefits of belonging to the RCA.

People often assist others in accessing the blessings and benefits of the RCA. When a person provides one-to-one assistance, normally only some small number of people are

helped. When barriers to access are reduced or eliminated, perhaps hundreds of others can be helped. Reducing or eliminating those limits can be achieved in two key ways:

- Change the inappropriately limiting systems and structures, or
- Equip people with knowledge, skills, and relationships needed to access and use the existing systems and structures.

Strategies:

- Develop and improve the relationship between the GSC and the racial/ethnic councils, which are the GSC's constitutional advisory committees.
- Increase the access to Our Call resources for people and congregations of color.
- Participate in the process of adoption and integration of the Belhar Confession, which provides the confessional grounds for stimulating, sustaining, and assessing progress toward becoming multiracial and freed from racism, among other goals.
- Help assemblies and institutions address challenges they face relative to becoming freed from racism.
- Increase the opportunities for issues concerning people of color to be considered by General Synod through the use of existing mechanisms.
- Influence polity and practice with a wider variety of cultural styles.
- Study and critique white privilege and its impact on the structures, systems, and theology of the RCA.

Data:

- Completed study of the relationship between the mandates concerning the relationship between the GSC and the racial/ethnic councils and the failure of GSC to live into those mandates. Developed a guide that explains the issues and suggests an effective mechanism to facilitate a fruitful partnership between GSC and the councils.
- The coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice was active with the Belhar Implementation Team in listening to the wider church, discerning strategies, and resourcing classes as they prepared to discuss and vote on adopting the Belhar Confession.
- Consulted with a large number of regional synods, classes, and congregations regarding challenges they face relative to racial/ethnic diversity. Developing relationships at Hope College and Northwestern College to this end. Collaborating with Western Theological Seminary's Journey program with two network learning communities focused on race and congregational life.
- Provided the Commission on Nominations with a list of more than twenty individuals for consideration as potential commission members. Most of the individuals were new to their lists of potential candidates.

Vacation Bible School Crosses Denominational, Racial Lines

Vacation Bible school was a new experience this year in Somerset, New Jersey. Under the leadership of pastor George Montanari, Middlebush Reformed Church partnered with three other churches to put on a weeklong VBS program in August.

Montanari says that although part of the motivation to cooperate was practical, it went much deeper than just enlarging the volunteer pool. "We recognized that our congregation is not yet reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity in our township, but we wanted to start to do ministry that would tap into that," says Montanari. "We wanted to expose our congregation to diversity, and to expose our wider township to us."

Middlebush extended an invitation to three nearby churches: Holy Trinity Lutheran, a predominantly white congregation; Maranatha Baptist Fellowship, an African-American congregation; and Faith Temple, an African-American Church of God in Christ congregation.

Montanari says that although the four congregations worship within blocks of each other, they'd had little to no contact with one another in the past. "That weighed heavy on my heart," he says. "There are many, many churches in this township, and it seemed to me that we needed to do something to exhibit the unity of the body of Christ—to make our witness visible. We needed to show that churches can cross lines—racial lines, denominational lines. And we had a blast!"

Goal for developing multiracial congregations: To develop one hundred RCA multiracial congregations, 25 percent of which are reproducing.

In earlier times, persons and groups often required a global mission partner to serve people of the global community—less so now. The world is here; its many peoples are near us physically and virtually.

We know from Revelation 5 and 7 that Jesus is at work guaranteeing the church's future to be multiracial. Demographic changes and transitions greatly expand opportunities for us to pioneer here and now congregations that reflect life in that Jesus-guaranteed future.

Strategies:

- Identify the number, names, locations, and ministries of current RCA multiracial congregations.
- Resource and learn from existing multiracial congregations.
- Nurture current and future leaders of multiracial congregations.
- Expand the number of multiracial congregations throughout the RCA, including helping interested monoracial congregations to transition to becoming multiracial ones.

Data:

- Continue to develop the Multiracial Congregation Team comprised of RCA leaders committed to the development of multiracial congregations.
- Continue to support conferences and workshops that promote the development of multiracial congregations.
- Several pastors who are interested in working with other pastors who are engaged in or interested in engaging in multiracial congregations have been trained in coaching and leading networks.

Goal for multiplying congregations of color: To increase the percentage of congregations of color from the current level of about 17 percent of all RCA congregations to 25 percent.

Together with the more established racial and ethnic groups, people groups that migrate to the U.S. and Canada provide extraordinary diversity in cultures and ideas. All bring valuable histories worthy of being honored and influential in the broad life of the RCA.

Diversity alone might naturally lead to increased social distrust and segmentation. However, the cross of Christ promotes unity, reconciliation, and justice, which can lead to what Martin Luther King Jr. and others called "the beloved community."

Congregations of color can add much to the RCA's commitment to become multiracial and freed from racism. They can:

- Provide meaningful places of worship where cultures and traditions are held in high regard.
- Ensure psychological and emotional comfort and healing from wounds received from experiences of being people of color living in the Americas.

- Speak prophetically to the wider church.
- Help the wider church to know, understand, and blend with the rhythms of life and grace embedded in the experiences of people of color.
- Stimulate the RCA to become more trustworthy and trust-filled as a multiracial family freed from racism.

Strategies:
- Facilitate the growth of congregations of color from about 17 percent to 25 percent of the RCA's total number of congregations.
- Encourage the multiplication of congregations of color to occur throughout the United States and Canada.

Data:
- Approximately 39 percent of new RCA church plants are of color or are multiracial.

Goal for training for the RCA's multiracial future: To increase cultural sensitivity and anti-racism capacities within two hundred assemblies, congregations, institutions, and agencies, including the GSC and commissions.

Training, for many, allows short-term increases both in knowledge and in dialogue with persons of other races. When accompanied by post-training; intentional, persistent relationship-building; and work events, training for our multiracial future can help us to build lifestyles that are multiracial and freed from racism.

Strategies:
- Partner with regional synods to ensure, where feasible, at least two multiracial or anti-racism training experiences occur annually.
- Encourage new GSC members and commission members to complete at least one training event.
- Encourage local follow ups to each training experience.
- Develop and provide biblical and theological bases for being multiracial and freed from racism.
- Identify resources used successfully in congregations and help other congregations to benefit from them.

Data:
- More than 50 people have participated in Sankofa experiences, 290 have participated in "Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey," and two congregations have Breakfast Clubs with approximately forty members participating.
- Developed, in partnership with the Multicultural Ministry Committee of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, a video entitled "Racism Is Sin because It Is an Offense to God." The video is located on the RCA's website at www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=6340.

Trip through South Focuses on Racial Reconciliation

More than 30 ministry leaders journeyed through the southern United States in spring 2009, visiting landmarks of the civil rights movement and touring ministries that focus on racial reconciliation.

The trip, called Sankofa, is a new educational initiative for members of the RCA.

Participants are paired with someone of another race for discussion throughout the four-day bus trip. This particular trip began in Chicago, Illinois, and included stops in Selma,

Montgomery, and Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

"It was a real engaging process," says Sandra Hardy, executive director of Restorers Inc. in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a ministry that creates partnerships between churches and communities. Hardy, an African American, was partnered with Jessica Bratt, a Caucasian RCA staff member.

"We were really in close proximity—on the bus you're sitting side by side. It allowed for some real dialogue about the topics that we were discussing, all the way from start to finish. It was good to really hear from each other's experiences firsthand."

During long miles of driving, participants watched movies about race and racial reconciliation and discussed them with their partners.

Hardy says she would recommend Sankofa to anyone, but especially to people who don't have cross-cultural relationships on a day to day basis. "I would encourage people who might be in those circumstances to go on a Sankofa because it's a good way, it's a safe way, to at least start the dialogue of race and really start to build a relationship with someone who looks different than yourself. That's really what helps break down those barriers—to dialogue and talk. Sometimes it sounds so simple, but often that's all it really takes."

Goal of revitalizing congregations through church-based community development: To assist the development of fifty local community development efforts that bring transforming life to congregations and their communities, including the forging of creative, transformative cross-racial relationships.

Reformed thinking teaches us:

- The world belongs to God, has fallen because of sin, and is being reconciled to God through the action of the Holy Spirit.
- The Spirit partners with the body of Christ to assist in the holistic restoration of communities.

As congregations engage communities, they themselves can become revitalized through:

- New relationships with served community people.
- New matters to pray about.
- Freshened reasons for worship.
- Renewed zeal to link worship with justice as required by God in Isaiah 58.

Additionally, an active church-based Christian community development ministry might be the only way many white congregations can grow meaningful long-term relationships with persons of other races. If done correctly, these relationships will be honorable and peer-oriented ones, not ones that fall into over/under or paternalistic patterns.

Strategies:

- Establish several pilots in the RCA focused on church-based Christian community development, and share results and learnings.
- Help pastors and classes to "exegete," interact well with, and develop transformational neighborhood plans with their neighbors and other community stakeholders, including communities experiencing demographic changes.
- Utilize "Church-Based Community Ministry: Stories, Principles, and Strategies to Help Congregations Launch Church-Based Community Ministries that Make a Difference in Their Communities" and other pertinent resources.
- Develop a relationship with the Christian Community Development Association and share results and learnings.

Data:

- In partnership with the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes, cosponsored the participation of forty-four people from fifteen churches and RCA-rooted non-profits at the October 2009 Christian Community Development Association annual conference. Networked twice with all participants during the conference and made initial plans for a regional hub for church-based community development capacity building.
- Formed Poverty and Hunger Action Group with James Seawood, Terry Troia, and Kenneth Bradsell to expand capacities for collaboration among RCA congregations focused on addressing hunger and poverty in the metropolitan New York area. Held a meeting in February 2010 at DeWitt Reformed Church in New York City to A) present the vision for churches responding to poverty and hunger, B) propose a multi-congregational, multi-year collaboration, C) provide training on a ministry continuum model, and D) determine next steps participants desired. Teams were developed to engage next steps.
- Engaged in an equipping relationship with a new church plant in Florida whose pastor desires to embed church-based community development ministry into the DNA of his new congregation.

Goal of learning with the global church: To increase the RCA's knowledge of and contributions to developing multiracial and freed from racism societies and churches through engagements with the global church.

The prophet Isaiah wrote that God "sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in" (Isaiah 40:22, NIV). Isaiah meant that God is not local or tribal, concerned largely with one swath of land or its people. Rather, God is engaged globally, keeping the whole planet in view, making serious judgments and decisions about it.

God's world is multiracial/ethnic, and its peoples' struggles for unity, reconciliation, and justice are profound, persistent, and contextual. God knows this and is actively engaged in these very human challenges. The RCA should be in some of those places, learning what God is doing there and sharing what God has taught us here.

Strategies:
This list of possibilities was developed in conjunction with the leadership of Global Mission.

- South Africa: Build on our history and existing partnerships there.
- Kenya: Build on Global Mission's relationships in locations where there are conflicting ethnic and tribal groups.
- The Reformed Church in Hungary in its work with the Roma people.
- The Waldensian Church in Italy in its work with Christians who are immigrants from Africa.
- Global ecumenical groups that add to our learning and contributions consistent with our mission.

Data:

- In February 2009, the coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice accompanied then General Synod president Carol Bechtel and others as part of a delegation to Kenya and South Africa. The trip resulted in significant learning, which is being implemented in our Belhar processes and other uses.
- RCA members are engaged with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and its satellite in the western hemisphere, CANNAC. Conferences and papers have been developed and shared from those experiences.

Goal for developing leaders: To increase the number of pastors and other leaders of color who are knowledgeable about Reformed theology and skillful in the implementation of the RCA's polity.

Too often, pastors of color who join the RCA receive inadequate teaching and coaching to help them thrive in the RCA. Too often, congregations of color appear not to be well aware of RCA polity, especially in terms of their rights, privileges, benefits, and responsibilities provided for in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*). Too often, leaders of color report they feel like outsiders in their classes and other leadership circles.

Strategies:

- Establish processes for developing the knowledge and skills of leaders of color in the uses of the *BCO* and other key documents.
- Encourage pastors of color and white pastors of multiracial congregations and congregations of color to participate in coaching and network relationships.
- Consider with regional synods and classes developing "farm systems" for identifying and nurturing the development of potential future pastors and other leaders, including those of color.

Data:
None to report as yet.

Luncheon Group Leads to Discipleship

Six years ago, Chour-Thai Reformed Church in Yonkers, New York, started a Lady Luncheon ministry. "We started with four ladies—Thai, Chinese, Mexican, and American—who brought their own food to share lunch and share their own cultures," says Chomsurang Tessalee, whose husband, Somboon, is pastor at Chour-Thai.

"We started to have a dream that one day we will bring our community together, but we didn't know how to do it! We just prayed and let the Lord lead us."

Tessalee says that God opened a door when the local public school invited her to come and share Thai culture. She invited some Chinese friends to come along as well, and soon teachers from the school were coming to Lady Luncheon.

"We started to invite more people. The second year we have about eight teachers from the school. The third year we have more teachers and people from our community—about 25 people. The fourth year, we have all teachers from the school come.

"The goals are clear now; we come together as believers to fellowship, to eat, to encourage, to pray, to enjoy the favor of all the people," Tessalee says, referencing Acts 2:46-47. "From food fellowship, it is now growing into spiritual fellowship."

Goal for widening our circles: To include women and young adults at all levels of assisting the Reformed Church in America in transitioning to being multiracial and freed from racism.

The Holy Spirit gives a wide range of spiritual gifts for the purposes of building up the church and equipping it to do its work of reconciling the world to God. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that the Holy Spirit treats men preferentially over women or older people preferentially over younger people in the matter of giving gifts and expecting them to be used. Failure to adequately populate our various tables with Spirit-gifted women and young adults, either 1) because they are women or young adults or 2) because we just do

not think to include significant numbers of them, might violate the actions of the Spirit to mature the body of Christ for its work of reconciling the world to God. This kind of violation might assure we will not become freed from racism.

Strategies:

- Ensure critical masses of people of color, women, and young adults contribute at input opportunities, decision points, and actions.
- Reach out intentionally through colleges and seminaries, among emerging leaders, Call Waiting, etc.
- Work closely with GSC coordinators for racial/ethnic and women's ministries, other Our Call leaders, and with congregational, classical, regional, and institutional groups that share our mission.

Data:

- The February 2010 Multiracial Strategy Coalition meeting is a clear example of "widening our circle." Twenty-seven people from around the RCA participated. Sixteen of them were people of color, ten were women, and five were young adults.
- The coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice visited Hope College for four days, participated in four classes, spoke in chapel, and met with students, faculty, and staff. Additional engagements are intended.

Goal for making communications strategic: To create strategic partnerships that result in democratizing information about becoming multiracial and freed from racism and resourcing decentralized initiatives.

Transitioning an organization as large and widespread as a denomination is not possible if communication is weighted toward one-to-one, small groups, conferences or events, or email. Communications must become contagious, messages spreading far beyond what one person, a small group, or a single medium can manage. The spreading of the word must use people's pre-existing social networks such that people share with and grow with people in their own face-to-face and virtual groups.

Information is democratized. Initiatives are decentralized. Access is provided to information far and wide.

Strategies:

- Form strategic partnerships with communications teams.
- Take advantage of various social media, platforms, and technologies.
- Use redundant communications efforts and multiple forms of technology as each medium might have its own particular following.
- Forward up-to-date information to classes and minister groups regarding being multiracial and freed from racism.

Data:

- A partnership has been developed between the RCA's communication and production services department that is strategic, and not merely service, in nature.
- Various social and media platforms are being used to convey messages about being multiracial and freed from racism: the RCA website, Facebook, Twitter, a blog, and various Google capacities.
- Publishing a minimum of three e-newsletters annually, emailing them widely through the RCA, and posting them on websites.
- Developing various stories, meditations, sermons, etc. for sharing and posting.
- Recently hired an assistant who is gifted for and passionate about developing communities through the use of social media.

Report of the General Synod Council on Communication

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind…" (1 Corinthians 1:4-5).

Throughout the year and through every aspect of Our Call, the RCA has been blessed. It has been blessed with incredible stories of the goodness and the faithfulness of God. In response we give thanks to God from whom all blessings flow, and we share these stories with each other.

GSC Coordinated Communication Strategy Uses Multiple Tools with an Increasing Focus on Web/Electronic Communication

Throughout 2009 the GSC staff continued a strategic shift towards a coordinated plan that emphasizes communication tools that align with RCA member needs while increasing efficiencies through the use of electronic and web communication. This shift reflects the changes occurring in our world, our denomination, our churches, and our homes. With the diversity of the RCA, communication needs to take the form of both print and electronic media, and must increasingly be presented in a number of languages, including English, Spanish, Korean, and Chinese.

An Update on Communication Strategy within the RCA

The 2009 General Synod approved the following recommendations that significantly changed the communication strategy of the RCA moving forward. The recommendations were as follows:

- To instruct the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the *Church Herald* Editorial Council, to offer a print and online publication combining the best of the *RCA Today* and the *Church Herald*, within existing budget constraints.
- To instruct the General Synod Council to explore ways to enhance current online offerings, especially by promoting online conversations by means of an open blog and increased use of online social networks, inviting current writers from the *Church Herald* to participate.
- To instruct the communications staff to conduct a readership review of *RCA Today* to determine the quantitative level of actual readership as well as the levels of satisfaction with the qualitative issues of content and layout, in time to report to the General Synod of 2011.
- To instruct the General Synod Council, in its capacity as the executive committee of the General Synod, in cooperation with the *Church Herald* Editorial Council, to facilitate an orderly cessation of publication of the *Church Herald*; and further, to ensure that the orderly cessation include appropriate severance for *Church Herald* personnel.
- To offer thanks to God for the ministry of the *Church Herald* (*MGS 2009*, pp. 225-226).

Since General Synod, a number of significant actions have taken place:

- The *Church Herald* produced its last magazine and staff of the magazine has been released.
- Terry DeYoung, the managing editor of the *Church Herald*, joined the GSC communication staff (as well as taking on the position of coordinator for disability concerns).

- Surveys for RCA members were distributed through the RCA website and in the fall *RCA Today* magazine. The survey results offered insight into the elements of the *Church Herald* and *RCA Today* that readers found most helpful. This information was critical as we worked to combine the best of the *Church Herald* and *RCA Today* magazines.
- In April 2010, the first *RCA Today* magazine was produced that combined the best of the two publications.
  - Several of the regular features of the *Church Herald* are continued in this new format, including the Church in Conversation, "platform" editorials, and contributions from several of the *Church Herald*'s regular contributors.
  - The communication team worked with the *Church Herald* staff to continue the *Church Herald* blog as a gathering point of RCA voices and opinions.
  - The RCA website continues to transition and pages are have been developed to offer RCA church life news, global church news, classified ads, and job postings to begin to fill the void in these areas that occurred when the *Church Herald* was discontinued.

The communication staff will continue to seek out feedback from RCA members as we produce communication pieces to enrich and inform congregations and support the mission and ministry of the RCA.

Following the recommendations of the 2009 General Synod, a readership review of *RCA Today* will be completed and reported to the 2011 General Synod.

RCA Electronic Communication Changes to Meet the Needs of Leaders, Members, and Seekers

More than 30 percent of the GSC denominational communication budget supports web, email, blogging, and social networking as an effective means to facilitate two-way communication with RCA members and share information with the church. Through the website, blogging, and social network sites, voices from throughout the denomination can be heard, healthy discussion can occur, and an editorial independence naturally occurs in ways never experienced in print communication.

The RCA website continues to evolve as the needs of RCA pastors, leaders, and members change. In the past year, increasing attention on the website was also given to presenting basic resources for those seeking information on the RCA and its ministries.

Stories from throughout the denomination continue to be featured on the homepage, with new stories posted twice each week. Practical resources, resource suggestions, newsletters, and other documents and forms are being posted daily. (The website has over 6,500 pages currently, an increase of nearly 20 percent over the previous year.)

Traffic to the site continues to rise. Comparing the first six months of the fiscal years of 2009 and 2010, site visits are up 8 percent while page views are up 57 percent. This translates into an average of 45,000 visitors viewing more than 230,000 pages each month.

The website team continues to maintain the websites of *RCA Today* and *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought*, as well as lending assistance to synods, agencies, and ecumenical partners that are in need of help.

Translation Efforts Increase

An integral piece of the RCA's coordinated communication strategy around the goal to

build a multiracial future freed from racism includes the urgent need to translate resources into the languages spoken throughout the denomination.

With the encouragement of past General Synods, the support and involvement of regional synods, and the ongoing cooperation of the racial/ethnic councils of the RCA, the number of communication pieces that are translated continue to increase. Particular focus has been placed on translating constitutional documents as well as Reformed creeds and confessions. The translations of creeds and confessions have increased rapidly through coordinated translation efforts with other denominations (e.g., Christian Reformed Church, Korean Presbyterians, Taiwanese Presbyterians, etc.). Additional translation work was done around commissioned leader and commissioned pastor resources. In order to make these resources available to the largest audience, the majority of the translated material is posted on the web in lieu of printing. This is both cost effective and allows translated material to be made available more quickly. This momentum will continue as we look to bring RCA communications into the languages in which our members worship the Lord.

Reformed Church Press

Reformed Church Press (RCP) is organized as a separate corporate entity of the General Synod. However, for more than a decade, it has functioned with the oversight of the General Synod Council. It provides the means for the RCA to continue to produce selected resources to support specific RCA mission and ministry in fulfillment of both the Statement of Mission and Vision and Our Call. It is the imprint used on all RCA-produced materials including books, General Synod documents, DVDs, CDs, promotional and communication vehicles, and *Perspectives* (a theological journal).

In 2009, RCP produced and updated more than forty resource products for the RCA, including a growing number of DVDs, resources translated into Spanish, Chinese, and Korean, and an ongoing focus on resources that support congregations around the elements of Our Call.

RCP also supports the efforts of the Commission on History and its publication of historical resources. New resources published in the past year by the Commission on History include:

- *Freedom on the Horizon: Dutch Immigration to America, 1840-1940*, by Hans Krabbendam
- *The Practice of Piety*, by Eugene Heideman
- *Liber A, 1628-1700 of the Collegiate Churches of New York*, edited and translated by Francis J. Sypher Jr.
- *Tools for Understanding: Essays in Honor of Donald J. Bruggink*, edited by James Hart Brumm
- *Aunt Tena: Called to Serve*, edited by Jacob E. Nyenhuis, Robert P. Swierenga, and Lauren M. Berka
- *Chinese Theological Education*, edited by Marvin D. Hoff

Report of the Board of Editors of *Perspectives*

The board of editors and the contributing editors of *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* thank the Reformed Church in America for all of the ongoing support as we continue in our endeavor to publish a quality publication of Reformed thought and reflections. *Perspectives* is published ten times each year and continues to be available in an online format as well, which attracts a steady stream of readers all year long (www.perspectivesjournal.org).

Through two years of marketing efforts, *Perspectives* has seen its subscriber base stabilize. This year, we plan on marketing *Perspectives* at the RCA's General Synod, as well as at the World Communion of Reformed Churches' Uniting General Council (to be held in Grand Rapids immediately after synod ends). We also continue to see a significant rise in readership online, with page views more than doubling in the last year.

Although *Perspectives* generates a good amount of subscription income, the continued viability of the publication is further shored up through the institutional support of a number of colleges and seminaries including Calvin College, Central College, Dordt College, Hope College, Northwestern College, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and Western Theological Seminary. The board of editors typically includes representatives from each of these institutions and has also offered free advertising for each institution during the current year.

Perspectives is currently co-edited by Steve Mathonnet-VanderWell (Second Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa), James Bratt (Calvin College history department), and Scott Hoezee (director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary). Phil Tanis, a GSC communication staff member, continues to be our managing editor and web editor. Susanna Childress (Valparaiso University) has joined as our new poetry editor while Steven Bouma-Prediger (Hope College religion department) serves as our review editor.

The board of editors currently includes seven individuals in addition to the three main editors, the review editor, the poetry editor, and the managing editor. This group meets twice each year to review recent issues and plan for upcoming editions of the magazine.

Outside of professional work done on layout, proofing, and subscription management, *Perspectives* remains a volunteer-driven organization. We look forward to continuing our work into 2010 and beyond.

Report on the Faith Alive Christian Resources Partnership

A recent review of reports indicates strong sales of resource material in all regions of the RCA. RCA staff meet regularly with Faith Alive Christian Resources leadership to ensure the partnership is working well and supporting the resource needs of both the RCA and Christian Reformed Church in North America. Staff cooperation between Faith Alive and the RCA is strong. The RCA receives revenue from the Reformed Church Press materials sold through Faith Alive that, in turn, is used to produce additional resources to support the RCA and other Reformed congregations throughout the United States and Canada.

Report of the Board of Benefits Services

General Synod has delegated to the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS) the responsibility to provide, manage, and administer retirement income, supplemental pensions, assistance grants, and insurance benefits for all ordained ministers and their families, and for other employees of agencies, assemblies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America.

The objective of BOBS is to support those in ministry in the RCA (ordained and non-ordained) by providing benefits during times of transition and financial need. In order to provide this support BOBS must utilize insurance principles that require levels of participation that can sustain the programs over time and in a cost efficient manner. BOBS also operates within strict laws governing insurance and retirement programs and must adhere to the tax code of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Within this regulatory environment BOBS, and its staff, is equally committed to fulfilling its mandates from the General Synod, and strives to respond pastorally to the needs of its participating pastors and church workers.

The Board of Benefits Services met by teleconference on August 27, 2009, to approve its fiscal year 2010 budget and to discuss medical costs and 2010 premiums. The board met in regular session on October 13 and 14, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and March 16 and 17, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois. The board also met on February 22 by teleconference to receive the resignation of its executive director, L. Wood Bedell, and to appoint Kenneth Bradsell as its acting executive director.

The sixteen member board is comprised of active and retired RCA ministers, insurance professionals, retirement professionals, financial planners, attorneys, and the officers of the General Synod. It is also supported by the Investment Advisory Committee and the Audit Committee, both joint standing committees representing the General Synod Council, BOBS, and the Church Growth Fund.

Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care

In 2001 and 2002 the Board of Benefits Services was faced with a deepening crisis. It had struggled for months to find a solution to its mandate to provide medical insurance for ministers, families, and lay church workers in an environment of rapidly escalating medical costs. The insurance program at the time was in deficit and close to insolvency. Premiums had to be raised the previous October by 15 percent and again that January in an effort to restore viability and cover real and anticipated claims. The RCA found itself unable to negotiate with carriers for a "group" plan because it had no provision in the plan or in its church order that made coverage anything other than voluntary. Efforts to work with other denominations were unsuccessful for similar reasons. The RCA plan was, to use language well known to those who are familiar with the health care debates of 2009 and 2010, an adverse selection nightmare.

The board members took seriously their responsibility to provide benefits for RCA ministers, families, and lay church workers. For several years the board talked of its service as providing "a covenant of care" to express the mutual obligations as a denomination to those who earn their living by serving the church. In the midst of the crisis of care it turned to James Cook to draft a study paper for its use in understanding the covenantal mandate of church, board, and participants. After receiving and studying the paper with James Cook the board decided to send it on to the General Synod as part of its report.

The 2002 meeting of the General Synod received the theological paper titled "Covenant of

Grace/Covenant of Care" authored by James Cook. It was described as a "compelling biblical and theological rationale for a comprehensive and covenantal provision of benefits for ministers, their families, and lay employees of the church" (*MGS 2002,* p. 358). The full paper is appended to the end of this report for reference. Delegates were encouraged to study it as they prepared for the General Synod meeting.

In receiving the paper in 2002 the General Synod took two actions:

a) Synod affirmed the paper "Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care" (see Appendix, p. 276) as a foundational statement for the life and work of the church and commended the paper to the General Synod's boards and agencies, regional synods, classes, consistories, and congregations of the RCA for study and application to their life and ministry (*MGS 2002*, R-111[amended], p. 363).
b) Synod directed the Board of Benefits Services to apply the biblical and theological principles of the paper "Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care" to the policies, programs, ministries, and services of the board (*MGS 2002*, R-112, p. 363).

In 2003 the Board of Benefits Services returned to the General Synod with a proposal to provide a financially viable and stable medical insurance program for ordained ministers, families, and lay workers clearly grounded in its continuing study of the "Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care" paper. In its report in 2003 the board stated: "Biblical stewardship is covenantal care for creation, the faithful management of all that is entrusted to us by God. It cannot simply be equated with the cheapest option or the greatest cost savings available to a congregation or a denominational agency or institution" (*MGS 2003*, p. 277).

The board went on to say:

> In place of individualism and special interests, the church's covenantal stewardship requires that the board provide a medical insurance plan in which all participate in order to best meet the needs of each servant of the church. The board, as a covenant partner, recognizes its responsibility to provide quality medical insurance at a reasonable and competitive cost. The board asks consistories, agencies, and institutions for their part to recognize that the premiums they pay provide not only for their own ministers or staff, who may be younger and in good health. They also help to bear the burdens of the elderly, retired, or ill servants of the church who are also our responsibility under the covenant of care.
>
> Faithful stewardship requires no less and offers a powerful witness to the competing interests and individualism that mark the medical insurance crisis of our time (*MGS 2003*, p. 377).

The board continued in its report to make a compelling case to the delegates for the implementation of a full participation, quality, group health plan for pastors and their immediate families, non-ordained church workers, and missionaries. In addition to being grounded in the theological study "Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care," providing a high quality group insurance plan was seen as an important component of the RCA's new Statement of Mission and Vision, which includes the phrase "to equip congregations for ministry," recognizing that a covenant to provide affordable, high quality medical care needed to be embedded in the call by consistories to those committed to a life of service in the church if the RCA was going to continue to attract the gifted leaders it needs. In that same year a study of denominational services conducted by the Carl Frost Center for Social Science Research at Hope College ranked the provision of insurance benefits to pastors and other church workers consistently high across all RCA regional synods.

The synod adopted for recommendation to the several classes changes to the *Book of*

Church Order to provide for a full insurance program. The changes included provisions regarding the responsibility of consistories, classes, and in the case of General Synod professors of theology, the General Synod, to fulfill provisions of the call form (Formulary 5). All ministers serving the church full-time under call or contract were to participate in the retirement and insurance programs of the Reformed Church in America, unless the minister was covered through the Canadian portion of the RCA plan. The amendments, including a revision of the call form (Formulary 5) were adopted by the classes and incorporated into the *Book of Church Order* in 2004. The order of the church was firmly grounded in the church's theology of covenant and the benefits to protect ministers, families, lay church workers, and those in retirement would be assured…or would they?

Covenant of Care Contribution and Full Participation

In response to the request of several classes who noted that in some cases ministers were eligible for medical insurance through a spouse's employer, and in those cases where the RCA plan was continuing to find it difficult to negotiate satisfactory contracts with service providers, the Board of Benefits Services revised the definition of full participation under the Covenant of Care. As of January 1, 2006, an RCA church with a full-time minister of Word and sacrament under call or contract can meet the full participation requirement by paying a contribution of one-half the single annual medical premium. This contribution protected the "group" nature of the plan, helped to maintain the viability of the RCA medical program, and also allowed the minister of Word and sacrament to participate in the wellness programs provided through Benefits for Life. The revision also served to protect ministers and consistories by making it possible for an ordained minister to reenter the RCA medical program should circumstances change and health coverage be needed. Thus, a minister who serves a congregation in a region where the best coverage is available in another plan could reenter the RCA plan upon accepting a call to church in a region where the RCA plan is the better option. A consistory in a calling situation would not be faced with purchasing high cost coverage for a minister who was not previously an RCA plan participant. A minister and a minister's family could reenter the plan if a change in medical condition of any family member caused another carrier to drop or deny coverage, a frequent and costly fact of life that may change with the new U.S. health care legislation but remains the current reality. Lastly, if a minister whose spouse's employer determines that it can no longer provide coverage to family members who are eligible for another group plan—as is happening with increased frequency in this time of deep recession—the minister and family could reenter the RCA plan without penalty.

As of January 1, 2007, in order to comply with the requirement of Formulary 5 as outlined in the *Book of Church Order*, the Board of Benefits Services has included all full-time ministers of Word and sacrament in the medical program or Covenant of Care contribution, basic life insurance, and long-term disability insurance. The board provides these benefits according to its responsibility as an agency of the General Synod and to meet requirements of its insurance contract. BOBS is called by the denomination to provide benefits to all full-time RCA ordained pastors. BOBS must establish benefits, policies, and rates based on this directive. BOBS does not have authority over the actions of churches and consistories and therefore cannot force the collection of contributions for the benefits required by the *BCO*. Non-compliance with Formulary 5 at the local level creates 1) the potential loss of benefits to the entire denomination, and 2) a potential inability to fully fund benefits due to non-payment at the local level. These two potentials both became a reality with the loss of long-term care coverage in 2008 due to lack of full participation. A third consequence was the premium increase for medical insurance for 2009—which would not have been necessary if all Covenant of Care premiums had been paid. As of 12/31/2009 there was over $522,000 in arrearages (non-payments from consistories who had signed Formulary 5 when their pastor was called and who accepted the church's order and discipline when

they were ordained and installed before the church) related to Covenant of Care and life and disability insurance premiums.

At the 2009 General Synod the Board of Benefits Services introduced R-52 for consideration. In the advisory committee R-52 was amended as follows:

> To increase the per-member assessment for classes in which consistories that, as of June 30, 2009, are in arrears in the payment of benefits required in Formulary 5 (Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament), including the Covenant of Care premium, for all of its ministers serving full-time in congregations under call or contract, unless the minister is covered through the Canadian portion of the RCA plan or the plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held (*BCO* I.II.12, Sec. 3, and 1.I.2, Sec. 7), with one-third of the total arrears due by the May date for regular assessments in the subsequent three years; and further,
>
> To require that for all years subsequent to 2009, all benefit premiums required in Formulary 5, including the Covenant of Care premium if applicable, that are unpaid as of June 30 will increase the per-member assessment for the classes in which consistories are over ninety days in arrears and that the amount in arrears must be paid by the May due date for regular assessments in each of the subsequent years.
>
> Reasons:
> 1. Consistories are required to fulfill the provisions of Formulary 5 for all full-time pastors under call or contract.
> 2. Formulary 5 requires payment to the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS) for medical insurance or the Covenant of Care premium, life insurance, and long-term disability premiums for all full-time called or contracted pastors. BOBS implemented the Covenant of Care contribution policy as of January 1, 2006.
> 3. Classes shall assure provisions of the call form (Formulary 5) for retirement and insurance (medical, life, and long-term disability) are fulfilled.
> 4. Therefore, implementation of this recommendation provides means by which classes can fulfill the obligations of the call form (Formulary 5) *(MGS 2009*, p. 228-229).

The moderator of the Advisory Committee on Finance and Benefits made a request to table the recommendation until the 2010 General Synod due to lack of time in the remaining General Synod schedule to address the issue appropriately. The General Synod voted to table R-52 until the 2010 meeting of the General Synod.

At its October meeting BOBS recognized that R-52 would be presented at the 2010 General Synod and that, if passed, would require churches in arrears to make up payments owed for benefits as of January 1, 2007. To help alleviate potential financial hardship BOBS provided a "forgiveness" policy for all churches in arrears. This policy stated that if churches made up payments for life and disability benefits since 2007 and agreed to remain current with Covenant of Care benefits payments starting January 1, 2010, then all Covenant of Care arrears would be eliminated from 2007 through December 31, 2009. As of April 1, 2010, twenty-four consistories have taken advantage of the forgiveness offer and are now considered "current." Thirty-eight consistories remain out of compliance representing eighteen classes. However, the largest balances reside in six classes (California, Chicago, Mid-Hudson, Orange, Southwest, and Zeeland).

The Board of Benefits Services discussed the tabled motion at length at its March 2010 meeting and again at a special meeting held on May 4. The board and the benefits staff are deeply appreciative of the response of the church to the forgiveness program put in place this winter. The board also recognizes the financial difficulty faced by many congregations

due to the continuing recession. At its May meeting the board discussed an alternative to R-52 for General Synod consideration.

Report of the All-Synod Advisory Committee on the Board of Benefits Services

The all-synod advisory committees were presented with the following tasks:

- To consider specifically the promise a congregation makes to a minister of Word and sacrament regarding benefits and the promise we make to one another as a denomination.
- To consider the interdependent nature of the promise between classes, churches, and the denomination as a whole.
- To specifically consider the Covenant of Care premiums.

The writing team thanks all the delegates for providing the input that was essential to this process, and BOBS for their dedication and commitment to quality care.

As we listened to the advisory committees and reviewed their newsprinted feedback, the Board of Benefits Services writing team heard the following:

- The covenant of care is exactly that—a covenant—and as such, there was strong agreement that Formulary 5 should be reaffirmed.
- There was very strong support and appreciation for the work of the BOBS with additional affirmation for the wellness programs.
- In keeping with covenantal language, the theme of "faithfulness" as opposed to "compliance" is preferred.
- Some delegates were unaware of Formulary 5, and expressed a desire for better communication and education that filters down to individual consistories.
- A question was raised about what it means to be "unable" to pay as opposed to "unwilling." Still, there was general support for those who are "unable" to pay, however, there was less enthusiastic support for the "unwilling."
- We recognize that the difficulty of the high premiums is a budgetary concern.
- Classes need "teeth" to enforce.

Taking this feedback into account we recommend that the General Synod vote against R-52 from 2009 which was taken from the table by the 2010 General Synod because the committees found the following recommendations address the intent of R-52 in a better way.

VOTED: To adopt R-52.

VOTED: To reconsider.

VOTED: To not adopt R-52.

The All-Synod Advisory Committees on the Board of Benefits Services recommended the following amendment to R-71 as originally presented by the Board of Benefits Services:

> R-71
> To direct the Board of Benefits Services to continue to honor requests for premium forgiveness until December 31, 2010, for churches that are current in their premium payments or "Covenant of Care" premiums for calendar year 2010 but continue to owe these payments for the period ending December 31, 2009; and further,

to prepare an incentive program within the financial ability of the Board of Benefits Services that would reduce the cost of medical insurance premiums beginning in 2011 for those churches and ministers, both active and retired, in classes that are in 100 percent compliance with the constitutional requirements of participation in RCA medical insurance or the payment of the "Covenant of Care" premium; and further,

to increase the ~~per-member~~ assessment ~~for~~ of those classes in which consistories that as of December 31, 2010, are in arrears in the payment of premiums for the benefits required in Formulary #5 (Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament) or the payment of the "Covenant of Care" premium for all of its ministers serving full-time in congregations under call or contract, unless the minister is covered through the Canadian health care plan, ~~portion of the RCA plan~~, with one-third of the arrears assessment due by May 31 in each of the subsequent three years.

Reasons:
1. This leaves the authority and responsibility with the classes to determine how the arrears will be satisfied.
2. This clarifies there is no correlation between the amount of the arrears and the number of members in a classis.
3. There is not a Canadian portion of the RCA plan.

A motion was made to further amend the recommendation as follows (deletions are stricken, additions are underlined):

. . . beginning in 2011 for those churches and ministers, ~~both active and retired,~~ in classes that are 100 percent . . .

payment of the "Covenant of Care" premium and all retired ministers including those in classes in non-compliance . . .

VOTED: To further amend R-71.

A motion was made to further amend the recommendation as follows (deletions are stricken, additions are underlined):

. . . classes that ~~are in~~ demonstrate 100 percent ~~compliance with~~ faithfulness to the constitutional requirements . . .

VOTED: To further amend R-71.

R-71
To direct the Board of Benefits Services to continue to honor requests for premium forgiveness until December 31, 2010, for churches that are current in their premium payments or "Covenant of Care" premiums for calendar year 2010 but continue to owe these payments for the period ending December 31, 2009; and further,

to prepare an incentive program within the financial ability of the Board of Benefits Services that would reduce the cost of medical

insurance premiums beginning in 2011 for those churches and ministers in classes that demonstrate 100 percent faithfulness to the constitutional requirements of participation in RCA medical insurance or the payment of the "Covenant of Care" premium, and all retired ministers including those in classes in non-compliance; and further,

to increase the assessment of those classes in which consistories that as of December 31, 2010, are in arrears in the payment of premiums for the benefits required in Formulary #5 (Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament) or the payment of the "Covenant of Care" premium for all of its ministers serving full-time in congregations under call or contract, unless the minister is covered through the Canadian health care plan, with one-third of the arrears assessment due by May 31 in each of the subsequent three years. (ADOPTED)

The All-Synod Advisory Committees on the Board of Benefits Services recommended the following amendment to R-72 as originally presented by the Board of Benefits Services:

R-72
To encourage the Board of Benefits Services, within its financial ability, to continue to offer "wellness" incentive programs for its participants ~~in classes with 100 percent compliance.~~ in the RCA Health Insurance plan or paying the Covenant of Care premium. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
This provides to all churches being faithful to the Covenant of Care the benefits of the Wellness Programs.

R-73
To instruct the Board of Benefits Services to engage in a comprehensive review of the current RCA insurance plan in light of the new health care legislation adopted by the U.S. Congress, to adjust the RCA plan as may be necessary and beneficial for plan participants, and to report to General Synod annually on the impact of this legislation on the RCA's group medical plan. (ADOPTED)

*Based on financial information available to the board in May 2010 the board believes it could offer a one-month premium holiday (or credit) to consistories in classes that demonstrate 100 percent compliance with the requirements established in the *Book of Church Order* (Formulary #5, p. 124; Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7, p. 14; Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 3, p. 50; Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 6, p. 69). This premium holiday (or credit) would result in a reduction of 2011 medical premiums below the cost of 2010 premiums at a time when group insurance plans throughout the United States are anticipated to rise from 12 to 40 percent.

The Board of Benefits Services looks forward to the work of this synod to bring resolution to this matter so that it is able to give its full attention to the benefits programs it has been mandated to provide for those in full-time service to Christ's church. (See R-2, p. 43 for the recommendation to take the 2009 R-52 off the table.)

The RCA Insurance Program: Striving to Help Participants Retain and Regain Health

The major objectives of BOBS are to provide benefits that meet the needs of participants and their families and to provide benefits that are financially sound and affordable for the denomination. Fortunately, due to the efforts of many throughout the denomination, the insurance programs (medical, drug, dental, disability, long-term care, and life) are on solid financial footing. As of January 1, 2010, the medical program is fully reserved and able to pay all incurred but not reported (IBNR) claims. The entire insurance program has a total working reserve, not including the IBNR reserve, of approximately $8.5 million. As a result, BOBS was able to 1) maintain average premium increases of 3 percent over the last five years. (In January 2010 BOBS increased insurance premiums 6 percent to ensure continuation of a sound program. It needs to be noted that other denominations, non-profit, governmental, and private/public sector employers across the US have been seeing double-digit increases from 15 percent to 30 percent); 2) develop programs that enhance the entire plan and better serve the participants; and 3) provide incentives to encourage greater participation in the wellness initiatives.

BOBS provides medical, life, and disability coverage through its Benefits for Life program. Benefits for Life is designed to provide quality medical care through United Healthcare and Medco and to offer comprehensive wellness and prevention services to promote health and well-being. Participants can benefit from the following services:

- Access to large physician, hospital, and prescription drug networks through United Healthcare and Medco.
- Health and well-being assessment surveys with the opportunity for participants to engage in lifestyle coaching programs to increase health and productivity.
- The HeartMath program, which is offered to all active participants. HeartMath is a program designed to help participants deal with the negative impact of stress and improve cognitive performance. For 2010 this program is being offered to all active participants and their spouses in the Benefits for Life program.
- For 2010 BOBS offered "Naturally Slim," a behavioral eating program, for all active participants.
- For 2010 "Amazing Pace," a pedometer based walking program, was offered to all active and retired participants.
- Online enrollment with single-sign-on functionality.
- Online access to benefits, with the ability to update indicative data immediately.
- Web-portal access to health resources related to wellness, health management, medical providers, and prescription drugs.
- One hundred percent coverage for most preventative and diagnostic procedures.

BOBS' major emphasis in 2010 is twofold: to increase participation in the wellness programs and to continue to provide high quality medical care to all eligible RCA participants while keeping insurance premiums as low as possible without risking the viability or solvency of the programs.

BOBS is committed to providing comprehensive wellness programs to eligible participants. It has been determined through claim analysis and biometric screenings that the HeartMath program and Naturally Slim have been extremely effective in reducing cost and improving participants' health; therefore, these programs plus the addition of the Amazing Pace program were expanded for 2010.

The RCA Pension Program: A Challenging Year for All

The key threat to the pension program in 2009 was the tremendous drop in the financial

markets that began in the middle of 2008. The situation presented immediate hardship to many retirees who had to reduce distributions due to decreases in their total assets. Fortunately, the markets have rebounded but the decline in the markets has allowed BOBS to think and act strategically about how the pension program can better serve participants.

To provide greater protection to eligible participants BOBS for 2010 has:

- Analyzed alternative annuity options in order to provide long-term security to retired participants. Currently, BOBS offers one fixed type annuity to participants. In 2010 the board hopes to expand that offering to provide other fixed or variable type annuities designed to offer long-term security as well as potential asset growth.
- Developed the Jubilee Financial Planning Series. Our pension provider, Fidelity, provides a wealth of education and financial resources to help participants, but BOBS determined that more was needed. The Jubilee Series is designed to help participants understand the programs provided by BOBS and also understand what they need to know about retirement and what they can do to prepare for it. The Jubilee Series is designed to be presented in group settings and is available for all participants in the RCA retirement programs.

For 2010 BOBS reduced administrative fees by $200,000. In 2009 BOBS administrative cost for the RCA Retirement Program was approximately $1.6 million. In comparison with other pension programs in the United States the RCA Retirement Program ranks in the 25th percent quartile. This means that 75 percent of all other pension programs have expense fees, as a percentage of total assets, higher than those of the RCA Retirement Program. While Benefits Services staff make every effort to keep expenses down, they also recognized that the decline in the market had an immediate impact on participant funds and therefore reduced their administrative expenses for 2010 by $200,000, which directly offsets program expenses.

BOBS is continuing to dialogue with attorneys and the Internal Revenue Service to reinstate the non-qualified RCA Retirement Program to a 403(b) program that has been in place since January 1, 2005. Currently, participants who have been in the pension plan prior to January 1, 2005, have assets in two programs: the non-qualified Retirement Program and the 403(b) Retirement Program. Since the non-qualified rules have become difficult to administer BOBS has been in discussion with the IRS to allow the non-qualified program to be reinstated as a 403(b) program. If BOBS is successful we will be able to further reduce administrative costs and provide greater protection to our participants.

Currently, the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program consists of participant money already deferred and invested in the 403(b) employee plan and contributions that have been made by churches, or other eligible employers, as of January 1, 2005. The board used the opportunity to enhance the 403(b) program by providing participants with greater management tools, loan flexibility, and additional investment options. The RCA 403(b) Retirement Program plan document, Summary Plan Description, and forms are available on the RCA website.

Fidelity Retirement Planning

The Board of Benefits Services is committed to providing educational resources to plan participants to assist them in planning for retirement. To this end BOBS has worked with Fidelity to provide various opportunities for participants to prepare for retirement. Fidelity works with participants who are three to five years away from retirement to evaluate current readiness for retirement and offer strategies to maintain or build toward greater retirement growth. Participants are matched with one retirement specialist through a one-on-one teleconference session or face-to-face at a local Fidelity branch to review budgeting and

retirement income stream. Plan participants can expect Fidelity to render this level of service free of charge. Additionally, younger participants also have access to Fidelity retirement counselors to gather strategies toward retirement, such as deferring part of their salaries in order to save for retirement. At this meeting of the General Synod, as they are each year, Fidelity representatives were available to counsel plan participants on planning for their retirements.

In collaboration with Fidelity, the board is also communicating with participants who, based on age, may not be investing in a portfolio mix that could best maximize their retirement savings. A Fidelity advisor will work with these participants to align their funds to target retirement income needs based on their current age.

Transition of Members of the Board of Benefits Services

With deep appreciation and sincere gratitude, the board thanks the following Board of Benefits Services members who have completed their term of service.

Philip Doeschot
Doug Struyk

The board is grateful to these persons for their willingness and ability to provide their expertise and wisdom to help serve those in the Reformed Church in America. We commend them for their work and trust God will continue to bless them in all they do.

Finally, the Board of Benefits Services commends L. Wood Bedell for his five years of dedicated service to the Reformed Church in America. Woody's visionary leadership brought vast improvements and strength to both the insurance and retirement programs. Building on the "Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care" adopted prior to his tenure, Woody persistently encouraged the RCA to live up to and into its covenantal theology so that those called to full-time service might be protected with insurance benefits during their service and in their retirement, and so that the retirement plan would provide sufficient support for ongoing quality of life.

APPENDIX

MGS 2002, pp. 358-363

COVENANT OF GRACE/COVENANT OF CARE

A church whose faith and life are drawn from the word of God finds every form of its ministry in that word. The several assemblies of the Reformed Church in America—consistory, classis, regional synod, and General Synod—are not administrative or legislative gatherings based on civic or corporate models without biblical or theological foundation. Rather, each of their meetings belongs to a tradition reaching back to the Jerusalem Council of the first century. Now as then, representatives of the church equipped by the Holy Spirit, discuss and determine how the church can best carry out its life and mission.

Similarly, the evangelistic outreach of the Reformed Church, from local congregations to world mission, is not motivated by models of corporate growth or marketing techniques, but rather by the Spirit-filled words of Jesus: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world"; by his post-resurrection commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations"; and by his pre-ascension promise: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The often lower-profile "inreach" of the Board of Pensions, now the Board of Benefits Services, is also rooted in the word of God. Its mandate is drawn not from the occasional New Testament text but from the very centerpiece of God's self-revelation that spans the testaments, namely, the covenant. Its perspective views the Scriptures as the story of God's remarkable love affair with the human race. It recognizes that what really made Eden Eden in the beginning was that on any given day, the first man and woman could hear the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze. When the sin of Adam and Eve replaced that mutual affection with alienation, the couple and their descendents learned that God loved them with a love that would not let them go. And so God came again, this time walking in the fields of Haran. There God made a covenant with Abram and Sarai that began with the promise to be God to them and to their children, and ended with the assurance that in them all the families of the earth would be blessed!

From there, the long story of God's people that culminates in the renewal of the covenant through the coming of Jesus is the story of how God's enduring love makes us one with God and with each other. God's loving, persistent concern to be in relationship with us is always expressed in the covenant of grace that not only binds the Old and New Testaments into one, but also makes those testaments God's gracious invitation to covenant life. This covenant life is from first to last a gift of God's unmerited love.

I. The Covenant of Grace

As the apostle Paul reminded his Jewish and Gentile Christian readers at Rome, Abraham is the father of all who trust God as Abraham did. With a single stroke of his pen, Paul takes us back to Genesis, the book of beginnings, where God's covenant with Abraham is hinted at in chapter 12, clarified in chapter 15 ("On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham"), and had its heart laid bare in chapter 17: "I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to your offspring after you." And centuries later when God assured Moses that there was an exodus and a destiny in his people's future, it was because God was remembering the covenant made with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel—the covenant to take them as his people and be their God.

Throughout the unfolding drama of Old Testament history, God's people broke the covenant from their side with tragic regularity. Appropriate discipline followed, but the covenant itself was never broken from God's side! In fact, the Old Testament moves to a hope-filled close with Jeremiah's bright word for the future, a text that focuses on covenant renewal:

> The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt-a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

For Christians, that promised covenant renewal was realized in the coming of Jesus. Although the New Testament does not complete any of Jesus' "I am" sayings with the words, "a new" or "renewed" covenant, it does make clear connections between Jesus and the covenant of grace. Paul's witness to the institution of the Lord's Supper in

1 Corinthians—the earliest record in the New Testament—is a shining example. There the bread saying is followed by this significant word about the cup: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." The letter to the Hebrews makes the point again, for what is implicit in the comparison made in chapter 8:

> But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises (v. 6).

becomes explicit in the next chapter:

> For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant (9:15).

Both of these texts bring Jesus and the new covenant together in the context of his death, his promises, and his deliverance from sin, without explicitly identifying him as the new covenant. That identification is made by attending to the Old Testament witness to what was essential to the old covenant, and then observing how those essentials are effectively incarnated in Jesus, the new covenant.

As we have seen, the heart of the covenant is the gift of God's self in a relationship of enduring love. In Jeremiah's splendid vision, even the promise of land, historically significant as it was, merits no mention. With unerring insight, the prophet points to the inner life where the heart of the covenant is laid bare: "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: ...I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33). Above all else, then, covenant means a personal relationship with God!

That a gracious renewal of the covenant is precisely what God is about in Jesus received definitive confirmation in the prologue of John's Gospel: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (1:14). That the incarnation is the full and final enactment of God's declared desire, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33), is plain enough. But how is the testimony that Jesus was "full of grace and truth" to be understood? Once again, this new covenant language about Jesus points us to the old. Behind John's words "grace and truth" stands a pair of Hebrew words. "Grace" translates the first one well enough, but to translate the second one as "truth" invites misunderstanding. It can lead us to think that Jesus champions some abstract truth over against falsehood or that Jesus is above all else the repository of all true knowledge and right thinking. But the Hebrew word used is a covenant word, a relational word that means truth in the sense of fidelity. It means being true or faithful to the covenant partner. The evangelist John, therefore, is not witnessing to Jesus as the embodiment of every kind of objective truth, but as the incarnation of God's covenant of grace and covenant fidelity. Israel's long experience of divine grace and faithfulness under the old covenant was now fully and finally manifested in Jesus, the new covenant. Jesus Christ is overflowing with God's enduring love. In him, the new covenant, we reach the supreme good of the old: "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them" (Revelation 21:3).

This is the covenant of grace celebrated repeatedly in Reformed Church worship. Setting out the meaning of the sacrament of baptism our liturgy declares:

> In baptism, God reveals and seals to us his covenant of salvation, given first to Noah and his whole family whom God saved from the waters of the flood, and renewed time after time through the patriarchs and prophets until it reached perfection in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. We participate in this covenant through faith in Christ, and in him become a new creation.

At the heart of the meaning of the Lord's Supper lies this thrilling confession about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ: "By his death, resurrection, and ascension he established a new and eternal covenant of grace and reconciliation that we might be accepted of God and never be forsaken by him."

And the language of covenant runs like a refrain through the order of worship for Christian marriage, underlining the enduring joy of this most intimate human relationship. The minister declares that the wedding party and their guests

> are gathered here to praise God for the covenant of grace and reconciliation made with us through Jesus Christ, to hear it proclaimed anew, and to respond to it as we witness the covenant of marriage [the man and woman] make with each other in Christ's name. Christian marriage is a joyful covenanting between a man and a woman in which they proclaim, before God and human witnesses, their commitment to live together in spiritual, physical, and material unity. In this covenant they acknowledge that the great love God has shown for each of them enables them to love each other.

Nor is it surprising, given this order's powerful witness to the covenant of grace, that the ceremony climaxes in vows to live together in a covenant of care: The man and woman take each other

> to have and to hold from this day forward,
> for better, for worse
> for richer, for poorer,
> in sickness and in health
> to love and to cherish
> as long as they both shall live.

Not surprising, indeed, for God's covenant of grace always carried within itself a covenant of care!

II. The Covenant of Care

Primary as the vertical relationship with God was in the old covenant, it was never separated from the horizontal relationship with other members of the covenant community. The Book of Exodus records God's strong covenant care for his people suffering as slaves in Egypt. In response to their groaning God remembered the covenant made with the patriarchs, looked down upon the Israelites, and took notice of them. That notice in turn motivated God to appear to Moses at the burning bush, complete with a full explanation:

> Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:7-10).

Exodus also specifically names the widow and the orphan as of special concern to the covenant community (22:22). In fact, these fatherless and unprotected members of the community could rest in the knowledge that "Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his habitation" (Psalm 68:5).

More than any other Old Testament witness, the Book of Deuteronomy declares that God's own care and compassion for the covenant people were to be mirrored in their covenant care and compassion for one another. Sample instances from that book alone serve to demonstrate that that care was both concrete and personal. No one was to be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward needy members of the community. Their needs were to be met liberally and ungrudgingly (15:7-11). When a bondman or bondwoman was set free, they were not to be sent out empty-handed but were to be provided for liberally from the harvest or flock, thus giving to them some of the bounty with which God had blessed their masters (15:12-14). (Israel was to remember how good it was to leave Egypt with the gifts of their masters.) During the harvest festivals, the slaves, the orphans, and the widows were to share in the joy and the abundance of food of the prosperous (16:11, 14).

Throughout these expressions of covenant care, God showed great concern for the rights and the dignity of those whose poverty had forced them into borrowing. Witness these remarkable Torah lines:

> When you make your neighbor a loan of any kind, you shall not go into the house to take the pledge. You shall wait outside, while the person to whom you are making the loan brings the pledge out to you. If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the garment given you as the pledge. You shall give the pledge back by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the Lord your God (Deut. 24:10-13).

The lender, said God, is not to invade the poor man's house and help himself to whatever pleased him as collateral. Rather, the poor man is to decide which of his things to offer as a pledge, and the lender is to wait on the porch until the poor man brings it out to him. And if the borrower is so destitute that his only collateral is his cloak, the lender must return it when the day's temperature goes down with the sun, so he can use it as his blanket through the night. Thus does the covenant God who inhabits eternity and dwells in the high and holy place make it a matter of personal concern to be sure a poor man sleeps warmly!

No wonder then that covenant privileges with God were always joined to covenant responsibilities toward covenant partners. Old covenant law and prophets were at one in demanding care for the needy, justice for the oppressed, and love for the stranger. In this way too, our Lord Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the new covenant. Jesus promised the blessing of God and inheritance in God's realm to all who care for the physical and material well-being of the needy. To care for the least of those who are members of my family, he said, is to care for me (Matthew 25). And to the covenant commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," Jesus not only added the parable of the Good Samaritan but also his own concern for covenant care: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

The book of Acts testifies that the covenant of care was close to the heart of the church from its inception. All who believed were not only together but had all things in common. They sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds to all according to need (chap. 2). The apostle Paul laid his understanding of the gospel before the leaders of the Jerusalem church, and when those church pillars had recognized the grace that had been given to him, they offered him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship and blessed their gentile mis-

sion asking only one thing: that they remember the poor (Galatians 2). And when the apostle John needed to remind his readers that the covenant of grace and the covenant of care are a seamless whole he simply raised the inescapable question for every Christian then and now: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?" (1 John 3:17).

Texts like those remind us of the moment in Jesus' earthly ministry when a Pharisee asked him which commandment in the law, the Torah-God's instruction for covenant life-is the greatest (Matthew 22). Remarkably, although the request was for one ("which commandment"), Jesus gave him two ("and a second is like it")! Apparently, Jesus thought it impossible to say the one without the other. Love of God is inseparable from love of neighbor. This suggests that like the seamless wholes—covenant of grace/covenant of care and love God above all/love your neighbor as yourself—the second commandment may also be a seamless whole: love your neighbor as yourself/care for your neighbor as yourself.

COMMISSION REPORTS

Report of the Commission on Christian Action

The parable of the Good Samaritan ends with Jesus saying, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). It is introduced, however, with a number of questions.

> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:25-29).

In answering these questions Jesus then tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. As many parables do, it evokes yet more questions. It was true for Jesus' audience then, and it is true for Jesus' audience now. On the day before he would be assassinated, in a speech entitled "I've Been to the Mountaintop," the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. pointed out these queries: "So the first question that the Levite asked was, 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

The constitutional responsibility of the Commission on Christian Action is that it "shall inform and advise the church concerning current social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised on those issues and proper action taken" (*BCO* 3.I.5.2b). In advising and informing the church, the commission continually raises the questions that the Good Samaritan parable wrestled with, and in so doing, invokes the church to go and do likewise.

The Commission on Christian Action met October 15-17, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and January 15-16, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois, engaging a variety of topics but concentrating its energies in response to recommendations received from previous General Synods, including R-23 from the 2009 General Synod (*MGS 2009,* p. 123*)*:

> To direct the Commission on Christian Action to study the possible benefits of RCA support of legislation that would permit an adopted person, or the adoptive parent or guardian of a minor who was adopted, access to a copy of the adopted person's original birth certificate and related medical and cultural information, upon request, for report to a subsequent General Synod.

Adoption and Access

THE MEDICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH OF PERSONS WHO ARE ADOPTED

Introduction

"In all of us there is a hunger, marrow deep,
to know our heritage, to know who we are and
where we have come from. Without this enriching
knowledge, there is a hollow yearning; no matter

what our attainments in life, there is the most disquieting loneliness." Alex Haley, *Roots*

There is a growing movement to support state legislation throughout the United States that allows adopted persons, or guardians of minors who were adopted, to have access to their birth records. Access to the copy of the adopted persons' original birth certificates and related medical, psychological, and cultural information is important for multiple reasons and for the medical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of adoptees. Another issue is that many adult adoptees wish to gain access to their biological parents themselves.

Medical Perspective

From a medical perspective it is important for adoptees to have access to the information of their biological families. Information about familial medical histories is useful in diagnosing and treating individuals. This is particularly true in regard to the treatment of hereditary diseases. Adults who themselves have been adopted and have children with a medical or developmental disorder are particularly in need of their own medical histories.

Denying adult adopted persons access to information related to their births and adoptions has potentially serious, negative consequences with regard to their physical and mental health (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007). The U.S. Surgeon General's office recognizes that family medical history is vital to prevention and early diagnosis and treatment, particularly in regard to diseases and conditions for which individuals may be genetically predisposed, such as heart disease and cancer.

Mental Health Perspective

From a mental health perspective, it is important for adopted persons to have access to their mental health histories in regard to certain hereditary psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and major depression (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007). Further, from the point of view of psychological well-being, based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1988; Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1965; Ainsworth, 1967; Ainsworth, Biehar, Waters, and Wall, 1978), it is important for individuals to have a sense of continuity with their histories. When the parental bond between children and biological parents is disrupted, lifelong issues in adult relationships can result. Therefore it is extremely important for individuals who have been adopted to have access to their biological parents. Of the several reasons that can lead to individuals having attachment disorder, among them is the placement of an infant or child in an orphanage or foster care. Reactive attachment disorder includes a sequelae of symptoms such as an aversion to touch and physical affection, control issues, anger problems, difficulty showing genuine care and affection, and an underdeveloped conscience (www.mayoclinic.org) that affects individuals throughout their lives. Research (Brodzinski, 1990; Findeisen, 1993) suggests that the adoptees' perceived abandonment might cause them psychological distress (Cubito and Brandon, 2000). Further, adoptees who seek their biological parents may have more psychological distress than those who do not seek their roots, despite the value that it may have to them in the long run.

It is interesting to note that individuals who search for their biological roots may have higher levels of psychological distress than those who chose not to search (Aumend and Barrett, 1984; Sobol and Cardiff, 1983), but that the levels of distress are still lower than distress noted in outpatient mental health samples of adoptees. It is unclear what drives the distress; it is possible that adoptees who choose to search may have higher levels of depression and anger (Cubito and Brandon, 2000), as well as lower levels of self-esteem (Aumend and Barrett, 1984; Sobol and Cardiff, 1983) when compared to adoptees who do

not search for their birth parents. It is speculated that the search process in and of itself may cause psychological distress (Cubito and Brandon, 2000) for those adoptees that choose to search for their birth parents. Social science research has revealed that adoptees who choose to search for the birth parents have a desire to know their genealogical histories (Sobol and Cardiff, 1983); have the need to know for themselves or their children their medical histories (Barbieri, 2005); and have a desire to increase their sense of identity (Sobol and Cardiff, 1983). Adoptees who opt not to seek their birth parents do so because of a fear of hurting either their adoptive or birth parents and/or because they are satisfied with their identity as children of their adoptive parents (Sobol and Cardiff, 1983).

Spiritual Perspective

Lastly, from a scriptural perspective, it is important that the adopted persons have a continuous history that can be traced to their origins. Such an unbroken, multigenerational perspective is reflected in the genealogies of biblical exemplars such as Noah (Genesis 5:3-5) and Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). For instance, biblical genealogies provide extensive histories of these individuals, as well as the contexts and traditions of their lives, as they relate to their interactions with God.

A Problem of Social Justice

Adopted persons appear to be the only individuals in the United States that are not permitted to have access to their birth records (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007). For adoptees, this basic right is often viewed as a civil rights violation. This inability for adoptees to have access to their birth records has potentially serious and negative consequences with regard to their physical, mental, and spiritual health. This issue is considered a violation of social justice principles, as we know them in the Scriptures**,** and one to which the church feels compelled to respond. The words of the Old Testament prophet Amos to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel to "hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts" (Amos 5:15, NIV) are relevant to contemporary adoptees seeking knowledge about their backgrounds.

In 1970 the number of adoptions in the United States peaked at 175,000 per year. Then in 1971, the Adoptees Liberty Movement Association organized for the purpose of abolishing the practice of sealed records, and this seemed to mark the beginning of adoptees' journey to full access to their birth records and to their birth parents, although their class action suit was unsuccessful in claiming that sealed adoption records were unconstitutional. Thus since the 1970s there has been an increase in the number of adoptees searching for their birth parents (Sorosky, Baran, and Panner, 1978; Cubito and Brandon, 2000). The founding of the more radical Bastard Nation in 1996 took this adoptee movement to another level in its purpose to promote the "full human and civil rights of adult adoptees" (www.adoption.org).

The History of Adoption Legislation

It appears that philosophically the underlying principle of adoption legislation was that birth parents had a right to be anonymous. The current trend in adoption literature is to challenge the right of the states to maintain sealed records and thereby to provide rights for adult adoptees who are in search for either birth records or their birth parents themselves.

The first state to introduce adoption legislation was Massachusetts in 1851. The concept of adoption was part of Roman law and was brought from France and Spain to Louisiana and Texas in the seventeenth century.

As adoption evolved and became more professional, states laws began to address the procedural aspects of adoption, including the confidentiality of adoption information. Minnesota passed the first adoption statue that required the screening of adoptive families and the sealing of the records of birth parents. The practice of amending birth certificates to the names of the adoptive family began in the 1930s in order to protect "illegitimate" children (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007).

World War II marked a shift from the required confidentiality of adoption records to their secrecy. This was to insure the integrity of the adoptive families and to prevent the birth parents from either reclaiming or harassing adoptive families (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007). The prevailing psychoanalytic theory of the time saw that as the path to reforming young, single, usually Caucasian women who had unwed pregnancies. The federal Uniform Adoption Act passed in 1953 provided standards for every state in the union. In 1958, the Child Welfare League of America, which was founded in 1921, wrote the "Standards for Adoption Services." At present every state in the United States has an adoption statute (Friedlander and Apte, 1974; www.adoption.org). Students in adoption policy and legislation have observed "the acceptance of adoption in the United States [is compatible] with cherished national traditions, from immigration to democracy" (www.adoption.org).

The 1960s and 1970s brought the sexual revolution and changing views of contraception and abortion, as well as women's rights and civil rights in general. It was at this point that most states began the practice of sharing non-identifying information with adult adoptees.

Currently, all fifty states and American Samoa allow adoptees who are eighteen years or older to have access to the identifying information of their birth parents (Child Information Welfare Gateway, 2006), providing that the birth parents have consented to having their information released. Identifying information includes the following: date and place of the adopted person's birth; age of the birth parents and general physical description, such as eye and hair color; race, ethnicity, religion, and medical history of the birth parents; educational level of the birth parents and their occupation at the time of the adoption; reason for placing the child for adoption; and existence of other children born to each birth parent.

However, in twenty-nine states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico a court order continues to be required for an adult adopted person to gain access to his or her original birth certificate (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007). Only two states (Alaska and Kansas) have always allowed adoptees direct access to their birth records (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007). Since 1996 six states (Alabama, Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Tennessee) have reestablished adoptees' access to their birth records without consent (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007). Some other states have imposed limitations on the release of identifying information. Arkansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas require the adopted person to undergo counseling about the possible consequences of contact with his or her birth family before any information is disclosed. In Connecticut, release of identifying information is prohibited if it is determined that the requested information would be seriously disruptive to any of the parties involved (Child Information Welfare Gateway, 2006).

In order to facilitate adoptees' access to their birth records, twenty-nine states (Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, and West Virginia) have organized Mutual Consent Registries (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006). However both the adoptees and the birth parents need to reg-

ister before a search can commence. In some cases, the adoptive parents must also register.

Legislation That Supports Adoptees' Rights

Opponents of legislation that would allow adoptees access to their birth records would like to uphold centuries of legislation that denies adoptees their basic civil rights. Proponents of legislation that would allow adoptees access to their birth records counter the arguments of those that oppose such legislation. Some typical arguments opposing such legislation are as follows:

1. **The lives of birth mothers will be disrupted if adult adoptees are allowed access to their birth records.** There is little evidence that the lives of birth mothers would be damaged if adult adoptees are allowed access to their records. According to the Model State Adoption Act in 1980, "There can be no legally protected interest in keeping one's identity secret from one's biological offspring; parent and child are considered co-owners of the information regarding the event of birth" (Federal Register, 1980). According to the Adoption Registry Coordinator of the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services (Helb, 2004), 95 percent of birth parents agree to some form of contact, and according to a British source 94 percent of non-searching birth mothers were very pleased or pleased that the adopted adult contacted them (British Association for Adoption and Fostering, 2005).

2. **Mutual Consent Registries already provide a way for adoptees to obtain their birth information.** It appears that Mutual Consent Registries are not adequate to guarantee that the civil rights of adoptees to have their birth certificates would be honored. Registries fail because birth parents may have died and birth parents or adoptees may not have registered; further, some registries only function if the individuals are adopted in the same state in which they are born. According to the American Adoption Congress study (1998), state registries have a 98 percent failure rate.

3. **Birth mothers who entered into adoption with the understanding that their information would be confidential may feel their privacy is being invaded.** Birth mothers are not generally promised confidentiality, even if they wish to maintain their privacy. According to the Model State Adoption Act (1980), there can be no legally protected interest in keeping the birth parents' identities a secret from their biological offspring, as "the parent and child are considered co-owners of the information regarding the event of birth" (Federal Register, 1980). Further, according to the U.S. Court of Appeals, the "Constitution does not encompass a general right to nondisclosure of private information" (U.S. Court of Appeals, 6th Circuit, *Promise Doe, et al. v. the State of Tennessee*, No. 96-6197, 1997).

4. **More women decide against abortion if they are guaranteed confidentiality in placing their children for adoption.** No research seems to correlate adoption and abortion rates, and it further appears that studies do not support the idea that lack of confidentiality is a factor in choosing abortion. Interestingly, states that allow adoptees to access their birth records have lower abortion rates than New Jersey, which does not allow adoptees access to their birth information. The Guttmacher Institute (2005) reported that 2001 and 2002 data indicate that Alaska and Kansas reported 11.7 and 21.4 abortions per 1,000 women respectively, while New Jersey reported 36.3 abortions per 1,000 women. In a national survey of 1,900 women having abortions, not one woman cited the inability to choose a confidential adoption as a factor in her decision to have the abortion (Guttmacher Institute, 2003). Further, Bethany Christian Services has not found a correlation between confidentiality and

women choosing to have abortions (Tameling, National Office Lifeline Director, Bethany Christian Services).

5. **Birth certificate legislation will reduce the number of adoptions in the United States.** In states with access laws, adoption rates are not correlated with adoptees' access rates. In reality the demand for adoption has decreased over time due to trends toward more openness in adoptions and toward the acceptance of single motherhood in the United States. Since the mid-1970s, the rate of never-married women placing their children for adoption has decreased from nearly 9 percent to less than 1 percent (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005).

6. **Access to birth records will undermine the strength of adoptive families.** British Association for Adoption and Fostering research has demonstrated that 97 percent of adoptees' feelings for their adoptive parents did not lessen once they gained access to their birth information (Feast, 2005). According to the NY Citizens Coalition for Children Survey (Cornell University, 1995), 84 percent of adoptive parents support adoptees' access to their own birth certificates.

Recommendations

It is recommended at the national level to promote policy changes regarding state laws on two aspects that affect adult adoptees. It is important for each state to amend its laws to restore unrestricted access for adult adoptees to their original birth certificates. Then it is recommended that at the national policy level, the appropriate child welfare agencies build on the experiences of the states that have restored the access of adult adoptees. Further, it is timely for educational institutions, as well as the appropriate federal and state child welfare agencies, to conduct social science research. Such research would be important to expand the understanding of the experiences of adopted persons, birth parents, and adoptive parents in relationship to the access-of-records issue. Lastly, educational institutions and churches should be encouraged to provide accurate data on adoption issues, in order to counter myths and misinformation about the issues surrounding adoption legislation and concepts. Churches would be the most likely institutions to disseminate information on the spiritual issues affecting adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents.

Summary

This paper hopes to communicate the importance of changing adoption policy legislation at the state level, with encouragement from the child welfare associations at the federal level. This is a civil rights issue that challenges the lack of equality for adult adoptees, who are the only population in the United States that does not have access to their birth records.

For the church, this is a call to justice in that it speaks to the equality of all humans in God's eyes and to the removing of a nationally institutionalized stigma, shame, and inequitable treatment. It is the church that can best speak to the need for the improved physical, mental, and spiritual health of adult adoptees.

Resources

National organizations involved in various aspects of adoption:

- **American Adoption Congress**: an international network of individuals and organizations committed to adoption reform (www.americanadoptioncongress.org)
- **Bastard Nation**: works for dignity and equal rights for adult adoptees through adoption reform (www.bastards.org)

- **Bethany Christian Services**: a private, licensed, nonprofit adoption and family service agency serving 30 states from over 70 locations and in 13 countries (www.bethany.org)
- **Child Welfare League of America**: oldest and largest U.S. organization devoted entirely to the well-being of America's vulnerable children (www.cwla.org)
- **Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute** (NJ Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education): information for adoption professionals with regard to research, policy, and practice (www.nj-care.org)
- **National Adoption Center**: a valuable resource for families that are currently adopting or seeking to adopt a child (www.adopt.org)
- **National Adoption Foundation**: provides financial assistance, services, and support to families (www.nafadopt.org)
- **North American Council on Adoptable Children**: provides information on how to adopt (www.cocaf.org/considering-nacac)

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R-74
To direct the General Synod Council to make the paper "The Medical, Psychological, and Spiritual Health of Persons Who Are Adopted" available on the RCA website and to disseminate the information via the monthly resource mailing; and further,

to encourage congregations to use the paper to inform and inspire RCA members with regard to how they can speak out publicly on the benefits that would permit an adopted person, or the adoptive parent or guardian of a minor who was adopted, access to a copy of the adopted person's original birth certificate and related medical and cultural information, upon request. (ADOPTED)

WITNESSING TO THE INCARNATION OF A COVENANT OF COMPASSION: THE CHURCH AND THE U.S. HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The General Synod of 2008 directed the Commission on Christian Action to prepare a study on the U.S. health care system, and how the church can be salt and light to bring greater justice and effectiveness to that system, for report back no later than the 2010 General Synod.

That the health care system is the subject of reform efforts in the U.S. Congress, the state legislatures and agencies, as well as within the society as a whole at the time of the commission's work places limits on the scope of its study and on its timeliness. Furthermore, the commission is aware that Christian ethicists, biblical scholars, and theologians have done much work on the subject of health care and the gospel, and the pastoral work of the church.[1] In that regard, the commission considers its work both suggestive and exploratory. The commission recognizes that the church has much to say and do as it lives out Christ's mission in the world, and hopes only to stimulate the imagination and compassion of the larger church, and each of our congregations and ministers, to the ministry of reconciliation in the world. However, the commission recognizes that, while the RCA is a denomination in two countries—the United States and Canada—the commission's directive focuses on the situation in the U.S. The commission asks that its Canadian members bear witness to their perspectives and experiences within the RCA's witness.

In what follows, the Commission on Christian Action seeks to speak with, for, and to the church. It seeks to call attention and focus to what is at stake for both the church and society and their respective members.

The Scriptural Mission: Health as Sign of the In-breaking Kingdom of God

It is beyond the scope of this paper to spell out a theology of health care and to give adequate attention to the witness of scripture to God's care for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the human family. Nonetheless, our Christian witness to human wholeness and thriving grows out of key theological convictions and the scriptures as our narrative guide to God's will. Therefore this report begins with the mission spelled out by our experience of God in Christ and the ministry of Christ among us. Having written this during the year when the lectionary readings were from the Gospel of Mark, it is useful to begin with the message of that gospel.

The beginning of the good news recorded in Mark's gospel narrates the coming of Christ as the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. To the extent that the church does what Christ began, it proclaims the good news from God and announces that the time of waiting and postponing is fulfilled, and the reign of God is arriving, so people should turn around and trust in the good news (Mk. 1:14-15). In taking up the concept of "kingdom of God," we recall that the term "kingdom" refers to the ruling activity of God, that is, the time and place where God's divine plan is being worked out—being implemented in a real, concrete, actual way. Jesus' message, summarized by Mark and the other New Testament writers, centers on the coming and actual arrival (a realized eschatology) of God's reign, both in its beginning in the ministry of John the Baptist, and its actualization in the ministry of Jesus. The plot structure of Mark's gospel emphasizes Jesus' ministry in Galilee as a ministry that extends the terrain of God's kingdom through Jesus' movement from place to place, and through healings and exorcisms, binding the strong man, and muzzling demons and casting them out of those they afflicted. While Galilee was part of a kingdom, in particular, the Roman Empire, and the puppet rule of Herod Antipas, that kingdom did not meet the needs of its members for well-being and wholeness. Mark describes the ministry of Jesus as occurring in a locale of crying human need, ruled by a legion of demonic forces—a gentile, porcine Roman Legion—that needed to be exorcised for the physical and mental wellness of its population.

That the ministry of Jesus that Mark narrates is centered on the physical and mental wellness of all is demonstrated rhetorically in Luke when, in his inaugural synagogue message, Jesus quotes Isaiah's description of the reign of God as the bringing of good news to the poor, release from captivity, sight for the blind, and freedom from oppression. While there is much that can be discovered in scripture about the relation between health, wholeness, and God's reign, the centrality of God's coming to us in Christ and the connection between that coming and physical and mental wellness are consonant with all of scripture: that salvation is both spiritual and physical, that the scripture does not bifurcate the physical from the spiritual. Physical and mental well-being are both signs of and actual outcomes of the in-breaking of the kingdom. In the words of Mark's Jesus, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand and take up your mat and walk'?" (Mark 2:9). The coming of God is the coming of wholeness and wellness. For the Christian, mental, physical, and spiritual health is a sign of the grace of God in action among us.

The Divine and Earthly Cities: Healing and Wholeness in Earthly Habitation

Recent scriptural studies have pointed out how kingdom language functioned as an implicit and sometimes explicit challenge to the existing political powers of Jesus' and the early

Christian community's time. The gospel writers' descriptions of the in-breaking reign stressed Jesus as healer and exorcist, which in part implies a judgment on the society of his time. Some in that society subsequently found Christ's message compelling: a message that proclaimed that the failure to care for those in need was itself a sign of the need for the justice of God's intervention.

The Reformed Church has a mission to address its culture, to speak to the powers that be of the good news. The relation between the "two kingdoms"—embodied in Augustine's monumental work *City of God*, and spelled out further in the church's lived reflection on the tension between ecclesial and civil culture—is recognized in the scripture's distinction between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of our God. That the church is in the world, and thus a participant in the systems of human relatedness, of which the U.S. health care system is a significant example, places the church in both kingdoms, the world's and God's. That the church owes its primary allegiance to God is a mark of God's call to what Reformed theologian H. Richard Niebuhr called "radical monotheism": the allegiance to God's kingdom requires us to recognize that the allegiances to political platforms and programs always stand under erasure, and only approximate, to greater or lesser degrees, anything approaching fulfillment of God's mandate. Nonetheless, the early Christians had the audacity to pray, following Christ's instruction, for the divine will to be exercised not only in heaven, but also on earth. Likewise, Christians today recognize that God's desire for the health and well-being of God's creatures has not changed. Furthermore, the good news includes not only the well-being of those in the church (the church models a different order from that lived out in the world), but that Christians in society also as citizens uphold the well-being of all God's children, Christian or not, as part of the social mandate of civil government. The general well-being of all (as the Belgic Confession recognizes [Art. 36]) calls on Christians to participate in and support (both through taxes and more generally) the tasks of government to maintain public good. The public recognizes this good, even if only the church sees the face of Christ in every needy person (Matt. 25).

Thus, the church, both in its individual members and in each gathering of Christians, has a dual task: that of living out the good news of the kingdom (and thus modeling the kingdom's goodness) as an example to the kingdoms of this world, and of serving as leaven to this world's own kingdoms. In the American context this requires the church to both participate in the ministries of ministration to and healing of the sick, as a witness to the world, and to enable the broader society's ministries of healing. (Biblical scholars are right to point out the commonness of healers in the first century—Jesus being presented as an exceptionally good one, where those seeking healing had the requisite faith).

In this sense, the directive from General Synod accurately identifies two aspects of Reformed theology's role in considering the national health care system: the church is both a light and salt. As light, it illuminates another way of seeing the health care crisis. As salt it is a Christian seasoning and preservative of particular values, principles, and attitudes that a just society cannot lose sight of in its attempts to govern justly and fairly.

As a witness within society, the church also brings its own experience with and experiences of the good news. Here, the church must submit itself to its own critique and examine not only its motives, but also its actions and its results. Sometimes the church has good intentions, intentions to heal and make well, but its faith in God and people is not well-informed and the good news it proclaims is experienced as bad news by the recipients of such well-meaning actions. The church must always be willing not only to learn from the light of revelation, but of reason and experience as well. Our understandings of scripture must always recognize the power of the Spirit to lead us into all truth—and that leading leads us beyond our present experience and understandings of God and God's word. Faithfulness to scripture requires us to test our understandings against the way others expe-

rience our actions. What counts as good news can too often become a legitimization of the status quo, and critique of the status quo can be experienced as bad news.

Thus, the church models the goodness of God in Christ, who not only forgives, but brings healing; who both proclaims, "Your sins are forgiven," and commands, "Take up your bed and walk." The former can be experienced in the heart, and find expression in transformed living. The latter can be empirically confirmed. The Reformed tradition has always stressed the real world effects of Christian life, that justification has implications for sanctification, even though dualism between spiritual and physical has sometimes led us to deemphasize the place of physical healing in the life of the believing community. Likewise, the church witnesses to its care for all, and through its participation in public life, ministers on behalf of Christ to all those in need.

Kerygma of Covenant and Compassion: Lessons from the Incarnation of Good News

Recent studies suggest that the proclamation of health, wholeness, and well-being by the early church, and its willingness to model that care in its life together, played a role in the appeal of the message to the Jewish, Hellenistic, and Roman audiences that were drawn to the early church. Beyond "bread and circuses" as a means of social control, the church offered the healing that comes from real caring and compassion. In this respect, like Mark's portrait of Jesus, the emotional component of caring was important to Jesus and his followers.[2] That Jesus looked with pity, or had compassion, or became angry with injustice and suffering, is recognized by Mark as contributing to Jesus' motivation to act on behalf of those in need. Hence, in the incarnation, as John says, God set up tent with us in our human camp, and was (and is) intimately involved in our human condition. As Hebrews reminds us, God in Christ became one of us, knowing our weaknesses and able to sympathize with us. Mark demonstrates this as Jesus' pathos motivates him not only to heal the sick and exorcize the mentally ill, but to do so systematically, town by town, to metaphorically bind the strong man, and to plunder his house, which was good news for those who had been taken advantage of by the system.

It would be presumptuous for the Commission on Christian Action, or even the General Synod or the denomination as a whole, to speak as if it had a solution to offer to the United States on transformation of the health care system. The church always, when it is faithful, recognizes its own teaching is based on its human understanding of the divine will, and that understanding becomes idolatrous when it is not recognized as a human understanding.

Nonetheless, the church also is bold enough to lift its heart to the Lord, and give thanks for the gifts God has given it for the well-being of all people, and to offer the gifts of God as good news, albeit in earthen vessels. Therefore, like the blind man in John's gospel, the church proclaims its experience of its own healing and its experience of wellness, and offers its own life as an example, asking others to taste and see that the Lord is good.

In short, the church speaks to society from its own experience of the gospel, and participates in society out of compassion and sensitivity to the needs of others, seeking to do to others what it would like done for its own members.

This tridentine role—serving those in need within its ranks, modeling being a healing community, and participating in a shared concern for those in need in broader society—allows the church to be a visible (and thus an accountable) presence in the world.

From this several principles and observations are in order.

PRINCIPLES:

1. The good news concerns not only the spiritual well-being or salvation of people, but the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of people as well. Physical, mental, and emotional healing are concomitant with the reign of God, as both a sign of its arrival and an effect of its presence.
2. The church is committed to good health both for Christians and all in society as it models and incarnates the compassion of Christ.
3. The metaphors of salt, light, leaven, and a city on the hill place Christians in their self-understanding as people who live out God's care for the world, express that care visibly, and model that care in their lives together.
4. Jesus' incarnation is one with Jesus' humanity. As a human bearer of the image of God, he is present in everyone who is in need.
5. Helping those in need is not enough. The systems by which people remain in need, or fail to have needs met, also must be addressed systemically.

These principles are just a few that can be drawn from scripture and from experience. While they tell us how the church's message is good news, this does not mean that only Christians hold such concern for others or for healthy life. Most people would recognize such values. The Christian teaching of compassion may not be acknowledged by all however. The church must recognize that outside (and even within) the community of faith, care for others may be valued, but may not receive the attention that Christians place on it for any number of reasons. For example, some perspectives would recognize compassion in principle, but place a greater value on self-reliance or submission to fate, or would take a more individualistic approach that would encourage self-care.

A City on the Hill: Living out the Good News in American Settings

Such principles and biblical and theological observations are all well and good. But the difficulties facing American citizens and their political officials in bringing about a more equitable and accessible health care system are myriad. Indeed, part of the difficulty in doing so results from both attachment to simple answers that would at best only be partial solutions, and to vested interest in maintaining aspects of the system that benefit some at the expense of others.

That said, voices that stress the intractability of the health care debate often do so on the basis of two kinds of errors. The first kind of error is an error of assumptions. Commitments to political, religious, or other starting points may interfere with attempts to provide care that is effective, affordable, and generally available to all, even (or especially) to those least able to provide for themselves. Nonetheless, such intransigence may be undergirded by questionable assumptions about human nature, assumptions that Christians will want to challenge.

For example, much conflict around health care appears to result from a conception of human nature that says humans are basically selfish individuals who cannot act out of true concern for others. While Christians certainly have a robust respect for human sinfulness, and Reformed Christians recognize that human nature has suffered, and by choice continues to suffer, from "total depravity" as a result of the fall. However, it is a caricature of Reformed theology to think that human nature is as bad as it can possibly be. Total depravity actually means that there is no aspect of human existence that has not been touched by the effects of sin (totality of "parts"), not that there is no capacity for human caring or good deeds; only that all human good deeds, however good they are, do not escape our "fallen-

ness" nor are capable in themselves of earning God's good favor. Nonetheless, by God's common grace, humans still care about one another, and thus may create institutions that limit and constrain evil and work for good.

Likewise, humans, it is sometimes argued, are psychological egoists—they are capable only of doing what they think is to their own benefit. But even if that were the case, it would not mean that humans could not find themselves doing things out of self-interest that also benefit others, and that society could not design systems that make what is good for the general public and those most vulnerable also beneficial to egoists.

Furthermore, health care debates often proceed from win-lose assumptions. If we win, you must lose. However, much of human social existence is not properly understood under this scenario. In health care, the care of others can result in a healthier, more active population, which (in capitalistic terms) is better for all and frees up resources for others.

Although this list could go on, one further example must suffice. Much of the health care debate assumes a correlation between cost and effectiveness. While the United States has the most expensive health care system, it does not necessarily have the healthiest population as a result. The assumptions that one brings to the health care debate often need to be challenged, or at least tested by lived experience and empirical data.

What follows are some reflections on the particularities of the American situation, and some observations informed by Christian compassion.

Identifying the Problems

There are a number of concerns that have raised the issue of health care at this time in American society.

1. Rising health care costs: The annual increases in health care expenses are unsustainable over the long haul, and have already reached the breaking point for many in society. Currently the U.S. expends about 16 percent of its Gross Domestic Product on health care ($2.3 trillion of a 2008 GDP of $14.6 trillion). Expected growth puts the figure at 25 percent of GDP by 2025, with half of that growth coming from new drugs and medical devices.[3]
2. Massive numbers of uninsured: 2007 statistics put the uninsured at 47 million Americans.
3. Low results vs. high expenditures: although the U.S. has the highest per capita health care costs, it ranks behind approximately twenty other countries in standard measures of health quality. OECD[4] statistics rank the United States 25th for infant mortality (22nd for infant mortality among white population only), 22nd in maternal mortality, 23rd in life expectancy from birth at for women and 22nd for men (although the U.S. does better for the life expectancy of those who reach age 65, where the U.S. ranks 10th for women and 9th for men). High costs are not necessarily correlated with better outcomes.
4. Inefficiencies in the system: the U.S. health care system has administrative and profit costs above that of other developed countries. Insurance company administrative costs are estimated to run from 8 to 22 percent of health care costs. Compare this to about 3 percent for U.S. Medicare, 5.5 percent in Switzerland, or less than 2 percent in Taiwan (due in part to state of the art electronic medical records).
5. Costs of prescription medications: costs for oral cancer drugs have risen from less

than $1,000 per month supply in the late 1960s to greater than $6,000 a month today. Medicare costs for doctor-administered drugs rose 267 percent from 1997 to 2004 ($3 billion to $11 billion) at the same time that total Medicare spending in comparison only rose 47 percent.

These are by no means the only concerns. The health care debate is characterized by a diffuse anxiety on many other fronts. Medical bankruptcies threaten families and individuals; employers find the trajectory of funding employee health care insurance unsustainable; health care providers express concern over delivery related complications and deaths.

The Quest for Solutions

There are a number of things the church should keep in mind as it seeks to incarnate Christ's healing ministry of compassion in society. On the one hand, there are some tendencies to be avoided. On the other hand, there are some emphases to be considered.

Tendencies to be avoided: The author of John's letters reminds us to love one another, with the observation that "perfect love casts out fear." Christians recognize that their own fears, self-concern, and selfishness are part of the problem. Nurse and economist Jane Hansen points out some hindrances to genuine dialogue and progress on health care reform: "Everyone wants one hundred percent of what they want. Change is OK only if it means no change, or if it means betterment for me. The 'other guy' should pay for it. 'Hard choices' must be made…but not by me." And, she concludes, "'The problem is…' it's always someone else's fault." Christians recognize that none of us lives for ourself and none of us dies for ourself (Rom. 14:7), rather we live for the Lord. But as Paul makes clear, "living for the Lord" requires concern for one another. The quality of our life as a nation depends in part on the justice we evidence by our concern for the health needs of all. In light of that, these tendencies to think only of ourselves need to be tempered with concern for the overall well-being of society and its least advantaged members. Likewise, name calling and villainization of opposing views has no appropriate role in the debate. Terms like "socialism," "death panels," and "rationed care" accusations distract from the hard work of finding solutions to complex problems in health care.[5]

So that means some emphases may be stressed by the church as it adds its voice to the conversation over health care reform in the United States.

1. There is a need to control the growth in overall costs and spending.

2. The United States needs to consider health care in the context of overall population health. Behavioral, lifestyle, and societal related health care concerns need to be a factor in this consideration; smoking, obesity, access to weapons, environmental hazards, and vehicle safety are part of the issues of general health care.

3. Universal access needs to be adopted.

4. Costs need to be affordable, not unduly burdensome.

We have highlighted established values that deal with health care issues. However, we acknowledge that this question came out of concern regarding health care costs within the RCA, particularly as it relates to mandated coverage for called ministers. Under the current situation, health insurance costs are an impediment to RCA growth. Some new congregations are choosing not to organize, and some established congregations are opting for contract pastors, in part to avoid health insurance costs.

R-75
To direct the Board of Benefits Services to do a financial assessment on the cost of various levels of insurance for RCA participants including a less comprehensive coverage plan that would meet basic health care needs, and report to General Synod 2011.

The All-Synod Advisory Committee on the Board of Benefits Services offered an amendment to the recommendation originally offered by the commission:

R-75
To direct the Board of Benefits Services to ~~do a~~ continue its financial assessment on the cost of various levels of insurance for RCA participants including investigating the viability of a less comprehensive coverage plan that would meet basic health care needs, and present a report with supporting data to General Synod 2011. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The Board of Benefits Services already explores low-cost insurance options.
2. There is interest in seeing how less comprehensive plans might impact ministers' health care and costs.
3. Providing supporting data encourages transparency.

A motion was made from the floor to amend R-76.

R-76
To direct the Board of Benefits Services to explore potential partnerships with other forms of health care plans as an avenue to improving health care value; and further, to make available the paper "Witnessing to the Incarnation of a Covenant of Compassion The Church and the U.S. Health Care System." (ADOPTED)

Endnotes
[1] In particular, see the 2002 General Synod statement "Covenant of Grace, Covenant of Care" (*MGS 2002*, pp. 358-363).
[2] This emphasis on the emotional responses of Jesus, stressed by Mark, is mitigated in accounts by the later evangelists, perhaps in part to paint Jesus as a model of self-control, à la philosophical schools' notions of virtue.
[3] Congressional Budget Office, cited in the *New York Times*. Thanks to Jane Hansen, MBA, MSN, FNP-C, of the Barrington, IL, League of Women Voters, for the background sources, statistics, and ideas used in this section of the paper.
[4] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development statistics on health care can be accessed at http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,3373,en_2649_37407_1_1_1_1_37407,00.html.
[5] Jane Hansen, Barrington, IL, League of Women Voters, speaking at McHenry County College, Crystal Lake, IL, September 9, 2009.

PRAY FOR NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES

Introduction

The status of North Korean refugees has become a significant problem under the regime of dictator Kim Jong Il. Refugees have become more prominent within the borders of China and Russia. Given dire economic and famine conditions and political oppression, in

order to seek safety for themselves and their families, many North Koreans have felt compelled to flee their communist country. Their current situation alerts the world of the necessity of action in order to stop unnecessary oppression, starvation, and deaths.

Situation of Recent North Korean Refugees

Many North Koreans find themselves in daily fear for their lives, and dream of a safe haven where food and protection are tangible. When they do flee, they are victimized a second time, as Chinese and North Korean authorities catch many of these refugees. They are denied even the most basic of human rights to which every person is entitled.

Major Routes for Refugees

North Koreans find limited paths of escape from their situations. With limited access and difficult terrain at the Russian border and the heavy military presence at the 38th parallel Demilitarized Zone (border with South Korea), many North Koreans attempt to escape by the only perceived remaining route into China by crossing the Tumen and Yalu Rivers. In order to prevent defection at this border, Kim Jong Il has instituted a program of increased military presence, characterized by watchtowers placed at 200 meter intervals, with armed soldiers and attack dogs.

Age of Refugees

Formerly, North Korean refugees tended to be adults, most older than twenty years, and less rarely the elderly, women, and children. However, in the years since the North Korean crop failures a greater number of refugees are minors; they flee the country and ultimately become international orphans.

Number of Refugees

Experts estimate that recently 300 to 500 refugees a day were fleeing North Korea by crossing the Tumen and Yalu Rivers, although due to recent tensions between China and North Korea, those numbers have gone down.

Due to Chinese government rigor, a majority of those who attempt to defect are returned to North Korea, where they await punishment and possible execution. Few refugees succeed in reaching their intended destination, usually South Korea or the United States.

Human Rights Violations

North Korean refugees are often sold as commodities, exploited for hard labor as slaves, and used in prostitution rings, where they are abused and at risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Forced Repatriation and Punishment by China and North Korea

Because of an extradition treaty between North Korea and China, refugees arrested in China are repatriated by force to North Korea. The Chinese government–drafted new penal code called "Border Management Interference Sins" has made lives of refugees who remain in China more difficult and hard. The Chinese government uses a carrot and stick approach to the disadvantage of refugees. Economic incentives work against refugee interests. The Chinese government has paid 500 yuan in compensation to informers who turned over refugees. In addition, three years of imprisonment and fines of 1,000 yuan are imposed on those who shelter or protect the refugees.

Refugees who have been arrested in Russia or China have been labeled "traitors of the country" and have been tortured, handcuffed, or shackled while being sent back to North Korea. Some have been subjected to use in medical experimentations and publicly denounced to discourage others from fleeing the country. Some minor-age refugees have had legs amputated or broken as a reminder to remain loyal to their motherland.

The status of repatriated refugees is distressing. Once back in the country, refugees are sent to reeducation centers, labor camps, and detentions centers. Some refugees who were outspoken religiously or politically have been executed by a gunshot to the head. North Korean authorities justified the executions reasoning that the refugees were "mentally tainted." Pregnant women have been subjected to forced abortion at reforming camps or labor camps. There have also been reports of infanticide.

South Korea Is Hesitant to Exacerbate Tensions with North Korea

Due to the already high tensions between South and North Korea, the South Korean government has been hesitant to further exacerbate tensions with the North Koreans. The South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Unification has practiced a non-tension policy toward the North Koreans since the Inter-Korean Summit.

Private (Religious, Civic) Organizations Support the Refugees

Within China there are numerous church organizations and Chosunjok—ethnic Koreans living in China—helping North Korean refugees in spite of imminent dangers and threats. In South Korea, Christian mission organizations and other organizations work covertly to support the refugees. These organizations provide food aid and funding for housing, build shelters near borders along the Tumen and Yalu Rivers, provide long-term shelters, help asylum seekers, provide medical assistance, help refugees settle in China, provide necessary documents, lead asylum seekers to embassies, and give opportunities for jobs, education, and adoption choices. However, Chinese security forces and North Korean authorities actively seek to hamper many of these ongoing activities.

Mission Strategy for the North Korean Refugees

There are many ways to support and assist North Korean refugees. Even minor forms of assistance can boost their chances of survival and provide refugees with new opportunities for freedom. Support for refugees includes the following:

1. Shelter
2. Food and warm clothing
3. Basic medical care
4. Spiritual and emotional undergirding

Conclusion

Today many North Korean refugees need assistance to experience freedom from religious and political oppression. The North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, approved by the U.S. government, states official American policy toward North Korea. The policy includes promoting 1) the human rights of the North Korean people; 2) assistance to refugees; 3) provision of protection of the refugees.

What can be done about the refugees? International Korean Christian organizations and other mission-minded groups should pray for them. Korean Christian congregations in the U.S. and Canada are particularly eager to assist their North Korean sisters and brothers. Some North Korean defectors have made contact with Korean churches while in China or

a third country, and have become members of a congregation, making it easy for them to stay in contact. Who will look after them? How will they be saved from human trafficking and exploitation? What can be done to help them overcome the life and death day-to-day situations they face? If we do not help them now they will likely be arrested, tortured, imprisoned, and eventually killed.

Korean churches provide North Korean defectors with a great deal of assistance. In addition, the Korean churches in the areas where defectors live sponsor seminars, presentations, and educational opportunities to raise awareness about North Korea. Nonetheless, further prayer and support are needed. As a denomination that values its Korean members, and that stands for justice, human rights, and dignity, the support of North Korean refugees is important to our mission.

R-77
That the members of the 2010 General Synod stand and join in prayer together for the people of North Korea and especially their refugee population; and further,

to direct the General Synod Council to make this status report, "Pray for North Korean Refugees," available on the RCA website and to disseminate the information via the monthly resources mailing; and further,

to encourage congregations and classes to continue to lift up all refugees in their prayers, and especially our North Korean sisters and brothers. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship

The Discipleship Team of the RCA has defined discipleship as "the practice of following Jesus Christ, becoming more like him in all we think, say, and do, empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God."

The Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship describes discipleship as "deep" and "rich."

- Discipleship is deep when it is transformational at personal, communal, and institutional levels.
- It is deep when it is incarnational, that is, when the gospel is not simply known intellectually but embodied and lived out in daily life.
- Discipleship is rich when it is both educational and missional, when the movement is both inward and outward.
- It is rich because it is relational, involving all generations teaching each other and learning from each other.

A vision of a Reformed Church where discipleship is deep and rich:

- Is a church that involves **everyone**—adults, youth, children. No one is left out; all people belong because all have a place to serve in ways that best suit their gifts and abilities and limitations.
- Deep and rich discipleship happens in a place that **doesn't avoid difficult issues**, but confronts them and teaches a way of freedom and grace.

- Is engaged in meaningful **prayer** at all times.
- Deep and rich discipleship happens when the adults model lifelong learning to the children and youth. Adults remain engaged in **teaching and learning** opportunities, deepening their faith in God.
- Its people are actively **involved in the ministry of Jesus**—bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and letting the oppressed go free.

Seasons of Discipleship Update

The task force appointed by the General Synod Council (GSC) and GSC staff with recommendations from the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship is seeking to encourage, equip, and empower congregations to embrace discipleship as a way to live in their unique time and place. One result is the design of a denomination-wide Seasons of Discipleship resource entitled *Back to Basics*. This resource will be available as a downloadable print resource and as a CD to equip pastors, and there are plans to eventually make it available in an interactive format on the RCA website. *Back to Basics* follows the five "deep and rich" vision themes outlined above as it explores six discipleship basics: Baptism, Belonging, Bible, Belief, Being, and Building. Each section includes a similar structure:

Hearing	Several Scripture passages that enlighten the focus/topic
Connecting	Mini sermon/devotion to stimulate thought processes, to encourage the inward growth of discipleship
Believing	Questions to help individuals, congregations, leaders, and consistories go deeper in their experience of the particular focus or topic
Living out	A description of best practices lived out to give examples and stimulate creativity in internalizing the practices
Sharing	A directing of attention to outward growth into mission, connection with others on the same journey via discussion and invitations to social networking.

Back to Basics will be formally launched at General Synod 2011 when leaders will be invited to use this tool to create an environment of discipling in community through face-to-face and technological means.

Looking Ahead

The commission believes that the RCA has grown "wide" in fulfilling its ten-year goal, and the opportunity now presents itself to grow "deep" in discipleship, spirituality, and transformative kingdom work. It should be noted, however, that the commission does not believe that these two goals are mutually exclusive. In fact, it is the commission's hope that by going deep the denomination will continue to grow wide.

One of the ways the commission wants to encourage this work is by connecting the offices of discipleship, revitalization, and multiplication to assist going deep in discipleship in new and existing churches. To that end, the commission brings the following motion.

R-78
To instruct the General Synod Council to form a task force that will include in its discussions discipleship, revitalization, and multiplication as they relate to exploring strategies for discipleship growth in our new and existing churches. (ADOPTED)

A second vision the commission has for deepening discipleship in the RCA is to encourage the implementation of the Belhar Confession with its core values of unity, reconciliation, and justice. These are core commitments for disciples of Christ and central biblical teachings that Christ commanded us to teach to all nations (Matt. 28:20). The commission feels the Belhar Confession should be embraced as a faithful witness to the Word of God and for the mission of the church and looks forward to assisting the RCA in living into the faith practices of unity, reconciliation, and justice.

Finally, as mentioned above, the commission takes the well-known words of Jesus in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) as foundational to its work. Here the command to "make disciples" is expressed through "baptizing" and "teaching them to obey everything" that Jesus commanded us. Given that our focus is broader than an educational component that is expressed only through "Sunday school" (which has often been taken as the only focus of the commission) the commission wants to signal this perspective through a name change for the commission. This proposed name change follows the Great Commission's example by putting discipleship first, with education retained as an intrinsic means of discipleship. This also will help break down the false, but often-perceived, bifurcation between Christian education and discipleship. Therefore, in order that we might be "reformed and always reforming according to the Word," we bring the following motion.

R-79
To rename the "Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship" the "Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education."

Upon the advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance, the synod:

VOTED: To substitute the following for R-79:

R-79
To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12 for approval by the synod and to be voted for ratification at the 2011 General Synod (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Sec. 12 Commission on Christian <u>Discipleship and</u> Education ~~and Discipleship~~ **(ADOPTED)**

Reason:
A substitute recommendation is offered to provide the changes to the *Book of Church Order* to enable this change to go forward this year.

Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities with the RCA Colleges

Consistent with the commission's responsibility to "advise the General Synod and RCA colleges and seminaries with regard to the preparation of those who carry out the church's teaching ministry" (*Book of Church Order* 3.I.5b.3), the commission brings a motion to endorse a revised covenant between the RCA colleges and the RCA. The existing covenant needs updating (it was originally endorsed by General Synod in 1969) to better reflect the current relationship between the colleges and the denomination.

The Preamble to the Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities was prepared by General Synod's Special Committee on "Reformed Church in America Philosophy on Higher Education" and was endorsed by the 1969 General Synod. The preamble is reprinted here to complete the updated Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities.

THE CHURCH AND ITS COLLEGES
(A PREAMBLE TO THE COVENANT OF MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES)

The involvement of the Reformed family of churches in institutions of higher learning goes back to the days of the Reformation. One of the great contributions of the Reformers to our heritage was the idea that Christian faith and learning should be inseparable. Each of the original nine colleges in America had some relationship with the church, arose in religiously homogeneous situations, and had as one major aim the training of men for the ministry. Although the three colleges of the Reformed Church in America, Hope, Central, and Northwestern, came into being much later, they arose in the mid-west to meet a similar need. All three have been and want to continue to be closely related to the church. All three have grown up in and have, until recently, themselves been religious homogeneous societies.

Not the least of the changes which now affect our colleges is that they have, in keeping with the national trend, doubled in size in the last ten years. The students and faculty now come from a heterogeneous background religiously and socially. This is the same period in which we have moved into a radically different world and nowhere is this more evident than on our nation's college campuses. This presents new problems to the church and its colleges, but it has also opened up a great new opportunity to the church to carry out a mission in higher education which it has never had before. THAT MISSION IS TO PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT WITHIN A REVOLUTIONARY WORLD. It is a mission of the church through its colleges to break the existing "sound barrier" between the secular and the sacred. It is a mission to relate the complexities of culture to the Christ of the church and to relate the life and message of the church to the mainstream of culture.

If that objective is to be realized in our three colleges in the years immediately ahead, a clear understanding of the new and changing aspects of this mission both by the church and its institutions is required. All parties concerned must realize that it is no small task to appeal to the minds and hearts of today's youth with the best in education and with a vital Christian faith.

Our three schools are liberal arts colleges and one aim which they cannot compromise is to be top-ranking in their field. Perhaps the first thing that needs to be said, then, is that they are not churches and they do not wish to usurp the special functions of the church, and that the church does not ask them to assume the totality of it mission. This is true even where there may be experimental student churches on campus. The colleges as such are not primarily institutions for evangelism or places to prepare men for the ministry. They are the church reaching out into the academic world offering, as we have said, an opportunity for the Reformed Church to be a witness to its Lord at that level. The Christian college, and the church through its colleges, is able to offer to the rest of higher education its distinctive insights. Ours are institutions where future leaders are challenged to consider every walk of life as a Christian vocation and as an opportunity to serve God while serving man.

As liberal arts colleges they are committed to providing for each student not only a depth of competency in a single area but a breadth of training and experience which will make him a more complete person in the modern world. This includes the cultivation of a critical appreciation for all aspects of man's physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual life. Within the context of the Christian community the student has an opportunity to face and explore the crucial issues in the world today.

To be a college in today's world means to strive for a faculty of academic excellence. To

be a Christian college in today's world means to have outstanding teachers in every department who have a commitment to the Christian faith.

The teaching of religion in our colleges is an academic discipline and must measure up to the same high standards of scholarship expected elsewhere. It should be expected that the teachers in this area have a warm appreciation for the Reformed faith and its creeds and for the authority of the Scriptures. On the college level it is important that the student see the creeds of the church in terms of their history, the historical situation which led to their formulation. With the Bible, too, interpretation must depend upon an honest and open endeavor to take into account the historical-contextual approach to the Scriptures. Students (some of whom have never read the Bible before) want to know what this Christian message is all about existentially, what it has to say to them in the way in which they see themselves and the world. It is, then, one of the functions of the church college and its departments of Bible and religion to enable the student's understanding of the Bible and the church's doctrines to keep pace with his growth in other areas of study. Where this maturity fails to take place the student may either discard his undeveloped faith or he may compartmentalize it and thus make it basically unreal and irrelevant to life.

It should be an ideal of a Christian college, then, that it seeks to articulate the biblical faith within the context of the life and studies of the academic community. It is consistent with the emphasis of the Reformers on Christian vocation to encourage the ministry of teachers and of students working together in all areas to find significant meaning for themselves and society in terms of faith in the redemptive Lordship of Christ over all of life.

To the extent that a Christian college is able to give expression through its faculty and its total life to the presuppositions and world view of the Christian faith it attempts to take scriptural revelation seriously in illuminating and energizing the college as a community. There are a number of implications of this goal. It should mean that the church-related college is surely a place where all idolatries and reductive tendencies—religious as well as scientific and political—should be actively challenged. While it is not an institution which should condone destructive behavior or skepticism, it fails to be Christian if it encourages uncritical support of prevailing cultural patterns. Rather it should be a place where independent thought and creative effort are encouraged to make the college, the church, and all other cultural institutions more nearly reflective of the ideals of redeemed persons and citizens. It is a community which, in carrying out its particular task, seeks to mediate the Christian qualities of concern, service, reconciliation, mercy, and reverence.

As a matter of honest conviction our colleges do not attempt to shelter the mind from ideas thought to be inimical to the faith, but rather seek to create an honest life-situation in which commitments are both affirmed and tested in the open debate of the academic community at large. To offer this type of program to the youth today requires a faculty which is encouraged to exercise responsible academic freedom—unhampered, honest search for the truth—knowing that truth itself is the bar of judgment before which knowledge-claims must stand. Teachers must be free to be constructive critics, free to challenge assumptions and values, while presenting alternatives, free to excite students to think for themselves and to develop their own positions. As far as teaching and the work of the mind are concerned the Christian college is committed to its belief that all truth is God's truth and that this truth in all areas must be sought with diligence and devotion, responded to with humility and with a high sense of responsibility. The church may expect of the faculties of its colleges a faith in the student as a person and a concern for his total development, his readiness to respond as a student and as an individual to the demands of truth, beauty, goodness, and a life of concern for his fellow man and for God.

This is a day of opportunity for the Reformed Church in America, to "be where the action

is." The campus is the place where revolutionary changes are keenly felt and where significant cultural movements affecting all of us are in the making. Our church colleges can be the places where revolutionary development in all fields of life and learning become constructive and creative because they are informed by a stimulating educational environment and by the directional signals of the Christian faith which include a compassion for men in need.

We believe that when the church supports its colleges it offers a unique gift to the youth, both within and outside the Reformed Church, and to the society of which they will become a part. The colleges mediate to the world the church's concern for young people preparing for vocation, and the colleges mediate to the church an understanding of contemporary life and insights which may bring the church itself to renewal and an even more dynamic life. By supporting its colleges, the church maintains its voice in research and writing as well as in teaching which can exhibit the implications which learning and faith have for each other. The colleges offer to the youth of the church a place where they test their ideas and determine the ultimate purposes of their lives, a community in which they can mature into lay leaders of Christian conviction or go on to prepare in our seminaries for a ministry of the Living Word to the people of God. We may note that the college campus is a place where meaningful experimentation in Christian life, worship, and service takes place, which will be useful to the church in its efforts to reach each new generation.

It is well that the churches find ways to maintain dialogue with their colleges so that constructive criticism and encouragement may be meaningfully felt. The church must be prepared to welcome its trained youth back into its fellowship and into an active ministry in the world. To do this, the church itself must be open to new ways of witness to an authentic Christian faith.

If the colleges and the church together can with patience and persistence find ways to make the eternal gospel of Christ as Savior and Lord meaningfully related to all areas of study and life, then we stand ready to affirm together our Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities.

COVENANT OF MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES
Between the RCA Colleges and the Reformed Church in America

I. The colleges covenant with the Reformed Church in America to:

1. **Examine the words and works of God and humankind in the spirit of openness and humility, recognizing that all truth is God's truth.**

2. **Infuse and deepen a superior education in the liberal arts with a mature understanding of the sources and resources of the Christian heritage; maintain an appreciation for the Reformed tradition and its implications for the integration of faith and learning.**

3. **Provide an atmosphere of search and confrontation that liberates the mind, enhances discernment, enlarges sympathies, and encourages the commitment of all students so they may achieve full personal development and self-definition.**

4. **Provide a community of learning, love, and forbearance that fosters unity in the presence of diversity.**

5. **Engage the church, providing it with courageous and timely intellectual leadership to guide its understanding of itself and strengthen its witness to**

a tense, ever-changing world, while giving earnest consideration to the views and counsel of the church.

6. **Inspire students to a contemplative and self-giving life, alerting them to the demands and needs of the time, while challenging them to serve.**

II. The RCA covenants with Central, Hope, and Northwestern Colleges to:

1. **Assure full freedom to pursue truth, and encourage the colleges in their responsibility and Christian responsiveness.**

2. **Provide wholehearted interest, favor, and financial support; encourage the colleges in their own resourcefulness.**

3. **Urge and aid its young people to attend one of the three RCA colleges, to pursue a life of Christian discipleship, and, if appropriate, to consider the pastoral ministry.**

4. **Interpret to the church the nature of higher education in the Christian tradition, its integrative mission, its unique requirements and limitations, its expected and unexpected outcomes in the lives of students and those they touch around the world.**

5. **Encourage the colleges to define and refine their image and mission as an RCA school and to fulfill their ecumenical Christian calling.**

6. **Cultivate mutual trust and initiate consistent and meaningful communication.**

R-80
To endorse the updated Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities between the RCA Colleges and the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

The General Synod is responsible for the ecumenical relations of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 5). In response to Christ's prayer that we may all be one (John 17:21) and to fulfill its constitutional responsibility, General Synod has constituted the Commission on Christian Unity to oversee ecumenical commitments, to present an ecumenical agenda to the church, and to carry out ecumenical directives given by the General Synod. Since its creation in 1974 (*MGS 1974*, R-6, pp. 201-202) and its adoption by General Synod in 1975 (*MGS 1975*, R-4, pp. 101-102), this commission has served General Synod by coordinating a range of ecumenical involvements reaching all levels of mission in the RCA. The commission advises General Synod on ecumenical matters and communicates with other denominations, ecumenical councils, and interdenominational agencies. The commission educates the RCA on ecumenical matters and advocates for actions and positions consistent with RCA confessions and ecumenical practices as outlined in "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," adopted by General Synod in l996 (*MGS 1996*, R-1, p.

197). General Synod refers ecumenical matters to the commission for study and implementation.

THE BELHAR CONFESSION

From the very beginnings of the church, often in times of crisis or threat, Christians have sought ways to say to the world: Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, this is who we are, what we believe, and what we intend to do. These statements of faith, including the Heidelberg Catechism and the Apostles' Creed, though centuries old and far removed from their place of origin, today still guide our understanding of Scripture and of faith, and of the life they call us to live.

In the late twentieth century the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa, like those Christian leaders centuries before them, stepped forward to confront yet another critical issue that threatened the very core of the gospel message. In this case, the church and the society in which it functioned were torn by horrible internal conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and the subjugation of those who were disenfranchised. From this crucible of suffering emerged the Belhar Confession, a biblically based doctrinal standard of justice, reconciliation, and unity, intended to guide not only the personal lives of God's children but the body of Christ in the world as well.

Like the confessions which preceded it, the Belhar Confession became a gift from one particular expression of the church to Christians in other parts of the world, a testimony for all of God's people in our time. For South Africa is not alone in its journey with conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and the subjugation of the downtrodden. This history of oppression in our own countries, and the reality of racism and injustice in our own time, calls for the voice of the Christian church to be heard with unmistakable clarity—one that not only speaks against injustice but also offers a biblically faithful picture of hope, mercy, and reconciliation. "Our prayer," said the South African Church in offering this confession to the world church and specifically to the RCA, "is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling-blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and unifying..." (The Introduction to the Belhar Confession from the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America).

The RCA's Process of Consideration

The RCA was a recipient of the gift of the Belhar. The 2000 General Synod voted to instruct the commission to commend the Belhar Confession to the church over the next decade for reflection, study, and response as a means of deepening the RCA's commitment to dealing with racism and strengthening its ecumenical commitment to the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) and other Reformed bodies (*MGS 2000*, R-13 amended, p. 100). The following year, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity recommended to General Synod "to endorse and use the theological foundation of the Belhar Confession to inform the RCA's commitment to be a church freed from racism" (*MGS 2001*, R-115 (substitute), p. 389) and "to invite members of congregations and classes to carefully study the Belhar Confession and the implications of its endorsement for life and ministry in the RCA, using materials made available by the Commission on Christian Unity" (*MGS 2001*, R-116 amended, p. 390). Throughout the remainder of the decade, the commission has made the Belhar Confession and the church-wide study its highest priority and focused on the creation of study and worship materials that would allow the RCA, its congregations and members, to engage the Belhar Confession deeply and in multiple ways. (An overview of how the General Synod has studied the Belhar Confession is available in the reports of the commission to previous General Synods.)

Last year, in response to the RCA's decade-long engagement with the Belhar Confession and with widespread support in the church, this commission recommended a change to the *Book of Church Order* that would add the Belhar Confession to the three established doctrinal standards of the RCA. Each delegate to the 2009 General Synod, through the advisory committee process, had the opportunity to discuss directly the recommendation and its possible implications for the life and ministry of the RCA. The writing team for the advisory committees summarized that discussion in this way, and in doing so, advised passage of the commission's recommendation:

> Three times in its history, the Reformed church has developed confessional statements. In 1561, Guido de Bres wrote the Belgic Confession, in the face of great persecution, seeking justice from the king of Spain. In 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism was written seeking reconciliation between Lutherans and Calvinists who were at violent odds with one another. In 1619 the Canons of Dort were composed to settle a theological dispute and bring unity to the church. The General Synod of that year confirmed these three confessions as standards of unity for the church.
>
> For twenty-four years, the Reformed Church in America has been considering the status of another confession that has been put before us, the Belhar Confession. Like the confessions before it, it was written under persecution, confessing God's desire for justice and reconciliation among people at violent odds with one another, and calling for unity in the church. Previous synods have passed this confession forward and outward for consideration. This General Synod has been offered the opportunity to consider another significant step. You have been given the task of deciding whether this confession will be adopted as a standard for your church.
>
> As moderators of the issue advisory committees, we were given three tasks: to listen, to summarize, and to make recommendations based on your advice. As fellow delegates, we want you to know that your voices have been heard. We heard the passionate voices, we heard the questioning voices, we heard the hopeful voices, we heard the doubtful voices, and we heard every voice speak out of a love for God and the church.
>
> We want to thank you for offering your voices and, more importantly, for the way in which you offered them. We feel privileged to share with you what you shared with us.
>
> Some of you found it significant that the Belhar Confession is a gift from the hearts of a marginalized people. Some of you would like to offer a gift of your own by adopting the Belhar Confession as a standard of unity. Some found in the language of the Belhar Confession the courage to take a stand and be held accountable. Some credited the Belhar Confession with the ability to raise our awareness of sins that we would otherwise ignore.
>
> Some of you also spoke to us of your concerns. Some of you shared with us your fear that this confession about unity could result in division within our denomination; you felt that adopting the Belhar Confession is made more complex by the potential connection to our ongoing discussion regarding the topic of homosexuality. Some of you wondered if the Belhar Confession deserved the same status as our current standards. Some of you felt it was too broad in scope, and others felt it was too focused on the situation of another time and place. You affirmed that a confession only has value if it is embraced and used, and some of you said you could not be certain that we could adopt the Belhar Confession with integrity. Finally, some of you shared a hesitancy to add to our doctrinal standards.
>
> We listened to all of your voices. Ultimately, most of the voices spoke in favor of the

recommendation to adopt the Belhar Confession. We noticed a number of overarching themes in those more prevalent voices that serve as your reasons for the support of the Belhar Confession:

- The Belhar Confession expands and balances the RCA confessions to encompass the whole of Scripture. It speaks to unity and justice in ways that the other confessions do not.
- The Belhar Confession challenges the church to the hard work of unity and it gives a vision for unity and reconciliation in the global church and society. Many of you said we are ready to rise to that challenge and see this as an opportunity for unity in the church and around the globe.
- The Belhar Confession will help us add unity, justice, and reconciliation to our denominational DNA. So many of you told us you were ready to act out your faith and appreciated the Belhar Confession's emphasis on action as a response to belief.
- The Belhar Confession heightens our awareness of injustices around us and brings focus to specific areas of injustice, such as poverty and racism.
- The Belhar Confession strengthens the vision of Our Call.

For these reasons, many of you see this as the right moment to adopt a new confession. Many of you see the Belhar Confession as contemporary and relevant, and as resonating with the next generation of church members and new Christians and offering a meaningful answer to the cries of the oppressed around the world. Finally, many of you see the Belhar Confession as clearly defining our mission to a lost and broken world so loved by God.

(*MGS 2009*, pp. 245-246)

The commission, in response to the important discussions that took place in the advisory committee process, presented one further statement to the synod, highlighted for the 2009 delegates as it is here:

As the Commission on Christian Unity brings the Belhar Confession before the church we ask that the journal record the following as we join with the church in affirming that scripture is the only rule of faith and life and further that our confessions are historic and faithful witnesses to scripture. The commission acknowledges that the Belhar Confession does not negate the statements of the General Synod on homosexuality including the 1978 and 1979 statements. We want to provide clear understanding that the Belhar Confession, as a faithful witness to scripture, acknowledges that membership in the Church is "true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church" (The Belhar Confession article 2).

We share with all delegates the profound nature of this moment—this is a rare moment in the life of the church and therefore one that must not be entered into lightly but rather with Godly fear and trembling, humbly trusting that we will be faithful to the Gospel. With these understandings we will now present a recommendation to adopt the Belhar Confession as a standard of Faith as the fourth confession of the Reformed Church in America.

(*MGS 2009*, pp. 246-247)

Following further discussion and debate, the 2009 General Synod voted 166-65 (with one abstention) to adopt the following recommendation:

R-55
To adopt the following amendment to the first paragraph of the Preamble to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

> 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 Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice in the Reformed Church in America. Its Constitution consists of the Doctrinal Standards (which are the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism with its Compendium, ~~and~~ the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and the Belhar Confession), the Liturgy with the Directory for Worship, the Government of the Reformed Church in America, and the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures. (ADOPTED)
>
> (*MGS 2009*, p. 247)

That action by the 2009 General Synod placed this change in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) before the classes for approval. Two-thirds or more of the RCA's forty-six classes would need to approve that change, followed by a declarative vote from the 2010 General Synod, in order for the change in the *BCO* to take place.

The commission commends the forty-six classes of the RCA for their careful and informed conversations about this recommendation for change in the *BCO*, and about the Belhar Confession itself. Throughout the fall and well into spring, the commission was able to provide background and study materials to many classes in support of their study and deliberation. With a final reported total of thirty-two classes voting in favor of the recommendation, and fourteen classes not in favor, the recommendation has exceeded the two-thirds threshold for passage. The commission anticipates a positive declarative vote from the 2010 General Synod and thus the affirmation of the Belhar Confession as the fourth doctrinal standard of the RCA. Thanks be to God. Here again is the full text of the Belhar Confession.

BELHAR CONFESSION
September 1986*

1. **We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

2. **We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

   We believe
   - that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another (Eph. 2.11-22);
   - that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain (Eph. 4.1-16);
   - that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17.20, 23);
   - that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue

community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity (Phil. 2.1-5; 1 Cor. 12.4-31; John 13.1-17; 1 Cor. 1.10-13; Eph. 4.1-6; Eph. 3.14-20; 1 Cor. 10.16-17; 1 Cor. 11.17-34; Gal. 6.2; 2 Cor. 1.3-4);

- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God (Rom. 12.3-8; 1 Cor. 12.1-11; Eph. 4.7-13; Gal. 3.27-28; Jas. 2.1-13);
- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

3. We believe

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor. 5.17-21; Mt. 5.13-16; Mt. 5.9; 2 Pet. 3.13; Rev. 21-22);
- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world (Eph 4.17-6.23; Rom. 6; Col. 1.9-14; Col. 2.13-19; Col. 3.1-4.6);
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. **We believe**
   - that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
   - that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;
   - that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
   - that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
   - that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
   - that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
   - that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right (Deut. 32.4; Luke 2.14; John 14.27; Eph. 2.14; Isa. 1.16-17; Jas. 1.27; Jas. 5.1-6; Luke 1.46-55; Luke 6.20-26; Luke 7.22; Luke 16.19-31; Ps. 146; Luke 4.16-19; Rom. 6.13-18; Amos 5);
   - that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
   - that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

   Therefore, we reject any ideology
   which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

5. **We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Eph. 4.15-16; Acts 5.29-33; 1 Pet. 2.18-25; 1 Pet. 3.15-18).

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

* This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Approval and Next Steps

The approval of the Belhar Confession as the fourth confession of the RCA is a time for

both celebration and deep, honest reflection. For many in our church, this moment is the culmination of decades of work and prayer, and an affirmation of the RCA's firm and enduring commitment to unity, to justice, and to reconciliation in its life and ministry. The moment of declaration will be a deeply moving, deeply emotional moment for many in our midst, and with all of them the commission rejoices and celebrates.

Indeed, the impact of the RCA's decades-long engagement with the Belhar Confession can already be clearly seen. The General Synod itself voted in 2008 to add a sixth element to Our Call—"a multiracial future freed from racism"—that in part rose directly out of our engagement with the Belhar Confession. The Commission on Race and Ethnicity adopted the Belhar Confession as its theological foundation. Churches across the denomination regularly use the Belhar in their worship life and study it in their Christian education classes. Indeed, denominations around the world have watched with great interest the actions of the RCA with regard to the Belhar Confession; what we have done will have a profound impact on the world church.

But those examples and actions mark not the end of a decades-long process, but the beginning of another, equally important process. All through this discussion of the Belhar Confession and its possible place in RCA life and ministry—in adult study groups in church basements; formally in General Synod advisory committees and informally over lunch; in classis meetings and blogs and network groups and church foyer conversations—one question kept being raised, both by persons in favor of making the Belhar a doctrinal standard and by those not in favor: Is the RCA ready to take the Belhar Confession, and all of our doctrinal standards, seriously? Is the Belhar Confession just a piece of paper, or will it guide us in our faith? These are important questions, filled with hope and fear and anticipation.

The commission affirms, in the strongest possible language, this expressed desire of the church: that a confession must be a true expression of faith, by and through the church, giving rise to action/mission that becomes a historical witness to the truth that God is a living, active, and expressive God moving in events and time. That cannot be a one-year or two-year fad, but an ongoing effort to include our confessions in our worship life and our Christian education, and thus to allow their themes and words to influence our ministry in the world, both with respect to the Belhar and the other doctrinal standards of the RCA. The church was clear in its discussion of the past few months: relegated to a dusty shelf, the Belhar does us no good. We must know it and use it, appropriately and with clear knowledge of its intent.

To that end, the commission stands ready to work with the General Synod Council, and with other commissions (principally, the Commissions on Race and Ethnicity, Theology, and Christian Education and Discipleship) to develop strategies and practices that will continue to assist RCA congregations and members in engaging and applying the Belhar Confession. It makes this recommendation:

R-81
To instruct the General Synod Council, in partnership with the Commission on Christian Unity and other appropriate commissions, to create a Belhar Implementation Team, for a minimum of three years, to assist the Reformed Church in America and its congregations in the reception of the Belhar Confession into the life and witness of the RCA; and further,

to focus the mandate of this team on two key areas—first, on the development of resources and other practices to assist congrega-

tions, classes, and the denomination as a whole in the adoption and use of the Belhar Confession; and secondly, on the implications of the adoption of the Belhar Confession for all six elements of Our Call, for the current work of RCA staff in implementing Our Call, and for the development of a new ten-year goal for the RCA; and further,

to ensure that this team reports annually to the General Synod on its work and on the fulfillment of these goals. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. In its discussion of the Belhar Confession, the church clearly asked that, if adopted, the confession would become an active part of our life and ministry.
2. A dedicated team can ensure that this happens at all levels of the RCA, and can be held accountable for its work.

A confession declares that God is historical. The presence and action of God are evident in creation, i.e., the world. The world is the theater of God's action, God's glory. The world is the purpose of God's action. God's calling of the church into existence is the calling of a community that arises out of the world and lives in the world for the world.

A confession declares that the church is gathered not on its own behalf or for its own purposes, but to be the manifestation of God's healing, redeeming, repairing, and renewing of the world. As we say in the language of our day: a thousand churches/congregations in a million ways doing one thing—"following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God."

A confession professes to the world in word and deed that the church's business is God's business and that God's business is the world. It is a declaration to the world and a reminder to itself that the church is called to be radically attentive to the world, even as God is radically attentive to the world as creator, sustainer, and redeemer.

The Belhar Confession was offered to the RCA as a gift from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. Having accepted this gift, we now look to the future—how it will impact our life and ministry, and how we might offer it subsequently to others.

THE ECUMENICAL LIFE OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

Though the RCA's ecumenical life can be generally summarized under the rubrics "programmatic ecumenism," "conciliar ecumenism," and "ecumenical dialogue" these categories remain inadequate to express the full spectrum of our church's ecumenical life.

Programmatic ecumenism refers to cooperative work and partnerships with other churches creating joint programs of mission. Examples include cooperative education, curriculum development, disaster relief, and vacation church schools, shelters for the homeless, food banks, youth events, and services of worship. The RCA's global mission program is an outstanding example of programmatic ecumenism.

Conciliar ecumenism represents the world, national, regional, state, and local councils where churches come together for mission. Councils facilitate collaboration of denominations and churches in a host of programs of service and witness, while recognizing and accepting the distinctive history, polity, and ecclesial expression of the church catholic.

Ecumenical dialogues occur between and among churches at the denominational level.

They may be either bilateral (one-to-one) or multilateral (among more than two). Through dialogue, faithful expression is given to what churches believe. Areas of common belief are identified as well as areas of disagreement. The process of dialogue requires respectfully listening to one another, letting each church speak for itself, and then together recognizing any emergent consensus offering substantial fellowship and common mission. The RCA is involved in both bilateral and multilateral dialogues as a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the Canadian Council of Churches, and a charter member of the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Most recently the RCA has become an originating member of Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. In addition, several regional synods, classes, and local congregations hold memberships in the National Association of Evangelicals.

Interreligious dialogue is an emerging subject of discussion in the commission. Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, among others, have become increasingly prominent in several of the communities in which RCA congregations serve. The commission has been witnessing a need among RCA congregations for resources to facilitate understanding of different religious traditions so as to make interreligious dialogue profitable. The commission has already begun to research the subject of interreligious dialogue and intends to continue to explore ways in which to foster interreligious understanding and communication.

Ecumenical Appointees of the Reformed Church in America

The RCA is represented at ecumenical tables and events by persons elected or appointed who willingly give of their ecumenical gifts and time to promote a greater witness to the unity we have in Christ. Following participation in events or meetings, these appointees provide brief reports to the Office of the General Secretary and to the Commission on Christian Unity.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches

The RCA is a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), which has a membership of over 75 million Reformed Christians in its four area councils. The RCA is a member of the Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC), which is the regional expression of WARC in the region of the Caribbean, the U.S., and Canada.

The executive committees of WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) met jointly for the first time in Geneva in May 2009. They approved a draft constitution for the new organization to be called the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Use of the word “communion” implies that member denominations of the new organization will accept the ordination of each other’s clergy and respect the rites of each tradition.

The draft constitution will be presented for approval at the Uniting General Council (UGC) to be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in June 2010. Other decisions by the joint executive committees include approval of a plan to eliminate the budget deficit by 2011 and the outline of a proposed structure for WCRC, subject to approval by the UGC. The joint executive committees also accepted a report recommending that the WCRC operate from the current WARC offices in Geneva. The report suggests the decision could be revisited three years after WCRC is created.

The Global Dialogue on the Accra Confession was held September 3-7, 2009, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The delegates shared their many stories as signs of hope and energy. Among the most profound were the stories from Africa of the engagement of common people in organizing for change and reclaiming their respect and dignity through the

struggle for clean water and electricity in a context where the political leadership has failed them. Some churches in the North have and are developing policies that enable them to set aside resources for the promotion of the Accra Confession and education for justice. These stories of resistance are attested to in many other places as well.

The delegates were encouraged by an emerging dialogue between churches in the North and those in the South, especially on "empire" and what it means for both perspectives. The dialogue on globalization between URCSA and the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany has served as a signpost of what is possible for all. This journey of conversations holds potential for South-to-South dialogue also. The growing consensus on the concept of empire as a lens through which to read the Accra Confession and to seek after justice is a sign of hope.

CANAAC sponsored and funded the following gatherings: "Caribbean Covenanting for Justice Consultation" in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, in April 2009; "Colloquium on the Accra and Belhar Confessions" held in New York, January 8-10, 2010; and the Caribbean and North America Council for Mission's (CANACOM) Council meeting in Trinidad in October 2009.

Plans for the International Reformed Youth Forum Pre-Council are well underway. The launch of the Caribbean and North America Reformed Youth Forum will be done at the CANAAC meeting in early 2011. The partnership and collaboration with CANACOM continues. Joel Ortega Dopico (Presbyterian/Reformed Church of Cuba) and Janette McIntosh (Presbyterian Church in Canada) represented CANAAC. CANAAC cosponsored the event, providing funding through a generous grant from the United Church of Canada designated for the event.

In 2009, CANAAC provided generous scholarships for the following events: CANACOM's Young Adult Mission Workcamp in July and August 2009; Calvin Jubilee Conference at Montreat, North Carolina, in July 2009; and the UGC at Grand Rapids, Michigan, in June 2010. CANAAC will support the North American Covenanting for Justice Working Group, led by Dr. Oliver Patterson, which will initiate discussions around the Germany-Stellenbosch model of Covenanting for Justice. The members of the group will determine how that model may provide a basis for sustaining Covenanting for Justice in this region.

Plans for expanding the number of member churches which presently lend financial support to the regional councils and encouraging those member churches which have not updated their membership with WARC are also underway.

The Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. continues its work on the church's exercise of authority in the world, the doctrines of justification and sanctification, and full communion.

The World Council of Churches

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches

Renee House served as the RCA's representative to the World Council of Churches (WCC) Plenary Commission on Faith and Order, which met in Crete, October 7-14, 2009. Present for the meeting were 120 delegates and thirty-seven guests from the global church.

The commission meets every seven years to review the work of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order and to provide feedback and direction.

In addition to considering the general state of the WCC's mission to seek the visible unity of the church and to promote the common witness of the churches in mission, evangelism, and service, the Plenary Commission focused on three projects in which the standing commission has been engaged. Working in plenary and small groups, its participants discussed three studies corresponding to these projects, including "The Nature and Mission of the Church," "Tradition and the Traditions," and "Moral Discernment in the Churches."

Work on the study document "The Nature and Mission of the Church" generated deep discussion. Most striking in this process was the perspective offered on the document by delegates from South Africa, South America, Malaysia, Cameroon, India, Argentina, and Samoa. Each of these presentations on the nature and mission of the church revealed the degree to which the document was shaped by Western European theological forms and methods. As one presenter noted, there is tension in the study between an objective articulation of ecclesiology based in historic, written statements of faith, largely from the West, on the one hand, and more experiential approaches to, and expressions of, ecclesiology coming from the global South and East, on the other. In some ways, work on this document was a watershed moment in which the voice of the global church was truly heard and appreciated. Change in theological form and method is emerging. Progress toward sending "The Nature and Mission of the Church" to the churches may be delayed by this honest dialogue, but the final product will be a truer, more helpful expression of the church's self-understanding.

The project "Tradition and the Traditions" represents an attempt to reappropriate the works of the early church fathers (East and West) for the purpose of reaching behind the church's historical divisions in the hope of finding and building on a common heritage that predates these divisions, and indeed, in many cases, even the canonization of the Christian Scriptures. Work in plenary and small groups confirmed that for churches rooted in the Reformation the authority of church traditions is a matter of ongoing dispute. Thus much of the discussion focused on questions of the authority and use of theological sources outside of Scripture and even of our many received traditions. We acknowledged that Scripture and patristic sources are necessarily interpreted by our various communities with varying outcomes. Work will continue on this project, but there was a sense that the fundamental questions concerning the authority of patristic (and perhaps matristic) sources need much more attention.

The most intense discussions took place in response to the study "Moral Discernment in the Churches." The participants approached this task through the use of case studies focused on three different moral questions. The goal was not to determine the "right moral action" together, but rather to clarify the sources and the degree of authority the various churches grant them, together with the methods that they use in the process of engaging in moral discernment and action. It became clear fairly immediately that on matters of sources, authority, and method the various churches hold very different theologies and practices. The exercise did allow the participants to see how thoroughly these differences will impact attempts to speak on moral questions with one voice. This is a conversation that needs to continue and may serve as a model for churches, to be used not only in their ecumenical engagements with others but also within their own denominations.

In sum, this meeting of the plenary commission confirmed again that unity in Christ is God's gift to the church, and the hard labor to make that unity visibly manifest is the various churches' gift to themselves, the world, and God.

The Commission on Christian Unity and "The Nature and Mission of the Church"

When this commission accepted the WCC's call to respond to "The Nature and Mission of the Church," it issued invitations to RCA seminary professors and pastors to read the document and to answer as many questions embedded in the document as related to their interests and expertise. The commission was to serve as clearinghouse for their responses, which it intended to consolidate into a report to send back to the WCC. Renee House, Scot Sherman, and James Brownson responded to its invitation. Christopher Dorn scheduled a conference call with them, which took place in late February 2010. The members of this ad hoc group shared their general impressions of the document, as well as what they thought its strengths and weaknesses were from a Reformed perspective. The commission is planning to compile these comments in a working paper, which will form the basis of a report to be submitted to the WCC on behalf of the RCA.

Christian Churches Together

Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT) is a new ecumenical association in the United States. First conceived in 2001, the organization was formally established in 2003, out of a need to broaden and expand fellowship, unity, and witness among the diverse expressions of Christian faith. CCT includes representatives from the five church families, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical/Pentecostal, historic Protestant, and racial and ethnic, as well as members from national Christian organizations such as the Salvation Army, Bread for the World, Habitat for Humanity, and World Vision.

The 2010 annual meeting was held in Seattle, Washington, January 12-15. Meetings focused on the topics of poverty and evangelism. CCT adopted a plan to implement a "CCT Day of Common Action," to be held on April 2, 2011. The five church families will work together in communities across the country to shine a spotlight on ways to combat homelessness and poverty. A day of CCT meetings was held at the nearby offices of World Vision, as that organization, as well as attendees, reacted to the earthquake in Haiti. Daily worship was led by representatives of each of the five families.

The CCT website, www.ChristianChurchesTogether.org, makes available audio recordings of the 2010 annual meeting, as well as newsletters and other information about CCT initiatives.

RCA representatives included Brandon Beebe, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Tom DeVries, Earl James, and Susan Sgarlat. Seminarians attending were Terika Raak and Patricia Simmons.

Global Christian Forum

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) is a promising initiative that is drawing world leaders from evangelical, historic Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Catholic, and African Instituted churches into a new place of fellowship. Begun quietly in the 1990s, it is responding to the rapid shift in global Christianity marked by new vitality and growth in the churches in the Global South, often in Pentecostal and evangelical expressions that have no links to broader ecumenical bodies. From the start, the WCC, the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Evangelical Alliance, and others have been supportive of the GCF's work. In November 2007, the GCF gathered 240 Christian leaders from throughout the world at Limuru, Kenya for days many described as a watershed in modern Christian history. That gathering, and the nine years of preparation and regional encounters that led to it, provided a fresh vision of how the global church could build a unity of fellowship and witness that reflects the new realities of world

Christianity. The RCA has been an active supporter of the GCF since its beginning. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the RCA, serves actively on its steering committee and has participated in several regional meetings. He and then General Synod president John Ornee represented the RCA at the 2007 global gathering in Kenya. In 2009, Granberg-Michaelson was part of a GCF delegation visiting twenty-five church leaders throughout Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria to advance this vision in that region. Like its role with CCT, the RCA's active support for the GCF places it at the frontier of work for the unity of Christ's body that holds fresh and hopeful promise for the church's global witness and mission. More information can be found at www.globalchristianforum.org.

Roman Catholic/Reformed Dialogue

At the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church promulgated The Decree on Ecumenism on November 21, 1964. Thus the ecumenical landscape was to change and a new era of ecumenism to begin. In that context four denominations of the Reformed family of churches and representatives of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops began official conversations in the United States. The RCA was one of the early participants.

The first round of dialogues focused on the topics of revelation, Scripture and tradition. Successive dialogues produced six rounds of reports: *Reconsiderations* (1966-1967), "The Ministry of the Church" (1968-1971), "The Unity We Seek" (1976), "Ethics and the Search for Unity" (1980), "Partners in Peace and Education" (1985), and "Laity in the Church and Inter-Church Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope" (1996).

The seventh and current round began in 2002 under the auspices of WARC member churches and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The dialogue has focused on "Baptism: Its Practice and Relationship to the Eucharist." Theological, ecclesiastical, and pastoral issues have been explored in the hope that an agreement on baptism will lead to a "Common Certificate for Baptism" accepted by the participating churches. These include the Roman Catholic Church, the RCA, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the United Church of Christ. RCA participants in the dialogue are John Paarlberg and Renee House. Douglas Fromm serves as staff to the dialogue.

The last meeting of the current round is scheduled for October 2010. Should an agreement be reached and a common certificate drafted, a full report will be presented by the commission to the 2011 General Synod.

Iglesia Reformada Dominicana

The RCA began its work in the Dominican Republic several years ago through a cooperative partnership of the General Synod Council's Hispanic Ministries Council, former Global Mission director Bruce Menning, Andres Serrano and the Radio Impacto broadcast ministry begun through the church he serves (Iglesia Reformada La Senda in Corona, California), and the Regional Synods of Mid-Atlantics and New York (where the largest concentrations of Dominicans outside of the Dominican Republic reside). With the support of the GSC and the general secretary, the RCA formed a "coaching team" to mobilize a group of local pastors in the Dominican Republic intent on establishing a "Reformed" presence there that would minister throughout the entire country, embrace the large Haitian immigrant population, and establish partnership with a growing Reformed presence in Haiti also. With the retirement of Bruce Menning in early 2009, Kenneth Bradsell was asked to assume interim leadership of the RCA coaching team. In 2009 the RCA:

- Contributed over $30,000 in financial support including major financial gifts from the regional synods of New York and Mid-Atlantics to help establish the Iglesia

Reformada Dominicana (IRD) as a recognized and fully incorporated church in the Dominican Republic.
- Committed to providing ongoing support for the operation of the new denomination on an annual decreasing level while the new church challenged its growing membership to become self-supporting.
- Presided at the official organization of the General Synod of the IRD in May 2009, the ordination of its first ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, and commissioned church workers for new church development.
- Participated in the first baptisms of twenty-five children from the initial congregations of the new denomination at a beachside service in Boca Chica, a seaside village a short drive from the nation's capital, Santo Domingo.
- With the cooperation and financial support of Radio Impacto, helped the new IRD establish an office for its one paid staff person, Yeral Ogando, who serves as secretary to the executive committee.
- Provided monthly in-service teachers for the continuing education of IRD ministers in sacraments, confessions, biblical introduction, Reformed theology, and church order.
- Licensed the IRD to use the RCA logo and other identifying "marks" in its work throughout the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

At the 2009 meeting of the RCA's General Synod, four ecumenical delegates from the newly formed IRD brought greetings from their church: Ruperto Medina Beltre, Nelson Polanco, Juan Cruz, and Felix Carabello. Beltre and Polanco signed a "Covenant of Partnership" with the RCA General Synod that states in part:

> The undersigned representatives of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and the General Synod of the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana affirm before God and the minister and elder delegates of our General Synods a covenant of mutual support as our two churches engage in cooperative ministry to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all other Christian good works.

The full text of the agreement may be found in the *2009 Minutes of the General Synod* (pp. 258-259).

In January 2010 General Synod president James Seawood joined the RCA's coaching team for the annual meeting of the team with the IRD's General Synod Executive Committee. Seawood was able to visit several IRD ministries where he taught, preached, and listened to the concerns and missional dreams of the leaders and people of the new church as it seeks to expand its outreach throughout the country and into Haiti. Fresh commitments were made at this meeting to continue the support of the developing church and to find new ways to support the in-service teaching of the pastoral leadership.

On January 11, Seawood led an RCA delegation along with representatives of the IRD on a journey to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, for visits with local Haitian pastors who have been working with the IRD pastors. As is now widely known, he and his wife, Emra, and the others in the delegation, along with those pastors and churches they were visiting, were among those trapped in the city when it was struck by the devastating earthquake on January 12.

The events following the earthquake in Haiti shifted the agenda of the partnership between the IRD and the RCA dramatically. With the assistance and support of Seawood and the rapid deployment of David Dethmers, the RCA's coordinator for Reformed Church World Service, the RCA began to channel significant emergency aid through its partners in the

IRD. The IRD took responsibility for purchasing emergency supplies in the Dominican Republic and transporting these supplies to the pastors it has been assisting in Port-au-Prince. Seawood was able to accompany one of these visits in February.

In late February 2010, through the work of Brigido Cabrera, director of the GSC's Hispanic Council, the IRD was able to form the first of three proposed classes. The IRD classes will follow the federal division of the country into three districts. The first classis, located in the "National District" surrounding and incorporating the capital city of Santo Domingo, was organized with nine congregations and four mission congregations (new church starts). The RCA congratulates the IRD on the formation of this first classis, the "Classis del Ozama."

Also in 2010, the RCA has seen a significant increase in direct mission support from some RCA congregations to projects proposed by the IRD to build and support new congregations. RCA congregations seeking new opportunities to provide mission support are strongly encouraged to consider supporting the work of our newest partner church.

Ecumenical Relations and Mission Partnerships involving RCA Commissions, Program Units, Regional Synods, Classes, and Congregations

The RCA enjoys ecumenical relationships with every member church of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC, which as mentioned above will be renamed the World Communion of Reformed Churches as a result of merger with the Reformed Ecumenical Council in June 2010) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). For the manifold riches that come from these diverse relationships, as well as from those relationships with other churches that are not members of WARC and LWF, the RCA gives thanks. Since their origins, all these relationships have borne fruit both in our church and in the churches with which we are in relationship.

Notwithstanding the relationships the RCA already enjoys with other churches in virtue of our common membership in WARC, there will be times when appropriate bodies in the RCA and in another church may wish to enter into a closer church-to-church relationship for the purpose of working together on a mission project, or establishing a congregational twinning, companion classis, or companion synod relationship. The commission seeks to clarify the process by which the RCA and its congregations, classes, and regional synods can enter into such a relationship with appropriate bodies in churches in countries outside the United States and Canada.

Two bodies are instrumental to the formation and maintenance of ecumenical and mission partnerships. The first is the Commission on Christian Unity, which as an agency of General Synod is responsible for engaging in ecumenical relationships, in addition to informing and advising the RCA about all aspects of these relationships in accord with "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," adopted by General Synod in 1996 (*MGS 1996*, R-1, p. 197). The second is the Global Mission unit of the General Synod Council. This body is responsible for engaging members and congregations of the RCA in ministries which reach unevangelized peoples, empower global partners, equip RCA congregations for mission, and promote compassion and justice.

The RCA in its various assemblies is encouraged to seek the guidance of the Commission on Christian Unity and Global Mission when establishing any new partnerships, thus ensuring that important decisions about the international relationships into which the RCA may enter are made only after careful consultation among all concerned and in a manner consistent with its basic theological beliefs and missiological commitments. The set of cri-

teria immediately below are offered to clarify the conditions to be met before the RCA may enter into a relationship with another church.

- The General Synod of the RCA and the equivalent body of another church may vote to establish a church-to-church relationship. Before recommending that such a relationship be established, the Commission on Christian Unity will consult with Global Mission, adhering to the principles for establishing and maintaining ecumenical relations enunciated in "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America."
- Global Mission will sometimes consider it appropriate to enter into a mission partnership with another church. In such an event, Global Mission will consult with the Commission on Christian Unity. Any action on the part of Global Mission to enter into a mission partnership will be matched by a similar action by a similar body in the other church. Before establishing a mission partnership, Global Mission and the Commission on Christian Unity will together consult with the prospective mission partner church to confirm that it is a member of WARC or LWF or that it is similar enough with the RCA in its theological beliefs and missiological commitments to qualify as a meaningful mission partner.
- When a congregation, classis, or regional synod entertains the decision to enter into a relationship of any kind with an equivalent body in another church, it will consult with Global Mission and the Commission on Christian Unity with the understanding that such an action will be matched by a similar action on the part of a similar body in the other church. This action on the part of the other church will be included in a report to Global Mission and the Commission on Christian Unity. In this report, the congregation, classis, or regional synod will also confirm either that the prospective mission partner church is a member of WARC or LWF or that in its judgment it is similar enough with the RCA in theological beliefs and missiological commitments to qualify as a meaningful partner with a congregation, classis, or regional synod of the RCA.

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The Commission on Christian Worship met twice since General Synod 2009: October 15-17, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and February 2010 through digital communications.

The commission's agenda was specifically focused around two areas:

- Reorganization of the commission's structure to better resource the denomination and its diverse congregations, and
- Initial work on the creation of a multi-purpose baptismal liturgy.

Reorganization

The Commission on Christian Worship, throughout its recent history, has been a commission specifically focused on reacting to requests and assignments from General Synod. Its most recent multi-year initiative was completed in 2009 by the classical ratification of a change to the *Book of Church Order* allowing the use of "occasional use liturgies" for the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the subsequent presentation (and approval) of four (non-constitutional) liturgies for occasional use in various contexts.

The October 2009 meeting of the Commission on Christian Worship was used to reorganize the commission into a working group with four foci, each overseen by members of the commission with interest and expertise in their area:

- Rites and liturgies
- Music
- Visual and movement arts
- Incorporation of children and youth in worship

The commission's desire is to provide the denomination with well vetted, diverse, and accessible resources in each of the above four arenas with particular attention to ensuring they are 1) fundamentally Reformed and 2) missional and culturally relevant with diversity of style and application.

Resources will be made available to the denomination predominantly through rca.org but may also be provided to congregations through the denomination's regular mailings.

Individuals aware of resources that may be suitable for distribution and recommendation to others in the denomination are encouraged to forward them (preferably via email) to one of the commission's members.

Multi-Purpose Baptismal Liturgy

After four years of working on liturgies for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the commission has become increasingly aware of the need for a "multi-purpose" baptismal liturgy—one that is suitable for a variety of contexts when a congregation desires to celebrate infant baptism, adult baptism, reaffirmation of baptism, and profession of faith in a single service. It is the commission's hope to present a multi-purpose baptismal liturgy to General Synod of 2011 for provisional use and eventually submit it to the denomination for constitutional approval.

Other Business

Digital Meeting
The Commission on Christian Worship is deeply aware of the financial struggles experienced by many individuals and congregations throughout the RCA and thus met for its February 2010 meeting digitally via GoogleWave. Although GoogleWave may not be the most effective digital interface for commission interactions, it is the commission's intent to increasingly rely on digital communications in order to both 1) provide increasingly timely resources to the denomination and 2) use the church's resources as faithfully as possible.

Baptismal Certificate
The RCA provides baptismal certificates for purchase and download through Faith Alive Christian Resources (www.faithaliveresources.org). Recently the commission was asked to evaluate whether the standard certificates were consistent with the theological standards of the RCA. In response to that request, the commission is recommending a change in the verbiage of the certificates to indicate that individuals are baptized into "the visible membership of the holy, catholic church" rather than the membership of a local congregation.

Election of New Moderator
The commission is pleased to announce the election of Scot Sherman as its new moderator following the conclusion of Tim TenClay's final term and looks forward to his wise and experienced leadership in the years to come.

Report of the Commission on Church Order

The Commission on Church Order met October 15-17, 2009, and again February 4-5, 2010, both times in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Additionally the commission communicated often by email to process the business of the commission.

General Synod Professors Task Force

Much of the work of the commission this year involved working with the General Synod Professors Task Force, specifically in the area of the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) changes that they are proposing to this year's General Synod. Both commission meetings had significant time spent in dialogue with task force representatives to be assured that the *BCO* language will correctly reflect RCA polity as well the intent of the changes proposed by the task force.

Judicial Bodies

In 2007 the commission brought to General Synod a recommendation that proposed significant changes to the *BCO* in how judicial business would be conducted in the Reformed Church in America. Generally that proposal stated that in most assemblies when functioning as a judicatory, that work of the judicatory would be facilitated by a new judicial body of that assembly called a Commission on Judicial Business. While the 2007 General Synod approved the recommendation and while a majority of the classes ratified the proposed *BCO* amendments, the amendments failed to receive the necessary approval by two-thirds of the classes to allow for incorporation of the changes into the *BCO*.

The commission's report to the 2009 General Synod reported that the commission had been working and would continue to work on a similar proposal but one that only involved the judicatories on the level of the regional synods and the General Synod.

While the Commission on Church Order did continue to work on such a proposal and does continue to believe that there are merits for it for the church, it will postpone proposing any changes to create judicial bodies since it believes that now is not the time to make such a proposal to General Synod. One of the reasons for postponement is that much of what is being proposed by the General Synod Professors Task Force is intertwined with any proposal that would create judicial bodies. The commission believes it best not to confuse the two by having both proposals come to the same General Synod. Plus, how the General Synod receives the General Synod Professors Task Force report and recommendations will affect what might come from the Commission on Church Order regarding judicial bodies.

The commission will continue to keep this subject on its agenda for future consideration.

Church Multiplication Team Conviction Document

The RCA Church Multiplication Team (CMT) developed a conviction document that defines the relationship between a church plant and its classis of accountability. This document is commonly known as the CMT conviction. The CMT is a ministry arm of the General Synod Council (GSC). It reports to GSC through the general secretary. The CMT conviction has been on the agenda of the commission for the last two years.

In summary, the CMT conviction states that a classis of a parenting church determines the classis of accountability and support for a new church start. It goes on to say that this relationship will remain with the classis of the parent church for the initial ten years—or

longer. The primary concern that the commission has with this document is that authority is vested in this document rather than appropriately in an assembly.

In last year's report the commission stated that it intends to continue to monitor how the CMT conviction is used and to remain in communication with the CMT and GSC. The commission has expressed to both the CMT and GSC its desire to serve the General Synod and to do what is best for the RCA and God's kingdom.

The commission has received a detailed report from the CMT about how and where the conviction has been applied. Contact has been made with those classes who have been affected by the application of the conviction. Early reports received back indicate that good communication between all parties is occurring and no specific issues of concern have been reported. The commission will continue to monitor the application of the CMT conviction.

Commissioned Pastor Task Force

A task force was formed by the 2009 General Synod to "review the training for and clarify the role of commissioned pastors in the RCA, and to bring a report and whatever recommendations they deem necessary to the next meeting of the General Synod" (*MGS 2009,* R-41, p. 135). The work of that task force resulted in several requests communicated directly to the commission. These are in addition to the recommendations of the Commissioned Pastor Task Force to the 2010 General Synod that are contained in its report.

The commission reviewed and approved of the language of the new commissioned pastor declaration (formulary) that is being proposed by the task force to the 2010 General Synod.

The *BCO* rules for the commissioned pastor, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 11, state:

> The commissioned pastor shall remain a member of a local church, but is amenable solely to the discipline of the classis as set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3 of the *Book of Church Order,* for the period of commissioned service.

However, when looking at the referenced article, there is no mention of commissioned pastor. The commission believes that there needs to be appropriate language within the discipline sections so that the church knows how they apply to a commissioned pastor. Therefore the commission makes the following recommendation:

R-82
To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 3, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, subsequent sections renumbered):

Sec. 3. Discipline of a Commissioned Pastor

Elders who are serving in a classis commission as a commissioned pastor are subject solely to the government and discipline of the classis. Commissioned pastors shall be subject to the same rules as ministers within Chapter 2, Part I. (ADOPTED)

Commissioned pastors are given temporary member status in a classis and as such are tem-

porarily given the rights and privileges of membership during the period of commissioned service. However it appears that *BCO* wording to include temporary members in classis quorum counts does not appear. The task force requested the commission to look at this issue. Because the issue of temporary members includes more than just commissioned pastors, the commission considered this issue separately. Discussion and a recommendation concerning the temporary member issue appears later in this report.

The task force requested "that the Commission on Church Order consider a change to the Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6, the 'responsibilities' of the GSC, by adding a section mandating GSC to have the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team, articulating its purposes and responsibilities."

The commission considered this request. It determined that adding wording to mandate a General Synod Council team is not something that is appropriate to include in the bylaws of GSC. No other such teams are mandated. Requiring this particular team could set an unintended precedent of mandating any number of GSC teams. The GSC needs the freedom to form whatever teams or groups are necessary to carry out the mission of the church, rather than to have the teams mandated. Further, the Commissioned Pastor Task Force suggested that any such bylaw should include the team makeup, which would include members from a team not defined by the bylaws—not that the commission is suggesting that any teams should be defined by the bylaws. The commission believes that GSC can adequately provide for the necessary structure for commissioned pastors without a team mandate.

Temporary Members of Classis Counting toward a Quorum

It came to the attention of the commission through an inquiry from a classis that the *BCO* does not allow or require that temporary members be counted by a classis when determining that a quorum is present for a stated session of classis. Temporary members are either ministers from other denominations who have been given temporary membership (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Art. 12, Sec. 16) or commissioned pastors, who are temporary members during the period of commissioned service (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Art. 14. Sec. 8).

As previously mentioned in this report, this issue was also considered by the Commissioned Pastor Task Force. It was the opinion of that task force that this was an oversight. The commission agrees and concludes that all temporary members should be counted when considering a quorum for a stated session. Additionally a similar quorum is required when a classis is voting on a recommendation to supersede a consistory. Similarly the commission believes that the quorum count to supersede a consistory also needs to consider temporary members. Therefore the following recommendation is made:

R-83
To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 4, Section 1; and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 13e, Section 14, and Section 15 for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Article 4. Sessions of Classis

Sec. 1. **Stated sessions of classis shall be held at least annually at such times as the classis may determine. All classis sessions shall begin and end with prayer. There shall be a sermon preached, or a devotional service, or both, at each stated session. The presence of a majority of the elder delegates and a majority of those minis-**

ters and temporary members who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction of the classis is required.

Article 7. Superintendence of the Churches

Sec. 13. **Classis shall be directed by the following rules when superseding a consistory:**

e. The final action of the classis to dissolve a consistory shall require a two-thirds vote. The classis shall have a quorum present consisting of a majority of the elder delegates and a majority of those ministers and temporary members who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction of the classis.

Sec. 14. **When the classis has superseded a consistory, it shall have the authority, in the exercise of its discretion and in accordance with the laws of the state in which that church is located, to:**

a. terminate whatever authority the consistory or any other body has as trustees of the church property.

b. Take the church under its direction by appointing such trustees as are required for the protection, preservation, management and ownership of the property during such time as the classis shall determine.

All actions of the classis under this section shall require a two-thirds vote. The classis shall have a quorum present consisting of a majority of the elder delegates and a majority of those ministers and temporary members who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction of the classis.

Sec. 15. **The classis shall have the authority to reconstitute the consistory of a church when, in the judgment of the classis, sufficient growth has been achieved or suitable stability created so that the church can continue ministry without classis administration. The classis shall guide the consistory selection process (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 14). All actions of the classis under this section shall require a two-thirds vote. The classis shall have a quorum present consisting of a majority of the elder delegates and a majority of those ministers and temporary members who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction of the classis. (ADOPTED)**

[Note: The changes to Article 7 above assume the 2010 General Synod will have passed the declarative resolution ratifying the *BCO* amendments which provide the new wording. If the declarative resolution is not passed by the synod this recommendation will need to revert to the language found in the 2009 version of the *BCO*.]

Recourse Available for Dismissal of a Complaint or Appeal by a Judicial Committee

A change to the *BCO* was approved by the 2008 General Synod that allows for the dismissal of a complaint or an appeal by a judicial committee if it is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit. The change was subsequently approved by the classes and incorporated into *BCO* in 2009. This change minimizes the time and energy that is spent with such items of judicial business.

The 2008 General Synod also adopted an amendment to the original recommendation to try to clarify what recourse might be available to this action. That amendment added the following sentence that appears in the *BCO* in parentheses: "(This dismissal may be subject to complaint to the higher judicatory, but not appeal.)"

The commission believes that this parenthetical amendment addition is in error. There does not seem to be any reason to disallow an appeal as the recourse. An appeal is in part a transfer to a higher judicatory of a complaint or an appeal on which judgment has been rendered in a lower judicatory. The judicial committee that rendered such judgment was a judicatory committee acting on behalf of the judicatory. There is a record of the proceedings that can be delivered to the higher judicatory. The commission believes that an appeal is the proper route for any such recourse and therefore recommends that the words that were added by an amendment at General Synod be deleted.

R-84
To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 5 and Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5 for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletions are stricken out):

Article 2. Process for Complaints

Sec. 5. **If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. If the complaint is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the committee may dismiss the complaint without a hearing. ~~(This dismissal may be subject to complaint to the higher judicatory, but not appeal.)~~ If the complaint goes forward, the committee shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted and shall also hear the parties together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner with all parties present. If the complainant in person or by counsel fails to appear, the committee may declare the case to be defaulted.**

Article 2. Process for Appeals

Sec. 5. **If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. If the appeal is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the committee may dismiss the appeal without a hearing. ~~(This dismissal may be subject to complaint to the higher judicatory, but not appeal.)~~ If the appeal goes forward, the committee shall also**

hear the original parties, together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Either party may elect not to appear in person or by counsel at the hearing. (ADOPTED)

References to the *Church Herald*

The references in the General Synod bylaws to the *Church Herald* need to be deleted since it no longer exists. The following recommendation to the Bylaws of the General Synod is proposed:

Upon the advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance the synod voted to amend the original R-85 by deleting the entire Article 4, Sec. 2a. (double line strike-out) as follows:

a. ~~The General Synod Council and the Editorial Council of the Church Herald.~~

Reasons:
1. Deleting only a portion of the words in subsection "a." eliminates this subsection as one defining a group; therefore, the entire section needs to be deleted to accomplish what is desired.
2. Amendment is editorial only and does not change the substance of the recommendation.

R-85
To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 2a and Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Sections 3 and 5, for approval by the synod and to be voted for ratification at the 2011 General Synod (deletions are stricken out):

Article 4. Membership on General Synod Agencies and Commissions

Sec. 2. Eligibility

Membership on General Synod agencies and commissions shall be open to all confessing members of the RCA. An employee may not hold membership on the agency or commission to which that person is accountable unless specifically provided in the agency constitution or bylaws; nor may an executive employed by the General Synod or any of the regional synods hold other than *ex-officio* membership on the General Synod Council.

No person shall be eligible to hold other than *ex-officio* membership on more than one agency or commission in each of the following groups:

~~a. The General Synod Council and the Editorial Council of the Church Herald~~.

a. ~~b.~~ The commissions of the General Synod.

b. ~~c.~~ Delegations to ecumenical organizations.

Article 8. Corresponding Delegates

~~***Sec. 3. Church Herald***~~

~~**The editor of the Church Herald shall be a corresponding delegate. The Editorial Council may appoint one of its members, who shall also be a corresponding delegate.**~~

[The section number of the deleted section will be retained for future use.] **(ADOPTED)**

Work with Other Task Forces and Groups

The work with the General Synod Professor Task Force and the Commissioned Pastor Task Force has already been mentioned in this report. It is common for the commission to be in communication and consultation with other commissions and task forces especially as their work may involve changes in the *BCO.* In addition to the two already mentioned the commission has worked with other groups.

Opinions and advice were given to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) regarding proposed modifications to the bylaws of the MFCA. Additionally advisory interpretation of the *BCO* was requested by the Commission on Nominations regarding MFCA board nominations. That information was shared with both the Commission on Nominations and the MFCA.

The commission received the recommendations that are coming from the Reformed and Missional Task Force. Advice and suggestions were given to the task force regarding the *BCO* changes proposed to the 2010 General Synod to bring those proposed changes into better conformity with the polity of the RCA.

Report of the Commission on History

The RCA could use a good haunting, a creaking and groaning from its collective ancestry, a tingling breeze up the spine of its memory. Such a haunting need not be dark and chilling. Indeed, a good haunting awakens us to the past, to the whispers and fading deeds of those who have gone before. The people of Israel needed such a haunting in the early chapters of Judges. Shorn of Moses and then Joshua, the Israelites found themselves possessed by idols and oppressed by Canaanites and Philistines; “that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10).

What is known today of God’s mighty and enduring work among our RCA ancestors? Is this a generation that remembers and knows the Lord? Can the faithful expect God to intervene in the present and bless the future when they neglect God’s wisdom and gifts bestowed on past generations? Where can the haunted faithful discover and recover the history of the RCA?

There is good news! For over forty years the Commission on History (COH) has been attending to the heritage of the RCA. The COH was established in 1966, and is responsi-

ble for advising the General Synod on the collection and preservation of official denominational records. Through the oversight of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, review of historical resources, and the creation of a "virtual history center" (in cooperation with the Office of Historical Services), the commission promotes research and reflection on the history of the RCA, its classes, and its congregations in order to help the denomination learn from its past and grow into the future God has in mind.

Those seeking to discover and remember RCA history may turn not only to the many fine Historical Series volumes in print (see the RCA website), but also to the seven new volumes, which are for sale online and at this General Synod meeting: *Tools for Understanding: Essays in Honor of Donald J. Bruggink* (James Hart Brumm, editor), *Liber A: 1628-1700 of the Collegiate Churches of New York* (Francis J. Sypher Jr., editor and translator), *Aunt Tena, Called to Serve: Journals and Letters of Tena A. Huizenga, Missionary Nurse to Nigeria* (Jacob E. Nyenhius, Robert P. Swierenga, and Lauren M. Berka, editors), *Freedom on the Horizon: Dutch Immigration to America, 1840-1940* (Hans Krabbendam), *The Practice of Piety: The Theology of the Midwestern Reformed Church in America, 1866-1966* (Eugene P. Heideman), *A Collegial Bishop? Classis and Presbytery at Issue* (Allan J. Janssen and Leon van den Broeke, editors), and *The Church under the Cross: Mission in Asia in Times of Turmoil, a Missionary Memoir* (Wendell P. Karsen). Moreover, as an invaluable tool for communicating an essential knowledge of the RCA's heritage both to new members and to those who would wish renewed pride in our past, take time to explore *By Grace Alone: Stories of the Reformed Church in America* (Donald J. Bruggink and Kim Nathan Baker). Peruse all the titles of the RCA Historical Series online at www.rca.org/series or by typing "Historical Series" in the search window at www.rca.org. The Commission on History counts with special joy this ongoing work of the Historical Series under the able leadership of founding general editor Donald J. Bruggink. The series has now reached an astounding sixty-seven volumes.

The Commission on History met October 15-17, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan (in conjunction with the other commissions and the General Synod Council), and March 18-19, 2010, at Highland Park Reformed Church and New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The commission will continue to fulfill its calling in part by reviewing manuscripts for future publication in the Historical Series and encouraging persons who are contemplating RCA research projects and new volumes to contact the commission for guidance and possible collaboration.

The Commission on History hereby notifies the General Synod of significant dates in the life and history of the RCA.

Upcoming Anniversaries for Celebration

(In-print resources from the Historical Series for the anniversaries are listed below in italics. See Faith Alive Christian Resources for further information: www.faithaliveresources.org. For additional resources, including photographs and bulletin inserts, see the link for Resources on the Archives page at www.rca.org/archives.)

2010

1850 – 160th anniversary of the uniting of the Classis of Holland with the Reformed Church in America as immigrants in Holland, Michigan, unite with the Synod of Albany. See *Family Quarrels*.

1875 – 135th anniversary of the establishment of the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions as a separate board from the RCA's Board of Foreign Missions. See *Letters to Hazel*.

1890 – 120th anniversary of Samuel Zwemer's travels to the Arabian Gulf to work with James Cantine to establish a mission in the region. See *Pioneers in the Arab World* and *Doctors for the Kingdom*.

1895 – 115th anniversary of Frank Hall Wright's efforts to start a mission to Native Americans. See *Taking the Jesus Road*.

1900 – 110th anniversary of Ida Scudder beginning her medical work in India. She became known throughout the country simply as "Dr. Ida." See *From Mission to Church: The Reformed Church in American Mission to India*.

1960 – 45th anniversary of the establishment of the National Department of Women's Work, which was descended from the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions and the predecessor to Reformed Church Women.

2011

1836 – 175th anniversary of the Scudders' move to Madras, India, from Ceylon (what is today Sri Lanka). They arrived in Ceylon in 1819 to start the mission. See *From Mission to Church*.

1856 – 155th anniversary of the union with the RCA of Dutch immigrants in Pella, Iowa, who had arrived with Domine Scholte. See *Iowa Letters*.

1866 – 145th anniversary of the chartering of Hope College, one hundred years after the establishment of Queens College (Rutgers). See *Can Hope Endure?*

Report of the Commission on Judicial Business

The RCA's Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) has eight members—one from each regional synod. Typically the membership consists of four clergy and four laypersons. The laypersons are required to have legal training and experience. Currently the commission has one vacancy due to the resignation of the member from the Regional Synod of the Far West.

The responsibilities of the CJB are to carry out the responsibilities assigned to it in the RCA's *Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures* (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2).

The Office of the General Synod received one appeal during the past year. It was referred to the General Synod's Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) for review, recommendation, and report to the 2010 General Synod. The appeal was from an action by the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics. It was filed by the Rev. Dr. Dean Wolbrink, and may be referred to herein as the Wolbrink Appeal.

A. The Parties to the Wolbrink Appeal

The appellant in this appeal is the Rev. Dr. Dean Wolbrink (Wolbrink). The respondent is the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics (Regional Synod). The Classis of Delaware-Raritan (Delaware-Raritan Classis) was also considered a party respondent in light of *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Sections 4 and 5, which provide generally for all parties to be involved.

B. Pre-Hearing Procedural Matters

All filing and notice requirements for the appeal were met. Each of the three parties (acting through their respective counsel) submitted a written brief. Wolbrink was represented by Rev. John Hiemstra, Rev. Donald Hoover, Rev. Peter Maurer, and Rev. Adrian Tenhor. The Regional Synod was represented by Rev. Robert Fretz. Its stated clerk, Rev. Frederick Mold, Jr., also attended the hearing. The Classis of Delaware-Raritan was represented by its stated clerk, Rev. Stephen Eckert.

The CJB initially conferred by conference call on April 5, 2010. None of the parties waived their respective rights to a hearing (which right is provided pursuant to *BCO* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5). Accordingly, a hearing was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on Thursday, June 3, 2010, and the CJB met in conference after the hearing that same day. Edward Thornton, who serves on the CJB as the representative from the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, recused himself and did not participate in this appeal.

C. The Nature of the Wolbrink Appeal

The Wolbrink Appeal arises out of the decision of the Regional Synod's Committee on Judicial Business at its meeting on December 1, 2009.

As grounds for his appeal, Wolbrink claims that the Regional Synod erred in dismissing his appeal without a hearing.

D. Procedural and Factual Background

The facts and history surrounding the dispute between the parties are found in the record provided to the CJB, pages 300,000-300,376.

On September 9, 2009, the Classis of Delaware-Raritan found Wolbrink guilty on three charges and suspended him as Minister of Word and Sacrament. Wolbrink appealed to the Regional Synod. The Regional Synod's Judicial Business Committee met on December 1, 2009, and dismissed the appeal without a hearing under *BCO* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5. Wolbrink now appeals to the General Synod.

E. Discussion

The *BCO* provides that Wolbrink, as appellant, has the responsibility to establish that the lower judicatory (the Regional Synod) erred in its decision (*BCO* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 9). The General Synod, according to the *BCO*, shall give deference to the decision of the lower judicatory, and shall uphold the decision of the lower judicatory if it is supported by substantial evidence in the record when the record is viewed as a whole (*BCO* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 10).

BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 9 provides that the judicial business committee of a judicatory may dismiss an appeal without a hearing if the appeal is determined to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit. A frivolous appeal is an appeal that is so devoid of merit that it cannot seriously be argued. A dilatory appeal is an appeal that lacks merit and is undertaken for the purpose of delay. An appeal that is clearly without merit is one in which the lack of merit appears from the stated grounds of appeal and the record, without the necessity of argument.

There is no question in the present case of Wolbrink acting for the purpose of delay. We

have considered whether the appeal was frivolous or clearly without merit. We are of the view that there were at least two grounds of appeal that had enough merit to be considered arguable.

First, the accusers proved the offenses by filing certain emails that Wolbrink circulated, without the supporting testimony of any witnesses. Wolbrink asked for permission to cross-examine on this evidence, and was denied. It is arguable that the emails should have been proven by evidence of witnesses who received them, and that Wolbrink had the right to cross-examine such witnesses.

Second, Wolbrink requested disclosure of the names of the members of the investigative committee which authorized the charge. He was concerned that the committee may have contained members who participated in the trial. The Classis refused to make this disclosure at the trial and the identity of the investigating committee was not disclosed until this Commission requested it as part of pre-hearing orders. The members of the investigative committee did not take part in the trial, but at the time of the Regional Synod's judicial business committee's decision, this was not known. Wolbrink should have been allowed to argue bias or prejudice in the case and manifest injustice in the judgment.

The Regional Synod's committee also cited in support of its decision an email that Wolbrink sent to the General Secretary of the General Synod a few days after filing the appeal to Regional Synod. The committee observed that *BCO* Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 11 provides that no person connected with the case shall circulate any written or printed arguments of briefs upon any appeals before the final disposition of same. The *BCO* does not provide a specific consequence for breach of this provision, and it may be that a judicatory that hears an appeal can order a remedy. But in the present case, the provision does not apply. Whatever the content of the email to the General Secretary, sending an argument to one person does not constitute circulating it.

F. Recommendation

The CJB makes the following recommendation to the General Synod:

R-86
To reverse the decision of the Regional Synod and remand the case to it, with instructions to hear the appeal. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity

The Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) held its meetings October 16-17, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and March 4-7, 2010, in Atlanta, Georgia. The members of the commission include Mark S. Kellar (moderator), Santos Gonzalez, So Ae Heintzelman, Kevin McMahan (recorder), Kenneth B. Petty Jr., Keith Ross, Lois (Holly) Schut, Lewis T. Tait Jr., and Earl James (staff).

General Synod Council and the Racial/Ethnic Councils

The Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3 (*General Synod Council*), Section 2 (*Composition*), subsection b in the *Book of Church Order*, states the following:

> 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.

This mandate contains and suggests at least the following points:

1. The racial/ethnic councils have a constitutional relationship to the General Synod Council (GSC).
2. The councils gather the experience and wisdom of their respective people of color as they relate to ministries and policies of the Reformed Church in America.
3. The councils express to GSC those gathered experiences and wisdom in ways that develop and advocate for ministry and policy.

Over the last several years, the councils reported to GSC in the form of an annual report. Information in those reports might contain historical references, activities completed by or on behalf of the reporting council, words of gratitude for contributions made, etc. An assessment of several years of those reports indicates that the information supplied in the reports does not meet what GSC should be requesting per the bylaws. It might be that GSC accepts these short, written reports as satisfying the mandate, but CORE concludes otherwise. Based on information from the CORE's inquiry, few meaningful steps have been taken by GSC to ensure the bylaws' purposes are being met.

In addition to this bylaws matter, failure to be well-informed from the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations seriously limits GSC's knowledge and ability to effectively lead with regard to the RCA's commitments to being multiracial and freed from racism. The Commission on Race and Ethnicity believes that the relationship between GSC and the racial and ethnic councils requires encouragement, regular monitoring, and evaluation to ensure 1) the expectations of the bylaws and 2) the commitments to be multiracial and freed from racism are met.

This resolution affects both the multiplication and revitalization thrusts of Our Call.

R-87
To direct General Synod Council to complete by November of each year through 2015 a written annual report that evaluates the status of the General Synod Council's relationship with the racial/ethnic councils against the mandate of the Bylaws of the General Synod (*Book of Church Order* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2b) and includes in that evaluation the General Synod Council's plan for the coming year for improving through the councils its access to the collective vision and voice of RCA racial and ethnic congregants and congregations, and to forward this report to the Commission on Race and Ethnicity each year.
(ADOPTED)

Native American and First Nations Voices in General Synod

In its March meeting, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity received and considered a copy of the report from the task force which met in January 2010 "to explore the current status of the relationship between the Reformed Church in America and Native American/First Nations congregations and communities," and to craft a plan on how to restore these voices to the "life, work, and ministry of the RCA" as charged by R-71 (*MGS 2009*, p. 313).

CORE affirms this task force's work to assess a painful history while making recommendations for how the RCA can be more inclusive of these brothers and sisters in Christ in the future. CORE supports the task force proposal for funding to "continue its work for up to two years" in order "to create a restoration plan" (see R-39, p. 150) for GSC to review at its fall 2011 meeting. Consistent with this task force's recommendation that GSC create "venues for the denomination to be more intentional about listening" to these voices, CORE believes it is critical to restore Native American/First Nations people's voices within the RCA, beginning with representation at General Synod. But CORE also observes that ethnic councils and other "interest groups" do not send delegates to synod. CORE believes this is a structural obstacle to increased participation for Native American/First Nations people that calls for resourceful resolution. Therefore, CORE augments the Native American/First Nations task force recommendation as follows.

Upon the advice of the Advisory Committee on Our Multiracial Future Freed from Racism the synod did not adopt R-88 in order for the task force to set its own agenda. Also, the objectives of the recommendation are met in R-39 (page 150).

R-88
To direct the General Synod Council to establish a renewed 2009 R-71 Native American/First Nations task force directed to develop and submit a plan to include Native American/First Nations peoples' voices in General Synod as a part of the "restoration plan" it will submit for the General Synod Council to review at its fall 2011 meeting. (NOT ADOPTED)

White Privilege and Discipleship

The RCA is committed to becoming multiracial and freed from racism. Additionally, the 2009 General Synod declared "racism is sin because it is an offense to God" (R-70, *MGS 2009*, p. 311).

That declaration provides a critical spiritual and Scriptural underpinning for truly becoming multiracial and living freed from racism. There are several important features surrounding the declaration to point out:

1. The world belongs to God, is fallen because of sin, and is being reconciled by the Spirit to God.
2. The Spirit matures and builds up the church to assist in God's great reconciling work.
3. One of the ways the Spirit builds up the church is through giving spiritual gifts. The apostle Paul wrote that everyone has at least one gift, no one has all of them, and the church is to use these gifts as the body uses all its parts.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read that the Spirit gives or deploys gifts according to race or ethnicity. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that the Spirit honors accessing or validating gifts based on racial considerations or familiarity. However, leaders and members of the church often do exactly this—honor and access gifts based on familiarity with the race of the gifted person or group.

CORE is not interested in determining whether our human practices in this regard are intentional or unintentional on the part of individuals. CORE is compelled to state that we do not engage with many of the Spirit's gifts because of sin and the effects of human decisions and actions. The RCA provides a profound one-day training experience called "Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey." In that experience, participants learn:

1. History has been racialized.
2. Racialized history socializes us.
3. Socialization leaves deep marks in our discipleship.
4. How we are discipled affects our self- and Christian identity.

These four points help us understand the depth and pervasiveness of racism in our North American context.

Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey introduces a profound, dynamic, and pervasive concept called "white privilege" and shows how white privilege is a critical basis of racism in North America.

White privilege has been defined as follows:

1. "A right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by white persons beyond the common advantage of all others" (http://academic.udayton.edu/race/01race/whiteness05.htm).
2. "White privilege is a way of conceptualizing racial inequalities that focuses as much on the advantages that whites accrue as on the disadvantages that people of color experience. Unlike theories of overt racism or prejudice, which suggest that people actively seek to oppress or demean other racial groups, theories of white privilege assert that the experience of whites is viewed by whites as normal rather than advantaged" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_privilege).

Below is a partial list of statements pertaining to white privilege presented by Peggy McIntosh in her essay entitled "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." (The article is located at the following web address: www.case.edu/president/aaction/UnpackingTheKnapsack.pdf.) The more "yes" responses to the overall list of statements, the more likely a person benefits from white privilege.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
9. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.
11. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.
12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

Both personal experiences and research about white privilege indicate several things for people generally, RCA members and other Christian included.

1. Whites generally receive societal benefits because they are white and have not earned many of those benefits.
2. Whites and people of color tend to act out the presumption that "real" power to decide and influence lies with whites.
3. Whites generally do not think about being white or exercising power or having privileges because of being white while people of color often are aware of race and ethnicity, race-based uses of power and influence, and historic "givennesses" about race-based societal benefits.

An uncomfortable but predictable outcome of white privilege in the RCA and in life generally is a profound reluctance to trust and lack of empathy between racial groups. This reluctance to trust goes deeper than cultural differences; it is rooted in historical decisions and actions intended to give preference to whites.

The RCA provides excellent short-term training that introduces participants to white privilege. Primary, though not sole, outcomes to training tend to be short-term knowledge increases and short-term opportunities to converse and learn with others about the training topic.

However, the RCA has no resource to help people struggle against the effects of white privilege and racism on the development of our self, Reformed, or Christian identities. Long-term discipleship provides one of the few pathways along which such resources can be developed. Below are statements about discipleship as they appear on the RCA website:

1. "Discipleship is the practice of following Jesus Christ, becoming more like him in all we think, say, and do, empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Christ, in a lost and broken world so loved by God" (www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=211).
2. "Transformational discipleship is about life change in an individual, church, or community" (www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=4303).
3. Incarnational discipleship is "when disciples embody the gospel in their daily lives, their thoughts, works, actions, and heart become more like Christ" (www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=4304).

CORE believes the effects of white privilege cannot be defeated unless the efforts to do so are deeply embedded in lifelong Christian formation and education as described in the above definitions.

R-89
To direct the General Synod Council to establish a task force that develops a series of discipleship resources and experiences that are educational, transformational, and incarnational such that people understand white privilege and its effects in our lives, and become equipped to live from self and Christian identities that are freed from the harmful and hurtful effects of white privilege; and further,

to comprise the task force of twelve members including two from the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, two from the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, one from each racial/ethnic council, two experts in creating discipleship

resources, and three persons not from these groups who are passionate about and committed to this assignment. The task force is to be multigenerational and include equivalent numbers of men and women; and further,

the task force shall be of two years duration and forward to General Synod 2012 its final report, to include at minimum the following:

1. **A compendium of recommended resources and experiences.**
2. **A series of transformational experiences that feature a) cultural dislocation (moving outside one's comfort zone in order to see with new eyes), b) partnership across cultures (learning in transracial and/or intercultural relationships, and c) actionable projects (to actually "join the journey" in dismantling racism and white privilege as opposed to mere thinking and discussing it); and further,**

that the General Synod Council provide funds sufficient for this task force to complete its work. (ADOPTED)

Task Force to Study White Privilege in Synod and GSC Processes

The RCA has reached the end of "A Decade Freed from Racism" but we remain, not surprisingly, still bound by this evil declared by General Synod 2009 as sin. The Commission on Race and Ethnicity recognizes much good progress that has been made, particularly in the past few years, yet CORE believes it is important to keep our denomination's focus on how to actually achieve a multiracial future for the RCA together as one healthy body with many diverse parts by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God.

CORE spent much of its October 2009 and March 2010 meetings reflecting on the insidious dynamics and unjust consequences of white privilege.

White privilege is often mistaken and resisted as a form of "reverse racism" toward all Anglo-Americans, but it is not. White male privilege is the socially constructed power of one group, in this case white males, over other groups. When such privilege is conferred by the society, one does not need to do anything to earn it. In fact, it is assumed that those offered such privilege will take advantage of its benefits. These advantages do not mean that beneficiaries do not need to work for what they achieve, but it does mean that they have a greater likelihood of success than those with lesser advantage. Cooperating with such a system is learned, even if unconsciously. White males, as others, can choose to unlearn this system of privilege and work for social justice.

The essence of white male privilege is the assumption that white males know best and are entitled, even ordained by God, to direct and rule others. Other cultures, genders, and races are viewed paternalistically at best, and are conquered and enslaved at worst. The white male system emphasizes control mechanisms of power, hierarchy, achievement, rationality, and order more than relational qualities of compassion, collaboration, service, emotion, and mystery. Most of all, white male privilege seeks to perpetuate itself as the only real standard, as normal. Of course, this implies that other ways of being and operating are abnormal and deviant.

White male privilege consolidates traditional power, prevents challenges to the status quo, and either assimilates or excludes minority cultures and voices. White male privilege is

manifest in any institution where white males continue to hold power that is disproportionate to their numbers in the organization.

"White privilege is the other side of racism. Unless we name it, we are in danger of wallowing in guilt or moral outrage with no idea of how to move beyond them. It is often easier to deplore racism and its effects than to take responsibility for the privileges some of us receive as a result of it…Once we understand how white privilege operates, we can begin addressing it on an individual and institutional basis" (*White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, by Paula S. Rothenberg [Worth Publishers: 2005], p.1).

It is simply not adequate to be opposed to racism and sexism in principle while stopping short of naming and dismantling the white male privilege system itself. In fact, the existing system cannot "fix itself" without including new voices at the table. Together, we must continually improve our ability to recognize and address, indeed reform, the privilege and power that divides us.

CORE recognizes that many synod and GSC processes and operations predate our current RCA commitments 1) to be Reformed and missional, 2) to pursue a multiracial future freed from racism, and 3) to include women in all offices of the church. Since these processes have been established within a system of white male privilege it is very important that they undergo discerning critical evaluation.

James 2:1-9 forbids favoritism in the church, and Acts 6:1-4 records that the apostles took corrective action when they recognized that some groups in the church were being favored over others. Before we can act we must better understand these particular dynamics of privilege as they are enacted in the RCA.

R-90
To direct the General Synod Council to appoint a task force to study and critique the effects of white privilege in the processes and operations used and decisions made by General Synod and the General Synod Council, with a report to General Synod 2012; and further,

to make a progress report to the Commission on Race and Ethnicity by January 31, 2011, with the final report completed and forwarded to the Commission on Race and Ethnicity by January 31, 2012; and further,

to have the task force comprised of twelve people, to include:

- **two representatives from the Commission on Race and Ethnicity,**
- **one representative from General Synod Council,**
- **one General Synod Council staff person with expertise on General Synod and General Synod Council processes, operations, and decisions,**
- **one representative from each of the ethnic councils,**
- **one person representing Native American/First Nations perspectives, and**
- **one representative from the Commission for Women; and further,**

to have the task force report include, at minimum:

1. **The historic nature of white privilege on organizations and systems, including those of the RCA.**
2. **Implications from the following sources on modifying or reshaping General Synod and General Synod Council processes and operations:**
   a. **The Reformed and missional discussions**
   b. **The commitments to become multiracial and freed from racism**
   c. **The commitment to include women in all areas of church leadership**
3. **Directions going forward to reduce or remove the effects of white privilege from the processes and operations of General Synod and the General Synod Council. (NOT ADOPTED)**

A motion was made from the floor:

R-91
To direct the General Synod Council and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity to study and critique the effects of white privilege in the processes and operations used and decisions made by General Synod and General Synod Council. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology met in Chicago, Illinois, October 15-17, 2009, in conjunction with the annual joint meeting of all General Synod commissions and the General Synod Council (GSC), and again on February 1-2, 2010.

The commission has completed a great deal of work this year and is pleased to include in this report study papers on the marks of the church and Christian-Muslim relations, as well as new translations of the Standards prepared by a joint RCA/CRC task force. The commission continues its work on deacons in higher assemblies (see *MGS 2007*, R-18, p. 103), the development of a "Reformed and missional" lexicon (see *MGS 2008*, R-12, pp. 93f.), and its conversation on Ephesians 4:11 and "apostolic ministry."

Deacons in Higher Assemblies

The 2007 General Synod requested that the commission prepare a paper concerning the inclusion of deacons in the higher assemblies of the church for report to the 2009 General Synod. The commission's initial work in this study resulted in a change of direction and the preparation of a new paper which frames the office of deacon from a Reformed and missional perspective. The commission has reviewed this paper with appreciation, but has determined that it must be expanded to include a clear theology of "assemblies" in the RCA and to address the practical implications of including deacons in the broader assemblies of the church. The commission is requesting another year to complete this work with intention to bring a final report to the 2011 General Synod.

Conversation on Ephesians 4:11 and "Apostolic Ministry"

In 2009 the commission reported that it had begun to engage in conversation with several leaders in the RCA's church multiplication movement in which there is strong emphasis on Ephesians 4:11 (the five-fold gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher) and, most especially, on the role of "apostles" and "apostolic leaders" in the life of the church. The commission is concerned that these emphases may pose challenges to the RCA's existing order and ecclesiological assumptions. The commission met with RCA church multiplication leaders in the spring of 2009, and on the basis of this conversation prepared a working paper on "Apostles and Eph. 4:11 in the RCA" to which Tim Vink, coordinator for Church Multiplication, wrote a response. Representatives of the RCA's Church Multiplication Team (CMT) met with the commission again in October 2009, to identify areas of mutual agreement and ongoing concerns from both sides. Both the commission and members of the CMT have found these meetings to be very helpful and have agreed to continue these conversations with intention to prepare a study paper (or papers) in response to the hopes and concerns that have been identified.

Reformed and Missional Lexicon

The 2008 General Synod instructed the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship and the R-16/Reformed and Missional Task Force, "to compile a brief theological dictionary in order to provide a common language for continued conversation, giving particular attention and emphasis to the terms 'Reformed' and 'missional,' with report to the General Synod 2009." (*MGS 2008*, R-12, pp. 93f.). In 2009, having begun to create a lexicon of terms, the commission recognized the complexity of the assignment, and in its report to General Synod invited synod to provide further clarification of the task and requested additional time to complete it. For the status of this "brief theological dictionary," see the Report of the Reformed and Missional Task Force beginning on page 103.

World Council of Churches Papers on Ecclesiology

Two members of the commission, James Brownson and Renee House, participated with members of the Commission on Christian Unity in preparing formal responses to the World Council of Churches study documents "Called to Be the One Church" and "The Nature and Mission of the Church."

Marks of the Church

As instructed by the 2007 General Synod, the commission has engaged "in a study of the historic 'marks' of the church, as articulated in the RCA Standards and in light of missional understandings of the gospel, and to consider the recommendation of the addition of [mission as] a fourth 'mark' of the church (*MGS 2007*, R-20, p. 103). The commission has completed this assignment and offers its paper, "Exploring Mission as a Fourth Mark of the Church," to the synod.

EXPLORING MISSION AS A FOURTH MARK OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

The Commission on Theology offers this paper in response to a request from the 2007 General Synod that the commission "engage in a study of the historic 'marks' of the church, as articulated in the RCA Standards and in light of missional understandings of the gospel," and "consider…the addition of a fourth 'mark' of the church"[1] that would focus "much more explicitly [on] sending us as a church into God's mission in the world."[2] Presently, the RCA confesses three marks of the church as defined in the Belgic Confession: 1) the pure preaching of the gospel, 2) the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them, and 3) the practice of church discipline for correcting faults.[3] The request to consider adding mission as a mark of the church expresses the desire to provide an unequivocally clear confessional basis on which to call the RCA into greater understanding and faithfulness as it participates in God's mission, both at home and abroad. The commission supports this desire, and celebrates the many stories of new and existing congregations that are growing in faith, ministry, and mission.

In responding to the request to explore adding mission as a fourth mark of the church, the commission has studied the core purpose and meaning of the three Reformed marks of the church within the larger confessional frame of a Reformed ecclesiology and in relation to a Reformed understanding of the marks of the Christian life.[4] As a result of this exploration the commission has become convinced that the present marks of the church are already fully missional—they identify God's mission. They define the means God uses to create, sustain, and empower the church as it receives and participates in God's mission.

The commission recognizes that identifying the three marks of the church as fully and powerfully missional invites us into new ways of understanding our historic creeds and confessions. We also recognize that in arguing that the marks of the church point clearly to the mission of God, and thus are missional, we have still to locate a confessional basis on which to call and encourage the church—the whole people of God—into greater self-understanding and faithfulness as it receives and responds to God's mission in church and world. It is the commission's hope that this study paper will enable the RCA to understand the present marks of the church as missional and to find a foundation in our present creeds and confessions that further clarifies our identity and vocation as a people who are called and sent to share in God's mission.

In what follows we will: 1) present a brief overview of the Reformed marks of the church; 2) provide background to the 2007 General Synod recommendation; 3) develop a definition of what it means to be missional in a Reformed perspective; 4) elaborate the nature and purpose of the present marks of the church as missional and demonstrate that these marks preserve the Reformed focus on the sovereign action of the Triune God as the only source and cause of the church's being and faithfulness; 5) discuss the marks of the church in relation to marks of the Christian life[5]; 6) explore one of our ecumenical creeds within a missional frame as a kind of case study in re-appropriating our confessional heritage; and, 7) provide a summary of the paper and recommendations.

Section 1: Brief Overview of the Reformed Marks of the Church

From the outset of our exploration, it will be helpful to understand the purpose and function of these marks in their historic context. At the heart of the sixteenth century disputes between the Roman Catholic Church, the Anabaptists, and the churches that emerged under the leadership of the Protestant Reformers is the question, "What makes a church a church?" Amid conflicting responses to this question,[6] the Reformers were eager to define

the essential marks by which a true church could be recognized. The marks provide a clear and concise definition of what things must be present in order for a church to be considered a true church of Jesus Christ.

Above all, the Reformed marks locate the *essential* being of the church in the action of the Triune God, who elects and creates the church through the core practices of the pure preaching of God's Word, the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and the proper exercise of church discipline.[7] Through these means alone, in the power of the Spirit, the Reformers insisted that Jesus Christ is truly present in the midst of the congregation offering himself and all of his benefits. Here the church exists and is unambiguously recognizable.

The three marks do not intend to say *all* that must be said about the nature, purpose, and mission of the church. By themselves they do not provide a full-blown ecclesiology and therefore must be understood within the larger context of our ecumenical and Reformed creeds and confession. However, taken alone the marks *do* point us to what must be present at minimum, as essential for a church to be a true church of Jesus Christ. They are the starting point, the sure foundation in Word and Spirit from which the church receives its life and is built up to share in God's mission.

In the conflicted ecclesial context of the sixteenth century the marks provided a basis for making broad and charitable judgments among churches that held differing polities and practices, and they fulfill this same function today. But more importantly, the marks center a Reformed understanding of the church in the absolute priority of God's action in creating, sustaining, and empowering the church through Word and Spirit in preaching, sacrament, and discipline. We will provide a much fuller discussion of the marks of the church in Section 4 below, with attention to their central place in the mission of God, but offer this brief introduction for the sake of orienting what follows.

Section 2: Background to the Recommendation to Explore Mission as a Fourth Mark

Since the mid-1990s, the General Synod of the RCA, under the leadership of its general secretary, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, has been explicitly calling the whole church to understand and embrace its missional identity and to fulfill its missional vocation in the world. The commission fully affirms this direction in recognition of the fact that the church has often turned in on itself and resisted its vocation as agent of the reign of God in local and global contexts. We give thanks to God for signs of growth and renewal across the denomination.

During this period of focused attention on missional identity and vocation in the RCA, it has become clear that the term "missional," while widely used in the RCA and the greater church, is in need of clearer definition. In the past two years, the RCA has been working to define more precisely what it means to be "missional" in a Reformed perspective, and it is the intention of this paper to contribute to that discussion. But, as background, we note that the RCA's more general focus on becoming a missional denomination is reflective of numerous publications that describe the crisis of mainline Protestant denominations and attempt to respond to it by urging the church to rethink its core nature and purpose in terms of mission.[8]

Many of these writings claim that the spiritual and numerical decline mainline churches are experiencing is a direct result of their having an inadequate ecclesiology, that is, a theology of the church that does not and cannot provide a sufficient basis for a missional self-understanding and vocation that pertains to the congregation as a whole. More specifically, it is argued that Reformational churches continue to hold a view of the nature and pur-

pose of the church that was developed in and appropriate to a sixteenth century context, but is inadequate to the North American church's present missionary context and calling.

In the first place, according to this perspective, the sixteenth century Reformation churches existed in a Christendom context in which every person was, through baptism, a member of the church. As members of the church, all citizens were expected faithfully to gather to hear the Word preached, to participate in the sacraments, and to submit to the discipline of duly ordained and installed office holders. Within this Christendom paradigm, one writer concludes, "'Church' is conceived…as *the place where* a Christian civilization gathers for worship…" and the ministry and mission of the church are fulfilled by the clergy, who are responsible for "the church's authoritative activities."[9] As a result, there is "little attention to the church as a communal entity or presence," and even less attention to "the community's role as the bearer of missional responsibility in the world, both near and far away."[10]

A second aspect of the church's existence within sixteenth century Christendom is that church and "state" formed an alliance that shaped the church's own sense of its nature and purpose vis a vis the civil government. The church was responsible for matters *internal* to the church—right preaching, administration of the sacraments, and discipline, while the civil government was responsible for matters *external*, specifically, for the "furthering of the preaching of the gospel everywhere" through the expansion of the church.[11] Those who critique this sixteenth century ecclesiology conclude that within this paradigm, the civil government, and *not* the church, assumed responsibility for fulfilling Christ's Great Commission, at least in a limited way, by establishing new churches within its jurisdiction.[12]

Echoing aspects of this critique, General Secretary Granberg-Michaelson notes in his 2007 report to the General Synod that the RCA's sixteenth century confessions have not equipped, and cannot equip the church for mission because "'mission' wasn't really a priority concern at the time of the Reformation."[13] The church was focused on "establishing the authority of the word, the priority of grace, and the centrality of faith."[14] He contends that "[t]he clear New Testament emphasis on the missional calling of the church is largely absent" from the church's confessional Standards.[15] He continues by pointing out that the RCA's theology of the church, as expressed in the three "marks" of pure preaching, pure administration of the sacraments, and discipline, "describe what takes place *inside* the church," but not "what the church does in the world," that is, the marks are not about the congregation's missional identity and calling.[16]

While it is the case that our sixteenth century confessions do not explicitly speak of what we now call the Great Commission, nor express the same sense of mission that emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Protestant global mission enterprise, the commission has no doubt and seeks to show here that our Reformed confessions do express an unmistakable concern for the mission of God and the church's participation in it.

Reiterated in the general secretary's remarks is the conviction expressed in other publications on the missional church that the Reformed marks create an understanding of the church as "a place where certain things happen" at the hands of ordained officers, rather than pointing to the essential reality that the church is "a body of people sent on a mission."[17] It is perceived that what happens *inside* the church—the work of ministry—is the province of the church's officeholders alone, and that the Reformed marks thus necessarily undermine the Reformed belief in and commitment to the priesthood of all believers whereby all Christians together are called to share in ministry and mission. Through our discussion we intend to demonstrate that this is an inaccurate conclusion.

Further, the implication is that what happens *inside* the church, while foundationally important and instrumental to what happens *outside* the church, is not in and of itself a demonstration of the church's missional essence and action. What happens *inside* the church—worship, the careful preservation and re-articulation of the church's apostolic doctrine through teaching and preaching, the ordering and ministry of the offices, and the faithful enactment of the sacraments and discipline—is considered important in preparing the congregation for its mission, but these practices themselves are not understood as a manifestation of the congregation's participation in mission. Rather, the clear sense is that the church as congregation *becomes* missional and *fulfills* its missional vocation only as it is sent into the world, as it crosses boundaries in witness to the gospel.[18] It is on the basis of this understanding that the RCA's Missional Structures Task Force asked the 2007 General Synod to explore adding mission as a fourth mark of the church as a way to recover the "church's missional imperative."[19]

The Commission on Theology seeks to demonstrate that the three Reformational marks of the church, while not intended to provide a fully articulated Reformed ecclesiology, do point to the absolutely essential basis for the church's reception of and participation in the mission of God which is being fulfilled both inside and outside the church. The church in its gathering to hear the Word, celebrate the sacraments, and undergo the formation of its life in Christ through discipline is already receiving and responding to the mission of God. The church gathered, the church "inside," is already both object and instrument of God's mission. Having said this, we cannot deny the fact that the church has and does turn in on itself. The church has been and continues to be a reticent witness to the gospel as it participates in the daily life of God's world.[20]

The church is always in the process of responding more faithfully to God's mission in church and world and will be until Christ returns in glory. But we must not confuse God's mission with the church's response to it. The church is already, through the Word and Spirit, taken up into and being transformed by and for God's own mission. The church's most fundamental missional nature is given by God, who "missionizes" the world and the church through the actions described in the Reformed marks of the church. To ground a fuller discussion of these marks, we must give some definition to a Reformed understanding of the mission of God and the church's participation in and response to it.

Section 3: The Mission of God and the Church: Twentieth Century and Reformed Perspectives

Twentieth Century Perspectives: From Church-Centered to God-Centered Mission

Since the early twentieth century the church throughout the world has been in the process of redefining what we mean when we speak of mission. Following more than a century of expansive Protestant mission in the world, missionaries, missiologists, and theologians began in the early 1900s to assess the church's work in global mission.[21] This assessment produced multiple critiques, the chief one being that the church's theology and practice of mission were far too church-centered. There was a sense that the church itself was the ground of this global mission activity—it was the *church's* mission that drove the movement, and the goal of this mission was to plant churches, essentially to replicate its theology, order, and practices in foreign lands. This global mission activity did include educational and medical work as well as the planting of churches. But even these aspects were construed in terms of the *church's* mission, as something the church was doing. In addition, as a result of the nineteenth century world mission movement, mission came to be primarily understood as something that took place on the other side of the world, with the result that the "sending" churches in the Western world lacked a clear sense of call to incarnate God's mission in their local contexts.

As a corrective to an ecclesiocentric view of the church's mission, by the mid-twentieth century there was a recovery and expansion of the Western church's classical doctrine of the *missio Dei*, that is, the mission of God. It had become clear that the church's understanding and practice of mission must be grounded in theology—in an understanding of who God is and how God works in the world. The doctrine of *missio Dei* begins with a definition of God as a *sending* God. God the Father sends the Son into the world, and the Father and Son together send the Spirit. These divine sendings are then "expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world."[22] Accordingly, the church is taken up into God's own mission and sent into the world as instrument and agent of that mission. It is not, in the first place, the church's mission but God's. In its fullest sense, the *missio Dei* is carried out by the Spirit in the world, both through and apart from the church.[23]

This redefinition of the church's mission from within the perspective of "God's character and purpose as a sending or missionary God" both provides new perspective on the Trinity and corrects an ecclesiocentric understanding of the church's mission.[24] The church is missional because it has been called to participate in the work of a *missionary* God. The church exists within the Trinitarian mission as the last of God's sendings. This theocentric approach to mission clarifies that the church's mission depends entirely on God's initiative through the *missio Dei*, which is active not only in "foreign" lands but in every place, thus emphasizing that every local congregation is an instrument of and witness to God's larger mission, which is the restoration of the whole cosmos. This is an important corrective to a church-initiating and church-centered view of mission.

However, by speaking of God primarily as a "missionary" or a "sending" God and defining the church's essence in terms of "being sent" into the world, there is great potential to misunderstand the church's missional nature and purpose. If we focus the church's missional character and vocation on its *being sent* into the world, then we are left with the mistaken notion that only what the church does *outside* its four walls, or *outside* the gathered congregation, counts as mission. Only in being sent can the church claim to realize its missional essence and calling within God's mission. This means that the church's worship, preaching, teaching, celebration of the sacraments, discipline, fellowship, and order—its whole "internal" life—is merely instrumental to the church's *real* mission, but is not in and of itself a participation in God's mission. All of these activities of the church are in service to, but are not themselves defined as, mission. This perspective is highly problematic in that it loses sight of the fact that each of these dimensions of the church's life is precisely a manifestation of and a participation in God's own mission to redeem and renew the whole creation.

Reformed Perspective on the Mission of God and the Church

Although we are grateful for a recovery of the doctrine of *missio Dei*, which serves to move us from an ecclesiocentric to a theocentric understanding of mission, we are also mindful of the ways in which this doctrine may limit our understanding of who God is, and consequently our understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. If we speak of God, in the first instance, as a "missionary God" by focusing on the Father's sending of the Son, and the Father's and Son's sending of the Spirit, who sends the church, we overlook God's foundational work as Creator and sustainer of the whole universe. We may speak of God's work in creating the universe as a manifestation of God's mission, but this divine mission cannot be framed in terms of sending. The church's self-understanding in relation to God and the world must be situated within a fully Trinitarian understanding of God's being and work.[25]

As Reformed Christians we confess that God the Father, with the Son and Spirit, "created

heaven and earth and everything in them" and daily "upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence."[26] As Creator of the universe, God is the source of its being and its sovereign Lord. In the doctrine of God as Creator we find the deep root of God's enduring, direct relationship with the world, which defines the full scope of God's mission. This relationship exists despite the effects of sin and quite apart from human acknowledgement of it. In faithfulness to God's work in creation, the Spirit of God is ever active in the world, manifesting God's truth and righteousness even through persons, institutions, and governments which do not confess God's name.[27] As Creator, God "called the world into being" and therefore does not and will not abandon creation, despite human ignorance, resistance, and sinfulness.[28]

In order to redeem the whole creation and bring the world back into the knowledge of God, God sends Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, into the world. We confess that God the Son, through the mutual willing and divine love of Father and Spirit, became incarnate, lived, died, and rose again in order to defeat the destructive effects of human sin, and to establish God's eschatological kingdom within creation at a particular time and place in history. God was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to God's self.[29] Jesus Christ brings this reconciling, renewing grace not only to human persons, but to God's entire creation, which with humanity groans and longs for its full redemption.[30] In Christ, God elects the church to be a manifestation, sign, instrument, and agent of God's reign for the sake of creation's redemption.

At Pentecost, God's Spirit is poured out as the Spirit of God's new creation. The Spirit speaks in the world according to God's ultimate Word in Christ, who has already defeated the powers of sin and death.[31] Already now, the Spirit brings God's renewed reign, God's kingdom, to bear on the life of the whole world and the church as pledge and foretaste of the kingdom of God which is yet to come in fullness. We live, move, and have our being in relation to the Trinitarian God, whose work in creation, redemption, and transformation provides the fullest possible frame for our understanding of the mission of God and the church's own response to it.

Reformed Perspective on the Mission of God—God's Kingdom, Christ, Spirit, and the Church

Within this fully Trinitarian understanding, we acknowledge that the church's being and mission are grounded in the work of Christ, and we are reminded of the cosmic scope and impact of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.[32] The church has often held too narrow of an understanding of God's salvific work in Christ. It has seen the central goal of Christ's work as restoring individuals to right relationship with God so that they might receive eternal life. Thus, the church's core mission is understood to be exclusively evangelistic, that is, to share with words the news of Christ's atoning death in order to save individual lost souls from everlasting damnation.

While Christ's work in atonement certainly is personal, and through the Spirit's labor does bring individuals into right relationship with God, a fully Trinitarian perspective insures that we will have a proper sense of the scope of the salvation that Christ has accomplished. The salvation that Christ brings, not only in his death and resurrection, but also in his earthly ministry, is nothing less than the presence of God's kingdom renewing the whole creation. In Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Spirit, "God's royal rule has invaded the earth" and God has "become victorious over all the dark powers that have enslaved [hu]mankind and made His good creation subject to bondage."[33]

In the 1970s the General Program Council of the RCA began to frame the church's missional vocation within God's cosmic mission in a publication titled "An Evangelism

Manifesto."[34] In the "Manifesto," God's kingdom is defined as "the active, saving reign of the Triune God in history."[35] The "Manifesto" elaborates the scope of God's dynamic reign in this way:

> To proclaim "the kingdom of God has drawn near" is to herald those mighty events in which God's royal rule has invaded the earth in the coming of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is to bring the thrilling news of God's victory in the death and resurrection of His Son over all the dark powers that have enslaved [hu]mankind and made His good creation subject to bondage. It is to tell of what God has done to bring forgiveness to the guilty, help to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, deliverance to the oppressed. It is to announce to the whole creation a divine reign of justice and peace.[36]

The Triune God is the primary actor in manifesting God's own reign, effecting healing and releasing from bondage, evoking repentance and belief, renewing creation, and creating a community of persons—the church—as recipient, manifestation, sign, and agent of God's mission in the world. But, as these words from the RCA's Our Song of Hope confess, God's mission, through the action of the Holy Spirit, extends far beyond the life and reach of the church:

> God's Spirit speaks in the world
> according to God's ultimate word in Christ.
> In every time and place,
> in ancient cities and distant lands,
> in technology and business,
> in art and education,
> God has not been left without a witness.
> The Word has entered where we have failed to go.
>
> In each year and in every place
> we expect the coming of Christ's Spirit.
> As we listen to the world's concerns,
> hear the cry of the oppressed,
> and learn of new discoveries,
> God will give us knowledge,
> teach us to respond with maturity,
> and give us courage to act with integrity.
>
> As citizens we acknowledge the Spirit's work in human government
> for the welfare of the people,
> for justice among the poor,
> for mercy towards the prisoner,
> against inhuman oppression of humanity.
> We must obey God above all rulers,
> waiting upon the Spirit,
> filled with the patience of Christ.
>
> We pray for the fruits of the Spirit of Christ
> who works for peace on earth,
> commands us to love our enemies,
> and calls for patience among the nations.
> We give thanks for God's work among governments,
> seeking to resolve disputes by means other than war,
> placing human kindness above national pride,
> replacing the curse of war with international self-control.[37]

God's own laboring which brings God's kingdom to earth is larger than the church, but is also constitutive of the church's whole being, life, and witness. The church does not bring God's kingdom to earth. Rather it receives, announces, celebrates, and lives as the reality, sign, and instrument of the kingdom in every aspect of its life as the people of God, both in its gathering and its sending.

God's Election of the Church

Having elaborated a Reformed understanding of the mission of God and the church within it, and before turning to a fuller discussion of the three marks of the church, we must acknowledge our tradition's most foundational understanding of the church's existence. Prior to the church's becoming visible as community and institution, our Reformed faith names the fact of God's eternal election as constitutive of the church's being. Based on the biblical witness we confess that in absolute freedom and unconditional love God chooses a people to be God's own. God chooses Abraham and Sarah, makes a covenant with them, blesses them, and promises that in them "all the families of the earth shall be blessed."[38] God renews this covenant with Abraham's offspring in calling the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt with the promise, "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God."[39]

God's choosing is what constitutes a holy people blessed to live in covenant with God and to be a blessing for all nations and peoples. The reality of God's eternal election stands as foundational to our Reformed doctrine of the church. Because of God's gracious choosing in Christ, the most fundamental Reformed definition of the church is that it is the people of God.[40] Concerning belief in "the holy catholic church," the Heidelberg Catechism states:

> 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. And of this community I am always and will be a living member.[41]

In Our Song of Hope we confess:

> Christ elects the church to proclaim the Word and celebrate the sacraments, to worship God's name, and to live as true disciples. He creates a community to be a place of prayer, to provide rest for the weary, and to lead people to share in service.[42]

The church is the community of those whom God has chosen to be God's own, to receive, live in, and proclaim the grace of God in Christ. In 1 Peter 2:9 the church is described as a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The church as the people of God is made up of *every person* who through baptism has been united with Christ to share in his threefold office as prophet, priest, and king. [43]

There is much more that could be said about the church as the body of Christ and community of the Holy Spirit, but our discussion of the church as the people of God, chosen and blessed to be a blessing, provides the necessary foundation for our specific discussion of the marks of the church. God's election of a people to be God's own stands as absolute ground in a Reformed understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. The marks of the church assume the existence of a community chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and point to the means by which God gathers, protects, preserves, and prepares this people to receive and be God's blessing in the world.

Section 4: The Reformed Marks of the Church and the Mission of God

The RCA with other churches in the Reformed and Lutheran traditions confesses three marks of the church:[44]

> The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults.[45]

As has been said, the purpose of these marks is not to provide a full-blown ecclesiology. Rather, they define the absolute, non-debatable means by which the church can be *recognized*, not only as the true church, but also as an institution and community in distinction from all other institutions and communities in society. In one sense, they provide a minimal definition of what makes a church a church—right preaching, right administration of two sacraments, right exercise of discipline. In another sense, they direct us to the three things that are absolutely essential and the only necessary means by which God calls and equips the church. All three marks are centered in the life-giving presence of God's living Word through the Holy Spirit. All three assume and are situated in the reality of the church as the people of God.

At the heart of Reformed theology is the conviction that, in the power of the Spirit, God's Word—in Scripture, in preaching, in the sacraments, in its application through discipline—ushers the church into the real presence of Christ, the living Word. That Word is active and powerful. God's Word, in the power of the Spirit, does not fail to accomplish what God intends. It may not bring forth immediate fruit, but because of its content and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be confident that in time the Word will become effective in human hearts and minds.

Through Word and Spirit, God carries out God's mission. God gathers a chosen people, grants them faith, assures them of God's redemption, evokes their worship and confession, and forms them for lives of thankful obedience in the world over which God is sovereign ruler. The Reformed marks rightfully focus on the absolute priority of God's action in creating and sustaining the church as a visible, public, open community in which good news is constantly preached, heard, signed, and sealed to the world.

First Mark: "The Pure Preaching of the Gospel"

In keeping with the teaching of John Calvin, the Reformed tradition is unequivocally clear that we cannot truly know God or ourselves apart from God's Word, and "that no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless [one] be a pupil of Scripture."[46] Human faith in the merciful promises of God cannot exist apart from the Word of God, for, as Calvin says, "[F]aith needs the Word as much as fruit needs the living root of a tree."[47]

As the first mark of the church, the "pure preaching of the gospel" by duly called and installed ministers ensures both the permanence and freedom of God's Word in the church. The Word does not come *from* the congregation, but rather, *from* God *to* the congregation, and then the Word moves in, with, and through the congregation into the world. When the church worships, the Word is *in* the congregation as promise, call, and challenge—always for, and sometimes over against, the congregation. The faith of the church can live and grow only from the "pure preaching" of the Word, which means that ministers are accountable to faithfully preach the pure gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ as given in the apostolic witness and preserved in the church's doctrine.

As Calvin teaches, strictly speaking, "Christ [himself] is the only foundation of the church."[48] His life, death, resurrection, and ascension have secured for us forgiveness of sins and reconciled us to God; through him we have been adopted as God's sons and daughters, incorporated into the body of Christ, and given new life. But the church is built on the foundation of Christ through the preaching of the pure doctrine of Christ as received from the first apostles and expressed in the church's creeds and confessions. Calvin writes, "All that Christ had done towards effecting reconciliation would have been of no service, if it had not been proclaimed by the gospel."[49] Preaching is the means by which the grace of God in Jesus Christ becomes known and produces faith in us. Pure preaching brings Christ to the congregation. In the preacher's words, Christ speaks, bidding God's people to seek salvation in him alone, to depend upon and cleave to him alone.

In defining the first mark of the church Calvin includes not only the Word "purely preached" but also the Word "heard."[50] The RCA's own understanding of the first mark implicitly includes both *preaching* and *hearing* of the Word. Preachers preach so that both the preacher and the congregation will *hear* God's address to them. Preaching is not an end in itself and members of the congregation are not simply passive recipients of the minister's preaching. They are taken up into the powerful work of the Spirit through the twofold illumination that accompanies the preaching of the gospel. In and of itself the gospel of Christ shines forth and sheds light upon us, but the gospel light shines in vain unless Christ "at the same time enlighten our understandings by His Spirit."[51]

Both the minister and congregation must present themselves in active receptivity and obedience so that God's Word might find "a fixed abode" and "show its effectiveness" in "bringing forth fruit and prospering by God's blessing."[52] The first mark *centers* in the pure preaching of the gospel by ministers, but its *goal* is the increase of faith and the building up of the church to participate in the ministry of Christ and the mission of God. Where the Holy Spirit illumines human understanding and seals the promises of the gospel to human hearts,[53] young and old, women and men become "wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for" Christ.[54]

Second Mark: "The Pure Administration of the Sacraments"

The second mark, the "pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them" is inseparable from the first mark of pure preaching. On the one hand, the sacraments offer the same thing as the Word: the promises and presence of God in Jesus Christ, through the Spirit. On the other hand, the Spirit truly uses the sacraments, these visible signs joined with Word, to effect and deepen our union with Christ, our communion with one another as the body of Christ, and our discipleship in daily life. We can speak of the sacraments as an intensification of the work of God's Word in and through us.

In baptism, through the gift of faith and the work of the Spirit, we are truly united with Christ and with his church which is both universal and local. Through baptism Christ offers himself and all his benefits to the church. We are offered forgiveness of sins and invited to receive the righteousness of Christ. We also grow up in the life-giving Spirit who daily works sanctification in us so that as a community and as individuals we might more fully participate in Christ's own ministry and mission to sanctify the world.

At the Table Christ is truly present through the Spirit, and as the Spirit enables us to receive the bread and wine in true faith, Christ nourishes us with his own self. Thus our union with Christ is deepened and strengthened, we are again assured the forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and the church is built up as the body of Christ for its vocation within the mission of God.

Like the first mark of pure preaching, the second mark also assumes a congregation *actively receptive* to the Spirit's work in and through the sacraments so that through our deeper union with Christ we might be strengthened for participation in the threefold office of Christ into which we were baptized.[55] Ministers and elders administer the sacraments, but their effects are realized in the lives of all God's people who present themselves in faith and readiness to receive what Christ offers.

But, here again, the pure administration of the sacraments as a mark of the church points us to the absolute priority of God's action and the fulfillment of God's mission through baptism and the Lord's Supper. There is no clearer example of the Reformed conviction that God is the one who acts in the sacraments than our practice of infant baptism. It is God who sends the Spirit, and the Spirit who labors in the congregation so that the sacramental signs may be true instruments of God's grace. The Spirit grants the faith necessary to receive the grace offered, and seals the promises represented in the signs of water, bread, and wine. In the sacraments, through the Spirit, Christ is truly present and active, creating, sustaining, and empowering the church to be the body of Christ in submission and service to Christ its Savior and Head.

Third Mark: The Practice of Discipline

The practice of discipline, the third mark, is also inseparable from the first two marks of preaching and celebrating the sacraments. Discipline finds its power and effect through the operation of God's Word and Spirit as it brings God's Word to bear, in very particular ways, on the whole life of the congregation, and through it the church experiences the action of the present, living Christ. Through the practice of discipline, the Reformers established that the church has a "responsibility not only to present true Christian doctrine but also to shape true Christian behaviour."[56] Records of the Genevan consistory show that discipline focused primarily on educating adults in Reformed faith thus enabling their understanding and piety, and on calling persons who were in conflict to be reconciled in reflection of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. In these latter cases, the consistory offered pastoral counseling to members of biological families, husbands and wives, and neighbors in special concern that they be able to partake of the Lord's Supper at peace with one another as instructed in Matthew 18.[57]

At times in the church's history, discipline has been narrowly understood and practiced as correcting immoral behaviors in the lives of *individual* Christians. Surely such discipline is necessary. However, the chief concern of Christian discipline is to build up the body of Christ so that the church may "grow up in all things into Christ our Lord."[58] As a form of discipleship, discipline serves the whole church's growth in belief and witness in response to Christ's ministry and mission. Discipline is practiced in order to increase the integrity, not only of individuals, but of the whole people of God in its life together. The church is to be a public sign and witness to the power and presence of Christ through whom God is reconciling the world to God's self. As a reconciled community, the church exists as a visible sign of what God has done and is doing to restore the world's relationship with God, and to break down the walls that divide people from one another. Discipline is directed toward individual and communal discipleship as the Spirit works God's Word more thoroughly into the community of Christ so that we might be both sign and agent of God's kingdom—a manifestation of the reality that we are together the first fruits of God's new creation.

Discipline requires the same active reception on the part of the congregation discussed in relation to the first two marks. As the Spirit enables, the congregation responds with obedience to the ministry of discipline, God's people submit to the forming power of God's Word and Spirit. But here again, the emphasis in discipline falls on what the Triune God

is doing to sanctify and build up the church for life, ministry, and mission.

Above all else, the three Reformed marks of the church direct our attention to the foundational means that God uses to "missionize" the world. The object of God's ultimate concern is the world which God has created and now sustains. Within the world, God elects, calls, and preserves the church through Word and Spirit. In its preaching, celebration of the sacraments, and acts of discipline, the church's officebearers with the congregation submit to God's working in and through the marks. In its obedient submission, the church of Jesus Christ is fully missional, that is, it is already a participant in and instrument of God's mission. A Reformed missional ecclesiology resists the conclusion that the church becomes the church, or realizes its essence, only in its turning toward the world in mission. It resists the idea that the *inside* life of the church is merely instrumental, that the church preaches, worships, baptizes, comes to the Table, and practices discipline *so that* she can get on with the real business of the church—doing God's mission on the *outside*.

As a community that has received and believed the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ, in its whole life together on the *inside*, imperfect though it may be, the church is already a true church—a manifestation of God's eschatological kingdom. As such, it is also already a public, though imperfect, sign of that kingdom. In *further response* to God's Word of grace, the Spirit empowers the church, both as a community and as individual Christians, to share in God's mission to the larger world through witness in word and deed. The church is both faithful and unfaithful in responding to the call and forming power of God's Spirit. Therefore, there is constant need for the church to confess its failure to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love neighbor as self. As we confess our sin we open ourselves anew to the good news of God's love and submit ourselves to the daily process of being sanctified and recreated for participation in the mission of God.

But, we must be clear—the church's response to God's Word through outwardly directed mission and ministry is not constitutive of its existence, that is, this response does not create the church as a true church. God's eternal election, Christ's presence through multiple manifestations of the Word and Spirit, and the community's active reception of Christ constitute the church *as* church. Our Reformed confession wholly expects that *because* of the power and efficacy of Christ's Word and Spirit congregations and individual Christians will more fully and faithfully participate in the whole scope of God's mission. As will be seen in Section 5, this expectation is clearly expressed in the Reformed "marks of the Christian."

The Reformed Marks of the Church and the Offices

Before leaving this discussion of the Reformed marks of the church, we probe the connection between the marks and the offices. As we have seen above, the marks of the church are indisputably linked to the offices of the church, a fact that has been blamed for the "clericalization" of the church's ministry, and cited as the reason why congregations and Christians have lost their sense of missional being and calling.[59]

The fact that God uses the offices of the church to unfold God's mission in the world points us to the *beginning, not the end*, of what God intends to accomplish in and through the church. God provides the offices and calls persons to fill them in order to *ensure* that in every time and every place there will be a Word from the living Lord that is faithful to the preaching and teaching of the apostles, that the sacraments will be celebrated in ways that witness to the real presence and action of Jesus Christ, and that discipline will be practiced in order to enable the church to be more fully conformed to Christ, its Lord, Savior, and Head. God creates the offices, and calls, equips, and sustains officebearers to participate in God's mission.

In a paper prepared for the RCA titled "Faithful Consistories," Paul Fries writes, "The offices are essentially missional, instruments by which Christ transforms the people of God (regeneration and sanctification) and equips them for the ministry of the kingdom in the world (witness in word and deed)."[60] The offices re-present Christ to the congregation through the announcement of the *kerygma* (ministers), the formation of God's kingdom *koinonia* (elders), and the service of *diakonia* in church and world (deacons). They exist as one of the means by which God carries out God's own mission in Christ, through the Spirit, bringing God's kingdom to earth.

In their absolute plurality and unity, the offices of minister, elder, and deacon reflect the multifaceted ministry of Christ and embody the full scope of God's mission. In turn, through the work of the offices, "the congregation is called to and prepared for the work of representing Christ and his kingdom in the world."[61] The office of the deacon comes most fully into view at this point—enabling the congregation to speak and perform the gospel. The marks of the church clearly depend on the work of ministers and elders, but apart from the work of the deacon, the marks cannot reach their goal in calling the church to be engaged in the world toward the sanctification of persons, as well as social structures, governments, and nations. Deacons embody the prophetic task of announcing in word and deed that God's kingdom has come to earth demanding repentance and the reordering of human life in ways that manifest God's care, mercy, justice, and peace. They do this work directly and are responsible to build up the congregation to share in this prophetic, diaconal engagement.

By the power of the Spirit, the Word of God comes to the gathered congregation, in its public space, through the offices of minister and elder, and through the office of the deacon God's kingdom moves into the larger world. The assembled congregation receives Christ, the living Word. Joined in mystical union with Christ, Christians share in the work of ministry and mission within the congregation, and are sent forth every Sunday morning to declare and incarnate God's good news in their local contexts and daily vocations. The present marks of the church preserve the priority of God's action from which flows the action of God's people. But, the action of God's people in response to God's action is not *constitutive* of the church's being and existence, and thus is not properly called a mark of the church. We can and do expect congregations and individual Christians to respond to and share in God's mission. Such response *is* a mark of the Christian life and will be elaborated more fully below in our discussion of the marks of the Christian.

Apart from the offices, which are intended to ensure the church's faithfulness to the marks, the congregation will neither receive for itself, nor be able to hand over in mission to the world, the witness of Word and Spirit through which it has been saved and by which it is sanctified and empowered. This brings us to our discussion of the Reformed tradition's understanding of the marks of the Christian in relation to the marks of the church.

Section 5: The Marks of the Christian and the Christian Life[62]

The marks of the Christian stand as a necessary complement to the marks of the church as they focus on the congregation's faithful response to the church's preaching, celebration of the sacraments, and exercise of discipline. Some who have criticized sixteenth century Reformed confessions for their failure to say anything about the congregation's missional nature and vocation have also charged that the confessions say almost nothing about witness as a necessity of the Christian life.[63] In what follows, we respond to this claim by demonstrating how thoroughly our Reformed confessions address the importance of the congregation's and the Christian's response to the good news of the gospel.

In the same article that defines the marks of the church, the Belgic Confession describes the marks of Christians in this way:

> As for those who can belong to the church, we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians: namely, by faith, and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness, once they have received the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. They love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works.
>
> Though great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their lives, appealing constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins, though faith in him.[64]

Although these marks refer to individual Christians, they describe the marks of the Christian community in response to God's mission through Word, sacrament, and discipline. The Christian's and the congregation's participation in the mission of God is fulfilled through obedience to the two tables of the law—love of God and love of neighbor—and is manifest through a life of worship, active engagement in the church's *koinonia*, and vocation or *diakonia* in the world by which means God's presence is manifest, the world is transformed, and God is glorified.

The Heidelberg Catechism provides an essential understanding of the Christian life. Arguably, the entire thrust of the catechism is to enable Christians, in response to God's grace in Christ, wholeheartedly to live for Christ every day, with body and soul, in life and in death.[65] The Christian shares not only in Christ's priesthood, but also in his prophetic and kingly offices. In response to the question, "But why are you called a Christian?" the catechism answers,

> Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity.[66]

Through their union with Christ, all the baptized, together and as individuals, participate in his threefold office. Christians do not share in Christ's threefold office in any way that parallels or completes Christ's own work. Christ's work through his threefold office is perfect and unrepeatable:

> [Christ] has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our redemption; our only high priest who has redeemed us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the redemption he has won for us.[67]

Christians respond to what Christ himself has done and is doing in them and in the world. Through the Spirit, their work flows from and follows after Christ. This sense of the Christian's participation in Christ's threefold office is the basis of their witness in the world and an enlargement on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

As prophets with Christ, Christians are called to confess his name. The church's public worship is the primary place this confession takes place: it is understood corporately and publicly. In worship, Christians together confess their faith through the words of the church's creeds, the singing of hymns, the offering of prayers, and participation in the sacraments. Sharing in Christ's prophetic office through participation in public worship in a visible, corporate confession is required of Christians, "even if civil authorities and royal

decrees forbid [it] and death and physical punishment result."[68] Indeed, under such conditions, the confession has even greater impact.

In addition to this corporate confession, as prophets with Christ "every one in his place and degree" is called to profess the Christian faith with understanding, "faithfully, boldly and constantly, that God may thereby be celebrated, and his truth revealed in its living force and power."[69] This quote is from Zacharius Ursinus's commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, which was a widely used guide for the preaching and teaching of Reformed doctrine. Given the commentary's substantive elaboration of Reformed faith and its widespread use, we are left with no doubt that the Reformers believed, preached, and taught that all Christians are called to confess with their mouths, always and everywhere, belief in the Triune God. Our sixteenth century confessional tradition is unequivocally clear that Christians are called to bear witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ as an act of thanksgiving to God and in service to neighbor.

This "word witness" of the Christian is joined to "life witness" as an essential part of their participation in Christ's *priestly* office. Ursinus describes it as the first dimension of the office, writing, "Our priesthood, therefore, is…to teach others; that is, to show and communicate to them the knowledge of the true God."[70] He is speaking here not of ministers, but of all believers. Christians show others "the knowledge of the true God" through their daily living, and their life in community. In gratitude for God's grace, Christians, together and as individuals, engage in good works "so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ."[71] The catechism's entire treatment of the Ten Commandments, following Calvin's understanding of the third use of the law as a gracious guide for Christians, elaborates the contours of godly living. It provides a roadmap for the lifelong journey of giving thanks and glory to God.

Ursinus teaches that the second dimension of the priestly office is to intercede, "to call upon God" for ourselves and for others.[72] In its teaching on the Lord's Prayer, the catechism describes prayer as "the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us."[73] It is the means that God provides for our reception of his grace and the Holy Spirit, and for our return offering of thanks. But it is not only our prayers that we offer. As priests with Christ, we offer our whole selves, in everything that we do, as living sacrifices of praise. In this, we die to the old self and give ourselves to be "instruments of righteousness unto God" in the church and in the world.[74] Within the body of Christ, all members are obliged to offer the gifts that God has given to them for the sake of building up others in the body.[75] Clearly, the priesthood of all believers focuses the communal and individual call to offer self wholeheartedly, unreservedly, with thanksgiving and joy to God's own mission and ministry.

Finally, Ursinus describes the Christian's sharing in the kingly office of Christ as participation, through faith, in Christ's own work of opposing and overcoming sin, "the devil, the world, and all enemies."[76] Undoubtedly, each person's life is the primary site of this struggle as the Spirit works sanctification. Christians submit to the rule of Christ through Word and Spirit by submitting to the offices that Christ has instituted in the church. But through these means, Christians are formed and called also to struggle with Christ against the powers and principalities at work in human society. The Reformed understanding of this kingly office highlights the call for Christians and congregations to be actively engaged in the socioeconomic and political realities of their contexts, bearing witness to God's own sovereign rule and will for the world. Through baptism, Christians and congregations together are anointed to share in Christ's threefold office. This theology provides a broad and deep foundation for the whole people of God, in their life together, to *be* a sign and to engage in witness—ministry and mission—in thankful, obedient response to God's grace and the call to love God and neighbor unreservedly.

Having shown how the marks of the church in conjunction with the marks of the Christian provide a profound ecclesiology in which the action of the Triune God establishes the church as object and instrument of God's mission, we end this paper with a brief "missional" reading of one of the RCA's ecumenical creeds. We offer this as a first step in urging the church to engage its present confessions in ways that clarify their potential to increase our understanding of and engagement in God's mission.

Section 6: The Nicene "Attributes" of the Church in Missional Perspective

As a way of unfolding both a broader and more specific sense of the church's mission within the mission of God, we invite the RCA to consider all of its creeds and confessions from within a missional perspective. Within the limits of this paper we can offer only a brief, illustrative missional reading of the Nicene Creed. The creed, which is widely confessed by the church historical and global, describes the church catholic in terms of four attributes: the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These are also sometimes referred to as "marks" of the church, but to avoid confusion, we will use the term "attributes." What do these attributes have to teach us about the mission of the church in general, and of the RCA in particular?

In the first place, the church's oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are utterly and completely God's gifts to the church. They point to the action, past, present, and future, of the Triune God. These attributes find their origin in God, who makes the church one, grants it Christ's holiness, fuels its catholicity, and grounds its apostolic inheritance and mission. In reality, however, although these attributes are God's gifts to the church, they are not entirely visible in the present. That is why our confession of these attributes is an act of faith in the truest sense—it is the assurance of something that God has given and in which we hope although we cannot see it fully in the present.[77] These attributes do not unambiguously "mark" the church, or make it recognizable in the world in the ways that the marks of preaching, sacraments, and discipline do. For example, the church's holiness always exists alongside the church's manifest unholiness.

Thus, even as we confess these attributes as God's gifts to the church which are not yet fully realized and visible, we also recognize that the attributes call the church to strive to become what God has already created it to be. God's gracious gifts to the church place the church under obligation to God; they bind the church in its missional calling to make visible in the world the truth of the church's existence as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These attributes, confessed throughout the world as an article of the church's faith, present the church with a clear mandate within God's mission. There will always be a "not yet," an intractable eschatological reserve, even in the church's best attempts to manifest its true identity. But this fact does not release the church from God's own urgent mission to show forth the church's sacred identity as sign and witness to what God has done and is doing, and what will be.

The church is one. We needn't look far to see that the church exists in division and disunity. But the evidence does not alter the truth that all churches exist as one body in Christ Jesus, who is the head and Lord of the church. All churches exist in the unity that Christ creates, sharing one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one table, one ministry, and one mission within the mission of the Triune God. This truth calls every church, national and local, to seek this unity in relation to other churches as part and parcel of God's urgent mission in the world. The church's unity must become manifest in dialogue, shared worship, and shared work in the world as a demonstration of the church's life in the kingdom of God. The RCA's ecumenical work is critical to this fundamental aspect of the church's mission.

Further, the church's unity must be increasingly manifest in the coming together in worship and mission of persons who have been separated, consciously or unconsciously, on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture, and social status. In this regard, the Belhar Confession can provide a powerful confessional foundation for the RCA's mission of showing forth the unity and justice that God desires and the Spirit makes possible. Unity is the manifestation of the Christ's reconciling work, which breaks down the dividing walls which human beings construct.

The church is holy. The church's holiness is a gift given by the Triune God in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. The church is holy "because it is sanctified through Christ's activity in and on it."[78] In the present, the church's holiness as lived reality is incomplete—it is a community of saints, chosen by God, who daily confess and flee from sin. The church is a community on the way. Daily the Spirit of the risen Christ sanctifies the church, assuring it of the forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ and granting fuller participation in Christ's resurrected life. As a community born of Christ's resurrection, the church is called to manifest, in its life together, the miracle of the sanctified humanity that the Spirit of God is creating. The church as a reconciled community is a sign of God's kingdom on earth. Set apart by God to receive and show forth the righteousness and holiness of Christ, living in the power of the Spirit, the church stands in solidarity with and in witness to the world that there is a new possibility for the reordering of human life and societies within God's kingdom of justice and peace.

The church is catholic. The confession of the church's catholicity, or universality, confirms God's desire and mission to draw all nations and peoples into the redeeming, re-creating work of Jesus Christ. In our own confession of the church as "universal," we are reminded of our responsibility to Christ's Great Commission. What we say with our mouths we must do with our whole selves—follow the Spirit to the ends of the earth, preaching, teaching, baptizing, and opening peoples and nations to the sanctifying, transforming work of the Holy Spirit. As the gospel has been preached throughout the world, the Spirit has taken up and sanctified the life and practices of diverse cultures to produce a glorious variety of fresh doxologies to the Triune God. In this diversity, the church's catholicity is always in dialog and discernment with the core confession of one Lord, one faith, one baptism as we seek to manifest our confession that the church is one.

The church is apostolic. The gospel of grace in Jesus Christ is a gift given by God at the hands of the apostles. We can speak of the church apostolicity in two senses. First, the church is apostolic as it receives, preserves, and renews the first-century apostles' witness to Jesus Christ. This process of receiving and preserving the apostolic witness is at the heart of the church's mission. We are commissioned to guard the core evangelical doctrine "so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power."[79] The Protestant Reformers fought hard to restore the doctrine and practices of the church in witness to the absolute sovereignty of God, the offer of free grace in Jesus Christ, and the work of the Spirit to sanctify the people of God and human societies. It is sometimes argued in the RCA that we should not be too rigid about the confession and practice of our Reformed faith because it impedes the work of mission. This sensibility has fueled arguments against infant baptism in the RCA.

We believe that the preservation of the apostolic faith in its Reformed expression is absolutely essential to the second aspect of the church's apostolicity—the faithful handing over, in word and deed, of the good news of God in Jesus Christ. This process of handing over the good news includes the church's preaching, celebration of the sacraments, and discipline—the means God uses to form the whole people of God for their apostolic vocation. Like the first apostles the church is sent into the world with the good news that in Jesus Christ God's kingdom has come in power, promise, and judgment. The church as apostolic is "sent out on behalf of the reign of God."[80]

This brief exposition of the Nicene attributes of the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic from within a missional frame of reference begins to demonstrate how the RCA's current ecumenical creeds provide a confessional basis for calling the church into greater faithfulness as it receives and responds to the full scope of God's mission. Further elaboration of the RCA's existing creeds and confessions in a similar fashion will broaden and sharpen the church's understanding of its mission within the mission of God.

Section 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

In light of the foregoing discussion, the Commission on Theology recommends that the RCA not add mission as a fourth mark of the church. We have attempted to show that the present three marks of the church are fully missional in that they direct us to the means by which the sovereign God carries out God's own mission, in the Spirit, through the right preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline. Through these means, God gathers God's elect and makes Christ present to the congregation. In the church gathered, Christ offers himself and all his benefits so that the congregation might be assured of God's salvation and live as a reconciled, thanks-giving, worshiping, learning community in witness to God's power and grace. As the church receives the gospel in obedience and joy it is already participating in the mission of God, and in this sense, the church is already missional.

At the same time, the commission is clear that God is forming and calling the church to fulfill its apostolic vocation in the world in response to and on behalf of God's kingdom. This becomes especially evident when we consider the marks of the church in relation to the marks of the Christian life. The first set of marks points us to the priority of God's action and mission through Word and Spirit. Although these are linked to the offices of the church, their absolute power and effect belong to the Word and Spirit. The second set of marks points us to the certainty that God's Word will produce the fruits of repentance, sanctification, and witness in the whole people of God. We can expect congregations and individual Christians to respond to God's good news in Christ by growing in faith and active witness within the church and the world. But, we have cautioned against confusing the marks of the Christian life, which focus on the church's *response* to God's mission, and the marks of the church, which focus on the means by which God carries out God's mission through Word and Spirit. Taken together, the marks of the church and the marks of the Christian remind us that the church participates in God's mission both inside and outside the church. The church does not become missional when it is *sent* into the world. Rather, the church is already missional in its gathering. Then as it reaches out beyond its walls and goes into the world, the church engages in a fuller response to the mission of God in which it is already participating.

In order to strengthen the RCA's understanding of and guide its participation in God's mission, we have urged the church to embrace a Reformed, fully Trinitarian perspective on the divine mission. The doctrine of the *missio Dei* serves to remind us that the mission of the church is a response to the mission of God. God is the One who in sovereign grace and freedom initiates God's own mission. God is the One who is bringing God's reign to earth now and who will one day bring that reign to full and glorious fruition on heaven and earth. In this, we know God to be a sending God.

God the Father sends the Son into the world. The Father and the Son send the Spirit, and the Spirit with the Son sends the church into the world as apostle. But, prior to this history of divine "sendings," we recognize God as the One who creates and sustains the whole universe. The "sendings" find their purpose in reference to God's work as Creator. God sends Christ, the Spirit, and the church in fulfillment of God's mission to redeem and restore the creation and all that is in it—to bring God's kingdom on earth as in heaven.

This understanding of God's mission and the church's place within it is most clearly expressed in the RCA's confession, Our Song of Hope. Although not adopted as a confessional Standard by the RCA, Our Song of Hope was approved by the General Synod in 1978 as "a statement of the church's faith for use in its ministry of witness, teaching, and worship."[81] As we seek a confessional basis on which to call the church to greater faithfulness within the mission of God, we commend greater use of Our Song of Hope in the RCA, as this confession highlights our Reformed and missional identity and vocation. We also urge the RCA to more fully explore its present confessional heritage in light of a Reformed and missional understanding of God and the church. Our extensive discussion of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism and our brief treatment of the Nicene Creed highlight the missional import of our Reformed and ecumenical creeds and confessions. Finally, we celebrate the RCA's engagement with the Belhar Confession and urge the church to let this confession form us as communities which both manifest and seek God's desire for unity, justice, and shalom for all persons.

The Commission on Theology offers this paper in support of the church's desire to find a strong confessional basis on which to ground our identity and action as people who have received God's good news in Jesus Christ and are seeking more faithfully to be sign and instrument of God's kingdom, for the sake of the whole creation.

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To distribute the paper "Exploring Mission as a Fourth Mark of the Church" for study and use in the RCA. (ADOPTED)

Endnotes

1 "Report of the Missional Structures Task Force," *Minutes of the General Synod* (*MGS*) *2007*, 103.

2 "Report of the Missional Structures Task Force," 95.

3 Belgic Confession, Article 29, *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1988).

4 Belgic Confession, Article 29.

5 Belgic Confession, Article 29.

6 On the one side, for example, the Roman Catholic Church insisted that the true church practiced seven sacraments, traced its ordained priesthood to the original apostles, and maintained a particular hierarchical ordering of the various church offices. On the other side, the Anabaptists insisted that the true church only existed where every member of the congregation manifested a certain purity and holiness of life.

7 Other church traditions add other marks by which the church is constituted and made visible. Luther adds the mark of preaching "and its reception in faith, confession and deed"; ordination and offices; public prayers, praise, thanksgiving, instruction; and discipleship in suffering (Reinhard Hutter, "The Church as Public: Dogma Practice, and the Holy Spirit," *Pro Ecclesia* [Vol. III, No. 3], 354-355). In his discussion of the various marks of the church universal, Donald G. Bloesch offers these observations: Anabaptists teach that the church is marked by a commitment to peace, suffering or persecution, and the purity of the community. Pentecostal traditions name signs and wonders as marks of the church. Liberation theologians focus on solidarity with the poor and the search for justice and peace as marks of the church. Bloesch adds prayer as a mark of every church (in his *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 106-109).

8 See for example, Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991); Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). Hereinafter cited as Van Gelder, *Essence of the Church*; Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America,* The

Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 80. Hereinafter cited as *Missional Church.*

[9] *Missional Church*, 80. See also Van Gelder, *Essence of the Church*, 53-58.

[10] *Missional Church*, 80. See also Eugene Heideman, *A People in Mission: Their Expanding Dream*, Heritage and Hope Series of the Reformed Church in America, Focus Four: North American Missions (n.p.: Reformed Church Press, 1984), 3.

[11] Belgic Confession, Article 36.

[12] *Missional Church*, 80.

[13] Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, "The Challenges to Becoming a Missional Church," *MGS 2007*, 32.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Hunsberger, "Sizing Up the Shape of the Church," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. by George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 337.

[18] See, for example, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, "The Challenges to Becoming a Missional Church," which states: "A missional church places its commitment to participate in God's mission in the world at the center of its life and identity. Mission places the focus on what God is doing in the world…", 33.

[19] Op. cit., 35; see also, "Report of the Missional Structures Task Force," *MGS 2007*, 95.

[20] Some of the reasons for the church's reticent witness are set forth in the Commission on Theology paper "The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society," *MGS 2000*, 124-139. The church's witness is carried out in a post-modern, post-Christian, religiously plural context in which the public role of the church has been diminished. The value of religious tolerance is espoused as the necessary response to multiple competing truth claims. In this situation, the church must gain clarity about its confession of who God is in Jesus Christ, and about the ways in which it will give witness to its belief in the midst of religious pluralism.

[21] For a thorough assessment of the modern Protestant world mission movement, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1991), especially "Introduction," 1-11, and Chapter 9, "Mission in the Wake of the Enlightenment," 262-345. Hereinafter cited as Bosch, *Transforming Mission.*

[22] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

[23] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 391. This sense of the scope of the Spirit's work in and beyond the church is clearly expressed in the RCA's contemporary confession Our Song of Hope, especially stanzas 8-14, which describe the Spirit's work in all areas of human cultures and societies.

[24] *Missional Church*, 4.

[25] See, for example, A. A. van Ruler, "The Necessity of a Trinitarian Theology," in *Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics: Essays Toward a Public Theology*, collected and trans. by John Bolt, Toronto Studies in Theology 38 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 1-26.

[26] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 26. (When quoting from existing sources, we will accept the masculine pronoun for God.)

[27] Our Song of Hope: A Provisional Confession of Faith of the Reformed Church in America, with commentary and appendixes by Eugene P. Heideman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). See especially stanzas 8-11, which describe the Spirit's work in the world, both within and apart from the church. This contemporary confession was approved by the Reformed Church in America's General Synod in 1978 as "a statement of the church's faith for use in its ministry of witness, teaching, and worship"

(www.rca.org, accessed November 11, 2009).

[28] Our Song of Hope, opening unnumbered stanza.

[29] 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:19-20.

[30] Romans 8:19-21.

[31] Our Song of Hope, Stanzas 4 and 8.

[32] Colossians 1:19-20.

[33] RCA, General Program Council, "An Evangelism Manifesto" (Lansing, IL: RCA Distribution Center, 1975).

[34] RCA, "An Evangelism Manifesto."

[35] RCA, "An Evangelism Manifesto."

[36] RCA, "An Evangelism Manifesto."

[37] Our Song of Hope, stanzas 8-11.

[38] Genesis 12:1-3.

[39] Exodus 6:7.

[40] There is not space here to talk about the relationship between Israel and the church as the people of God. The Heidelberg includes in the church all whom God chooses "from the beginning of the world to its end" (Q&A 54). On this basis, some Reformed theologians argue that communion or conversation with Israel is at the heart of the church's mission. See for instance Link, "The *Notae*," where he defines communion with Israel as "one of the most fundamental marks of the church," p. 243; see also A. A. Van Ruler, whose understanding that the church's conversation with Israel is an essential aspect of the church's participation in the mission of God is reflected in the church order of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (*Kerkorde der Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, Article VIII, "Van het apostolaat der Kerk" [n.p.: De General Synode der Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, 1951], 5).

[41] Heidelberg Catechism, *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1988), Q&A 54. Italics added for emphasis.

[42] Our Song of Hope, stanza 15.

[43] Heidelberg Q&A 32: "But why are you called a Christian? Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity." This point will be elaborated in our discussion of the marks of the Christian.

[44] The fact that the RCA confesses three marks of the church in common with a worldwide communion of Reformed and Lutheran churches reminds us that adding mission as a fourth mark has serious implications for our ecumenical relations. Such a decision would require us to be in conversation with our ecumenical partners.

[45] Belgic Confession, Article 29. John Calvin recognized the absolute necessity of discipline for correcting faults, but resisted making it a distinct mark of the church for two reasons. First, and positively, he understood discipline as a function of the Spirit's work through the preaching and teaching of the Word and participation in the sacraments, and thus not an additional mark of the church. Second, he wished to avoid the Anabaptists' stress on church discipline as the means by which the true church is "marked," or becomes visible, in the holiness and faithfulness of the congregation. Calvin feared that this emphasis shifted the essential marks of the church away from God's action, in the Spirit, through Word and sacrament, toward the response of the church's membership in faithful and holy living. Calvin was clear that the congregation's visible holiness could never serve as a mark of the church, both because of the persistence of sin in every Christian, and because the church is made up of a mixed company of people.

[46] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., The Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.vi.2. Hereinafter cited as Calvin, *Institutes.*

[47] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.31.

[48] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans.

by William Pringle (1854; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), Eph. 2:20. Hereinafter cited as Calvin, *Ephesians.*

[49] Calvin, *Ephesians*, Eph. 2:17.

[50] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536, trans. and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 2.29; and his *Institutes*, IV.i.9.

[51] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. William Pringle, 2 vols. (1848; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), vol. 2, 2 Cor. 4:6. See also, Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.34: "Indeed, the Word of God is like the sun, shining upon all those to whom it is proclaimed, but with no effect among the blind…Accordingly, it cannot penetrate into our minds unless the Spirit, as the inner teacher, through his illumination makes entry for it."

[52] Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.i.10.

[53] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.36.

[54] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1.

[55] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32.

[56] Robert M. Kingdon, "The Geneva Consistory in the Time of Calvin," in *Calvinism in Europe*, *1540-1620*, ed. by Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, and Gillian Lewis (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 22. Hereinafter cited as Kingdon.

[57] Kingdon, 24-34.

[58] "Communion Prayer," RCA "Order of Worship" in *Rejoice in the Lord*: *A Hymn Companion to the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 568.

[59] See, for example, *Missional Church*, 80 and Van Gelder, *Essence of the Church*, 53-58.

[60] Paul R. Fries, "Faithful Consistories: Office, Ministry, and Mission in the Reformed Church in America" (*MGS 2000*), 280-95. Hereinafter cited as Fries, "Faithful Consistories."

[61] Fries, "Faithful Consistories," 292.

[62] This section is adapted from an earlier work by Renee House, *Becoming a "Missional" Denomination: A Constructive Analysis of Theology and Specific Practices in the Reformed Church in America* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2008), 325-334.

[63] Darrell Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 115.

[64] *Belgic Confession*, Article 29.

[65] Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 2nd American ed., trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus, OH: Scott & Bascom, 1852), Question 1, 1.

[66] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32.

[67] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 31.

[68] Belgic Confession, Article 28.

[69] Ursinus, Heidelberg Catechism, 179.

[70] Ursinus, Heidelberg Catechism, 179.

[71] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 86.

[72] Ursinus, Heidelberg Catechism, 179.

[73] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 116.

[74] Ursinus, Heidelberg Catechism, 179.

[75] Belgic Confession, Article 28.

[76] Ursinus, Heidelberg Catechism, 179.

[77] Hebrews 11:1.

[78] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 353.

[79] 1 Corinthians 1:17.

[80] *Missional Church*, 110. See the whole chapter titled "Missional Witness: The Church as Apostle to the World."

[81] Our Song of Hope (www.rca.org, accessed November 11, 2009).

Christian-Muslim Relations

The Commission on Theology has collaborated with John Hubers, Peter Ford, and Michael Bos, former and present RCA missionaries with extensive experience in the Middle East, to prepare a paper that will provide guidance to the RCA in its life and witness among Muslim people. The commission's decision to provide this updated paper is in response to the increasing presence of Muslims as our neighbors in the United States and Canada, and the significant issues that have emerged since the events of 9/11.

The paper presented here is an update of a previous commission paper, "Christian Witness to Muslims: An Introduction to the Issues," which was adopted by the General Synod in 1995 (see *MGS 1995*, pp. 357-368, or the same paper in *The Church Speaks, Vol. 2*, ed. by James Cook [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], pp. 232-252). Through its work in global mission the RCA has a long and faithful history of hospitable engagement with people of Muslim faith that can provide insight and direction for the whole church.

CHRISTIAN PRESENCE AND WITNESS AMONG MUSLIMS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Fifteen years ago the General Synod approved the adoption of a paper on Christian-Muslim relations entitled "Christian Witness to Muslims: An Introduction to the Issues." The purpose of this paper is to update and reiterate the core contributions of that paper. Since 1995 several things have happened that necessitate an update, most related to 9/11 and its aftermath. Those who perpetuated this murderous act claimed Islam as their inspiration. This led many to seek a better understanding of what was at that time a largely unknown or misunderstood faith. Unfortunately, it also led some to react with suspicion and fear with the resurrection of distortions and misinformation about Muslims and Islam that have characterized the worst periods in the history of Muslim-Christian relations.

On a more positive note, 9/11 made us more aware of the presence of Muslims in our communities. Many of our churches, particularly in urban areas, are in neighborhoods where Muslims live and work. They are our colleagues and neighbors, fellow students, and proprietors of shops we frequent. With this awareness also comes recognition that we need to be better informed. This update answers what is being expressed by many of our churches as an urgent need—the need to help our members find ways to move beyond suspicion and fear toward the development of neighborly relationships that are definitive of the best kind of Christian witness. To this end we turn to 2 Corinthians 5 for a relational model that can help move us in that direction.

In this chapter we read that we are called to be Christ's ambassadors, God making his reconciling appeal to the world through us (v. 20). What this suggests is that witness is as much about who we are as what we do. As the 1995 paper on Christian-Muslim relations says, "[E]very believer is a witness for Christ whether he or she wants to be or not."

In this way our witness among our Muslim neighbors is no different from the witness we bear in all our relationships. Here, too, we are called to love our neighbors as we love our very selves, seeking our neighbors' good above our own. Here, too, we are to respond to our neighbors' needs as the Good Samaritan did to the injured man on the Jericho road. Here, too, we work together with our neighbors for the good of our community. Here, too, we are always prepared to share the hope that is within us with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15), believing that the saving hope that is ours in Christ must be offered to all. If we want the best for our neighbors we cannot keep the good news to ourselves.

This emphasis on the ambassadorial nature of Christian witness provides a needed balance

to the often polarizing debate between those who advocate evangelism as the only proper approach to our non-Christian neighbors, versus those who advocate dialogue as though these are mutually exclusive categories. They are not. A compassionate witness will include a desire to pass on to our neighbors what we know about God in Jesus, but it will also recognize that living that truth necessitates a genuine relationship in which mutuality and dialogue are key. Jesus said "make disciples," but he also said "love your neighbor as you love yourself." These are not mutually exclusive. They are necessary corollaries. Love requires listening to and learning from our neighbors as much as it does sharing what is most important to us. This is the kind of relationship good friends develop. What is crucial in a time of heightened tension between our two faith communities is that Muslims and Christians become good neighbors and friends.

Perhaps the best way to understand how these two elements of Christian witness intermingle is to make note of the witness Jesus himself lived. Christ came to proclaim and demonstrate God's love for all people. Christ lived that same love as God's Word incarnate, so that people could see and experience it. Surely one of the main things that attracted people to Jesus was his life among them. Jesus challenged them to believe in him because of the works he did (John 10:37-38). In order to witness to Christ, then, Christians must witness as Christ did, embodying Christ's love in their lives, a love that necessitates dialogue.

A critical element of ambassadorial relationships is a desire to learn as much as we can from our neighbors as to what it is they value most. Unfortunately, in the case of our Muslim neighbors this often means sorting through misleading negative stereotypes. Richard Cimino, who did a thorough study of articles and statements made by American evangelical spokespersons on Islam soon after 9/11, notes that although many represented thoughtful attempts to gain a better understanding of the faith and practices of this largest of non-Christian faith communities, some also revived the worst historic vilifications of Islam and Muslims.[1]

When we want to help people understand what we believe, we feel the need to tell our own story in our own way. Muslims are no different. They want us to understand their faith story from their perspective. Good neighborly relations are built on this kind of understanding—friends sharing with friends that which is closest to their hearts. Those who wrote the 1995 paper had this in mind when they wrote the informational section of the paper. What is found below directly incorporates substantial sections of this paper, only adding or deleting that which is in need of revision in light of more recent developments. The hope throughout is that our Muslim neighbors and friends will recognize this to be a fair reflection of what they believe and practice.

What needs to be kept in mind as you read through this material is that what is presented here is foundational rather than broadly definitive. Like Christianity, Islam has under its umbrella a rich diversity of perspectives, patterns of thought, and behavior. A Muslim in Indonesia does not necessarily practice faith in the same way as a Muslim in Germany. There are Muslim mystics and Muslim rationalists. There are secularized Muslims and traditionally devout Muslims. Some are radicals, others are Muslim in name only. Most are like most Christians, people who find comfort and a sense of order in the practice of their faith; a moral compass and grounding that makes it difficult for them to consider looking at the world through any other glasses. That's what we discover when we meet Muslims as neighbors and friends. What we discover is that there is no one mold into which all Muslims fit.

Islam, like Christianity, is represented by an incredibly diverse community. There is, however, a foundational history and belief structure that gives Muslims a communal identity. It is to this that we now turn.

1. Islamic Origins and Fundamentals

Historically, Islam as an organized religious system stems from the life and ministry of the prophet Muhammad, who was born in 570 C.E. in Mecca, an important commercial city and pilgrimage site for polytheistic tribal peoples on the Arabian peninsula. At the age of twenty-five he married a widow, Khadija, owner of a caravan business for whom he had worked. Estranged from the polytheistic religion of his clan, Muhammad began to seek the solitude of a cave outside of Mecca for meditation. About 610, during his meditations, Muslims believe that Muhammad began having revelations from the one true God through the agency of the angel Gabriel. Hostility arose when he began to call the Meccans to the worship of the one God, particularly from the more powerful clan leaders, who saw his message as a threat to the lucrative pilgrimage trade.

Encouraged by a group of seekers from the nearby city of Yathrib (later Medina) Muhammad moved with his followers to this city in what was called the *Hijrah,* or migration. This move marks the official beginning of the Islamic calendar. Here in Yathrib he organized his followers into a religious community that engaged the Meccans in a series of largely defensive skirmishes and battles culminating in Muhammad's victorious return to Mecca in 630. He later returned to Medina, where he stayed until his death in 632.

In Islam, Muhammad is considered to be a prophet and an apostle or messenger, following in the line of all the prophets of Judaism and Christianity. In the view of Muslims he is the "seal" of all the prophets, confirming their message and providing its definitive interpretation (Surah 10:38). He is not considered divine and is not worshiped in Islam. Muslims believe that Muhammad's greatest miracle was receiving the Qur'an in Arabic, the full revelation of God, dictated to him by the angel Gabriel over a period of twenty years.

According to Islam, the Qur'an fulfills, completes, and supplants the Old and New Testaments. Muslims consider it as the direct address of God, and hence as beyond the limitations of human history. God is the one who speaks in the Qur'an, its underlying theme being an uncompromising monotheism. Muslims believe that the Qur'an reveals the perfect will of God for their lives.

After Muhammad's death, his followers found that there were important matters not explicitly dealt with in the Qur'an. Traditions *(hadith)* were then collected by members of the Muslim community concerning what they had heard Muhammad say and what they had seen him do (*sunnah*). These were carefully checked as to the credibility of the witnesses involved. While they do not have the validity of the Qur'an, which is regarded as the very word of God, they do have a secondary validity because they come from the mouth or actions of the one who was God's chosen instrument. These two sources then, the Qur'an and the Hadith, constitute the major sources from which Muslims derive the religious law *(shariah),* their rule for life.

Muslims believe that their religion was directly revealed by God, and it is incumbent upon Christians who live and talk with Muslims to be sensitive to their beliefs regarding Muhammad, the Qur'an, and the origins of Islam. It is notable, however, that Muhammad is known to have had contact with Christians and Jews during his years of employment with his wife Khadija's caravan business. In these travels he may have lodged in Christian monasteries, a common place for travelers to stay. Muhammad's familiarity with Judeo-Christian Scriptures and themes probably originates in these types of contact even though no one can say for certain how this impacted his thought.

After Muhammad's lifetime, armies under the banner of Islam began a series of conquests that would spread Islam from the Atlantic to the borders of China within a century. These conquests were aided by political instability in the Christian world related at least in part to schisms that arose out of fifth century disagreements over the nature of Christ. The Christian Byzantine Empire, which controlled much of what is now the Arab world, had also been at war with Persia for many years. The empire had been oppressive, conscripting soldiers for its army and taxing the people heavily. To some Byzantine subjects, the Muslim invasions, at least initially, seemed to represent liberation from oppression.

Eventually, Muslim armies conquered a vast region that had been predominantly Christian, including Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain. Christians and Jews, identified as "people of the book" in the Qur'an, were given freedom of worship and allowed by the Muslim authorities (with certain restrictions) to maintain their identity and lifestyle. Despite sporadic incidents of persecution, often in times of economic crisis, members of the Jewish and Christian communities held significant political positions in Muslim empires and accumulated great wealth. Significant Christian communities have survived to the present day in some of these regions despite being gradually reduced to minority status.

During the Middle Ages, European Christians, acting out of a mixture of political, religious, and economic motivations, attempted to invade and conquer Palestine. The ensuing struggle, known in the West as the Crusades, stretched over two centuries. It ended in defeat for the armies of Christendom, the weakening of the Byzantine Empire, and a dramatic heightening of the hostility between the Muslim and Christian worlds. Understandably, many Muslims came to see the Crusades as the first in a long series of imperialistic attacks on their civilization and religion.

While Islam's foothold in formerly Christian territory in the Middle East and southeast Europe came through conquest, the population in other parts of the world with Muslim majorities, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, and large portion of sub-Saharan Africa, became Muslim through peaceful missionary efforts. From its origins as the faith of a handful of converts in Mecca in the seventh century, Islam has now grown to a community estimated to be 1.4 billion strong. One out of every six people on earth claims Islam as their faith. Only the Christian faith community is larger.

The Arabs today are a minority in the world of Islam, even though Arabic remains the language of the Qur'an and Muslim devotion. The majority of Muslims today come from Asia, especially from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, China, and the former Soviet Union. Through immigration, Muslims have become a significant presence in Europe as well as in North America, where they will soon constitute the largest non-Christian religious group. (They remain second to Judaism, but will soon pass them. Even so, the size should not be overestimated. Out of 300 million Americans, only just over four million are Muslim.) Some of the growth of Islam in North America is also due to conversion, particularly in the African-American community, where highly disciplined forms of Islam have enjoyed significant success in dealing with the problems of urban poverty.

The majority of Muslims subscribe to Sunni Islam, which recognizes the full authority of the *hadith*, or traditions arising from the practice of Muhammad and his closest followers. The largest non-Sunni group is Shi'a Islam, which is dominant in Iran and strongly represented in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, and Lebanon. The Shi'a tend to place more emphasis on divinely guided spiritual leaders and look forward to a future in which religious and temporal leadership are completely reunited. On most fundamental issues, however, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are in accord.

A Note about Militant Islamist Movements

The face of Islam presented above is one that most Muslims would recognize as reflective of their own perspectives. There is, however, another face that, given the propensity of its proponents for spectacular acts of headline-making violence, has led many Americans to believe that this is what Islam is about. This is a form of the faith that is often identified as "fundamentalist" Islam or "Islamism." A full treatment of this phenomenon can be found in books listed in the bibliography by John Esposito and Meghnad Desai. What we offer here are several brief points that can help put this movement in its proper perspective.

- While Islamicists portray their interpretation of the Islamic faith to be its only legitimate formulation, in point of fact Islam has taken on many different expressions over the years, just as Christianity has. At different times and places in history mystical interpretations of Islam have been predominant. In other contexts more legalistic, scholastic forms of the faith have prevailed. In Oman and other countries tolerance has long been stressed as an essential Muslim teaching. Even today new forms of Islam are emerging as Muslims find themselves having to adjust to the same pluralistic realities as Christians do. The late Edward Said often pointed out that it is better when speaking about Islam to use the plural—there are "Islams" he would say.

- Islamist movements have usually emerged in times of political, economic, or social crises. The Wahhabi movement that serves as an inspiration for many of today's more radical expressions of Islam arose at a time of great turmoil and disillusionment in the eighteenth century Ottoman Empire. The man who has sometimes been described as the "philosopher of Islamic terror," the Egyptian writer and thinker Sayyid Qutb, was one of a number of mid-twentieth-century Arab intellectuals who became disillusioned with Western materialism, which he saw as having a deleterious effect on emerging post-colonial societies. Most of these movements are attempts to recover what they perceive to be a loss of identity in the face of a dominant Western-inspired secularism. The same thing could be said about Christian and Hindu fundamentalist movements, as well.

- What is often most troubling to fellow Muslims about these militant interpretations of Islam is their insistence that all other formulations of the faith are expressions of unbelief. This is unprecedented in Islam, whose orthodox spokespersons have, for the most part, refused to characterize variant expressions of the faith as being outside the pale. The point here is to note that the primary targets of the Islamicist fury are in most cases fellow Muslims. Their primary self perception is that of reformers, calling fellow Muslims back to what they perceive to be a more pure expression of the faith.

2. Christianity and Islam: Similarities and Differences

In order to understand the most formative source of Muslim belief, it is important to have some familiarity with the Qur'an. Translations are available in inexpensive paperback editions in most bookstores. (See the bibliography for recommended editions.) One should approach the Qur'an with an open mind, understanding that it differs from the Bible in its style, subject matter, and arrangement. The Qur'an refers frequently to persons and events from the Bible, although these references in the Qur'an are never verbatim and lack historical context. This alone underscores the different nature of the two scriptures.

Understanding the beliefs and practices of another religion is a complex process requiring patience, empathy, and objectivity. The temptation exists to view that religion exclusively through the lens of one's own faith. This can produce a very inaccurate picture, in which

points of resemblance are over-emphasized, and beliefs central to the other religion are obscured. Nonetheless, one can make a beginning effort to understand Islam by noting some important points of similarity and difference between Muslim and Christian beliefs.

Important similarities between Islam and Christianity include the following:

A. Revelation. Both claim to be religions revealed by the one true God. For Muslims, of course, it is the Qur'an which is God's final revelation to humankind, revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel.

B. Monotheism. Islam is one of the three great monotheistic religions, along with Judaism and Christianity. The basic tenet of Islam is monotheism, the worship of the one true God. The Arab word for God, Allah, is used by both Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians to refer to the one true God. (Linguistically, the word is related to the Hebrew words *El* and *Elohim.)* At the same time, one must realize that the Islamic perception of the identity and activity of God is not entirely the same as the Christian perception. In Islam, similar to Christian belief, God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and all that is in it. God is all-knowing and all-powerful. God will be the judge on the Day of Judgment, granting eternal life to believers and condemning unbelievers to hell. God is the forgiver of sins, merciful and compassionate. Yet Islam teaches that God demands complete obedience and submission, or surrender (the meaning of the Arabic word *islam*) to God's revealed will as it is found in the Qur'an and the Hadith.

C. Prophets. Qur'anic revelation gives high regard to the prophets who came before Muhammad, including the patriarchs in the Old Testament, and Jesus and John the Baptist in the New Testament. It adds the names of other prophets from the Arabic tradition. These are all men whom God chose to bring his messages or guidance *(huda)* to the peoples of the world. God chose a few prophets to be his special messengers or apostles. A messenger is a prophet to whom God has "sent down" a book. According to Islam, God sent down the Torah to Moses, the Psalms to David, the Gospel to Jesus, and the Qur'an to Muhammad.

The Qur'anic revelation honors Jesus with the recognition of his unique role in God's purpose. It states that he was born of the Virgin Mary, without a human father. He was the greatest prophet and teacher before Muhammad. He did many miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead, miracles that even Muhammad did not do. Muslim tradition (hadith) adds that Jesus is in heaven today with his human body; he will return at the end of history to vindicate Islam and usher in God's final judgment. Jesus is called "the Messiah" in the Qur'an; other names are "Son of Mary," "the Messenger of God," "a word from God," and "a spirit from God."

D. The five pillars. Surrender to God happens within the framework of mandated rituals and practices known as the five pillars of Islam. Some of the ideas behind these pillars are common to Judaism and Christianity. They give common reference points to the two faiths.

The first pillar is witness. A believer must make public confession of his or her faith in God and Islam before credible witnesses. For the Muslim this means to "bear witness that there is no deity except the one true God, and that Muhammad is his messenger."

The second pillar is worship, or prayer. After ritual washing, the believer recites prescribed prayers and verses from the Qur'an while facing in the direction of the Ka'aba in Mecca. There are instructions for the position of the body at various points in the worship. This worship is to be offered five times every day. There is time allotted for per-

sonal prayers at the conclusion of the worship experience, but they are not mandatory. While worship is possible anywhere, the recommended place is the mosque (*masjid*).

The third pillar is fasting during the month of Ramadan, the month in which Muhammad began receiving his revelations. During this month, a Muslim is forbidden to take anything into his or her body from dawn to sunset. Much time should be spent in the contemplation of God, worshiping God, and reading or listening to the Qur'an.

The fourth pillar is the giving of alms to the poor, especially during the month of Ramadan. This practice emphasizes that the believer's possessions must also be submitted to God by being shared with the poor.

The final pillar is the pilgrimage (hajj). If possible, all Muslims should make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Preferably, this should be done in the pilgrimage month, arriving in time to observe the first ten days of the month in Mecca.

Along with these five pillars, there is a strong emphasis in the Qur'an on doing good deeds and living a righteous life, walking the straight path which God has revealed. Whatever Christians may think of the origin and nature of Islam, it is evident that there are many Muslims sincerely seeking to serve the One they worship as the Lord of the universe.

While there are a number of similarities between Islam and Christianity, there are also basic differences of which we become aware when we begin to discuss matters of faith with our Muslim friends on a more serious level.

Important differences between Islam and Christianity include the following:

A. Revelation. Christians believe that the Bible came into being over a span of centuries through the Spirit of God dwelling within the writers, inspiring them, yet working through their own personalities. Although the original text of the Bible is written in Hebrew and Greek, the Bible is given for all people in all ages, and should therefore be translated into all languages in order that everyone can understand and profit from its message. This revelation became incarnate in Jesus, the "Word made flesh," so that Christians understand the Bible as finding its fulfillment and meaning in Christ.

Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic to one person over approximately twenty-two years, dictated to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Muhammad recited it word for word to his followers, who wrote it down. After the death of Muhammad, the messages were eventually brought together in a single book. Muslims believe that it is impossible to translate the Qur'an exactly into any other language. What Christians would regard as a translation of the Qur'an would be called by Muslims an "interpretation" or a paraphrase. In Islamic worship and devotion, the Qur'an is to be read only in Arabic.

From these differences in the concept of revelation, one can easily understand why the proliferation of translations of the Bible raises questions in the minds of Muslims as to the authenticity of the Bible. Because languages continually change, Christians feel translations of the Bible must be updated in order to convey the ideas that God gave to the original writers. The Muslim believes that the ideas of the Qur'an remain clear only as the original Arabic words are retained.

B. Trinity. Muslims reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, holding it to be an unacceptable qualification of the monotheism that is central to Islam. In fact, many Muslims understand the doctrine in a way which is closer to "tri-theism" than to a declaration of the "tri-unity" of the one God, which, of course, offends the powerful Islamic conviction of

God's uncompromising unity. Apparently for this reason, among the ninety-nine beautiful names for God in Islamic tradition, the term "Father" is never used, and the term "Son of God" is never used for Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned frequently in the Qur'an as an instrument of God's revelation to his messengers. But the Spirit is not understood in Islam as a personal presence within all believers, empowering them to live faithfully before God. Nor can it be construed as a "person" of a trinitarian God. Some Muslims hold that it refers to the angel Gabriel.

C. The person of Christ. Even though Muslims believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, without a human father, he is not considered divine. Neither does the Qur'an contain the idea of the incarnation, that "God was in Christ." Kenneth Cragg, in his book *The Arab Christian*, writes that the theological task for Christians lies "in bringing together what Islam means by *Allahu akbar* (God is the greatest) and what the New Testament understands by 'God in Christ'"[2]

D. Human sinfulness and redemption. Another major difference between Islam and Christianity lies in the Muslim view of the human predicament and its solution. According to the Qur'an, humans were created weak and imperfect. God then sent his prophets in order to guide them on "the straight path" that would lead them to Paradise. This path includes becoming a Muslim and practicing the five pillars of the faith. As long as a person does this, and does not become a worshiper of more than one god, he or she will enter into Paradise.

There appears to be no word for, or idea of, "sinfulness" in Arabic. According to Islam, although Adam was weak at creation, humans are not "born in sin." Basically, to sin is to wander from the straight path, or to commit mistakes. When one sins he or she must ask God's forgiveness, seek to make amends for the wrong done, and return to the straight path. There does not seem to be the sense of alienation between God and humanity as a consequence of sin which Christianity expresses in its doctrine of original sin.

Since Islam's view of the human predicament is more optimistic than Christianity's, it should not surprise Christians that Islam sees no need for a divine act of redemption. Hence, for Muslims the death of Jesus has no saving significance. Through the mercy of God, individuals can be saved by means of the five pillars.

This is illustrated where the Qur'an (4:157), describing the persecution of the prophets, says about Jesus: "They slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them." The Arabic in the last part of the sentence is ambiguous, and Muslim scholars disagree on its interpretation: either the crucifixion happened with the one crucified only appearing to be Jesus, or the crucifixion only appeared to happen. The main point is that Islam feels no need for a savior or redeemer. It was not, in their view, necessary for Jesus to die in this way. On the other hand, as Cragg says, "Christianity must hold on to the central Christian conviction, as the heart of its scripture and liturgy, of the God whose sovereignty fulfills itself in the love that comes, suffers, and reconciles, in the measures we can identify in Jesus and the cross" (*The Arab Christian*, p. 293).

E. Religion and state. The relation between religion and state in Islam is not one of separation; it is one of integration. This close relationship raises one of the most frequently asked questions about Islam: if Muslims believe that Islam should inform and influence the state, is Islam compatible with democracy? The answer depends upon whom you ask. Among the general populace and intelligentsia of Muslim-majority countries, there are significant numbers who believe not only that Islam is compatible with democracy, but that

their religion demands it. They turn to Qur'anic verses that say that a trait of the faithful is to consult with one another (42:38) and together people are stewards of the earth (6:165). They also believe that states should be governed by the rule of law and not the rule of an autocrat. Civil, common, commercial, and criminal law associated with Western democracies is seen as consonant with the law they desire for their states. Their desire is not to replicate past Islamic practices. They believe Islam contains the foundational principles upon which democracy and contemporary forms of law can be adapted for Muslims.

Through the media we are also well aware that there are some Muslims who believe that Islam is incompatible with democracy. They believe Islam should directly inform the laws of the land and the control of the state should be centralized. One note of caution: we need to take care not to associate this position with Islamic militancy, which is another form of Islam that is aggressive toward all who disagree with them, including other Muslims. The rejection of democracy as self-governance does not necessarily mean one endorses militancy.

Theoretically, the compatibility between Islam and democracy is very well thought out and many Islamic countries are in various stages of adapting themselves to greater political participation of the people. When will we see the fruition of this? What challenges will be met along the way? There are no clear answers, but the relationship between Islam and democracy stands as a central issue in the Islamic world.

What has been said previously speaks to Muslim-majority countries. As for Muslims living in our midst in the United States, almost all are here because they value the same freedoms and liberties that we value. Immigrant Muslims came in order to share our American form of democracy and way of life. Their children were born and raised here, and along with other Americans who have chosen to follow Islam, they are fellow citizens who have become part of the diverse religious landscape of America.

Conclusion

The differences between Islam and Christianity are real and in some cases foundational to what we believe. They should not be minimized or denied, neither should they be the source of conflict that makes friendships impossible. Christians and Muslims have been living together as friends and neighbors in many countries around the world for many years. The more we come together as friends, respectfully recognizing differences, sharing commonalities, the less possible it will be for fanatics to exploit these differences in ways that lead to violent conflict.

The Scriptures encourage Christians to show their love for God by loving their neighbors (1 John 4:20-21). This includes Muslims, who are no longer "over there," but people we meet in shops and at school and in our neighborhoods. The greatest gifts Christians have to share with neighbors are the life and peace that come through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Christians should not hesitate in sharing these precious gifts with Muslims. Yet the gifts must be shared in a way that reflects the mind and Spirit of Christ, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:6-7, RSV). As Christians serve their neighbors in Christ's love the Holy Spirit will allow those encounters to become moments of grace accomplishing God's purpose. The most important thing is that we overcome the fear that keeps us from building these kinds of grace-full opportunities. The love of Christ compels us to do so.

Endnotes

[1] www.religionwatch.com/doc/2005-Cimino-Evangelicals-Islam.pdf.

[2] Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), p. 283.

A List of Recommended Works

English translations/interpretations of the Qur'an

The Qur'an: A New Translation, by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem

The Holy Qur'an, by Muhammad Ali (usually found with Arabic text and English translation side by side along with Ali's interpretive footnotes)

The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall

The Koran Interpreted, by Arthur Arberry

The Noble Qur'an in the English Language, by Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan (interpretation recommended by orthodox Sunni Muslims)

The Message of the Qur'an, by Muhammad Asad

For understanding Islam from a Muslim perspective

Ideals and Realities of Islam, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, distributed by Kazi Publications, 2000).

Islam: Faith and History, by Mahmoud Ayoub (New York: Oneworld Publications, 2005).

Islamic Thought: An Introduction, by Abdullah Saeed (New York: Routledge, 2006).

No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam, by Reza Aslan. (New York: Random House, 2005).

For understanding Islam from a Christian perspective

Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam, by Colin Chapman (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007).

God Is One: The Way of Islam, by R. Marston Speight (New York: Friendship Press, 2001).

Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church: Exploring the Mission of Two Communities, by David Shenk (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 2003).

The Call of the Minaret, by Kenneth Cragg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

For the history of Christian-Muslim relations

American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism, by Thomas Kidd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

A History of Christian-Muslim Relations, by Hugh Goddard (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2000).

Islam and the West: The Making of an Image, by Norman Daniel (Edinburgh: University Press, 1960).

Islam, Christianity, and the West: A Troubled History, by Rollin Armour (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

For guidance in sensitive Christian witness

Muslims and the Gospel: Bridging the Gap, by Roland Miller (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2005).

Peaceable Witness among Muslims, by Gordon Nickel (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999).

Waging Peace on Islam, by Christine Mallouhi (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

For critical studies of militant interpretations of Islam

Rethinking Islamism: The Ideology of the New Terror, by Meghnad Desai (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co, 2006).

The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization, by Richard Bulliet (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists, by Khaled Abou El Fadl (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam, by John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

On Muslim-Christian dialogue

A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue, by Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997).

A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue, by Mahmoud Ayoub and Irfan Omar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

Islam and Christianity: A Guide to Building Bridges, by Mitali Perkins.

Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue, by Jane I. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

No God but God: A Path to Muslim-Christian Dialogue on God's Nature, by A. Christian van Gorder (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations, by Charles Kimball (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

Online resources

www.westernsem.edu/media/rreview/spring2008: *Reformed Review,* Spring 2008; articles on Islam by Michael Bos, Peter Ford, Lew Scudder, and John Hubers.

www.rca.org/islam: RCA website on Christian-Muslim relations with links to various resources.

www.acommonword.com: comprehensive Muslim-run site on responses to "A Common Word Between Us and You."

www.pcusa.org/interfaith: interfaith relations pages on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) website.

http://archive.elca.org/ecumenical/interreligious/resources.html: interfaith resources on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America website.

R-93
To distribute the paper "Christian Presence and Witness among Muslims: Opportunities and Challenges" for study and use in the RCA. (ADOPTED)

The Advisory Committee on Theology presented a new recommendation which was amended from the floor:

R-94
To instruct the Commission on Theology <u>in consultation with Global Mission</u> to create a supplemental resource that guides congregations in witnessing ~~to~~ <u>among</u> and engaging in positive ways with our Muslim neighbors. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Practical steps and suggestions for implementation would help congregations to live out the vision of the paper.
2. Authors of the paper expressed interest in offering supplemental resources to assist congregations.

Common Translation of the Standards with the Christian Reformed Church

In the fall of 2008, the Commission on Theology approved a set of criteria to be used by a joint RCA/CRC task force for preparing of new translations of our shared Standards—the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort. These new common translations will be included in the joint RCA/CRC hymnbook to be published in 2013. Commission member Todd Billings and Eugene Heideman were the RCA's representatives on this task force. In 2009 representatives from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) joined in the process of producing a common translation of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Details concerning the basic principles followed in preparing these translations, including matters of Scripture citations, inclusive language, and substantive differences between previous RCA and CRC versions of the Standards (e.g. Article 36 of the Belgic Confession; the "Rejection of Errors" in the Canons of Dort) are addressed in the "General Introduction for the Reformed Confessions Translation."

The commission is recommending that the General Synod approve these new translations for use and study in the RCA. The approval of new translations of the Standards is not a constitutional change, nor does this approval preclude the use of previous translations of the RCA's Standards. We believe that having common translations with the CRC and, in the case of the Heidelberg, with the PC(USA) as well, is a great help to us as we engage these ecumenical partners in theological dialogue and share in other joint ventures. We also believe that it will be a great gift to have the Standards published in the new RCA/CRC hymnal.

General Introduction for the Reformed Confessions Translation

This translation is the result of the work of a joint task force formed by the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The task force was commissioned to produce a common text for the Reformed confessions, building upon the work of the previous translations from both denominations. Since a separate introduction will introduce each confession, this general introduction gives a statement of principles used for coming to a common translation.

The task force did not attempt a wholesale retranslation of the confessions, but used the texts of previously approved RCA and CRC translations as a starting point. When the translations diverged, or where subsequent scholarship called into question both previous translations, the task force returned to the original language documents to resolve the differences. Sometimes this resolution involved opting for the previous RCA or CRC translations; at other times, the task force developed a fresh translation from the original text.

Some divergences in previous translations were based around the rendering of gender for humanity and God. The task force has used the following approach in these cases: in references to humankind, all references to "men" or other exclusive terms have been changed to "human," or a similar gender inclusive rendering. With regard to language about God, the task force sought to reduce the number of male pronouns for God when it could be done with felicity, but it did not attempt to eliminate them altogether. There were several principles guiding this. On the one hand, excessive repetition of the male pronoun for God was avoided. On the other hand, excessive repetition of the word "God" as a substitute for the pronoun "him" was also avoided. In addition, when the elimination of a male pronoun for God would obscure the theological point of the passage, the pronoun was retained. These principles echo the protocol used by Faith Alive Christian Resources.

For direct quotations from Scripture, the task force uses the New Revised Standard

Translation for the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. With the Canons of Dort, translations of its own seventeenth century translations of the Bible are given. For the Canons, in particular, the text of the confessions depends upon the particular seventeenth century translations being used at the Synod.

This joint translation does not erase the differences remaining between the denominations about the confessions. For example, wherever an action of the General Synod of one denomination has made a modification of the confession (as with the Belgic Confession, Article 36), it is noted in the text, but the discrepancy is not resolved, but simply preserved. Nevertheless, for both denominations, this translation represents a step forward in cooperation and partnership.

Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) was composed in the city of Heidelberg, Germany, at the request of Elector Frederick III, who ruled the province of the Palatinate from 1559 to 1576. The new catechism was intended as a tool for teaching young people, a guide for preaching in the provincial churches, and a form of confessional unity among the several Protestant factions in the Palatinate. An old tradition credits Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus with being the coauthors of the catechism, but the project was actually the work of a team of ministers and university theologians under the watchful eye of Frederick himself. Ursinus probably served as the primary writer on the team, and Olevianus had a lesser role. The catechism was approved by a synod in Heidelberg in January 1563. A second and third German edition, each with small additions, as well as a Latin translation were published the same year in Heidelberg. The third edition was included in the Palatinate Church Order of November 15, 1563, at which time the catechism was divided into fifty-two sections or Lord's Days, so that one Lord's Day could be explained in an afternoon worship service each Sunday of the year.

The Synod of Dort approved the Heidelberg Catechism in 1619, and it soon became the most ecumenical of the Reformed catechisms and confessions. It has been translated into many European, Asian, and African languages and is still the most widely used and warmly praised catechism of the Reformation period.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

Introduction

Lord's Day 1

Q&A 1

Q. What is your only comfort
in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own,[1]
but belong—
body and soul,
in life and in death[2]—
to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.[3]

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,[4]
and has delivered me from the tyranny of the devil.[5]
He also watches over me in such a way[6]
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;[7]
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.[8]

Because I belong to him,
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
assures me of eternal life[9]
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready
from now on to live for him.[10]

[1] 1 Cor. 6:19-20
[2] Rom. 14:7-9
[3] 1 Cor. 3:23; Titus 2:14
[4] 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:2
[5] John 8:34-36; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-11
[6] John 6:39-40; 10:27-30; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:5
[7] Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18
[8] Rom. 8:28
[9] Rom. 8:15-16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14
[10] Rom. 8:1-17

Q&A 2
Q. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?
A. Three things:
first, how great my sin and misery are;[1]
second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery;[2]
third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.[3]

[1] Rom. 3:9-10; 1 John 1:10
[2] John 17:3; Acts 4:12; 10:43
[3] Matt. 5:16; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 5:8-10; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:9-10

Part I: Human Misery

Lord's Day 2

Q&A 3
Q. How do you come to know your misery?
A. The law of God tells me.[1]

[1] Rom. 3:20; 7:7-25

Q&A 4
Q. What does God's law require of us?
A. Christ teaches us this in summary in Matthew 22:37-40:

"'You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your mind.'[1]
This is the greatest and first commandment.

"And a second is like it:
'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'[2]

"On these two commandments hang
all the law and the prophets."

[1] Deut. 6:5
[2] Lev. 19:18

Q&A 5
Q. Can you live up to all this perfectly?
A. No.[1]
I have a natural tendency
to hate God and my neighbor.[2]

[1] Rom. 3:9-20, 23; 1 John 1:8, 10
[2] Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:23-24; 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 3:3

Lord's Day 3

Q&A 6
Q. Did God create people
so wicked and perverse?
A. No.
God created them good[1] and in his own image,[2]
that is, in true righteousness and holiness,[3]
so that they might
rightly know God their creator,[4]
love him with all their heart,
and live with God in eternal happiness,
praising and glorifying him.[5]

[1] Gen. 1:31
[2] Gen. 1:26-27
[3] Eph. 4:24
[4] Col. 3:10
[5] Ps. 8

Q&A 7
Q. Then what is the source of this corrupt human nature?
A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents,
Adam and Eve, in Paradise.[1]
This fall has so poisoned our nature[2]
that we are all conceived and born
in a sinful condition.[3]

[1] Gen. 3
[2] Rom. 5:12, 18-19
[3] Ps. 51:5

Q&A 8
Q. But are we so corrupt
that we are totally unable to do any good
and inclined toward all evil?
A. Yes,[1] unless we are born again
by the Spirit of God.[2]

[1] Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; Isa. 53:6
[2] John 3:3-5

Lord's Day 4

Q&A 9
Q. But doesn't God do us an injustice
by requiring in his law
what we are unable to do?
A. No, God created human beings with the ability to keep the law.[1]
They, however, tempted by the devil[2]
and in deliberate disobedience,[3]
robbed themselves and all their descendants of these gifts.[4]

[1] Gen. 1:31; Eph. 4:24
[2] Gen. 3:13; John 8:44
[3] Gen. 3:6
[4] Rom. 5:12, 18, 19

Q&A 10
Q. Will God permit
such disobedience and rebellion
to go unpunished?
A. Certainly not.
God is terribly angry
with the sin we are born with
as well as the sins we personally commit.

As a just judge,
God will punish them both now and in eternity,[1]
having declared:
"Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey
all the things written in the book of the law."[2]

[1] Ex. 34:7; Ps. 5:4-6; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6; Heb. 9:27
[2] Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26

Q&A 11
Q. But isn't God also merciful?
A. God is certainly merciful,[1]
but also just.[2]
God's justice demands
that sin, committed against his supreme majesty,
be punished with the supreme penalty—
eternal punishment of body and soul.[3]

[1] Ex. 34:6-7; Ps. 103:8-9
[2] Ex. 34:7; Deut. 7:9-11; Ps. 5:4-6; Heb. 10:30-31
[3] Matt. 25:35-46

Part II: Deliverance

Lord's Day 5

Q&A 12
**Q. According to God's righteous judgment
we deserve punishment
both now and in eternity:
how then can we escape this punishment
and return to God's favor?**
A. God requires that his justice be satisfied.[1]
Therefore the claims of this justice
must be paid in full,
either by ourselves or another.[2]

[1] Ex. 23:7; Rom. 2:1-11
[2] Isa. 53:11; Rom. 8:3-4

Q&A 13
Q. Can we make this payment ourselves?
A. Certainly not.
Actually, we increase our debt every day.[1]

[1] Matt. 6:12; Rom. 2:4-5

Q&A 14
**Q. Can another creature—any at all—
pay this debt for us?**
A. No.
First,
God will not punish any other creature
for what a human has committed.[1]
Second,
no mere creature can bear the weight
of God's eternal wrath against sin
and deliver others from it.[2]

[1] Ezek. 18:4, 20; Heb. 2:14-18
[2] Ps. 49:7-9; 130:3

Q&A 15
**Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer
should we look for then?**
A. One who is a true human[1] and truly righteous,[2]
yet more powerful than all creatures,
that is, one who is also truly God.[3]

[1] Rom. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:17
[2] Isa. 53:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26
[3] Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Jer. 23:6; John 1:1

Lord's Day 6

Q&A 16
Q. Why must he be a true and righteous human?
A. God's justice demands
that one who shares our human nature, which has sinned,
pay for sin;[1]
but a sinful human could never pay for others.[2]

[1] Rom. 5:12, 15; 1 Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:14-16
[2] Heb. 7:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:18

Q&A 17
Q. Why must the mediator also be true God?
A. So that the mediator,
by the power of his divinity,
might bear the weight of God's wrath in his humanity
and earn for us
and restore to us
righteousness and life.[1]

[1] Isa. 53; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21

Q&A 18
Q. Then who is this mediator—
true God and at the same time
a true and righteous human?
A. Our Lord Jesus Christ,[1]
who was given to us
to completely deliver us
and make us right with God.[2]

[1] Matt. 1:21-23; Luke 2:11; 1 Tim. 2:5
[2] 1 Cor. 1:30

Q&A 19
Q. How do you come to know this?
A. The holy gospel tells me.
God began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise;[1]
later, God proclaimed it
by the holy patriarchs[2] and prophets[3]
and foreshadowed it
by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law;[4]
and, finally, God fulfilled it
through his own beloved Son.[5]

[1] Gen. 3:15
[2] Gen. 22:18; 49:10
[3] Isa. 53; Jer. 23:5-6; Mic. 7:18-20; Acts 10:43; Heb. 1:1-2
[4] Lev. 1-7; John 5:46; Heb. 10:1-10
[5] Rom. 10:4; Gal. 4:4-5; Col. 2:17

Lord's Day 7

Q&A 20
Q. Will all people, then, be saved through Christ just as they were lost through Adam?
A. No.
Only those are saved
who through true faith
are grafted into Christ
and accept all his benefits.[1]

[1] Matt. 7:14; John 3:16, 18, 36; Rom. 11:16-21

Q&A 21
Q. What is true faith?
A. True faith is
not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true
all that God has revealed to us in Scripture;[1]
it is also a wholehearted trust,[2]
which the Holy Spirit creates in me[3] by the gospel,[4]
that, not only to others but to me also,[5]
God has freely granted forgiveness of sins,
eternal righteousness,
and salvation,[6]
out of sheer grace,
solely because of Christ's merit.[7]

[1] John 17:3, 17; Heb. 11:1-3; James 2:19
[2] Rom. 4:18-21; 5:1; 10:10; Heb. 4:14-16
[3] Matt. 16:15-17; John 3:5; Acts 16:14
[4] Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21
[5] Gal. 2:20
[6] Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:10
[7] Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10

Q&A 22
Q. What then must a Christian believe?
A. All that is promised us in the gospel,[1]
a summary of which is taught us
in the articles of our universal
and undoubted Christian faith.

[1] Matt. 28:18-20; John 20:30-31

Q&A 23
Q. What are these articles?
A. I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there 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.

Lord's Day 8

Q&A 24
Q. How are these articles divided?
A. Into three parts:
God the Father and our creation;
God the Son and our deliverance;
and God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

Q&A 25
Q. Since there is only one divine being,[1]
why do you speak of three:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
A. Because that is how
God has revealed himself in his Word:[2]
these three distinct persons
are one, true, eternal God.

[1] Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6
[2] Matt. 3:16-17; 28:18-19; Luke 4:18 (Isa. 61:1); John 14:26; 15:26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:6; Tit. 3:5-6

Part II: Deliverance: God the Father

Lord's Day 9

Q&A 26
Q. What do you believe when you say,
"I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth"?
A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who out of nothing created heaven and earth
and everything in them,[1]
who still upholds and rules them
by his eternal counsel and providence,[2]
is my God and Father
because of Christ the Son.[3]

I trust God so much that I do not doubt
he will provide
whatever I need
for body and soul,[4]

and will turn to my good
whatever adversity he sends upon me
in this sad world.[5]

God is able to do this because he is almighty God,[6]
and desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.[7]

[1] Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 44:24; Acts 4:24; 14:15
[2] Ps. 104; Matt. 6:30; 10:29; Eph. 1:11
[3] John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5
[4] Ps. 55:22; Matt. 6:25-26; Luke 12:22-31
[5] Rom. 8:28
[6] Gen. 18:14; Rom. 8:31-39
[7] Matt. 7:9-11

Lord's Day 10

Q&A 27
Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?
A. The almighty and ever present power of God[1]
by which God upholds, as with his hand,
heaven
and earth
and all creatures,[2]
and so rules them that
leaf and blade,
rain and drought,
fruitful and lean years,
food and drink,
health and sickness,
prosperity and poverty,[3]
and everything else,
come to us
not by chance[4]
but by his fatherly hand.[5]

[1] Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28
[2] Heb. 1:3
[3] Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15-17; John 9:3; Prov. 22:2
[4] Prov. 16:33
[5] Matt. 10:29

Q&A 28
Q. What benefits do we receive from the knowledge of God's creation and providence?
A. We can be patient when things go against us,[1]
thankful when things go well,[2]
and for the future we can have
good confidence in our faithful God and Father
that nothing in creation will separate us from his love.[3]
For all creatures are so completely in God's hand
that without his will
they can neither live nor move.[4]

[1] Job 1:21-22; James 1:3
[2] Deut. 8:10; 1 Thess. 5:18
[3] Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:38-39
[4] Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28

Part II: Deliverance: God the Son

Lord's Day 11

Q&A 29
Q. Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," meaning "savior"?
A. Because he saves us from our sins,[1]
and because salvation cannot be sought
or found in anyone else.[2]

[1] Matt. 1:21; Heb. 7:25
[2] Isa. 43:11; John 15:5; Acts 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:5

Q&A 30
Q. Do those who look for their salvation in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only savior Jesus?
A. No.
Although they boast of being his,
by their actions they deny
the only savior, Jesus.[1]

For either Jesus is not a perfect savior,
or those who in true faith accept this savior
must have in him all they need for their salvation.[2]

[1] 1 Cor. 1:12-13; Gal. 5:4
[2] Col. 1:19-20; 2:10; 1 John 1:7

Lord's Day 12

Q&A 31
Q. Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed"?
A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father
and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit[1]
to be
our chief prophet and teacher[2]
who fully reveals to us
the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance;[3]
our only high priest[4]
who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body,[5]
and who continually pleads our cause with the Father;[6]
and our eternal king[7]
who governs us by his Word and Spirit,
and who guards us and keeps us
in the deliverance he has won for us.[8]

[1] Luke 3:21-22; 4:14-19 (Isa. 61:1); Heb. 1:9 (Ps. 45:7)
[2] Acts 3:22 (Deut. 18:15)
[3] John 1:18; 15:15
[4] Heb. 7:17 (Ps. 110:4)
[5] Heb. 9:12; 10:11-14
[6] Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24
[7] Matt. 21:5 (Zech. 9:9)
[8] Matt. 28:18-20; John 10:28; Rev. 12:10-11

Q&A 32
Q. But why are you called a Christian?
A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ[1]
and so I share in his anointing.[2]
I am anointed
to confess his name,[3]
to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks,[4]
to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil
in this life,[5]
and afterward to reign with Christ
over all creation
for eternity.[6]

[1] 1 Cor. 12:12-27
[2] Acts 2:17 (Joel 2:28); 1 John 2:27
[3] Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9-10; Heb. 13:15
[4] Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9
[5] Gal. 5:16-17; Eph. 6:11; 1 Tim. 1:18-19
[6] Matt. 25:34; 2 Tim. 2:12

Lord's Day 13

Q&A 33
Q. Why is he called God's "only begotten Son"
when we also are God's children?
A. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God.[1]
We, however, are adopted children of God—
adopted by grace through Christ.[2]

[1] John 1:1-3, 14, 18; Heb. 1
[2] John 1:12; Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:5-6

Q&A 34
Q. Why do you call him "our Lord"?
A. Because—
not with gold or silver,
but with his precious blood[1]—
he has delivered us
from sin and from the tyranny of the devil,[2]
and has bought us,
body and soul,
to be his very own.[3]

[1] 1 Pet. 1:18-19
[2] Col. 1:13-14; Heb. 2:14-15
[3] 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Tim. 2:5-6

Lord's Day 14

Q&A 35
Q. What does it mean that he "was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary"?
A. That the eternal Son of God,
who is and remains
true and eternal God,[1]
took to himself,
through the working of the Holy Spirit,[2]
from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary,[3]
a truly human nature
so that he might also become David's true descendant,[4]
like his brothers and sisters in every way[5]
except for sin.[6]

[1] John 1:1; 10:30-36; Acts 13:33 (Ps. 2:7); Col. 1:15-17; 1 John 5:20
[2] Luke 1:35
[3] Matt. 1:18-23; John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14
[4] 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 132:11; Matt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3
[5] Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:17
[6] Heb. 4:15; 7:26-27

Q&A 36
Q. How does the holy conception and birth of Christ benefit you?
A. He is our mediator[1]
and, in God's sight,
he covers with his innocence and perfect holiness
my sinfulness in which I was conceived.[2]

[1] 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 9:13-15
[2] Rom. 8:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 4:4-5; 1 Pet. 1:18-19

Lord's Day 15

Q&A 37
Q. What do you understand by the word "suffered"?
A. That during his whole life on earth,
but especially at the end,
Christ sustained
in body and soul
the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.[1]

This he did in order that,
by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice,[2]
he might deliver us, body and soul,
from eternal condemnation,[3]
and gain for us
God's grace,
righteousness,
and eternal life.[4]

[1] Isa. 53; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18
[2] Rom. 3:25; Heb. 10:14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10
[3] Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 3:13
[4] John 3:16; Rom. 3:24-26

Q&A 38
Q. Why did he suffer
"under Pontius Pilate" as judge?
A. So that he,
though innocent,
might be condemned by an earthly judge,[1]
and so free us from the severe judgment of God
that was to fall on us.[2]

[1] Luke 23:13-24; John 19:4, 12-16
[2] Isa. 53:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13

Q&A 39
Q. Is there something more
in his having been "crucified"
than if he had died some other death?
A. Yes.
For by this I am assured
that he shouldered the curse
which lay on me,
since death on a cross had been cursed by God.[1]

[1] Gal. 3:10-13 (Deut. 21:23)

Lord's Day 16

Q&A 40
Q. Why did Christ have to suffer death?
A. Because God's justice and truth are such that
nothing else could pay for our sins[1]
except the death of the Son of God.[2]

[1] Gen. 2:17
[2] Rom. 8:3-4; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 2:9

Q&A 41
Q. Why was he "buried"?
A. His burial testifies
that he really died.[1]

[1]Isa. 53:9; John 19:38-42; Acts 13:29; 1 Cor. 15:3-4

Q&A 42
Q. Since Christ has died for us,
why do we still have to die?
A. Our death does not pay the debt of our sins.[1]
Rather, it puts an end to our sinning
and is our entrance into eternal life.[2]

[1] Ps. 49:7
[2] John 5:24; Phil. 1:21-23; 1 Thess. 5:9-10

Q&A 43
Q. What further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?
A. By Christ's power
our old selves are crucified, put to death, and buried with him,[1]
so that the evil desires of the flesh
may no longer rule us,[2]
but that instead we may offer ourselves
as a sacrifice of gratitude to him.[3]

[1] Rom. 6:5-11; Col. 2:11-12
[2] Rom. 6:12-14
[3] Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:1-2

Q&A 44
Q. Why does the creed add, "He descended to hell"?
A. To assure me during attacks of deepest dread
that Christ my Lord,
by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul,
on the cross but also earlier,
has delivered me from hellish anguish and torment.[1]

[1] Isa. 53; Matt. 26:36-46; 27:45-46; Luke 22:44; Heb. 5:7-10

Lord's Day 17

Q&A 45
Q. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?
A. First, by his resurrection he has overcome death,
so that he might make us share in the righteousness
he obtained for us by his death.[1]

Second, by his power we too
are now raised to a new life.[2]

Third, Christ's resurrection
is a sure pledge to us of our blessed resurrection.[3]

[1] Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:16-20; 1 Pet. 1:3-5
[2] Rom. 6:5-11; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-4
[3] Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:12-23; Phil. 3:20-21

Lord's Day 18

Q&A 46
Q. What do you mean by saying, "He ascended to heaven"?

A. That Christ
was taken up from the earth into heaven[1]
before the eyes of his disciples
and remains there on our behalf[2]
until he comes again
to judge the living and the dead.[3]

[1] Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11
[2] Rom. 8:34; Eph. 4:8-10; Heb. 7:23-25; 9:24
[3] Acts 1:11

Q&A 47
Q. But isn't Christ with us
until the end of the world
as he promised us?[1]
A. Christ is true human and true God.
In his human nature Christ is not now on earth;[2]
but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit
he never leaves us.[3]

[1] Matt. 28:20
[2] Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21
[3] Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:16-19

Q&A 48
Q. If his humanity is not present
wherever his divinity is,
then aren't the two natures of Christ
separated from each other?
A. Certainly not.
Since divinity
is not limited
and is present everywhere,[1]
it is evident that
Christ's divinity is surely beyond the bounds of
the humanity that has been taken on,
but at the same time his divinity is in
and remains personally united to
his humanity.[2]

[1] Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 7:48-49 (Isa. 66:1)
[2] John 1:14; 3:13; Col. 2:9

Q&A 49
Q. How does Christ's ascension to heaven
benefit us?
A. First, he is our advocate
in heaven
in the presence of his Father.[1]

Second, we have our own flesh in heaven
as a guarantee that Christ our head
will also take us, his members,
up to himself.[2]

Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth
as a further guarantee.[3]
By the Spirit's power
we seek not earthly things
but the things above, where Christ is,
sitting at God's right hand.[4]

[1] Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1
[2] John 14:2; 17:24; Eph. 2:4-6
[3] John 14:16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5
[4] Col. 3:1-4

Lord's Day 19

Q&A 50
Q. Why the next words:
"and is seated at the right hand of God"?
A. Because Christ ascended to heaven
to show there that he is head of his church,[1]
the one through whom the Father rules all things.[2]

[1] Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18
[2] Matt. 28:18; John 5:22-23

Q&A 51
Q. How does this glory of Christ our head
benefit us?
A. First, through his Holy Spirit
he pours out gifts from heaven
upon us his members.[1]

Second, by his power
he defends us and keeps us safe
from all enemies.[2]

[1] Acts 2:33; Eph. 4:7-12
[2] Ps. 110:1-2; John 10:27-30; Rev. 19:11-16

Q&A 52
Q. How does Christ's return
"to judge the living and the dead"
comfort you?
A. In all distress and persecution,
with uplifted head
I confidently await the very judge
who has already submitted himself to the judgment of God
in my place and removed the whole curse from me.[1]
Christ will cast all his enemies and mine
into everlasting condemnation,
but will take me and all his chosen ones
to himself
into the joy and glory of heaven.[2]

[1] Luke 21:28; Rom. 8:22-25; Phil. 3:20-21; Tit. 2:13-14
[2] Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-10

Part II: Deliverance: God the Holy Spirit

Lord's Day 20

Q&A 53
Q. What do you believe concerning "the Holy Spirit"?
A. First, that the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, is eternal God.[1]

Second, that the Spirit is also given to me,[2] makes me share in Christ and all his benefits[3] through true faith, comforts me,[4] and will remain with me forever.[5]

[1] Gen. 1:1-2; Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4
[2] 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 4:6
[3] Gal. 3:14
[4] John 15:26; Acts 9:31
[5] John 14:16-17; 1 Pet. 4:14

Lord's Day 21

Q&A 54
Q. What do you believe concerning "the holy catholic church"?
A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word,[1] out of the entire human race,[2] from the beginning of the world to its end,[3] gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life[4] and united in true faith.[5]
And of this community I am[6] and always will be[7] a living member.

[1] John 10:14-16; Acts 20:28; Rom. 10:14-17; Col. 1:18
[2] Gen. 26:3b-4; Rev. 5:9
[3] Isa. 59:21; 1 Cor. 11:26
[4] Matt. 16:18; John 10:28-30; Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-14
[5] Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:1-6
[6] 1 John 3:14, 19-21
[7] John 10:27-28; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 1 Pet. 1:3-5

Q&A 55
Q. What do you understand by "the communion of saints"?
A. First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts.[1]

Second, that each member
should consider it a duty
to use these gifts
willingly and joyfully
for the service and enrichment
of the other members.[2]

[1] Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 6:17; 12:4-7, 12-13; 1 John 1:3
[2] Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:20-27; 13:1-7; Phil. 2:4-8

Q&A 56
Q. What do you believe
concerning "the forgiveness of sins"?
A. I believe that God,
because of Christ's satisfaction,
will no longer remember
any of my sins[1]
or my sinful nature
which I need to struggle against all my life.[2]

Rather, by grace
God grants me the righteousness of Christ
to free me forever from judgment.[3]

[1] Ps. 103:3-4, 10, 12; Mic. 7:18-19; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 John 1:7; 2:2
[2] Rom. 7:21-25
[3] John 3:17-18; Rom. 8:1-2

Lord's Day 22

Q&A 57
Q. How does "the resurrection of the body"
comfort you?
A. Not only will my soul
be taken immediately after this life
to Christ its head,[1]
but also my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ,
will be reunited with my soul
and made like Christ's glorious body.[2]

[1] Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:21-23
[2] 1 Cor. 15:20, 42-46, 54; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2

Q&A 58
Q. How does the article
concerning "life everlasting"
comfort you?
A. Even as I already now
experience in my heart
the beginning of eternal joy,[1]

so after this life I will have
perfect blessedness such as
no eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no human heart has ever imagined:
a blessedness in which to praise God forever.[2]

[1] Rom. 14:17
[2] John 17:3; 1 Cor. 2:9

Lord's Day 23

Q&A 59
Q. What good does it do you, however, to believe all this?
A. In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting.[1]

[1]1 John 3:36; Rom. 1:17 (Hab. 2:4); Rom. 5:1-2

Q&A 60
Q. How are you righteous before God?
A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.[1]

Even though my conscience accuses me
of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments,
of never having kept any of them,[2]
and of still being inclined toward all evil,[3]
nevertheless,
without any merit of my own,[4]
out of sheer grace,[5]
God grants and credits to me
the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ,[6]
as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner,
and as if I had been as perfectly obedient
as Christ was obedient for me.[7]

All I need to do
is accept this gift with a believing heart.[8]

[1] Rom. 3:21-28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil 3:8-11
[2] Rom. 3:9-10
[3] Rom. 7:23
[4] Tit. 3:4-5
[5] Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8
[6] Rom. 4:3-5 (Gen. 15:6); 2 Cor. 5:17-19; 1 John 2:1-2
[7] Rom. 4:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:21
[8] John 3:18; Acts 16:30-31

Q&A 61
Q. Why do you say that through faith alone you are righteous?

A. Not because I please God
by the worthiness of my faith.
It is because the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness
of Christ alone are my righteousness before God,[1]
and because I accept this righteousness and make it mine
in no other way
than through faith.[2]

[1] 1 Cor. 1:30-31
[2] Rom. 10:10; 1 John 5:10-12

Lord's Day 24

Q&A 62
Q. Why can't our good works
be our righteousness before God,
or at least help make us right with God?
A. Because the righteousness
which can pass God's judgment
must be entirely perfect
and must in every way measure up to the divine law.[1]
But even our best works in this life
are imperfect
and stained with sin.[2]

[1] Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10 (Deut. 27:26)
[2] Isa. 64:6

Q&A 63
Q. How can our good works
be said to merit nothing
if God rewards them
in this life and the next?[1]
A. This reward is not earned;
it is a gift of grace.[2]

[1] Matt. 5:12; Heb. 11:6
[2] Luke 17:10; 2 Tim. 4:7-8

Q&A 64
Q. But doesn't this teaching
make people indifferent and wicked?
A. No,
for it is impossible
for those grafted into Christ through true faith
not to produce fruits of gratitude.[1]

[1] 1 Luke 6:43-45; John 15:5

Part II: The Sacraments

Lord's Day 25

Q&A 65
Q. It is through faith alone
that we share in Christ and all his benefits:
where then does that faith come from?
A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts[1]
by the preaching of the holy gospel,[2]
and confirms
it by the use of the holy sacraments.[3]

[1] John 3:5; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; Eph. 2:8
[2] Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23-25
[3] Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 10:16

Q&A 66
Q. What are sacraments?
A. Sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals.
They were instituted by God so that
by our use of them
he might make us understand more clearly
the promise of the gospel,
and seal that promise.[1]

And this is God's gospel promise:
to grant us forgiveness of sins and eternal life
by grace
because of Christ's one sacrifice
accomplished on the cross.[2]

[1] Gen. 17:11; Deut. 30:6; Rom. 4:11
[2] Matt. 26:27-28; Acts 2:38; Heb. 10:10

Q&A 67
Q. Are both the word and the sacraments then
intended to focus our faith
on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross
as the only ground of our salvation?
A. Yes!

In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us
and by the holy sacraments confirms
that our entire salvation
rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.[1]

Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 3:27

Q&A 68
Q. How many sacraments
did Christ institute in the New Testament?
A. Two: baptism and the holy Supper.[1]

[1] Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26

Part II: The Sacraments: Baptism

Lord's Day 26
Baptism

Q&A 69
Q. How does holy baptism
remind and assure you
that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross
benefits you personally?
A. In this way:
Christ instituted this outward washing[1]
and by it promised,
as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body,
so certainly his blood and his Spirit
wash my soul's impurity,
that is, all my sins.[2]

[1] Acts 2:38
[2] Matt. 3:11; Rom. 6:3-10; 1 Pet. 3:21

Q&A 70
Q. What does it mean
to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?
A. To be washed with Christ's blood means
that God, by grace, has forgiven our sins
because of Christ's blood
poured out for us in his sacrifice on the cross.[1]

To be washed with Christ's Spirit means
that the Holy Spirit has renewed
and sanctified us to be members of Christ,
so that more and more we become dead to sin
and live holy and blameless lives.[2]

[1] Zech. 13:1; Eph. 1:7-8; Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:5
[2] Ezek. 36:25-27; John 3:5-8; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 6:11; Col. 2:11-12

Q&A 71
Q. Where does Christ promise
that we are washed with his blood and Spirit
as surely as we are washed
with the water of baptism?
A. In the institution of baptism, where he says:

"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."[1]

"The one who believes and is baptized will be saved;
but the one who does not believe will be condemned."[2]

This promise is repeated when Scripture calls baptism
"the water of rebirth"[3] and
the washing away of sins.[4]

[1] Matt. 28:19
[2] Mark 16:16
[3] Tit. 3:5
[4] Acts 22:16

Lord's Day 27

Q&A 72
Q. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?
A. No, only Jesus Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.[1]

[1] Matt. 3:11; 1 Pet. 3:21; 1 John 1:7

Q&A 73
Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism the washing of rebirth and the washing away of sins?
A. God has good reason for these words.
First, God wants to teach us that
the blood and Spirit of Christ take away our sins
just as water removes dirt from the body.[1]

But more important,
God wants to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign,
that we are as truly washed of our sins by the Spirit
as our bodies are washed with water.[2]

[1] 1 Cor. 6:11; Rev. 1:5; 7:14
[2] Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27

Q&A 74
Q. Should infants also be baptized?
A. Yes,
they, as well as adults,
are included in God's covenant and people,[1]
and they, no less than adults, are promised
deliverance from sin through Christ's blood
and the Holy Spirit who produces faith.[2]

Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the covenant,
they too should be incorporated into the Christian church
and distinguished from the children
of unbelievers.[3]
This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision,[4]
which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.[5]

[1] Gen. 17:7; Matt. 19:14
[2] Isa. 44:1-3; Acts 2:38-39; 16:31
[3] Acts 10:47; 1 Cor. 7:14
[4] Gen. 17:9-14
[5] Col. 2:11-13

Part II: The Sacraments: The Holy Supper of Our Lord

Lord's Day 28
The Holy Supper of Our Lord

Q&A 75
Q. How does the Lord's Supper remind and assure you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all his benefits?
A. In this way:
Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat this broken bread and to drink this cup in remembrance of him.
He has thereby promised:[1]

First,
as surely as I see with my eyes
the bread of the Lord broken for me
and the cup shared with me,
so surely
his body was offered and broken for me
and his blood poured out for me
on the cross.

Second,
as surely as
I receive from the hand of the one who serves,
and taste with my mouth
the bread and cup of the Lord,
given me as sure signs of Christ's body and blood,
so surely
he nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life
with his crucified body and poured-out blood.

[1] Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25

Q&A 76
Q. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his poured-out blood?
A. First, it means
to accept with a believing heart
the entire suffering and death of Christ
and thereby
to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.[1]

In addition, it means
to be united more and more to Christ's blessed body[2]
through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us.
And so, although he is in heaven[3] and we are on earth,
we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.[4]
And we forever live on and are governed by one Spirit,
as the members of our body are by one soul.[5]

[1] John 6:35, 40, 50-54
[2] John 6:55-56; 1 Cor. 12:13
[3] Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 11:26; Col. 3:1
[4] 1 Cor. 6:15-17; Eph. 5:29-30; 1 John 4:13
[5] John 6:56-58; 15:1-6; Eph. 4:15-16; 1 John 3:24

Q&A 77
Q. Where does Christ promise
to nourish and refresh believers
with his body and blood
as surely as
they eat this broken bread
and drink this cup?
A. In the institution of the Lord's Supper:

"that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed,
took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and said,
'This is my body that is broken* for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.'
In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,
'This cup is the new covenant in my blood;
do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death
until he comes."[1]

This promise is repeated by Paul in these words:

"The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?
The bread that we break,
is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?
Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread."[2]

[1] 1 Cor. 11:23-26
[2] 1 Cor. 10:16-17

*The word "broken" does not appear in the best text traditions, although it was present in original German of the Heidelberg Catechism

Lord's Day 29

Q&A 78
Q. Are the bread and wine changed into the real body and blood of Christ?
A. No.
Just as the water of baptism
is not changed into Christ's blood
and does not itself wash away sins
but is simply a divine sign and assurance[1] of it,
so too the sacred bread of the Lord's Supper
is not changed into the actual body of Christ,[2]
even though it is called the body of Christ[3]
in keeping with the nature and language of sacraments.[4]

[1] Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5
[2] Matt. 26:26-29
[3] 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:26-28
[4] Gen. 17:10-11; Ex. 12:11, 13; 1 Cor. 10:1-4

Q&A 79
Q. Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood? And why does Paul use the words, a participation in Christ's body and blood?
A. Christ has good reason for these words.
First, he wants to teach us that
just as bread and wine nourish the temporal life,
so too his crucified body and poured-out blood
are the true food and drink of our souls for eternal life.[1]

But more important,
he wants to assure us, by this visible sign and pledge,
that we, through the Holy Spirit's work,
share in his true body and blood
as surely as our mouths
receive these holy signs in his remembrance,[2]
and that all of his suffering and obedience
are as definitely ours
as if we personally
had suffered and made satisfaction for our sins.[3]

[1] John 6:51, 55
[2] 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:26
[3] Rom. 6:5-11

Lord's Day 30

Q&A 80*
Q. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

A. The Lord's Supper declares to us
that we have complete forgiveness of all our sins
through the one and only sacrifice of Jesus Christ,
which he himself accomplished on the cross once for all.[1]
It also declares to us
that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ,[2]
who with his true body
is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father[3]
where he wants us to worship him.[4]

But the Mass teaches
that the living and the dead
do not have their sins forgiven
through the suffering of Christ
unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests.
It also teaches
that Christ is bodily present
under the form of bread and wine
where Christ is therefore to be worshiped.
Thus the Mass is basically
nothing but a denial
of the one and only sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ
and a condemnable idolatry.

[1] John 19:30; Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 25-26; 10:10-18
[2] 1 Cor. 6:17; 10:16-17
[3] Acts 7:55-56; Heb. 1:3; 8:1
[4] Matt. 6:20-21; John 4:21-24; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3

*Q&A 80 was altogether absent from the first edition of the catechism but was present in a shorter form in the second edition. The translation here given is of the expanded text of the third edition.

In response to a mandate from Synod 1998, the Christian Reformed Church's Interchurch Relations Committee conducted a study of Q. and A. 80 and the Roman Catholic Mass. Based on this study, Synod 2004 declared that "Q. and A. 80 can no longer be held in its current form as part of our confession." Synod 2006 directed that Q. and A. 80 remain in the CRC's text of the Heidelberg Catechism but that the last three paragraphs be placed in brackets to indicate that they do not accurately reflect the official teaching and practice of today's Roman Catholic Church and are no longer confessionally binding on members of the CRC.

The Reformed Church in America retains the original full text, choosing to recognize that the catechism was written within a historical context which may not accurately describe the Roman Catholic Church's current stance.

Q&A 81
Q. Who should come
to the Lord's table?

A. Those who are displeased with themselves
because of their sins,
but who nevertheless trust
that their sins are pardoned
and that their remaining weakness is covered
by the suffering and death of Christ,
and who also desire more and more
to strengthen their faith
and to lead a better life.

Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant, however,
eat and drink judgment on themselves.[1]

[1] 1 Cor. 10:19-22; 11:26-32

Q&A 82
Q. Should those be admitted
to the Lord's Supper
who show by what they profess and how they live
that they are unbelieving and ungodly?
A. No, that would dishonor God's covenant
and bring down God's anger upon the entire congregation.[1]
Therefore, according to the instruction of Christ
and his apostles,
the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such people,
by the official use of the keys of the kingdom,
until they reform their lives.

[1] 1 Cor. 11:17-32; Ps. 50:14-16; Isa. 1:11-17

Lord's Day 31

Q&A 83
Q. What are the keys of the kingdom?
A. The preaching of the holy gospel
and Christian discipline toward repentance.
By these two means,
the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers
and closed to unbelievers.[1]

[1] Matt. 16:19; John 20:22-23

Q&A 84
Q. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and closed
by the preaching of the holy gospel?
A. According to the command of Christ,
it is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring
to everyone who believes, that,
as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith,
God, because of Christ's merit,
Truly forgives all their sins.

The kingdom of heaven is closed, however,
by proclaiming and publicly declaring
to unbelievers and hypocrites that,
as long as they do not repent,
the wrath of God and eternal condemnation
rest on them.

God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come,
is based on this gospel testimony.[1]

[1] Matt. 16:19; John 3:31-36; 20:21-23

Q&A 85
Q. How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by Christian discipline?
A. Christ commands that
those who bear the name Christian
but profess unchristian teachings or lead unchristian lives
should be admonished.
If, after repeated personal and loving admonitions,
they do not give up their errors or evil ways,
they should be reported to the church, that is,
to those ordained by the church for that purpose.
If they fail to respond also to the church's admonitions,
the church excludes them from the congregation
by withholding the sacraments from them,
and God excludes them from the kingdom of Christ.[1]

However,
if they promise and demonstrate genuine reform,
they are received again
as members of Christ
and the church.[2]

[1] Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:3-5, 11-13; 2 Thess. 3:14-15
[2] Luke 15:20-24; 2 Cor. 2:6-11

Part III: Gratitude

Lord's Day 32

Q&A 86
Q. Since, then, we have been delivered from our misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?
A. Because Christ,
having redeemed us by his blood,
is also renewing us by his Spirit into his image,
so that with our whole lives
we may show that we are thankful to God
for his benefits,[1]
so that he may be praised through us,[2]

so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits,[3]
and so that by our godly living
our neighbors may be won over to Christ.[4]

[1] Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:5-10
[2] Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19-20
[3] Matt. 7:17-18; Gal. 5:22-24; 2 Pet. 1:10-11
[4] Matt. 5:14-16; Rom. 14:17-19; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1-2

Q&A 87
Q. Can those be saved
who do not turn to God
from their ungrateful
and unrepentant ways?
A. By no means.
Scripture tells us that
no unchaste person,
no idolater, adulterer, thief,
no covetous person,
no drunkard, slanderer, robber,
or the like
will inherit the kingdom of God.[1]

[1] 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:1-20; 1 John 3:14

Lord's Day 33

Q&A 88
Q. What is involved
in genuine repentance or conversion?
A. Two things:
the dying-away of the old self,
and the rising-to-life of the new.[1]

[1] Rom. 6:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:5-10

Q&A 89
Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?
A. It is to be genuinely sorry for sin
and to more and more hate
and run away from it.[1]

[1] Ps. 51:3-4, 17; Joel 2:12-13; Rom. 8:12-13; 2 Cor. 7:10

Q&A 90
Q. What is the rising-to-life of the new self?
A. It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ[1]
and a love and delight to live
according to the will of God in all good works.[2]

[1] Ps. 51:8, 12; Isa.57:15; Rom. 5:1; 14:17
[2] Rom. 6:10-11; Gal. 2:20

Q&A 91
Q. What are good works?
A. Only those which
are done out of true faith,[1]
conform to God's law,[2]
and are done for God's glory;[3]
and not those based
on our own opinion
or human tradition.[4]

[1] John 15:5; Heb. 11:6
[2] Lev. 18:4; 1 Sam. 15:22; Eph. 2:10
[3] 1 Cor. 10:31
[4] Deut. 12:32; Isa. 29:13; Ezek. 20:18-19; Matt. 15:7-9

Part III: Gratitude: The Ten Commandments

Lord's Day 34

Q&A 92
Q. What is God's law?
A. God spoke all these words:

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT
"I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery;
you shall have no other gods before me."

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT
"You shall not make for yourself an idol,
whether in form of anything that is in heaven above,
or that is on the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth.
You shall not bow down to them or worship them;
for I the Lord your God am a jealous God,
punishing children for the iniquity of parents,
to the third and fourth generation
of those who reject me,
but showing love to the thousandth generation of those
who love me and keep my commandments."

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT
"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God,
for the Lord will not acquit anyone
who misuses his name."

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT
"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
Six days you shall labor and do all your work.
But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God;
you shall not do any work—
you, your son or your daughter,
your male or female slave,
your livestock,
or the alien resident in your towns.
For in six days the Lord made
the heaven and earth, the sea,
and all that is in them,
but rested the seventh day;
therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day
and consecrated it."

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT
"Honor your father and your mother,
so that your days may be long
in the land that the Lord your God is giving to you."

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT
"You shall not murder."

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT
"You shall not commit adultery."

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT
"You shall not steal."

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT
"You shall not bear false witness
against your neighbor."

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT
"You shall not covet your neighbor's house;
you shall not covet your neighbor's wife,
or male or female slave,
or ox, or donkey,
or anything that belongs to your neighbor."[1]

[1] Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21

Q&A 93
Q. How are these commandments divided?
A. Into two tables.
The first has four commandments,
teaching us how we ought to live in relation to God.
The second has six commandments,
teaching us what we owe our neighbor.[1]

[1] Matt. 22:37-39

Q&A 94
Q. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?
A. That I, not wanting to endanger my own salvation, avoid and shun
all idolatry,[1] sorcery, superstitious rites,[2]
and prayer to saints or to other creatures.[3]

That I rightly know the only true God,[4]
trust him alone,[5]
and look to God for every good thing[6]
humbly[7] and patiently,[8]
and love,[9] fear,[10] and honor[11] God
with all my heart.

In short,
that I give up anything
rather than go against God's will in any way.[12]

[1] 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 10:5-14; 1 John 5:21
[2] Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:9-12
[3] Matt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9
[4] John 17:3
[5] Jer. 17:5, 7
[6] Ps. 104:27-28; James 1:17
[7] 1 Pet. 5:5-6
[8] Col. 1:11; Heb. 10:36
[9] Matt. 22:37 (Deut. 6:5)
[10] Prov. 9:10; 1 Pet. 1:17
[11] Matt. 4:10 (Deut. 6:13)
[12] Matt. 5:29-30; 10:37-39

Q&A 95
Q. What is idolatry?
A. Idolatry is
having or inventing something in which one trusts
in place of or alongside of the only true God,
who has revealed himself in the Word.[1]

[1] 1 Chron. 16:26; Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 5:5; Phil. 3:19

Lord's Day 35

Q&A 96
Q. What is God's will in the second commandment?
A. That we in no way make any image of God[1]
nor worship him in any other way
than has been commanded in God's Word.[2]

[1] Deut. 4:15-19; Isa. 40:18-25; Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:22-23
[2] Lev. 10:1-7; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; John 4:23-24

Q&A 97
Q. May we then not make any image at all?
A. God can not and may not be visibly portrayed in any way.

Although creatures may be portrayed,
yet God forbids making or having such images
if one's intention is to worship them
or to serve God through them.[1]

[1] Ex. 34:13-14, 17; 2 Kings 18:4-5

Q&A 98
Q. But may not images be permitted in churches in place of books for the unlearned?
A. No, we should not try to be wiser than God.
God wants the Christian community instructed
by the living preaching of his Word[1]—
not by idols that cannot even talk.[2]

[1] Rom. 10:14-15, 17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19
[2] Jer. 10:8; Hab. 2:18-20

Lord's Day 36

Q&A 99
Q. What does the third commandment require?
A. That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God
by cursing,[1] perjury,[2] or unnecessary oaths,[3]
nor share in such horrible sins
by being silent bystanders.[4]

In a word, it requires
that we use the holy name of God
only with reverence and awe,[5]
so that we may properly
confess God,[6]
pray to God,[7]
and glorify God in all our words and works.[8]

[1] Lev. 24:10-17
[2] Lev. 19:12
[3] Matt. 5:37; James 5:12
[4] Lev. 5:1; Prov. 29:24
[5] Ps. 99:1-5; Jer. 4:2
[6] Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10
[7] Ps. 50:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:8
[8] Col. 3:17

Q&A 100
Q. Is blasphemy of God's holy name by swearing and cursing
really such serious sin
that God is angry also with those
who do not do all they can
to help prevent and forbid it?
A. Yes, indeed;[1]
for no sin is greater
or provokes God's wrath
more than blaspheming his name.
That is why God commanded it to be punished with death.[2]

[1] Lev. 5:1
[2] Lev. 24:10-17

Lord's Day 37

Q&A 101
Q. But may we swear an oath in God's name
if we do it reverently?
A. Yes, when the government demands it,
or when necessity requires it,
in order to maintain and promote truth and trustworthiness
for God's glory and our neighbor's good.

Such oaths are approved in God's Word[1]
and were rightly used by the people of God in the Old and New Testaments.[2]

[1] Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Jer. 4:1-2; Heb. 6:16
[2] Gen. 21:24; Josh. 9:15; 1 Kings 1:29-30; Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23

Q&A 102
Q. May we also swear by saints or other creatures?
A. No.
A legitimate oath means calling upon God
as the only one who knows my heart
to witness to my truthfulness
and to punish me if I swear falsely.[1]
No creature is worthy of such honor.[2]

[1] Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23
[2] Matt. 5:34-37; 23:16-22; James 5:12

Lord's Day 38

Q&A 103
Q. What is God's will
in the fourth commandment?

A. First,
that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained,[1]
and that, especially on the festive day of rest,
I diligently attend the assembly of God's people[2]
to learn what God's Word teaches,[3]
to participate in the sacraments,[4]
to pray to God publicly,[5]
and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.[6]

Second,
that every day of my life
I rest from my evil ways,
let the Lord work in me through his Spirit,
and so begin in this life
the eternal Sabbath.[7]

[1] Deut. 6:4-9, 20-25; 1 Cor. 9:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:13-17; Tit. 1:5
[2] Deut. 12:5-12; Ps. 40:9-10; 68:26; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25
[3] Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Cor. 14:31-32; 1 Tim. 4:13
[4] 1 Cor. 11:23-25
[5] Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:1
[6] Ps. 50:14; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8-9
[7] Isa. 66:23; Heb. 4:9-11

Lord's Day 39

Q&A 104
Q. What is God's will
in the fifth commandment?
A. That I show honor, love, and loyalty
to my father and mother
and all those in authority over me;
that I submit myself with proper obedience
to all their good teaching and discipline;[1]
and also that I be patient with their failings[2]—
for through them God chooses to rule us.[3]

[1] Ex. 21:17; Prov. 1:8; 4:1; Rom. 13:1-2; Eph. 5:21-22; 6:1-9; Col. 3:18- 4:1
[2] Prov. 20:20; 23:22; 1 Pet. 2:18
[3] Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-8; Eph. 6:1-9; Col. 3:18-21

Lord's Day 40

Q&A 105
Q. What is God's will
in the sixth commandment?
A. I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor—
not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture,
and certainly not by actual deeds—
and I am not to be party to this in others;[1]
rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge.[2]

I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either.[3]

Prevention of murder is also why
government is armed with the sword.[4]

[1] Gen. 9:6; Lev. 19:17-18; Matt. 5:21-22; 26:52
[2] Prov. 25:21-22; Matt. 18:35; Rom. 12:19; Eph. 4:26
[3] Matt. 4:7; 26:52; Rom. 13:11-14
[4] Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:14; Rom. 13:4

Q&A 106
Q. Does this commandment refer only to murder?
A. By forbidding murder God teaches us
that he hates the root of murder:
envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness.[1]

In God's sight all such are hidden murder.[2]

[1] Prov. 14:30; Rom. 1:29; 12:19; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 John 2:9-11
[2] 1 John 3:15

Q&A 107
Q. Is it enough then
that we do not murder our neighbor
in any such way?
A. No.
By condemning envy, hatred, and anger
God wants us
to love our neighbors as ourselves,[1]
to show patience, peace, gentleness,
mercy, and friendliness towards them,[2]
to protect them from harm as much as we can,
and to do good even to our enemies.[3]

[1] Matt. 7:12; 22:39; Rom. 12:10
[2] Matt. 5:3-12; Luke 6:36; Rom. 12:10, 18; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 3:8
[3] Ex. 23:4-5; Matt. 5:44-45; Rom. 12:20-21 (Prov. 25:21-22)

Lord's Day 41

Q&A 108
Q. What does the seventh commandment require?
A. God condemns all unchastity.[1]
We should therefore thoroughly detest it[2]
and, within the holy state of marriage or not,
live chaste and decent lives.[3]

[1] Lev. 18:30; Eph. 5:3-5
[2] Jude 22-23
[3] 1 Cor. 7:1-9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Heb. 13:4

Q&A 109
Q. Does God, in this commandment,
forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?

A. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul,
and God wants both to be kept clean and holy.
That is why God forbids
all unchaste actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires,[1]
and whatever may incite someone to them.[2]

[1] Matt. 5:27-29; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; Eph. 5:3-4
[2] 1 Cor. 15:33; Eph. 5:18

Lord's Day 42

Q&A 110
Q. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?
A. God forbids not only outright theft and robbery,
punishable by law.[1]

But in God's sight theft also includes
all scheming and swindling by which we seek to get
for ourselves our neighbor's goods,
whether by force or means that appear right,[2]
such as
inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume;
fraudulent merchandising;
counterfeit money;
excessive interest;
or any other means forbidden by God.[3]

In addition God forbids all greed[4]
and pointless squandering of his gifts.[5]

[1] Ex. 22:1; 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 6:9-10
[2] Mic. 6:9-11; Luke 3:14; James 5:1-6
[3] Deut. 25:13-16; Ps. 15:5; Prov. 11:1; 12:22; Ezek. 45:9-12; Luke 6:35
[4] Luke 12:15; Eph. 5:5
[5] Prov. 21:20; 23:20-21; Luke 16:10-13

Q&A 111
Q. What does God require of you in this commandment?
A. That I do whatever I can
for my neighbor's good,
that I treat others
as I would like them to treat me,
and that I work faithfully
so that I may share with those in need.[1]

[1] Isa. 58:5-10; Matt. 7:12; Gal. 6:9-10; Eph. 4:28

Lord's Day 43

Q&A 112
Q. What does the ninth commandment require?

A. God's will is that I
never give false testimony against anyone,
twist no one's words,
not gossip or slander,
nor join in condemning anyone
frivolously or without a hearing.[1]

Rather, in court and everywhere else,
I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind;
these are devices the devil uses,
and they would call down on me God's intense wrath.[2]
I should love the truth,
speak it candidly,
and openly acknowledge it.[3]
And I should do what I can
to guard and advance my neighbor's good name.[4]

[1] Ps. 15; Prov. 19:5; Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37; Rom. 1:28-32
[2] Lev. 19:11-12; Prov. 12:22; 13:5; John 8:44; Rev. 21:8
[3] 1 Cor. 13:6; Eph. 4:25
[4] 1 Pet. 3:8-9; 4:8

Lord's Day 44

Q&A 113
Q. What does the tenth commandment require?
A. That not even the slightest thought or desire
contrary to any one of God's commandments
should ever arise in our hearts.

Rather, with all our hearts
we should always hate sin
and desire whatever is right.[1]

[1] Ps. 19:7-14; 139:23-24; Rom. 7:7-8

Q&A 114
Q. But can those converted to God
obey these commandments perfectly?
A. No.
In this life even the holiest
have only a small beginning of this obedience.[1]

Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose,
they do begin to live
according to all, not only some,
of God's commandments.[2]

[1] Eccles. 7:20; Rom. 7:14-15; 1 Cor. 13:9; 1 John 1:8-10
[2] Ps. 1:1-2; Rom. 7:22-25; Phil. 3:12-16

Q&A 115
Q. Why, then, does God want the Ten Commandments
preached so pointedly
if no one can keep them in this life?

A. First, so that the longer we live
the more we may come to know our sinfulness
and the more eagerly look to Christ
for forgiveness of sins and righteousness.[1]

Second, so that,
while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit,
we may never stop striving
to be renewed more and more after God's image,
until after this life we reach our goal:
perfection.[2]

[1] Ps. 32:5; Rom. 3:19-26; 7:7, 24-25; 1 John 1:9
[2] 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 John 3:1-3

Part III: Gratitude: The Lord's Prayer

Lord's Day 45

Q&A 116
Q. Why do Christians need to pray?
A. Because prayer is the most important part
of the thankfulness God requires of us.[1]
And also because God gives his grace and Holy Spirit
only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly,
asking God for these gifts
and thanking God for them.[2]

[1] Ps. 50:14-15; 116:12-19; 1 Thess. 5:16-18
[2] Matt. 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-13

Q&A 117
Q. What is the nature of a prayer
that pleases and is heard by God?
A. First, we must pray from the heart
to no other than the one true God,
revealed to us in his Word,
asking for everything God has commanded us to ask for.[1]

Second, we must fully recognize our need and misery,
so that we humble ourselves in God's majestic presence.[2]

Third, we must rest on this unshakable foundation:
even though we do not deserve it,
God will surely listen to our prayer
because of Christ our Lord.
That is what God promised us in his Word.[3]

[1] Ps. 145:18-20; John 4:22-24; Rom. 8:26-27; James 1:5; 1 John 5:14-15
[2] 2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 2:11; 34:18; 62:8; Isa. 66:2; Rev. 4
[3] Dan. 9:17-19; Matt. 7:8; John 14:13-14; 16:23; Rom. 10:13; James 1:6

Q&A 118
Q. What did God command us to pray for?

A. Everything we need, spiritually and physically,[1]
as embraced in the prayer
Christ our Lord himself taught us.

[1] James 1:17; Matt. 6:33

Q&A 119
Q. What is this prayer?
A. Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.
For the kingdom
and the power
and the glory are yours forever.
Amen.[1]*

[1] Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4

*Earlier and better manuscripts of Matthew 6 omit the words "For the kingdom…Amen."

Lord's Day 46

Q&A 120
Q. Why did Christ command us to call God "our Father"?
A. That at the very beginning of our prayer
he may awaken in us
the childlike reverence and trust
toward God
which should be basic to our prayer:
that God has become our Father through Christ,
and will even less deny us
what we ask in faith[1]
than our parents refuse us
the things of this life.

[1] Matt. 7:9-11; Luke 11:11-13

Q&A 121
Q. Why the words "in heaven"?
A. These words teach us
not to think of God's heavenly majesty
as something earthly,[1]
and to expect everything
needed for body and soul
from God's almighty power.[2]

[1] Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-25
[2] Matt. 6:25-34; Rom. 8:31-32

Lord's Day 47

Q&A 122
Q. What is the first petition?
A. "Hallowed be your name" means:

Help us to rightly know you,[1]
to hallow, glorify, and praise you
for all your works
and for all that shines forth from them:
your almighty power, wisdom, kindness,
justice, mercy, and truth.[2]

And it means,

Help us to direct all our living—
what we think, say, and do—
so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us
but always honored and praised.[3]

[1] Jer. 9:23-24; 31:33-34; Matt. 16:17; John 17:3
[2] Ex. 34:5-8; Ps. 145; Jer. 32:16-20; Luke 1:46-55, 68-75; Rom. 11:33-36
[3] Ps. 115:1; Matt. 5:16

Lord's Day 48

Q&A 123
Q. What does the second petition mean?
A. "Your kingdom come" means:
Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way
that more and more we submit to you.[1]

Uphold and increase your church.[2]

Destroy the devil's work;
destroy every force which revolts against you
and every conspiracy against your holy Word.[3]

Do this until the full coming of your kingdom,
in which you will be
all in all.[4]

[1] Ps. 119:5, 105; 143:10; Matt. 6:33
[2] Ps. 122:6-9; Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:42-47
[3] Rom. 16:20; 1 John 3:8
[4] Rom. 8:22-23; 1 Cor. 15:28; Rev. 22:17, 20

Lord's Day 49

Q&A 124
Q. What does the third petition mean?

A. "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" means:

Help us and all people
to reject our own wills
and to obey your will without any back talk.
Your will alone is good.[1]

Help us one and all to carry out the work we are called to,[2]
as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.[3]

[1] Matt. 7:21; 16:24-26; Luke 22:42; Rom. 12:1-2; Tit. 2:11-12
[2] 1 Cor. 7:17-24; Eph. 6:5-9
[3] Ps. 103:20-21

Lord's Day 50

Q&A 125
Q. What does the fourth petition mean?
A. "Give us this day our daily bread" means:

Do take care of all our physical needs[1]
so that we come to know
that you are the only source of everything good,[2]
and neither our work and worry
nor your gifts
can do us any good without your blessing;[3]
and so that we, therefore, give up our trust in creatures
and trust in you alone.[4]

[1] Ps. 104:27-30; 145:15-16; Matt. 6:25-34
[2] Acts 14:17; 17:25; James 1:17
[3] Deut. 8:3; Ps. 37:16; 127:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:58
[4] Ps. 55:22; 62; 146; Jer. 17:5-8; Heb. 13:5-6

Lord's Day 51

Q&A 126
Q. What does the fifth petition mean?
A. "Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors" means:

Because of Christ's blood,
do not hold against us, poor sinners that we are,
any of the sins we do
or the evil that constantly clings to us.[1]

Forgive us just as we are fully determined,
as evidence of your grace in us,
to forgive our neighbors.[2]

[1] Ps. 51:1-7; 143:2; Rom. 8:1; 1 John 2:1-2
[2] Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35

Lord's Day 52

Q&A 127
Q. What does the sixth petition mean?
A. "And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one" means:

By ourselves we are too weak
to hold our own even for a moment.[1]

And our sworn enemies—
the devil,[2] the world,[3] and our own flesh[4]—
never stop attacking us.

And so, Lord,
uphold us and make us strong
with the strength of your Holy Spirit,
so that we may not go down to defeat
in this spiritual struggle,[5]
but may firmly resist our enemies
until we finally win the complete victory.[6]

[1] Ps. 103:14-16; John 15:1-5
[2] 2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:10-13; 1 Pet. 5:8
[3] John 15:18-21
[4] Rom. 7:23; Gal. 5:17
[5] Matt. 10:19-20; 26:41; Mark 13:33; Rom. 5:3-5
[6] 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23

Q&A 128
Q. What does your conclusion to this prayer mean?
A. "For the kingdom
and the power
and the glory are yours forever" means:

We have made all these petitions of you
because, as our all-powerful king,
you are willing and able
to give us all that is good;[1]
and because your holy name,
and not we ourselves,
should receive all the praise, forever.[2]

[1] Rom. 10:11-13; 2 Pet. 2:9
[2] Ps. 115:1; John 14:13

Q&A 129
Q. What does that little word "Amen" express?

A. "Amen" means:

This shall truly and surely be!

It is even more sure
that God listens to my prayer
than that I really desire
what I pray for.[1]

[1] Isa. 65:24; 2 Cor. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:13

Introduction to the Belgic Confession

The oldest of the doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America is the Confession of Faith, popularly known as the Belgic Confession, following the seventeenth century Latin designation "Confessio Belgica." "Belgica" referred to the whole of the Netherlands, both north and south, which today is divided into the Netherlands and Belgium. The confession's chief author was Guido de Bres, a preacher of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, who died a martyr to the faith in the year 1567. During the sixteenth century the churches in this country were exposed to terrible persecution by the Roman Catholic government. To protest against this cruel oppression, and to prove to the persecutors that the adherents of the Reformed faith were not rebels, as was laid to their charge, but law-abiding citizens who professed the true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures, de Bres prepared this confession in the year 1561. In the following year a copy was sent to King Philip II, together with an address in which the petitioners declared that they were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, but that they would "offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire," rather than deny the truth expressed in this confession.

Although the immediate purpose of securing freedom from persecution was not attained, and de Bres himself fell as one of the many thousands who sealed their faith with their lives, his work has endured and will continue to endure. In its composition the author availed himself to some extent of a confession of the Reformed churches in France, written chiefly by John Calvin, published two years earlier. The work of de Bres, however, is not a mere revision of Calvin's work, but an independent composition. In 1566 the text of this confession was revised at a synod held at Antwerp. In the Netherlands it was at once gladly received by the churches, and it was adopted by national synods held during the last three decades of the sixteenth century. The text, not the contents, was revised again at the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 and adopted as one of the doctrinal standards to which all office-bearers in the Reformed churches were required to subscribe. The confession is recognized as one of the best official summaries of Reformed doctrine.

In order to preserve decisions of previous General Synods of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America, Article 36 will appear in parallel columns when printed in worship resources shared between these denominations. The text of Article 36 is presented in parallel columns because the Christian Reformed Church in 1938 and 1985 decided to revise it from the original text in order to set forth what it judged to be a more biblical statement on the relationship between church and state, and to eliminate language that denounces "Anabaptists, other anarchists…." The Reformed Church in America has not made any amendments to the Belgic Confession. However, when the Reformed Church in America adopted the Belgic Confession in 1792 as one of the three confessional Standards of Unity, it also adopted "The Explanatory Articles" that reconciled the statements in the three Standards and the Church Order of Dort with the situation in which it existed in the newly independent United States of

America. With regard to Article 36 dealing with the relation of church and state, it stated that "Whatever relates to the immediate authority and interposition of the magistrates in the government of the church, and which is introduced more or less, into all the national establishments in Europe, is intirely (sic) omitted in the constitution now published." With regard to the harsh words about the Anabaptists in Article 36, the Explanatory Articles state that "In publishing the articles of faith, the Church determined to abide by the words adopted in the Synod of Dordtrecht, as most expressive of what she believes to be truth; in consequences of which, the terms alluded to could not be avoided. But she openly and candidly declares, that she by no means thereby intended to refer to any denomination of Christians presently known, and would be grieved at giving offence, or unnecessarily hurting the feelings of any person."

THE BELGIC CONFESSION

Article 1: The Only God
We all believe in our hearts
and confess with our mouths
that there is a single
and simple
spiritual being,
whom we call God—

eternal,
incomprehensible,
invisible,
unchangeable,
infinite,
almighty;

completely wise,
just,
and good,
and the overflowing source
of all good.

Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God
We know God by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government
of the universe,
since that universe is before our eyes
like a beautiful book
in which all creatures,
great and small,
are as letters
to make us ponder
the invisible things of God:
God's eternal power and divinity,
as the apostle Paul
says in Romans 1:20.

All these things are enough to convict humans
and to leave them without excuse.

Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly
by his holy and divine Word,
as much as we need in this life,
for God's glory
and for our salvation.

Article 3: The Written Word of God
We confess that this Word of God
was not sent nor delivered "by human will,"
but that "men and women moved by the Holy Spirit,
spoke from God,"
as Peter says.[1]

Afterward our God—
with special care
for us and our salvation—
commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles,
to commit this revealed Word to writing.
The two tables of the law were written
with God's own finger.

Therefore we call such writings
holy and divine Scriptures.

[1] 2 Pet. 1:21

Article 4: The Canonical Books
We include in the Holy Scripture the two volumes
of the Old and New Testaments.
They are canonical books
with which there can be no quarrel at all.

In the church of God the list is as follows:
In the Old Testament,
the five books of Moses—
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy;
the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth;
the two books of Samuel, and two of Kings;
the two books of Chronicles, called Paralipomenon;
the first book of Ezra; Nehemiah, Esther, Job;
the Psalms of David;
the three books of Solomon—
Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song;
the four major prophets—
Isaiah, Jeremiah*, Ezekiel, Daniel;
and then the other twelve minor prophets—
Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah,
Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk,
Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

In the New Testament,
the four gospels—
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John;
the Acts of the Apostles;

the fourteen letters of Paul—
to the Romans;
the two letters to the Corinthians;
to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians;
the two letters to the Thessalonians;
the two letters to Timothy;
to Titus, Philemon, and to the Hebrews;
the seven letters of the other apostles—
one of James;
two of Peter;
three of John;
one of Jude;
and the Revelation of the apostle John.

* "Jeremiah" here includes the Book of Lamentations as well as the Book of Jeremiah.

Article 5: The Authority of Scripture
We receive all these books
and these only
as holy and canonical,
for the regulating, founding, and establishing
of our faith.

And we believe
without a doubt
all things contained in them—
not so much because the church
receives and approves them as such
but above all because the Holy Spirit
testifies in our hearts
that they are from God,
and also because they
prove themselves
to be from God.

For even the blind themselves are able to see
that the things predicted in them
do happen.

Article 6: The Difference between Canonical and Apocryphal Books
We distinguish between these holy books
and the apocryphal ones,
which are the third and fourth books of Esdras;
the books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Sirach, Baruch;
what was added to the Story of Esther;
the Song of the Three Children in the Furnace;
the Story of Susannah;
the Story of Bell and the Dragon;
the Prayer of Manasseh;
and the two books of Maccabees.

The church may certainly read these books
and learn from them
as far as they agree with the canonical books.

But they do not have such power and virtue
that one could confirm
from their testimony
any point of faith or of the Christian religion.
Much less can they detract
from the authority
of the other holy books.

Article 7: The Sufficiency of Scripture
We believe
that this Holy Scripture contains
the will of God completely
and that everything one must believe
to be saved
is sufficiently taught in it.
For since the entire manner of service
which God requires of us
is described in it at great length,
no one—
    even an apostle
    or an angel from heaven,
    as Paul says[2]—
ought to teach other than
what the Holy Scriptures have
already taught us.
For since it is forbidden
to add to the Word of God,
or take anything away from it,[3]
it is plainly demonstrated
that the teaching is perfect
and complete in all respects.

Therefore we must not consider human writings—
    no matter how holy their authors may have been—
    equal to the divine writings;
    nor may we put custom,
    nor the majority,
    nor age,
    nor the passage of times or persons,
    nor councils, decrees, or official decisions
    above the truth of God,
    for truth is above everything else.

    For all human beings are liars by nature
    and more vain than vanity itself.

    Therefore we reject with all our hearts
    everything that does not agree
    with this infallible rule,
    as we are taught to do by the apostles
    when they say,
    “Test the spirits
    to see if they are from God,”[4]
    and also,

"Do not receive into the house
or welcome anyone
who comes to you
and does not bring this teaching."[5]

[2] Gal. 1:8
[3] Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19
[4] 1 John 4:1
[5] 2 John 10

Article 8: The Trinity
In keeping with this truth and Word of God
we believe in one God,
who is one single essence,
in whom there are three persons,
really, truly, and eternally distinct
according to their incommunicable properties—
namely,
Father,
Son,
and Holy Spirit.
The Father
is the cause,
origin,
and source of all things,
visible as well as invisible.

The Son
is the Word,
the Wisdom,
and the image
of the Father.

The Holy Spirit
is the eternal power
and might,
proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Nevertheless,
this distinction does not divide God into three,
since Scripture teaches us
that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
each has a distinct subsistence
distinguished by characteristics—
yet in such a way
that these three persons are
only one God.

It is evident then
that the Father is not the Son
and that the Son is not the Father,
and that likewise the Holy Spirit is
neither the Father nor the Son.

Nevertheless,
these persons,
thus distinct,
are neither divided
nor fused or mixed together.

For the Father did not take on flesh,
nor did the Spirit,
but only the Son.

The Father was never
without the Son,
nor without the Holy Spirit,
since all these are equal from eternity,
in one and the same essence.

There is neither a first nor a last,
for all three are one
in truth and power,
in goodness and mercy.

Article 9: The Scriptural Witness on the Trinity
All these things we know
from the testimonies of Holy Scripture
as well as from the effects of the persons,
especially from those we feel within ourselves.

The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures,
which teach us to believe in this Holy Trinity,
are written in many places of the Old Testament,
which need not be enumerated
but only chosen with discretion.

In the book of Genesis God says,
"Let us make humankind in our image,
according to our likeness."
So "God created humankind in his image"—
indeed, "male and female he created them."[6]
"See, the man has become like one of us."[7]

It appears from this
that there is a plurality of persons
within the Deity,
when God says,
"Let us make humankind in our image"—
and afterward God indicates the unity
in saying,
"God created."

It is true that God does not say here
how many persons there are—
but what is somewhat obscure to us
in the Old Testament
is very clear in the New.

For when our Lord was baptized in the Jordan,
the voice of the Father was heard saying,
"This is my Son, the Beloved;"[8]
the Son was seen in the water;
and the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove.

So, in the baptism of all believers
this form was prescribed by Christ:
Baptize all people "in the name
of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit."[9]

In the Gospel according to Luke
the angel Gabriel says to Mary,
the mother of our Lord:
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
therefore the child to be born will be holy;
he will be called Son of God."[10]

And in another place it says:
"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with all of you."[11]

["There are three that testify in heaven,
the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit,
and these three are one."][12]

In all these passages we are fully taught
that there are three persons
in the one and only divine essence.
And although this doctrine surpasses human understanding,
we nevertheless believe it now,
through the Word,
waiting to know and enjoy it fully
in heaven.

Furthermore,
we must note the particular works and activities
of these three persons in relation to us.
The Father is called our Creator,
by reason of his power.
The Son is our Savior and Redeemer,
by his blood.
The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier,
by living in our hearts.

This doctrine of the holy Trinity
has always been maintained in the true church,
from the time of the apostles until the present,
against Jews, Muslims, and certain false Christians and heretics,
such as Marcion, Mani,
Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius,
and others like them,
who were rightly condemned by the holy fathers.

And so,
in this matter we willingly accept
the three ecumenical creeds—
the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian—
as well as what the ancient fathers decided
in agreement with them.

[6] Gen. 1:26-27
[7] Gen. 3:22
[8] Matt. 3:17
[9] Matt. 28:19
[10] Luke 1:35
[11] 2 Cor. 13:14
[12] 1 John 5:7. Following the better Greek texts, the NRSV and other modern translations place this verse in a footnote.

Article 10: The Deity of Christ
We believe that Jesus Christ,
according to his divine nature,
is the only Son of God—
eternally begotten,
not made or created,
for then he would be a creature.

He is one in essence with the Father;
coeternal;
the exact image of the person of the Father
and the "reflection of God's glory,"[13]
being like the Father in all things.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God
not only from the time he assumed our nature
but from all eternity,
as the following testimonies teach us
when they are taken together.

Moses says that God created the world;[14]
and John says that all things were created through the Word,[15]
which he calls God.
The apostle says that God created the world through the Son.[16]
He also says that God created all things through Jesus Christ.[17]

And so it must follow
that the one who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ
already existed before creating all things.

Therefore the prophet Micah says
that Christ's origin is "from ancient days."[18]
And the apostle says
that the Son has "neither beginning of days
nor end of life."[19]

So then,
he is the true eternal God,
the Almighty,
whom we invoke,
worship,
and serve.

[13] Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3
[14] Gen. 1:1
[15] John 1:3
[16] Heb. 1:2
[17] Col. 1:16
[18] Mic. 5:2
[19] Heb. 7:3

Article 11: The Deity of the Holy Spirit
We believe and confess also
that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally
from the Father and the Son—
neither made,
nor created,
nor begotten,
but only proceeding
from the two of them.
In regard to order,
the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity—
of one and the same essence,
and majesty,
and glory,
with the Father and the Son,

being true and eternal God,
as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

Article 12: The Creation of All Things
We believe that the Father,
when it seemed good to him,
created heaven and earth and all other creatures
from nothing,
by the Word—
that is to say,
by the Son.

God has given all creatures
their being, form, and appearance
and their various functions
for serving their Creator.

Even now
God also sustains and governs them all,
according to his eternal providence
and by his infinite power,
that they may serve humanity,
in order that humanity may serve God.

God has also created the angels good,
that they might be messengers of God
and serve the elect.

Some of them have fallen
from the excellence in which God created them
into eternal perdition;
and the others have persisted and remained
in their original state,
by the grace of God.

The devils and evil spirits are so corrupt
that they are enemies of God
and of everything good.
They lie in wait for the church
and every member of it
like thieves,
with all their power,
to destroy and spoil everything
by their deceptions.

So then,
by their own wickedness
they are condemned to everlasting damnation,
daily awaiting their torments.

For that reason
we detest the error of the Sadducees,
who deny that there are spirits and angels,
and also the error of the Manicheans,
who say that the devils originated by themselves,
being evil by nature,
without having been corrupted.

Article 13: The Doctrine of God's Providence
We believe that this good God,
after creating all things,
did not abandon them to chance or fortune
but leads and governs them
according to his holy will,
in such a way that nothing happens in this world
without God's orderly arrangement.

Yet God is not the author of,
and cannot be charged with,
the sin that occurs.
For God's power and goodness
are so great and incomprehensible
that God arranges and does his works very well and justly
even when the devils and the wicked act unjustly.

We do not wish to inquire
    with undue curiosity
into what God does that surpasses human understanding
    and is beyond our ability to comprehend.
But in all humility and reverence
we adore the just judgments of God,
which are hidden from us,
    being content to be Christ's disciples,
    so as to learn only what God shows us in the Word,
    without going beyond those limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort
since it teaches us
that nothing can happen to us by chance
but only by the arrangement of our gracious
heavenly Father,
who watches over us with fatherly care,
sustaining all creatures under his lordship,
so that not one of the hairs on our heads
(for they are all numbered)
nor even a little bird
can fall to the ground
without the will of our Father.[20]

In this thought we rest,
knowing that God holds in check
the devils and all our enemies,
    who cannot hurt us
    without divine permission and will.

    For that reason we reject
    the damnable error of the Epicureans,
    who say that God does not get involved in anything
    and leaves everything to chance.

[20] Matt. 10:29-30

Article 14: The Creation and Fall of Humanity
We believe
that God created human beings from the dust of the earth
and made and formed them in his image and likeness—
    good, just, and holy;
    able by the divine will to conform
    in all things
    to the will of God.

But when they were in honor
they did not understand it[21]
and did not recognize their excellence.
But they subjected themselves willingly to sin
and consequently to death and the curse,
lending their ear to the word of the devil.

For they transgressed the commandment of life,
which they had received,
and by their sin they separated themselves from God,
who was their true life,
having corrupted their entire nature.

So they made themselves guilty
and subject to physical and spiritual death,
having become wicked,
perverse,
and corrupt in all their ways.
They lost all their excellent gifts
which they had received from God,
and retained none of them
except for small traces
which are enough to make them
inexcusable.

Moreover, all the light in us is turned to darkness,
as the Scripture teaches us:
"The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it."[22]
Here John calls the human race "darkness."

Therefore we reject everything taught to the contrary
concerning human free will,
since humans are nothing but the slaves of sin
and cannot do a thing
unless it is given them from heaven.[23]

For who can boast of being able
to do anything good by oneself,
since Christ says,
"No one can come to me
unless drawn by the Father who sent me"?[24]

Who can glory in their own will
when they understand that "the mind of the flesh
is hostile to God"?[25]
Who can speak of their own knowledge
in view of the fact that "those who are unspiritual
do not understand the gifts of God's Spirit"?[26]

In short,
who can produce a single thought,
since he knows that we are not able to think a thing
about ourselves,
by ourselves,
but that "our competence is from God"?[27]

And therefore,
what the apostle says
ought rightly to stand fixed and firm:
"God works within us
both to will and to do
according to God's good pleasure."[28]

For there is no understanding nor will
conforming to God's understanding and will
apart from Christ's involvement,
as he teaches us when he says,
"Apart from me you can do nothing."[29]

[21] Ps. 49:20
[22] John 1:5
[23] John 3:27
[24] John 6:44
[25] Rom. 8:7
[26] 1 Cor. 2:14
[27] 2 Cor. 3:5
[28] Phil. 2:13
[29] John 15:5

Article 15: The Doctrine of Original Sin
We believe
that by the disobedience of Adam and Eve
original sin has been spread
through the whole human race.

It is a corruption of all human nature—
an inherited depravity which even infects small infants
in their mother's womb,
and the root which produces in humanity
every sort of sin.
It is therefore so vile and enormous in God's sight
that it is enough to condemn the human race,
and it is not abolished
or wholly uprooted
even by baptism,
seeing that sin constantly boils forth
as though from a contaminated spring.

Nevertheless,
it is not imputed to God's children
for their condemnation
but is forgiven
by his grace and mercy—
not to put them to sleep
but so that the awareness of this corruption
might often make believers groan
as they long to be set free
from the "body of this death."[30]

Therefore we reject the error of the Pelagians
who say that this sin is nothing else than a matter of imitation.

[30] Rom. 7:24

Article 16: The Doctrine of Election
We believe that—
all Adam and Eve's descendants having thus fallen
into perdition and ruin
by the sin of the first pair—
God showed himself to be as he is:
merciful and just.

God is merciful
in withdrawing and saving from this perdition those who,
in the eternal and unchangeable divine counsel,
have been elected and chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord
by his pure goodness,
without any consideration of their works.

God is just
in leaving the others in their ruin and fall
into which they plunged themselves.

Article 17: The Recovery of Fallen Humanity
We believe that our good God,
by marvelous divine wisdom and goodness,
seeing that humans had plunged themselves in this manner
into both physical and spiritual death
and made themselves completely miserable,
set out to find them,
though humans,
trembling all over,
were fleeing from the divine presence.

And God comforted them,
promising to give them his Son,
born of a woman,[31]
to crush the head of the serpent,[32]
and to make them blessed.

[31] Gal. 4:4
[32] Gen. 3:15

Article 18: The Incarnation
So then we confess that God fulfilled the promise
made to the early fathers and mothers
by the mouth of the holy prophets
when sending the only and eternal Son of God
into the world
at the time appointed.

The Son took the "form of a slave"
and was made in "human form,"[33]
truly assuming a real human nature,
with all its weaknesses,
except for sin;
being conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
without male participation.

And Christ not only assumed human nature
as far as the body is concerned
but also a real human soul,
in order to be a real human being.
For since the soul had been lost as well as the body
Christ had to assume them both
to save them both together.

Therefore we confess,
(against the heresy of the Anabaptists
who deny that Christ assumed
human flesh from his mother)
that Christ "shared the very flesh and blood of children";[34]
being the "fruit of the loins" of David "according to the flesh,"[35]
"descended from David" according to the flesh;[36]
the "fruit of the womb" of the virgin Mary;[37]
born of a woman;[38]
the seed of David;[39]
the "root of Jesse";[40]
descended from Judah,[41]
having descended from the Jews according to the flesh;
descended from Abraham—
having assumed descent from Abraham and Sara,
and was "made like his brothers and sisters,"
yet without sin.[42]

In this way Christ is truly our Immanuel—
that is: "God with us."[43]

[33] Phil. 2:7
[34] Heb. 2:14
[35] Acts 2:30
[36] Rom. 1:3
[37] Luke 1:42
[38] Gal. 4:4
[39] 2 Tim. 2:8
[40] Rom. 15:12

[41] Heb. 7:14
[42] Heb. 2:17; 4:15
[43] Matt. 1:23

Article 19: The Two Natures of Christ
We believe that by being thus conceived
the person of the Son has been inseparably united
and joined together
with human nature,
in such a way that there are not two Sons of God,
nor two persons,
but two natures united in a single person,
with each nature retaining its own distinct properties.

Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated,
without beginning of days or end of life,[44]
filling heaven and earth.

Christ's human nature has not lost its properties
but continues to have those of a creature—
it has a beginning of days;
it is of a finite nature
and retains all that belongs to a real body.
And even though he,
by his resurrection,
gave it immortality,
that nonetheless did not change
the reality of his human nature;
for our salvation and resurrection
depend also on the reality of his body.

But these two natures
are so united together in one person
that they are not even separated by his death.

So then,
what he committed to his Father when he died
was a real human spirit which left his body.
But meanwhile his divine nature remained
united with his human nature
even when he was lying in the grave;
and his deity never ceased to be in him,
just as it was in him when he was a little child,
though for a while it did not so reveal itself.

These are the reasons why we confess him
to be true God and truly human—
true God in order to conquer death
by his power,
and truly human that he might die for us
in the weakness of his flesh.

[44] Heb. 7:3

Article 20: The Justice and Mercy of God in Christ
We believe that God—
who is perfectly merciful
and also very just—
sent the Son to assume the nature
in which the disobedience had been committed,
in order to bear in it the punishment of sin
by his most bitter passion and death.

So God made known his justice toward his Son,
who was charged with our sin,
and he poured out his goodness and mercy on us,
who are guilty and worthy of damnation,
giving to us his Son to die,
by a most perfect love,
and raising him to life
for our justification,
in order that by him
we might have immortality
and eternal life.

Article 21: The Atonement
We believe
that Jesus Christ is a high priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek—
made such by an oath—
and that he presented himself
in our name
before his Father,
to appease his Father's wrath
with full satisfaction
by offering himself
on the tree of the cross
and pouring out his precious blood
for the cleansing of our sins,
as the prophets had predicted.

For it is written
that "the punishment that made us whole"
was placed on the Son of God
and that "by his bruises we are healed."
He was "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter";
he was "numbered with the transgressors"[45]
and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate,
though Pilate had declared
that he was innocent.

So he paid back
what he had not stolen,[46]
and he suffered—
"the righteous for the unrighteous,"[47]
in both his body and his soul—

in such a way that
when he sensed the horrible punishment
required by our sins
"his sweat became like great drops of blood
falling down on the ground."[48]
He cried, "My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me?"[49]

And he endured all this
for the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore we rightly say with Paul that
we know nothing "except Jesus Christ and him crucified";[50]
we "regard everything as loss
because of the surpassing value
of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord."[51]
We find all comforts in his wounds
and have no need to seek or invent any other means
to reconcile ourselves with God
than this one and only sacrifice,
once made,
which renders believers perfect
forever.

This is also why
the angel of God called him Jesus—
that is, "Savior"—
    because he would save his people
    from their sins.[52]

[45] Isa. 53:4-12
[46] Ps. 69:4
[47] 1 Pet. 3:18
[48] Luke 22:44
[49] Matt. 27:46
[50] 1 Cor. 2:2
[51] Phil. 3:8
[52] Matt. 1:21

Article 22: The Righteousness of Faith
We believe that
for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery
the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith
that embraces Jesus Christ,
    with all his merits,
and makes him its own,
and no longer looks for anything
    apart from him.

For it must necessarily follow
that either all that is required for our salvation
is not in Christ or,
if all is in him,
then those who have Christ by faith
have his salvation entirely.

Therefore,
to say that Christ is not enough
but that something else is needed as well
is a most enormous blasphemy against God—
    for it then would follow
    that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior.
And therefore we justly say with Paul
that we are justified "by faith alone"
or "by faith apart from works."[53]

However,
we do not mean,
properly speaking,
that it is faith itself that justifies us—
    for faith is only the instrument
    by which we embrace Christ,
    our righteousness.

But Jesus Christ is our righteousness
    in making available to us all his merits
    and all the holy works he has done
    for us and in our place.
And faith is the instrument
    that keeps us in communion with him
    and with all his benefits.

When those benefits are made ours
they are more than enough to absolve us
of our sins.

[53] Rom. 3:28

Article 23: The Justification of Sinners
We believe
that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins
because of Jesus Christ,
and that in it our righteousness before God is contained,
    as David and Paul teach us
    when they declare those people blessed
    to whom God grants righteousness
    apart from works.[54]

And the same apostle says
that we are "justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."[55]
And therefore we cling to this foundation,
which is firm forever,
    giving all glory to God,
    humbling ourselves,
    and recognizing ourselves as we are;
    not claiming a thing for ourselves or our merits
    and leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified,
    which is ours when we believe in him.

That is enough to cover all our sins
and to make us confident,
freeing the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror
of God's approach,
without doing what our first parents, Adam and Eve, did,
who trembled as they tried to cover themselves
with fig leaves.

In fact,
if we had to appear before God relying—
no matter how little—
on ourselves or some other creature,
then, alas, we would be swallowed up.

Therefore everyone must say with David:
"Lord, do not enter into judgment with your servant,
for no one living is righteous before you."[56]

[54] Ps. 32:1; Rom. 4:6
[55] Rom. 3:24
[56] Ps. 143:2

Article 24: The Sanctification of Sinners
We believe that this true faith,
produced in us by the hearing of God's Word
and by the work of the Holy Spirit,
regenerates us and makes us new creatures, [57]
causing us to live a new life[58]
and freeing us from the slavery of sin.

Therefore,
far from making people cold
toward living in a pious and holy way,
this justifying faith,
quite to the contrary,
so works within them that
apart from it
they will never do a thing out of love for God
but only out of love for themselves
and fear of being condemned.

So then, it is impossible
for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being,
seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith
but of what Scripture calls
"faith working through love,"[59]
which moves people to do by themselves
the works that God has commanded
in the Word.

These works,
proceeding from the good root of faith,
are good and acceptable to God,
since they are all sanctified by God's grace.

Yet they do not count toward our justification—
for by faith in Christ we are justified,
even before we do good works.
Otherwise they could not be good,
any more than the fruit of a tree could be good
if the tree is not good in the first place.

So then, we do good works,
but not for merit—
for what would we merit?
Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do,
and not God to us,
since God "is at work in us, enabling us both
to will and to work for his good pleasure"[60]—
thus keeping in mind what is written:
"When you have done all that you were ordered to do,
say, 'We are worthless slaves;
we have done only what we ought to have done.'"[61]

Yet we do not wish to deny
that God rewards good works—
but it is by grace
that God crowns these gifts.

Moreover,
although we do good works
we do not base our salvation on them;
for we cannot do any work
that is not defiled by our flesh
and also worthy of punishment.
And even if we could point to one,
memory of a single sin is enough
for God to reject that work.

So we would always be in doubt,
tossed back and forth
without any certainty,
and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly
if they did not rest on the merit
of the suffering and death of our Savior.

[57] 2 Cor. 5:17
[58] Rom. 6:4
[59] Gal. 5:6
[60] Phil. 2:13
[61] Luke 17:10

Article 25: The Fulfillment of the Law
We believe
that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended
with the coming of Christ,
and that all foreshadowings have come to an end,
so that the use of them ought to be abolished
among Christians.

Yet the truth and substance of these things
remain for us in Jesus Christ,
in whom they have been fulfilled.

Nevertheless,
we continue to use the witnesses
drawn from the law and prophets
to confirm us in the gospel
and to regulate our lives with full integrity
for the glory of God,
according to the will of God.

Article 26: The Intercession of Christ
We believe that we have no access to God
except through the one and only Mediator and Intercessor,
"Jesus Christ the righteous," [62]
who
therefore was made human,
uniting together the divine and human natures,
so that we human beings might have access to the divine Majesty.
Otherwise we would have no access.

But this Mediator,
whom the Father has appointed between himself and us,
ought not terrify us by his greatness,
so that we have to look for another one,
according to our fancy.
For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth
is there anyone who loves us
more than Jesus Christ does.
Although he was "in the form of God,"
Christ nevertheless "emptied himself,"
taking "human form" and "the form of a slave" for us;[63]
and he made himself "like his brothers and sisters in every respect."[64]

Suppose we had to find another intercessor.
Who would love us more than he who gave his life for us,
even though "we were his enemies"?[65]
And suppose we had to find one who has prestige and power.
Who has as much of these as he who is seated
at the right hand of the Father,[66]
and who has "all authority
in heaven and on earth"?[67]
And who will be heard more readily
than God's own dearly beloved Son?

So, the practice of honoring the saints as intercessors
in fact dishonors them
because of its misplaced faith.
That was something the saints never did nor asked for,
but which in keeping with their duty,
as appears from their writings,
they consistently refused.

We should not plead here
that we are unworthy—
for it is not a question of offering our prayers
on the basis of our own dignity
but only on the basis of the excellence and dignity
of Jesus Christ,
whose righteousness is ours by faith.

Since the apostle for good reason
wants us to get rid of this foolish fear—
or rather, this unbelief—
he says to us that Jesus Christ
was made like "his brothers and sisters in every respect,
that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest"
to purify the sins of the people.[68]
For since he suffered,
being tempted,
he is also able to help those
who are tempted.[69]

And further,
to encourage us more
to approach him
he says,
"Since, then, we have a great high priest
who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,
let us hold fast to our confession.
For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but we have one who in every respect has been tempted,
as we are,
yet without sin.
Let us therefore approach
the throne of grace
with boldness,
so that we may receive mercy
and find grace,
to help in time of need."[70]

The same apostle says that
we "have confidence to enter the sanctuary
by the blood of Jesus."
"Let us approach with a true heart
in full assurance of faith...."[71]

Likewise,
Christ "holds his priesthood permanently….
Consequently, he is able for all time to save
those who approach God through him,
since he always lives
to make intercession for them."[72]

What more do we need?
For Christ himself declares:
"I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father
except through me."[73]
Why should we seek
another intercessor?

Since it has pleased God
to give us the Son as our Intercessor,
let us not leave him for another—
    or rather seek, without ever finding.
For, when giving Christ to us,
God knew well that we were sinners.

Therefore,
in following the command of Christ
we call on the heavenly Father
through Christ,
our only Mediator,
as we are taught by the Lord's Prayer,
    being assured that we shall obtain
    all we ask of the Father
    in his name.

[62] 1 John 2:1
[63] Phil. 2:6-8
[64] Heb. 2:17
[65] Rom. 5:10
[66] Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3
[67] Matt. 28:18
[68] Heb. 2:17
[69] Heb. 2:18
[70] Heb. 4:14-16
[71] Heb. 10:19, 22
[72] Heb. 7:24-25
[73] John 14:6

Article 27: The Holy Catholic Church
We believe and confess
one single catholic or universal church—
    a holy congregation and gathering
    of true Christian believers,
        awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ
        being washed by his blood,
        and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This church has existed from the beginning of the world
and will last until the end,
    as appears from the fact
    that Christ is eternal King
    who cannot be without subjects.

And this holy church is preserved by God
against the rage of the whole world,
even though for a time
it may appear very small
to human eyes—
as though it were snuffed out.

For example,
during the very dangerous time of Ahab
the Lord preserved for himself seven thousand
who did not bend their knees to Baal.[74]

And so this holy church
is not confined,
bound,
or limited to a certain place or certain people.
But it is spread and dispersed
throughout the entire world,
though still joined and united
in heart and will,
in one and the same Spirit,
by the power of faith.

[74] 1 Kings 19:18

Article 28: The Obligations of Church Members
We believe that
since this holy assembly and congregation
is the gathering of those who are saved
and there is no salvation apart from it,
people ought not to withdraw from it,
content to be by themselves,
regardless of their status or condition.

But all people are obliged
to join and unite with it,
keeping the unity of the church
by submitting to its instruction and discipline,
by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ,
and by serving to build up one another,
according to the gifts God has given them
as members of each other
in the same body.

And to preserve this unity more effectively,
it is the duty of all believers,
according to God's Word,
to separate themselves
from those who do not belong to the church,
in order to join this assembly
wherever God has established it,
even if civil authorities and royal decrees forbid
and death and physical punishment result.

And so,
all who withdraw from the church
or do not join it
act contrary to God's ordinance.

Article 29: The Marks of the True Church
We believe that we ought to discern
diligently and very carefully,
by the Word of God,
what is the true church—
for all sects in the world today
claim for themselves the name of "the church."

We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites
who are mixed among the good in the church
and who nonetheless are not part of it,
even though they are physically there.
But we are speaking of distinguishing
the body and fellowship of the true church
from all sects that call themselves "the church."

The true church can be recognized
if it has the following marks:
The church engages in the pure preaching
of the gospel;
it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments
as Christ instituted them;
it practices church discipline
for correcting faults.
In short, it governs itself
according to the pure Word of God,
rejecting all things contrary to it
and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head.
By these marks one can be assured
of recognizing the true church—
and no one ought to be separated from it.

As for those who can belong to the church,
we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians:
namely by faith,
and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness,
once they have received the one and only Savior,
Jesus Christ.
They love the true God and their neighbors,
without turning to the right or left,
and they crucify the flesh and its works.

Though great weakness remains in them,
they fight against it
by the Spirit
all the days of their lives,
appealing constantly
to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus,
in whom they have forgiveness of their sins,
through faith in him.

As for the false church,
it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances
than to the Word of God;
it does not want to subject itself
to the yoke of Christ;
it does not administer the sacraments
as Christ commanded in his Word;
it rather adds to them or subtracts from them
as it pleases;
it bases itself on humans,
more than on Jesus Christ;
it persecutes those
who live holy lives according to the Word of God
and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry.

These two churches
are easy to recognize
and thus to distinguish
from each other.

Article 30: The Government of the Church
We believe that this true church
ought to be governed according to the spiritual order
that our Lord has taught us in his Word.
There should be ministers or pastors
to preach the Word of God
and administer the sacraments.
There should also be elders and deacons,
along with the pastors,
to make up the council of the church.

By this means
true religion is preserved;
true doctrine is able to take its course;
and evil people are corrected spiritually and held in check,
so that also the poor
and all the afflicted
may be helped and comforted
according to their need.

By this means
everything will be done well
and in good order
in the church,
when such persons are elected
who are faithful
and are chosen according to the rule
that Paul gave to Timothy.[75]

[75] 1 Tim. 3

Article 31: The Officers of the Church
We believe that
ministers of the Word of God, elders, and deacons
ought to be chosen to their offices
by a legitimate election of the church,
with prayer in the name of the Lord,
and in good order,
as the Word of God teaches.

So all must be careful
not to push themselves forward improperly,
but must wait for God's call,
so that they may be assured of their calling
and be certain that they are
chosen by the Lord.

As for the ministers of the Word,
they all have the same power and authority,
no matter where they may be,
since they are all servants of Jesus Christ,
the only universal bishop,
and the only head of the church.

Moreover,
to keep God's holy order
from being violated or despised,
we say that everyone ought,
as much as possible,
to hold the ministers of the Word and elders of the church
in special esteem,
because of the work they do,
and be at peace with them,
without grumbling, quarreling, or fighting.

Article 32: The Order and Discipline of the Church
We also believe that
although it is useful and good
for those who govern the churches
to establish and set up
a certain order among themselves
for maintaining the body of the church,
they ought always to guard against deviating
from what Christ,
our only Master,
has ordained
for us.

Therefore we reject all human innovations
and all laws imposed on us,
in our worship of God,
which bind and force our consciences
in any way.

So we accept only what is proper
to maintain harmony and unity
and to keep all in obedience
to God.

To that end excommunication,
with all it involves,
according to the Word of God,
is required.

Article 33: The Sacraments
We believe that our good God,
mindful of our crudeness and weakness,
has ordained sacraments for us
    to seal his promises in us,
    to pledge good will and grace toward us,
    and also to nourish and sustain our faith.

God has added these to the Word of the gospel
to represent better to our external senses
both what God enables us to understand by the Word
and what he does inwardly in our hearts,
    confirming in us
    the salvation he imparts to us.

For they are visible signs and seals
of something internal and invisible,
    by means of which God works in us
    through the power of the Holy Spirit.
So they are not empty and hollow signs
to fool and deceive us,
    for their truth is Jesus Christ,
    without whom they would be nothing.

Moreover,
we are satisfied with the number of sacraments
that Christ our Master has ordained for us.
There are only two:
    the sacrament of baptism
    and the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ.

Article 34: The Sacrament of Baptism
We believe and confess that Jesus Christ,
in whom the law is fulfilled,
has by his shed blood
put an end to every other shedding of blood,
    which anyone might do or wish to do
    in order to atone or satisfy for sins.

Having abolished circumcision,
which was done with blood,
Christ established in its place
the sacrament of baptism.

By it we are received into God's church
and set apart from all other people and alien religions,
that we may wholly belong to him
whose mark and sign we bear.
Baptism also witnesses to us
that God, being our gracious Father,
will be our God forever.

Therefore Christ has commanded
that all those who belong to him
be baptized with pure water
"in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit."[76]

In this way God signifies to us
that just as water washes away the dirt of the body
when it is poured on us
and also is seen on the bodies of those who are baptized
when it is sprinkled on them,
so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally,
in the soul,
by the Holy Spirit.
It washes and cleanses it from its sins
and transforms us from being the children of wrath
into the children of God.

This does not happen by the physical water
but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God,
who is our Red Sea,
through which we must pass
to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh,
who is the devil,
and to enter the spiritual land
of Canaan.

So ministers,
as far as their work is concerned,
give us the sacrament and what is visible,
but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—
namely the invisible gifts and graces;
washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls
of all filth and unrighteousness;
renewing our hearts and filling them
with all comfort;
giving us true assurance
of his fatherly goodness;
clothing us with the "new self"
and stripping off the "old self
with its practices."[77]

For this reason we believe that
anyone who aspires to reach eternal life
ought to be baptized only once

without ever repeating it—
for we cannot be born twice.
Yet this baptism is profitable
not only when the water is on us
and when we receive it
but throughout our
entire lives.

For that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists
who are not content with a single baptism
once received
and also condemn the baptism
of the children of believers.
We believe our children ought to be baptized
and sealed with the sign of the covenant,
as little children were circumcised in Israel
on the basis of the same promises
made to our children.

And truly,
Christ has shed his blood no less
for washing the little children of believers
than he did for adults.

Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament
of what Christ has done for them,
just as the Lord commanded in the law that
by offering a lamb for them
the sacrament of the suffering and death of Christ
would be granted them
shortly after their birth.
This was the sacrament of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore,
baptism does for our children
what circumcision did for the Jewish people.
That is why Paul calls baptism
the "circumcision of Christ."[78]

[76] Matt. 28:19
[77] Col.3:9
[78] Col. 2:11

Article 35: The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper
We believe and confess
that our Savior Jesus Christ
has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper
to nourish and sustain those
who are already regenerated and ingrafted
into his family,
which is his church.

Now those who are born again have two lives in them.
The one is physical and temporal—
they have it from the moment of their first birth,
and it is common to all.
The other is spiritual and heavenly,
and is given them in their second birth—
it comes through the Word of the gospel
in the communion of the body of Christ;
and this life is common to God's elect only.

Thus, to support the physical and earthly life
God has prescribed for us
an appropriate earthly and material bread,
which is as common to all people
as life itself.
But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life
that belongs to believers,
God has sent a living bread
that came down from heaven:
namely Jesus Christ,
who nourishes and maintains
the spiritual life of believers
when eaten—
that is, when appropriated
and received spiritually
by faith.

To represent to us
this spiritual and heavenly bread
Christ has instituted
an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body
and wine as the sacrament of his blood.
He did this to testify to us that
just as truly as we take and hold the sacrament in our hands
and eat and drink it with our mouths,
by which our life is then sustained,
so truly we receive into our souls,
for our spiritual life,
the true body and true blood of Christ,
our only Savior.
We receive these by faith,
which is the hand and mouth of our souls.

Now it is certain
that Jesus Christ did not prescribe
his sacraments for us in vain,
since he works in us all he represents
by these holy signs,
although the manner in which he does it
goes beyond our understanding
and is incomprehensible to us,
just as the operation of God's Spirit
is hidden and incomprehensible.

Yet we do not go wrong when we say
that what is eaten is Christ's own natural body
and what is drunk is his own blood—
but the manner in which we eat it
is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit
through faith.

In that way Jesus Christ remains always seated
at the right hand of God the Father
in heaven—
but he never refrains on that account
to communicate himself to us
through faith.

This banquet is a spiritual table
at which Christ communicates himself to us
with all his benefits.
At that table he makes us enjoy himself
as much as the merits of his suffering and death,
as he nourishes, strengthens, and comforts
our poor, desolate souls
    by the eating of his flesh,
and relieves and renews them
    by the drinking of his blood.

Moreover,
though the sacraments and what they signify are joined together,
not all receive both of them.
The wicked certainly take the sacrament,
to their condemnation,
but do not receive the truth of the sacrament,
    just as Judas and Simon the Sorcerer both indeed
    received the sacrament,
    but not Christ,
    who was signified by it.
    He is communicated only to believers.

Finally,
with humility and reverence
we receive the holy sacrament
in the gathering of God's people,
    as we engage together,
    with thanksgiving,
    in a holy remembrance
    of the death of Christ our Savior,
    and as we thus confess
    our faith and Christian religion.
Therefore none should come to this table
without examining themselves carefully,
    lest by eating this bread
    and drinking this cup
    they "eat and drink judgment against themselves."[79]

In short,
by the use of this holy sacrament
we are moved to a fervent love
of God and our neighbors.

Therefore we reject
as desecrations of the sacraments
all the muddled ideas and condemnable inventions
that people have added and mixed in with them.
And we say that we should be content with the procedure
that Christ and the apostles have taught us
and speak of these things
as they have spoken of them.

[79] 1 Cor. 11:29

Article 36: The Civil Government
We believe that
because of the depravity of the human race,
our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers.
God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies
so that human lawlessness may be restrained
and that everything may be conducted in good order
among human beings.

For that purpose God has placed the sword
in the hands of the government,
to punish evil people
and protect the good.

And the government's task is not limited
to caring for and watching over the public domain
but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry,
with a view to removing and destroying
all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist;
to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ;
and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere;
to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone,
as required in God's Word.

Moreover everyone,
regardless of status, condition, or rank,
must be subject to the government,
and pay taxes,
and hold its representatives in honor and respect,
and obey them in all things that are not in conflict
with God's Word,
praying for them
that the Lord may be willing to lead them
in all their ways
and that we may live a peaceful and quiet life
in all piety and decency.

And on this matter we reject the Anabaptists, anarchists,
and in general all those who want
to reject the authorities and civil officers
and to subvert justice
    by introducing common ownership of goods
    and corrupting the moral order
        that God has established among human beings.

Article 37: The Last Judgment
Finally we believe,
according to God's Word,
that when the time appointed by the Lord is come
(which is unknown to all creatures)
and the number of the elect is complete,
our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven,
    bodily and visibly,
as he ascended,
    with great glory and majesty,
to declare himself the judge
    of the living and the dead.
He will burn this old world,
    in fire and flame,
    in order to cleanse it.

Then all human creatures will appear in person
before the great judge—
    men, women, and children,
    who have lived from the beginning until the end of the world.

They will be summoned there
"with the archangel's call
and with the sound of God's trumpet."[80]

For all those who died before that time
will be raised from the earth,
    their spirits being joined and united
    with their own bodies
    in which they lived.
And as for those who are still alive,
they will not die like the others
but will be changed "in the twinkling of an eye"
from perishable to imperishable.[81]

Then the books (that is, the consciences) will be opened,
and the dead will be judged
    according to the things they did in the world,[82]
    whether good or evil.
Indeed, all people will give account
of all the idle words they have spoken,[83]
    which the world regards
    as only playing games.
And then the secrets and hypocrisies of all people
will be publicly uncovered
in the sight of all.

Therefore,
with good reason
the thought of this judgment
is horrible and dreadful
to wicked and evil people.
But it is very pleasant
and a great comfort
to the righteous and elect,
    since their total redemption
    will then be accomplished.
They will then receive the fruits of their labor
    and of the trouble they have suffered;
their innocence will be openly recognized by all;
and they will see the terrible vengeance
    that God will bring on the evil ones
    who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them
      in this world.

The evil ones will be convicted
    by the witness of their own consciences,
and shall be made immortal—
    but only to be tormented
    in "the eternal fire
      prepared for the devil and his angels."[84]

In contrast,
the faithful and elect will be crowned
    with glory and honor.
The Son of God will profess their names[85]
    before God his Father and the holy and elect angels;
all tears will be wiped from their eyes;[86]
and their cause—
    at present condemned as heretical and evil
    by many judges and civil officers—
will be acknowledged as the cause of the Son of God.

And as a gracious reward
the Lord will make them possess a glory
such as the human heart
could never imagine.

So we look forward to that great day with longing
in order to enjoy fully
the promises of God in Christ Jesus,
our Lord.

[80] 1 Thess. 4:16
[81] 1 Cor. 15:51-53
[82] Rev. 20:12
[83] Matt. 12:36
[84] Matt. 25:41
[85] Matt. 10:32
[86] Rev. 7:17

Introduction to the Canons of Dort

The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands is popularly known as the Canons of Dort. It consists of statements of doctrine adopted by the great Synod of Dort, which met in the city of Dordrecht in 1618-19. Although this was a national synod of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, it had an international character, since it was composed not only of Dutch delegates but also of twenty-six delegates from eight foreign countries.

The Synod of Dort was held in order to settle a serious controversy in the Dutch churches initiated by the rise of Arminianism. Jacob Arminius, a theological professor at Leiden University, questioned the teaching of Calvin and his followers on a number of important points. After Arminius's death, his own followers presented their views on five of these points in the Remonstrance of 1610. In this document and in later more explicit writings, the Arminians taught election based on foreseen faith, the universal application of Christ's atonement available to all who freely choose to accept it, limited human depravity, the resistibility of God's grace, and the possibility of a fall from salvation. In the Canons the Synod of Dort rejected these views and set forth the Reformed teaching on these points with the purpose of offering a deeper assurance of salvation to believers in accordance with the teaching of the Scriptures.

The Canons are thus unique among the Reformed confessions because of their original purpose as a judicial decision on the doctrinal points in dispute during the Arminian controversy. The original preface called them a "judgment, in which both the true view, agreeing with God's Word, concerning the aforesaid five points of doctrine, is explained, and the false view, disagreeing with God's Word, is rejected." The Canons also have a narrower scope than the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism in that they do not cover the whole range of doctrine, but focus on the five points of doctrine in dispute.

Although in form there are only four points in the Canons of Dort, we speak properly of five points, because the Canons were structured to correspond to the five articles of the 1610 Remonstrance. Main Points Three and Four were combined into one, always designated as Main Point Three/Four. Each of the main points consists of a positive and a negative part, the former being an exposition of the Reformed doctrine on the subject, the latter a repudiation of the corresponding errors. While the Reformed Church in America does not give confessional status to the Rejection of Errors, it nevertheless recognizes that the rejections help interpret the Canons by highlighting the specific errors addressed.

The biblical quotations in the Canons are translations from the original Latin and so do not always correspond to current versions. Though not in the original text, subheadings have been added to the positive articles and to the conclusion in order to facilitate study of the Canons.

THE CANONS OF DORT

Formally Titled
The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands

The First Main Point of Doctrine
Divine Election and Reprobation

The Judgment Concerning Divine Predestination Which the Synod Declares to Be in Agreement with the Word of God and Accepted Till Now in the Reformed Churches, Set Forth in Several Articles

Article 1: God's Right to Condemn All People
Since all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death, God would have done no one an injustice if it had been his will to leave the entire human race in sin and under the curse, and to condemn them on account of their sin. As the apostle says: "The whole world is liable to the condemnation of God" (Rom. 3:19), "All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Article 2: The Manifestation of God's Love
But this is how God showed his love: he sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (1 John 4:9, John 3:16).

Article 3: The Preaching of the Gospel
In order that people may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends messengers of this very joyful message to the people and at the time he wills. By this ministry people are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. For "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without someone preaching? And how shall they preach unless they have been sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15).

Article 4: A Twofold Response to the Gospel
God's wrath remains on those who do not believe this gospel. But those who do accept it and embrace Jesus the Savior with a true and living faith are delivered through him from God's wrath and from destruction, and receive the gift of eternal life.

Article 5: The Sources of Unbelief and of Faith
The cause or blame for this unbelief, as well as for all other sins, is not at all in God, but in humanity. Faith in Jesus Christ, however, and salvation through him is a free gift of God. As Scripture says, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is a gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Likewise: "It has been freely given to you to believe in Christ" (Phil. 1:29).

Article 6: God's Eternal Decree
The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from his eternal decree. For "all his works are known to God from eternity" (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). In accordance with this decree God graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of the elect and inclines them to believe, but by a just judgment God leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen. And in this especially is disclosed to us God's act—unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just—of distinguishing between people equally lost. This is the well-known decree of election and reprobation revealed in God's Word. The wicked, impure, and unstable distort this decree to their own ruin, but it provides holy and godly souls with comfort beyond words.

Article 7: Election
Election is God's unchangeable purpose by which he did the following:
Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, God chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. God did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation.

And so God decreed to give to Christ those chosen for salvation, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through the Word and Spirit. In other words, God decreed to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of the Son, to glorify them.

God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of God's glorious grace.

As Scripture says, "God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him with love; he predestined us whom he adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he freely made us pleasing to himself in his beloved" (Eph. 1:4-6). And elsewhere, "Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

Article 8: A Single Decree of Election
This election is not of many kinds, but one and the same for all who were to be saved in the Old and the New Testament. For Scripture declares that there is a single good pleasure, purpose, and plan of God's will, by which he chose us from eternity both to grace and to glory, both to salvation and to the way of salvation, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in.

Article 9: Election Not Based on Foreseen Faith
This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on. Accordingly, election is the source of every saving good. Faith, holiness, and the other saving gifts, and at last eternal life itself, flow forth from election as its fruits and effects. As the apostle says, "He chose us" (not because we were, but) "so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

Article 10: Election Based on God's Good Pleasure
But the cause of this undeserved election is exclusively the good pleasure of God. This does not involve God's choosing certain human qualities or actions from among all those possible as a condition of salvation, but rather involves adopting certain particular persons from among the common mass of sinners as God's own possession. As Scripture says, "When the children were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad…she (Rebecca) was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom. 9:11-13). Also, "All who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

Article 11: Election Unchangeable
Just as God is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing, and almighty, so the election made by him can neither be suspended nor altered, revoked, or annulled; neither can God's chosen ones be cast off, nor their number reduced.

Article 12: The Assurance of Election
Assurance of their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation is given to the chosen in due time, though by various stages and in differing measure. Such assurance comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word—such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on.

Article 13: The Fruit of This Assurance
In their awareness and assurance of this election, God's children daily find greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of God's mercies, to cleanse themselves, and to give fervent love in return to the One who first so greatly loved

them. This is far from saying that this teaching concerning election, and reflection upon it, make God's children lax in observing his commandments or carnally self-assured. By God's just judgment this does usually happen to those who casually take for granted the grace of election or engage in idle and brazen talk about it but are unwilling to walk in the ways of the chosen.

Article 14: Teaching Election Properly
By God's wise plan, this teaching concerning divine election was proclaimed through the prophets, Christ himself, and the apostles, in Old and New Testament times. It was subsequently committed to writing in the Holy Scriptures. So also today in God's church, for which it was specifically intended, this teaching must be set forth with a spirit of discretion, in a godly and holy manner, at the appropriate time and place, without inquisitive searching into the ways of the Most High. This must be done for the glory of God's most holy name, and for the lively comfort of God's people.

Article 15: Reprobation
Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God's eternal election—those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decree:

to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish those who have been left in their own ways and under God's just judgment, not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice.

And this is the decree of reprobation, which does not at all make God the author of sin (a blasphemous thought!) but rather its fearful, irreproachable, just judge and avenger.

Article 16: Responses to the Teaching of Reprobation
Those who do not yet actively experience within themselves a living faith in Christ or an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ, but who nevertheless use the means by which God has promised to work these things in us—such people ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to count themselves among the reprobate; rather they ought to continue diligently in the use of the means, to desire fervently a time of more abundant grace, and to wait for it in reverence and humility. On the other hand, those who seriously desire to turn to God, to be pleasing to God alone, and to be delivered from the body of death, but are not yet able to make such progress along the way of godliness and faith as they would like—such people ought much less to stand in fear of the teaching concerning reprobation, since our merciful God has promised not to snuff out a smoldering wick or break a bruised reed.* However, those who have forgotten God and their Savior Jesus Christ and have abandoned themselves wholly to the cares of the world and the pleasures of the flesh—such people have every reason to stand in fear of this teaching, as long as they do not seriously turn to God.

*Isaiah 42:3

Article 17: The Salvation of the Infants of Believers
Since we must make judgments about God's will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which

they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.

Article 18: The Proper Attitude Toward Election and Reprobation
To those who complain about this grace of an undeserved election and about the severity of a just reprobation, we reply with the words of the apostle, "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Rom. 9:20), and with the words of our Savior, "Have I no right to do what I want with my own?" (Matt. 20:15). We, however, with reverent adoration of these secret things, cry out with the apostle: "Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond tracing out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

Rejection of Errors
Rejection of the Errors by Which the Dutch Churches Have for Some Time Been Disturbed

Having set forth the orthodox teaching concerning election and reprobation, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I
Who teach that the will of God to save those who would believe and persevere in faith and in the obedience of faith is the whole and entire decision of election to salvation, and that nothing else concerning this decision has been revealed in God's Word.

For they deceive the simple and plainly contradict Holy Scripture in its testimony that God does not only wish to save those who would believe, but that he has also from eternity chosen certain particular people to whom, rather than to others, he would within time grant faith in Christ and perseverance. As Scripture says, "I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me" (John 17:6). Likewise, "All who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48), and "He chose us before the foundation of the world so that we should be holy..." (Eph. 1:4).

II
Who teach that God's election to eternal life is of many kinds: one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and the latter in turn either incomplete, revocable, conditional, or else complete, irrevocable, and absolute. Likewise, who teach that there is one election to faith and another to salvation, so that there can be an election to justifying faith apart from a nonconditional election to salvation.

For this is an invention of the human mind, devised apart from the Scriptures, which distorts the teaching concerning election and breaks up this golden chain of salvation: "Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

III
Who teach that God's good pleasure and purpose, which Scripture mentions in its teaching of election, does not involve God's choosing certain particular people rather than others, but involves God's choosing, out of all possible conditions (including the works of the law) or out of the whole order of things, the intrinsically unworthy act of faith, as well as the imperfect obedience of faith, to be a condition of salvation; and it involves his graciously wishing to count this as perfect obedience and to look upon it as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For by this pernicious error the good pleasure of God and the merit of Christ are robbed of their effectiveness and people are drawn away, by unprofitable inquiries, from the truth of undeserved justification and from the simplicity of the Scriptures. It also gives the lie to these words of the apostle: "God called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of works, but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9).

IV
Who teach that in election to faith a prerequisite condition is that humans should rightly use the light of nature, be upright, unassuming, humble, and disposed to eternal life, as though election depended to some extent on these factors.

For this smacks of Pelagius, and it clearly calls into question the words of the apostle: "We lived at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in transgressions, made us alive with Christ, by whose grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with him and seated us with him in heaven in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages we might show the surpassing riches of his grace, according to his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith (and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God) not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:3-9).

V
Who teach that the incomplete and conditional election of particular persons to salvation occurred on the basis of a foreseen faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness, which has just begun or continued for some time; but that complete and peremptory election occurred on the basis of a foreseen perseverance to the end in faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness. And that this is the gracious and evangelical worthiness, on account of which the one who is chosen is more worthy than the one who is not chosen. And therefore that faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are not fruits or effects of an unchangeable election to glory, but indispensable conditions and causes, which are prerequisite in those who are to be chosen in the complete election, and which are foreseen as achieved in them.

This runs counter to the entire Scripture, which throughout impresses upon our ears and hearts these sayings among others: "Election is not by works, but by him who calls" (Rom. 9:11-12); "All who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48); "He chose us in himself so that we should be holy" (Eph. 1:4); "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16); If by grace, not by works (Rom. 11:6); "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son" (1 John 4:10).

VI
Who teach that not every election to salvation is unchangeable, but that some of the chosen can perish and do in fact perish eternally, with no decision of God to prevent it.

By this gross error they make God changeable, destroy the comfort of the godly concerning the steadfastness of their election, and contradict the Holy Scriptures, which teach that "the elect cannot be led astray" (Matt. 24:24), that "Christ does not lose those given to him by the Father" (John 6:39), and that "those whom God predestined, called, and justified, he also glorifies" (Rom. 8:30).

VII
Who teach that in this life there is no fruit, no awareness, and no assurance of one's

unchangeable election to glory, except as conditioned upon something changeable and contingent.

For not only is it absurd to speak of an uncertain assurance, but these things also militate against the experience of the saints, who with the apostle rejoice from an awareness of their election and sing the praises of this gift of God; who, as Christ urged, "rejoice" with his disciples "that their names have been written in heaven" (Luke 10:20); and finally who hold up against the flaming arrows of the devil's temptations the awareness of their election, with the question "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?" (Rom. 8:33).

VIII
Who teach that it was not on the basis of his just will alone that God decided to leave anyone in the fall of Adam and in the common state of sin and condemnation or to pass anyone by in the imparting of grace necessary for faith and conversion.

For these words stand fast: "He has mercy on whom he wishes, and he hardens whom he wishes" (Rom. 9:18). And also: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matt. 13:11). Likewise: "I give glory to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and have revealed them to little children; yes, Father, because that was your pleasure" (Matt. 11:25-26).

IX
Who teach that the cause for God's sending the gospel to one people rather than to another is not merely and solely God's good pleasure, but rather that one people is better and worthier than the other to whom the gospel is not communicated.

For Moses contradicts this when he addresses the people of Israel as follows: "Behold, to Jehovah your God belong the heavens and the highest heavens, the earth and whatever is in it. But Jehovah was inclined in his affection to love your ancestors alone, and chose out their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day" (Deut. 10:14-15). And also Christ: "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! for if those mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matt. 11:21).

The Second Main Point of Doctrine
Christ's Death and Human Redemption Through It

Article 1: The Punishment Which God's Justice Requires
God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. This justice requires (as God has revealed in the Word) that the sins we have committed against his infinite majesty be punished with both temporal and eternal punishments, of soul as well as body. We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is given to God's justice.

Article 2: The Satisfaction Made by Christ
Since, however, we ourselves cannot give this satisfaction or deliver ourselves from God's anger, God in boundless mercy has given us as a guarantee his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.

Article 3: The Infinite Value of Christ's Death
This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.

Article 4: Reasons for This Infinite Value
This death is of such great value and worth for the reason that the person who suffered it is—as was necessary to be our Savior—not only a true and perfectly holy human, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Another reason is that this death was accompanied by the experience of God's wrath and curse, which we by our sins had fully deserved.

Article 5: The Mandate to Proclaim the Gospel to All
Moreover, it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel.

Article 6: Unbelief, a Human Responsibility
However, that many who have been called through the gospel do not repent or believe in Christ but perish in unbelief is not because the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross is deficient or insufficient, but because they themselves are at fault.

Article 7: Faith God's Gift
But all who genuinely believe and are delivered and saved by Christ's death from their sins and from destruction receive this favor solely from God's grace—which God owes to no one—given to them in Christ from eternity.

Article 8: The Saving Effectiveness of Christ's Death
For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all the elect, in order that God might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that Christ should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death). It was also God's will that Christ should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.

Article 9: The Fulfillment of God's Plan
This plan, arising out of God's eternal love for the elect, from the beginning of the world to the present time has been powerfully carried out and will also be carried out in the future, the gates of hell seeking vainly to prevail against it. As a result, the chosen are gathered into one, all in their own time, and there is always a church of believers founded on Christ's blood, a church which steadfastly loves, persistently worships, and here and in all eternity praises him as her Savior who laid down his life for her on the cross, as a bridegroom for his bride.

Rejection of the Errors
Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I
Who teach that God the Father appointed his Son to death on the cross without a fixed and definite plan to save anyone by name, so that the necessity, usefulness, and worth of what Christ's death obtained could have stood intact and altogether perfect, complete and whole, even if the redemption that was obtained had never in actual fact been applied to any individual.

For this assertion is an insult to the wisdom of God the Father and to the merit of Jesus Christ, and it is contrary to Scripture. For the Savior speaks as follows: "I lay down my life for the sheep, and I know them" (John 10:15, 27). And Isaiah the prophet says concerning the Savior: "When he shall make himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the will of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand" (Isa. 53:10). Finally, this undermines the article of the creed in which we confess what we believe concerning the Church.

II
Who teach that the purpose of Christ's death was not to establish in actual fact a new covenant of grace by his blood, but only to acquire for the Father the mere right to enter once more into a covenant with men, whether of grace or of works.

For this conflicts with Scripture, which teaches that Christ "has become the guarantee and mediator" of a better—that is, a new—covenant (Heb. 7:22; 9:15), "and that a will is in force only when someone has died" (Heb. 9:17).

III
Who teach that Christ, by the satisfaction which he gave, did not certainly merit for anyone salvation itself and the faith by which this satisfaction of Christ is effectively applied to salvation, but only acquired for the Father the authority or plenary will to relate in a new way with humanity and to impose such new conditions as he chose, and that the satisfying of these conditions depends on human free choice; consequently, that it was possible that either all or none would fulfill them.

For they have too low an opinion of the death of Christ, do not at all acknowledge the foremost fruit or benefit which it brings forth, and summon back from hell the Pelagian error.

IV
Who teach that what is involved in the new covenant of grace which God the Father made with humanity through the intervening of Christ's death is not that we are justified before God and saved through faith, insofar as it accepts Christ's merit, but rather that God, having withdrawn his demand for perfect obedience to the law, counts faith itself, and the imperfect obedience of faith, as perfect obedience to the law, and graciously looks upon this as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For they contradict Scripture: "They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ, whom God presented as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:24-25). And along with the ungodly Socinus, they introduce a new and foreign justification of humanity before God, against the consensus of the whole church.

V
Who teach that all people have been received into the state of reconciliation and into the grace of the covenant, so that no one on account of original sin is liable to condemnation, or is to be condemned, but that all are free from the guilt of this sin.

For this opinion conflicts with Scripture which asserts that we are by nature children of wrath.

VI
Who make use of the distinction between obtaining and applying in order to instill in the unwary and inexperienced the opinion that God, as far as he is concerned, wished to bestow equally upon all people the benefits which are gained by Christ's death; but that

the distinction by which some rather than others come to share in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life depends on their own free choice (which applies itself to the grace offered indiscriminately) but does not depend on the unique gift of mercy which effectively works in them, so that they, rather than others, apply that grace to themselves.

For, while pretending to set forth this distinction in an acceptable sense, they attempt to give the people the deadly poison of Pelagianism.

VII
Who teach that Christ neither could die, nor had to die, nor did die for those whom God so dearly loved and chose to eternal life, since such people do not need the death of Christ.

For they contradict the apostle, who says: "Christ loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20), and likewise: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died," that is, for them (Rom. 8:33-34). They also contradict the Savior, who asserts: "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15), and "My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for one's friends" (John 15:12-13).

The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine
Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the Way It Occurs

Article 1: The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature
Human beings were originally created in the image of God and were furnished in mind with a true and sound knowledge of the Creator and things spiritual, in will and heart with righteousness, and in all emotions with purity; indeed, the whole human being was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by their own free will, they deprived themselves of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place brought upon themselves blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in their minds; perversity, defiance, and hardness in their hearts and wills; and finally impurity in all their emotions.

Article 2: The Spread of Corruption
Human beings brought forth children of the same nature as themselves after the fall. That is to say, being corrupt they brought forth corrupt children. The corruption spread, by God's just judgment, from Adam and Eve to all their descendants—except for Christ alone—not by way of imitation (as in former times the Pelagians would have it) but by way of the propagation of their perverted nature.

Article 3: Total Inability
Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin. Without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.

Article 4: The Inadequacy of the Light of Nature
There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in all people after the fall, by virtue of which they retain some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrate a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling humans to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that they do not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways they completely distort this light, whatever its precise character, and suppress it in unrighteousness. In doing so all people render themselves without excuse before God.

Article 5: The Inadequacy of the Law
In this respect, what is true of the light of nature is true also of the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses specifically to the Jews. For humans cannot obtain saving grace through the Decalogue, because, although it does expose the magnitude of their sin and increasingly convict them of their guilt, yet it does not offer a remedy or enable them to escape from human misery, and, indeed, weakened as it is by the flesh, leaves the offender under the curse.

Article 6: The Saving Power of the Gospel
What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word or the ministry of reconciliation. This is the gospel about the Messiah, through which it has pleased God to save believers, in both the Old and the New Testaments.

Article 7: God's Freedom in Revealing the Gospel
In the Old Testament, God revealed this secret of his will to a small number; in the New Testament (now without any distinction between peoples) God discloses it to a large number. The reason for this difference must not be ascribed to the greater worth of one nation over another, or to a better use of the light of nature, but to the free good pleasure and undeserved love of God. Therefore, those who receive so much grace, beyond and in spite of all they deserve, ought to acknowledge it with humble and thankful hearts. On the other hand, with the apostle they ought to adore (but certainly not inquisitively search into) the severity and justice of God's judgments on the others, who do not receive this grace.

Article 8: The Earnest Call of the Gospel
Nevertheless, all who are called through the gospel are called earnestly. For urgently and most genuinely God makes known in the Word what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to God. God also earnestly promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who do come and believe.

Article 9: Human Responsibility for Rejecting the Gospel
The fact that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called. Some in self-assurance do not even entertain the Word of life; others do entertain it but do not take it to heart, and for that reason, after the fleeting joy of a temporary faith, they relapse; others choke the seed of the Word with the thorns of life's cares and with the pleasures of the world and bring forth no fruits. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13).

Article 10: Conversion as the Work of God
The fact that others who are called through the ministry of the gospel do come and are brought to conversion must not be credited to human effort, as though one distinguishes oneself by free choice from others who are furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). No, it must be credited to God: just as from eternity God chose his own in Christ, so within time God effectively calls them, grants them faith and repentance, and, having rescued them from the dominion of darkness, brings them into the kingdom of his Son, in order that they may declare the wonderful deeds of the One who called them out of darkness into this marvelous light, and may boast not in themselves, but in the Lord, as apostolic words frequently testify in Scripture.

Article 11: The Holy Spirit's Work in Conversion
Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in the elect, or works true conversion in them, God not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and

enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, God also penetrates into the inmost being, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. God infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant. God activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

Article 12: Regeneration a Supernatural Work
And this is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help. But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God's work is done, it remains in human power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not less than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God, but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, people themselves, by that grace which they have received, are also rightly said to believe and to repent.

Article 13: The Incomprehensible Way of Regeneration
In this life believers cannot fully understand the way this work occurs; meanwhile, they rest content with knowing and experiencing that, by this grace of God, they do believe with the heart and love their Savior.

Article 14: The Way God Gives Faith
In this way, therefore, faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for people to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on them, breathed and infused into them. Nor is it a gift in the sense that God bestows only the potential to believe, but then awaits assent—the act of believing—by human choice; rather, it is a gift in the sense that God who works both willing and acting and, indeed, works all things in all people and produces in them both the will to believe and the belief itself.

Article 15: Responses to God's Grace
God does not owe this grace to anyone. For what could God owe to those who have nothing to give that can be paid back? Indeed, what could God owe to those who have nothing of their own to give but sin and falsehood? Therefore those who receive this grace owe and give eternal thanks to God alone; those who do not receive it either do not care at all about these spiritual things and are satisfied with themselves in their condition, or else in self-assurance foolishly boast about having something which they lack. Furthermore, following the example of the apostles, we are to think and to speak in the most favorable way about those who outwardly profess their faith and better their lives, for the inner chambers of the heart are unknown to us. But for others who have not yet been called, we are to pray to the God who calls things that do not exist as though they did. In no way, however, are we to pride ourselves as better than they, as though we had distinguished ourselves from them.

Article 16: Regeneration's Effect
However, just as by the fall humans did not cease to be human, endowed with intellect and will, and just as sin, which has spread through the whole human race, did not abolish the nature of the human race but distorted and spiritually killed it, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish

the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and—in a manner at once pleasing and powerful—bends it back.

As a result, a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit now begins to prevail where before the rebellion and resistance of the flesh were completely dominant. In this the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consists. Thus, if the marvelous Maker of every good thing were not dealing with us, we would have no hope of getting up from our fall by our own free choice, by which we plunged ourselves into ruin when still standing upright.

Article 17: God's Use of Means in Regeneration
Just as the almighty work by which God brings forth and sustains our natural life does not rule out but requires the use of means, by which God, according to his infinite wisdom and goodness, has wished to exercise that divine power, so also the aforementioned supernatural work by which God regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason, the apostles and the teachers who followed them taught the people in a godly manner about this grace of God, to give God the glory and to humble all pride, and yet did not neglect meanwhile to keep the people, by means of the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So even today it is out of the question that the teachers or those taught in the church should presume to test God by separating what God in his good pleasure has wished to be closely joined together. For grace is bestowed through admonitions, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more lustrous the benefit of God working in us usually is, and the better that work advances. To God alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and effectiveness, all glory is owed forever. Amen.

Rejection of the Errors
Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I
Who teach that, properly speaking, it cannot be said that original sin in itself is enough to condemn the whole human race or to warrant temporal and eternal punishments.

For they contradict the apostle when he says: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death passed on to all people because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12); also: "The guilt followed one sin and brought condemnation" (Rom. 5:16); likewise: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

II
Who teach that the spiritual gifts or the good dispositions and virtues such as goodness, holiness, and righteousness could not have resided in the human will when they were first created, and therefore could not have been separated from the will at the fall.

For this conflicts with the apostle's description of the image of God in Ephesians 4:24, where he portrays the image in terms of righteousness and holiness, which definitely reside in the will.

III
Who teach that in spiritual death the spiritual gifts have not been separated from human will, since the will in itself has never been corrupted but only hindered by the darkness of the mind and the unruliness of the emotions, and since the will is able to exercise its innate free capacity once these hindrances are removed, which is to say, it is able of itself to will or choose whatever good is set before it—or else not to will or choose it.

This is a novel idea and an error and has the effect of elevating the power of free choice, contrary to the words of Jeremiah the prophet: "The heart itself is deceitful above all things and wicked" (Jer. 17:9); and of the words of the apostle: "All of us also lived among them" (the children of disobedience) "at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts" (Eph. 2:3).

IV
Who teach that unregenerate humanity is not strictly or totally dead in sin or deprived of all capacity for spiritual good but is able to hunger and thirst for righteousness or life and to offer the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit which is pleasing to God.

For these views are opposed to the plain testimonies of Scripture: "You were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1, 5); "The imagination of the thoughts of the human heart is only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Besides, to hunger and thirst for deliverance from misery and for life, and to offer God the sacrifice of a broken spirit is characteristic only of the regenerate and of those called blessed (Ps. 51:17; Matt. 5:6).

V
Who teach that corrupt and natural humanity can make such good use of common grace (by which they mean the light of nature) or of the gifts remaining after the fall that they are able thereby gradually to obtain a greater grace—evangelical or saving grace—as well as salvation itself; and that in this way God, for his part, shows himself ready to reveal Christ to all people, since God provides to all, to a sufficient extent and in an effective manner, the means necessary for the revealing of Christ, for faith, and for repentance.

For Scripture, not to mention the experience of all ages, testifies that this is false: "He makes known his words to Jacob, his statutes and his laws to Israel; he has done this for no other nation, and they do not know his laws" (Ps. 147:19-20); "In the past God let all nations go their own way" (Acts 14:16); "They" (Paul and his companions) "were kept by the Holy Spirit from speaking God's word in Asia;" and "When they had come to Mysia, they tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit would not allow them to" (Acts 16:6-7).

VI
Who teach that in the true conversion of men and women new qualities, dispositions, or gifts cannot be infused or poured into their will by God, and indeed that the faith [or believing] by which we first come to conversion and from which we receive the name "believers" is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only a human act, and that it cannot be called a gift except in respect to the power of attaining faith.

For these views contradict the Holy Scriptures, which testify that God does infuse or pour into our hearts the new qualities of faith, obedience, and the experiencing of his love: "I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33); "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring" (Isa. 44:3); "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). They also conflict with the continuous practice of the Church, which prays with the prophet: "Convert me, Lord, and I shall be converted" (Jer. 31:18).

VII
Who teach that the grace by which we are converted to God is nothing but a gentle persuasion, or (as others explain it) that the way of God's acting in conversion that is most noble and suited to human nature is that which happens by persuasion, and that nothing prevents this grace of moral persuasion even by itself from making the natural person spiritual; indeed, that God does not produce the assent of the will except in this manner of

moral persuasion, and that the effectiveness of God's work by which it surpasses the work of Satan consists in the fact that God promises eternal benefits while Satan promises temporal ones.

For this teaching is entirely Pelagian and contrary to the whole of Scripture, which recognizes besides this persuasion also another, far more effective and divine way in which the Holy Spirit acts in human conversion. As Ezekiel 36:26 puts it: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; and I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh…"

VIII
Who teach that God in regenerating people does not bring to bear that power of his omnipotence whereby God may powerfully and unfailingly bend the human will to faith and conversion, but that even when God has accomplished all the works of grace which he uses for their conversion, they nevertheless can, and in actual fact often do, so resist God and the Spirit in their intent and will to regenerate them, that they completely thwart their own rebirth; and, indeed, that it remains in their own power whether or not to be reborn.

For this does away with all effective functioning of God's grace in our conversion and subjects the activity of Almighty God to human will; it is contrary to the apostles, who teach that "we believe by virtue of the effective working of God's mighty strength" (Eph. 1:19), and that "God fulfills the undeserved good will of his kindness and the work of faith in us with power" (2 Thess. 1:11), and likewise that "his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

IX
Who teach that grace and free choice are concurrent partial causes which cooperate to initiate conversion, and that grace does not precede—in the order of causality—the effective influence of the will; that is to say, that God does not effectively help the human will to come to conversion before that will itself motivates and determines itself.

For the early church already condemned this doctrine long ago in the Pelagians, on the basis of the words of the apostle: "It does not depend on human willing or running but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16); also: "Who makes you different from anyone else?" and "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7); likewise: "It is God who works in you to will and act according to his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

The Fifth Main Point of Doctrine
The Perseverance of the Saints

Article 1: The Regenerate Not Entirely Free from Sin
Those people whom God according to his purpose calls into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, God also sets free from the dominion and slavery of sin, though not entirely from the flesh and from the body of sin as long as they are in this life

Article 2: The Believer's Reaction to Sins of Weakness
Hence daily sins of weakness arise, and blemishes cling to even the best works of saints, giving them continual cause to humble themselves before God, to flee for refuge to Christ crucified, to put the flesh to death more and more by the Spirit of supplication and by holy exercises of godliness, and to strain toward the goal of perfection, until they are freed from this body of death and reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Article 3: God's Preservation of the Converted
Because of these remnants of sin dwelling in them and also because of the temptations of the world and Satan, those who have been converted could not remain standing in this grace if left to their own resources. But God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the end.

Article 4: The Danger of True Believers' Falling into Serious Sins
The power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh. Yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them. For this reason they must constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only can they be carried away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God's just permission they sometimes are so carried away—witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of David, Peter, and other saints falling into sins.

Article 5: The Effects of Such Serious Sins
By such monstrous sins, however, they greatly offend God, deserve the sentence of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound the conscience, and sometimes lose the awareness of grace for a time—until, after they have returned to the right way by genuine repentance, God's fatherly face again shines upon them.

Article 6: God's Saving Intervention
For God, who is rich in mercy, according to the unchangeable purpose of election does not take the Holy Spirit from his own completely, even when they fall grievously. Neither does God let them fall down so far that they forfeit the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin which leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit), and plunge themselves, entirely forsaken by God, into eternal ruin.

Article 7: Renewal to Repentance
For, in the first place, God preserves in those saints when they fall the imperishable seed from which they have been born again, lest it perish or be dislodged. Secondly, by his Word and Spirit God certainly and effectively renews them to repentance so that they have a heartfelt and godly sorrow for the sins they have committed; seek and obtain, through faith and with a contrite heart, forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator; experience again the grace of a reconciled God; through faith adore God's mercies; and from then on more eagerly work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Article 8: The Certainty of This Preservation
So it is not by their own merits or strength but by God's undeserved mercy that they neither forfeit faith and grace totally nor remain in their downfalls to the end and are lost. With respect to themselves this not only easily could happen, but also undoubtedly would happen; but with respect to God it cannot possibly happen. God's plan cannot be changed; God's promise cannot fail; the calling according to God's purpose cannot be revoked; the merit of Christ as well as his interceding and preserving cannot be nullified; and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be invalidated nor wiped out.

Article 9: The Assurance of This Preservation
Concerning this preservation of those chosen to salvation and concerning the perseverance of true believers in faith, believers themselves can and do become assured in accordance with the measure of their faith. By this faith they firmly believe that they are and always will remain true and living members of the church, and that they have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Article 10: The Ground of This Assurance
Accordingly, this assurance does not derive from some private revelation beyond or outside the Word, but from faith in the promises of God which are very plentifully revealed in the Word for our comfort, from the testimony of "the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are God's children and heirs" (Rom. 8:16-17), and finally from a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works. If God's chosen ones in this world did not have this well-founded comfort that the victory will be theirs and this reliable guarantee of eternal glory, they would be of all people most miserable.

Article 11: Doubts Concerning This Assurance
Meanwhile, Scripture testifies that believers have to contend in this life with various doubts of the flesh, and that under severe temptation they do not always experience this full assurance of faith and certainty of perseverance. But God, the Father of all comfort, "does not let them be tempted beyond what they can bear, but with the temptation he also provides a way out" (1 Cor. 10:13), and by the Holy Spirit revives in them the assurance of their perseverance.

Article 12: This Assurance as an Incentive to Godliness
This assurance of perseverance, however, so far from making true believers proud and carnally self-assured, is rather the true root of humility, of childlike respect, of genuine godliness, of endurance in every conflict, of fervent prayers, of steadfastness in crossbearing and in confessing the truth, and of well-founded joy in God. Reflecting on this benefit provides an incentive to a serious and continual practice of thanksgiving and good works, as is evident from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

Article 13: Assurance No Inducement to Carelessness
Neither does the renewed confidence of perseverance produce immorality or lack of concern for godliness in those put back on their feet after a fall, but it produces a much greater concern to observe carefully the ways which the Lord prepared in advance. They observe these ways in order that by walking in them they may maintain the assurance of their perseverance, lest, by their abuse of God's fatherly goodness, God's gracious face (for the godly, looking upon that face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death) turn away from them again, with the result that they fall into greater anguish of spirit.

Article 14: God's Use of Means in Perseverance
And, just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the proclamation of the gospel, so God preserves, continues, and completes this work by the hearing and reading of the gospel, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and also by the use of the sacraments.

Article 15: Contrasting Reactions to the Teaching of Perseverance
This teaching about the perseverance of true believers and saints, and about their assurance of it—a teaching which God has very richly revealed in the Word for the glory of his name and for the comfort of the godly, and which God impresses on the hearts of believers—is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the spirits of error attack. The bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will ensure that the church will continue to do this. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.

Rejection of the Errors
Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I
Who teach that the perseverance of true believers is not an effect of election or a gift of God produced by Christ's death, but a condition of the new covenant which people, before what they call their "peremptory" election and justification, must fulfill by their free will.

For Holy Scripture testifies that perseverance follows from election and is granted to the chosen by virtue of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession: "The chosen obtained it; the others were hardened" (Rom. 11:7); likewise, "He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not, along with him, grant us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised—who also sits at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:32-35).

II
Who teach that God does provide believers with sufficient strength to persevere and is ready to preserve this strength in them if they perform their duty, but that even with all those things in place which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God is pleased to use to preserve faith, it still always depends on the choice of human will whether or not to persevere.

For this view is obviously Pelagian; and though it intends to make people free it makes them sacrilegious. It is against the enduring consensus of evangelical teaching which takes from humanity all cause for boasting and ascribes the praise for this benefit only to God's grace. It is also against the testimony of the apostle: "It is God who keeps us strong to the end, so that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8).

III
Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again not only can forfeit justifying faith as well as grace and salvation totally and to the end, but also in actual fact do often forfeit them and are lost forever.

For this opinion nullifies the very grace of justification and regeneration as well as the continual preservation by Christ, contrary to the plain words of the apostle Paul: "If Christ died for us while we were still sinners, we will therefore much more be saved from God's wrath through him, since we have now been justified by his blood" (Rom. 5:8-9); and contrary to the apostle John: "No one who is born of God is intent on sin, because God's seed remains in him, nor can he sin, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9); also contrary to the words of Jesus Christ: "I give eternal life to my sheep, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29).

IV
Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again can commit the sin that leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit).

For the same apostle John, after making mention of those who commit the sin that leads to death and forbidding prayer for them (1 John 5:16-17), immediately adds: "We know that anyone born of God does not commit sin" (that is, that kind of sin), "but the one who was born of God keeps himself safe, and the evil one does not touch him" (v. 18).

V
Who teach that apart from a special revelation no one can have the assurance of future perseverance in this life.

For by this teaching the well-founded consolation of true believers in this life is taken away and the doubting of the Romanists is reintroduced into the church. Holy Scripture, however, in many places derives the assurance not from a special and extraordinary revelation but from the marks peculiar to God's children and from God's completely reliable promises. So especially the apostle Paul: "Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39); and John: "They who obey his commands remain in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he remains in us: by the Spirit he gave us" (1 John 3:24).

VI
Who teach that the teaching of the assurance of perseverance and of salvation is by its very nature and character an opiate of the flesh and is harmful to godliness, good morals, prayer, and other holy exercises, but that, on the contrary, to have doubt about this is praiseworthy.

For these people show that they do not know the effective operation of God's grace and the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and they contradict the apostle John, who asserts the opposite in plain words: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, but what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he is made known, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). Moreover, they are refuted by the examples of the saints in both the Old and the New Testament, who though assured of their perseverance and salvation yet were constant in prayer and other exercises of godliness.

VII
Who teach that the faith of those who believe only temporarily does not differ from justifying and saving faith except in duration alone.

For Christ himself in Matthew 13:20ff. and Luke 8:13ff. clearly defines these further differences between temporary and true believers: he says that the former receive the seed on rocky ground, and the latter receive it in good ground, or a good heart; the former have no root, and the latter are firmly rooted; the former have no fruit, and the latter produce fruit in varying measure, with steadfastness, or perseverance.

VIII
Who teach that it is not absurd that people, after losing their former regeneration, should once again, indeed quite often, be reborn.

For by this teaching they deny the imperishable nature of God's seed by which we are born again, contrary to the testimony of the apostle Peter: "Born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable" (1 Pet. 1:23).

IX
Who teach that Christ nowhere prayed for an unfailing perseverance of believers in faith.

For they contradict Christ himself when he says: "I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32); and John the gospel writer when he testifies in John 17 that it was not only for the apostles, but also for all those who were to believe by their message that Christ prayed: "Holy Father, preserve them in your name" (v. 11); and "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you preserve them from the evil one" (v. 15).

Conclusion
Rejection of False Accusations

And so this is the clear, simple, and straightforward explanation of the orthodox teaching on the five articles in dispute in the Netherlands, as well as the rejection of the errors by which the Dutch churches have for some time been disturbed. This explanation and rejection the Synod declares to be derived from God's Word and in agreement with the confessions of the Reformed churches. Hence it clearly appears that those of whom one could hardly expect it have shown no truth, equity, and charity at all in wishing to make the public believe:

- that the teaching of the Reformed churches on predestination and on the points associated with it by its very nature and tendency draws the minds of people away from all godliness and religion, is an opiate of the flesh and the devil, and is a stronghold where Satan lies in wait for all people, wounds most of them, and fatally pierces many of them with the arrows of both despair and self-assurance;
- that this teaching makes God the author of sin, unjust, a tyrant, and a hypocrite; and is nothing but a refurbished Stoicism, Manicheism, Libertinism, and Turkism*;
- that this teaching makes people carnally self-assured, since it persuades them that nothing endangers the salvation of the chosen, no matter how they live, so that they may commit the most outrageous crimes with self-assurance; and that on the other hand nothing is of use to the reprobate for salvation even if they have truly performed all the works of the saints;
- that this teaching means that God predestined and created, by the bare and unqualified choice of his will, without the least regard or consideration of any sin, the greatest part of the world to eternal condemnation; that in the same manner in which election is the source and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and ungodliness; that many infant children of believers are snatched in their innocence from their mothers' breasts and cruelly cast into hell so that neither the blood of Christ nor their baptism nor the prayers of the church at their baptism can be of any use to them; and very many other slanderous accusations of this kind which the Reformed churches not only disavow but even denounce with their whole heart.

Therefore this Synod of Dort in the name of the Lord pleads with all who devoutly call on the name of our Savior Jesus Christ to form their judgment about the faith of the Reformed churches, not on the basis of false accusations gathered from here or there, or even on the basis of the personal statements of a number of ancient and modern authorities—statements which are also often either quoted out of context or misquoted and twisted to convey a different meaning—but on the basis of the churches' own official confessions and of the present explanation of the orthodox teaching which has been endorsed by the unanimous consent of the members of the whole Synod, one and all.

Moreover, the Synod earnestly warns the false accusers themselves to consider how heavy a judgment of God awaits those who give false testimony against so many churches and their confessions, trouble the consciences of the weak, and seek to prejudice the minds of many against the fellowship of true believers.

Finally, this Synod urges all fellow ministers in the gospel of Christ to deal with this teaching in a godly and reverent manner, in the academic institutions as well as in the churches; to do so, both in their speaking and writing, with a view to the glory of God's name, holiness of life, and the comfort of anxious souls; to think and also speak with Scripture according to the analogy of faith; and, finally, to refrain from all those ways of speaking which go beyond the bounds set for us by the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures and

which could give impertinent sophists a just occasion to scoff at the teaching of the Reformed churches or even to bring false accusations against it.

May God's Son Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and gives gifts to humanity, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the mouths of those who lay false accusations against sound teaching, and equip faithful ministers of God's Word with a spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all they say may be to the glory of God and the building up of their hearers. Amen.

*Islam

R-95
To approve these translations for use and study in the RCA; and further,

to instruct Reformed Church Press to use these translations in their future work with Faith Alive Christian Resources.

Upon the advice of the Advisory Committee on Theology:

R-96
To refer R-95 to the Commission on Theology for additional work. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Additional changes have been made to the translations by the translation committee since the Commission on Theology approved the changes printed in the General Synod Workbook.
2. The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church also is delaying its vote on the new translations.

Commission on Theology Staffing Change

Finally, the commission wishes to acknowledge the good and faithful service of Charlie White, who has staffed our commission since 2005. In this role, Charlie has done a superb job of providing patient and highly competent administrative support in making arrangements for our meetings, distributing documents, setting up conference calls, and keeping a careful log so that three weeks after our meetings, we might actually remember what we said and did; has joined our discussions in wise and clarifying ways; and has done it all with great grace and good humor. We give thanks to God for Charlie's gifts, and thanks to Charlie for using these gifts in service to the Commission on Theology. We also eagerly welcome Terry DeYoung as our new staff person and look forward to his work with us.

Report of the Commission for Women

> *Following Christ in mission together, led by the Holy Spirit, and working with all the partners God provides, we believe that God is calling the Reformed Church in America over the next ten years to focus its efforts and resources on starting new congregations and revitalizing existing congregations, thereby empowering fruitful and faithful ministries for the glory of God* (Our Call).

Within the Reformed Church in America and Our Call, the Commission for Women is charged with working for the full and complete participation of women in realizing the vision of a church and society inclusive of all gifts of all persons. The Commission for Women joins with the whole RCA in celebrating the progress made in Our Call, in the efforts to establish new congregations and revitalize existing ones, and in developing networks for pastors and other church leaders. At the same time, the commission continues to work toward the full inclusion of women in the life and ministry of the church.

Some may question whether such a commission is necessary in a time when approximately two-thirds of the members of the RCA are women, when the doctrine and polity support the ordination of women to all the offices of the church, and when RCA seminaries graduate nearly equal numbers of men and women. It is true that these are all positive measures of progress toward a denomination that fully embraces the gifts and callings of all of its members. Women continue to respond to God's call to serve in the various offices of the church, in accordance with the ideals of the RCA and the biblical teaching that "[t]he 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" (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Still, all is not equal in the RCA. Of 1,385 active ministers, 212 are women (15 percent). Only 101 women currently serve in churches, of the 901 active ministers serving in congregations (11 percent). While many of the women who serve in specialized ministries do so in accordance with their own sense of call, others report that the opportunities for them to serve in churches have been limited because of their gender. Of 63 ordained RCA ministers planting churches, three are women; of non-RCA-ordained ministers in new church starts, only one is female. These statistics suggest that women are not fully and equally participating in one of the stated focus areas of the RCA.

The statistics continue to show improvement in the percentages of women being ordained as ministers of Word and sacrament and serving in churches. While demographic data is not available for deacons and elders, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of women serving in these offices is also increasing. However, the numbers still reflect a disparity in demographics between our membership and our clergy, and inequality in the practice of our stated affirmation of the calls of both men and women.

Meetings with Seminary Students

The Commission for Women meets annually with female seminary students to offer support and ascertain how they are being nurtured and supported within the seminaries and by their congregations and classes. In November of 2009, the commission met with students from Western Theological Seminary to hear their stories of joy and concern. Many positive reports were shared by women who feel well received by their faculty, peers, classes, and teaching churches. However, those voices blended with others who spoke of painful opposition to their calls and inequities in their treatment. While the seminary as a whole is perceived by most of these women as a community that embraces

their gifts and callings, opportunities for pulpit supply and internships, which are required in the process of ordination, are more limited for women than they are for men. The commission heard accounts of women who inquired about internships and pulpit supply openings, and were told that there were no openings, only to learn thereafter that male peers had later filled the positions that women were told didn't exist.

Regular meetings with seminary students continue to be a crucial part of the commission's work. With increasing numbers of students coming to ordination through the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA), there is also a need for the commission to hear from RCA students attending non-RCA seminaries. In the coming year, in addition to continuing meetings with students from New Brunswick and Western Seminaries, members of the commission will be working with MFCA to coordinate meetings with female MFCA students to gain perspective on the unique benefits and struggles of their situations.

Inclusivity in RCA Events

The choice of a single word in a worship service may either welcome or exclude certain participants. The use of inclusive language in our worship and work together demonstrates our sharing of Christ's hospitality with one another, and it is one of the charges of the commission to be watchful of the use of such hospitable language in the gatherings of the RCA. To that end, the Commission for Women consulted with the Commission on Worship in the development of worship guidelines for General Synod, in order to encourage the use of inclusive language and attitudes that allow all participants to feel welcome in this gathering of the body of Christ.

Uses of the Conscience Clause

The Commission for Women regularly receives reports of abuse of the conscience clause. While the details of these accounts are usually not appropriate content for a report to General Synod, it is important to note that there are pastors and consistories who refuse to recommend students to be taken under care solely because they are women, and classes whose process is less than caring toward their female students. Because of the ongoing complaints about misuses of the conscience clause, the commission is examining the role and use of the conscience clause and trying to formulate a helpful response to the individual complaints and to the wider struggle of the RCA to both encourage women's full participation in the church and honor the diversity of opinion on the issue of women's ordination.

Progress on General Synod 2009 Recommendations and Staffing/Leadership Issues

While the Office for Women is not explicitly connected with the Commission for Women, the two bodies have a history of collaboration based on the shared concern for the equipping and empowering of women in the RCA. The Office for Women has been through a great deal of transition in the past year. In 2009, the position of director of Women's Ministries came to an end. The 2009 General Synod adopted (as amended) the commission's recommendation "[t]o direct the General Synod Council to develop a plan for a future Office for Women that would not be charged with raising its own support, enabling the RCA to live out its stated commitment to the full inclusion of women at all levels of the church's leadership and ministry; and further, to have a staff member in place by January 2010 or as soon as possible thereafter" (*MGS 2009,* R-74, p. 324).

The commission was represented during a process in which a group of thirty-three RCA men and women met to pray, think, and dream about the possibilities for a new incarnation

of the RCA's Office for Women. Out of that consultation came a new vision for how the Office for Women might encourage and equip women to fully participate in the life and ministry of the church, and a new position description for the coordinator of Women's Ministries. Claudette Reid began work as the new coordinator of Women's Ministries on June 1, 2010.

The Bylaws of the General Synod charge the Commission for Women with the responsibility to "develop, advocate, and implement strategies for systematic change to enable the full and complete participation of women in church and society" (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Sec. 10.b.4). General Synod 2009 also adopted (as amended) the commission's recommendation "[t]o instruct the General Synod Council to develop and hold a training event for all RCA staff that addresses issues of gender and power, assumptions about women as leaders, the use of language with regard to gender, and specific ways to fully include women in the life of the church; and further, to encourage the regional synods and classes to hold similar events, with the intention of increasing advocacy for women" (*MSG 2009,* R-73, p. 324). At the time of this report, such a training had not occurred, nor were concrete plans in place for one. As staff often represent the RCA both internally and externally, the Commission for Women continues to follow up on this recommendation of General Synod, and urge that it be acted upon with appropriate haste.

The Commission for Women continues to explore ways to encourage gender equality in job searches and hiring practices, including identifying suitable women candidates for staff position openings. Leadership training and networking opportunities that seek to identify and equip women who may be gifted for such positions is one possibility that the commission is currently investigating.

The commission's role in ensuring the partnership of men and women in the decision-making leadership of the RCA is not limited to professional staff, but also extends to committees, commissions, and agencies of the General Synod. In the past, this has happened largely through suggesting potential candidates for openings, but this has the downfall of limiting the pool to persons who are personally known by those already participating in these bodies. As the RCA seeks to become a denomination that better reflects the multiracial and multicultural body of Christ, the voices of those who are not yet known must be heard—which will require a better process for identifying a wider field of qualified candidates. No recommendation is necessary in this matter, but the commission strongly encourages the collection and maintenance of as large as possible a pool of nomination profile forms from which to draw for committees, commissions, and agencies of the General Synod.

Commission for Women Meetings

The Commission for Women met twice in the past year: in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on November 12-14, 2009, and in Phoenix, Arizona, on February 25-27, 2010. The commission continues to draw inspiration from Scripture, stories of fruitful mission and ministry, and the presence of the Holy Spirit for its ongoing ministry. While celebrating the ways in which women and men work together in the ministry of Christ, the commission also grieves for those whose search for support in following God's call has instead met with obstacles and dismissal. The commission continues to challenge the RCA to live more completely into its commitment to the full participation of women in the whole life and ministry of the church. In doing so, the Commission for Women gives glory and gratitude to God for the blessing of living out our call as the body of Christ in this lost and broken world so loved by God.

Report of the Commission on Nominations

The Commission on Nominations met in person on January 26, 2010, and again by conference call on February 25, 2010; March 26, 2010; and April 22, 2010. Throughout the year members of the commission actively sought out qualified candidates, solicited profiles (a brief two-page application that was formerly referred to as a "Talent Bank Form"), and checked references on those who expressed interest in serving on a commission or agency of the General Synod or on the board of directors or trustees of an RCA-related educational institution. In these ways the commission sought to fulfill its responsibilities as stated in the Bylaws of the General Synod—namely, "in consultation with the general secretary, [to] search the denomination for suitable nominees. In making nominations it shall consider the geographic location, occupation, and record of previous service to the denomination of persons suggested by classes, regional synods, and other sources. It shall consider this and other pertinent data in light of each commission's or agency's responsibilities, membership needs, suggested nominees, and place and schedule of meetings" (*Book of Church Order* [*BCO*], Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8.c.2).

The commission seeks to nominate individuals for service on agencies, commissions, and boards of directors on the basis of their spiritual gifts, heart (or passion), abilities, personality, experience, and special leadership abilities, and when possible seeks to involve young adult members of the RCA so they can be nurtured and encouraged to serve the RCA in a variety of ways in the future.

Through its efforts, the Commission on Nominations has proactively fulfilled its responsibility to "search the denomination" (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8.c.2) and believes those nominated have the traits that make them particularly well suited for the work of the positions to which they are being nominated. In addition to finding people who are exceptionally well suited to serve on a General Synod commission or agency or the board of directors or trustees of an RCA educational institution, the commission is pleased to report once again that it has, to the best of its ability, fulfilled its responsibility for ensuring that the requirements of the *Book of Church Order* are upheld.

When the number of qualified candidates from which to choose increases, the commission's work is made easier and the work of the RCA's agencies and commissions is carried out more effectively. Consequently, the commission encourages anyone interested in serving on a General Synod commission or agency or on the board of directors or trustees of an RCA-related educational institution to complete a profile form and submit it to the Commission on Nominations as indicated on the form. Profile forms are available from staff to the Commission on Nominations (Paul M. Karssen [712-737-4958 or pkarssen@rca.org)] or Laura Kiel Tarbous [212-870-3279 or ltarbous@rca.org]), or through the "Profile Form and Commission Information" link on the General Synod page of the RCA website (www.rca.org/synod).

The commission also recognizes that many people are simply too modest to suggest that they may have a valuable contribution to make. For that reason, the commission has also developed a process and form through which you can recommend others. If you know someone in the RCA who would be a valuable addition to one of its commissions, boards, or agencies, please recommend that person to the Commission on Nominations by completing a recommendation form. Once the form is submitted, the Commission on Nominations will contact the person recommended and ask if he or she would consider serving. As with the profile form, the recommendation form is available from staff members Paul Karssen and Laura Tarbous or through the General Synod page of the RCA website. The commission welcomes and values your input.

Nominees identified by the Commission on Nominations are as follows (Note: * indicates a final term, and # indicates an official nomination from the assembly, institution, or agency listed):

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Class of 2012
*Arnold Van Ankum

Class of 2014
*The Rev. Andrea Godwin-Stremler (Regional Synod of the Far West)#
*Jo Anna Lougin
*The Rev. Gloria McCanna
*The Rev. Justin Meyers
*The Rev. Jeffrey Petersen
*The Rev. Gregory Town (Regional Synod of Albany)#

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Class of 2013
*Linda Hippenhammer
*The Rev. Pamela Pater-Ennis
*Jimmie Stevenson

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Class of 2013
The Rev. Sharon Atkins
*The Rev. James Daniels

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Class of 2013
*The Rev. William Bennett
Norma Coleman-James

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Class of 2013
*Glenda De Koster
*Christopher Grier
The Rev. Ronald Rienstra

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER

Class of 2013
*The Rev. Lori Walber

COMMISSION ON HISTORY

Class of 2013
*Douglas Carlson
*Audrey Vermilyea

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS

Class of 2013
*The Rev. Richard Baukema (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes)#
Jonathan Gundlach (Regional Synod of the Far West)#

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS

Class of 2011
Annie Lee Phillips (African American Council)#
*The Rev. James Seawood (Past President of General Synod)#
Vacancy (Native American Indian Ministries Council)#

Class of 2012
Vacancy (Regional Synod of New York)#

Class of 2013
Armando Alas (Council for Hispanic Ministries)#
The Rev. Marcia Gibbons (Regional Synod of Albany)#
*The Rev. Sherwin Weener (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes)#
Vacancy (Regional Synod of the Far West)#

COMMISSION ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

Class of 2013
*So Ae Heintzelman (Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries)
*Lois (Holly) Schut

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY

Class of 2013
J. Mark Anderson
*The Rev. J. Todd Billings
The Rev. Daniel Griswold
The Rev. Leanne Van Dyk

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Class of 2013
*Joanne Fernandez-McDermott
*Steve Robbins
*The Rev. Lisa Tait

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES

Class of 2013
The Rev. Carl Boersma
*Daniel Kleinheksel
*Janet Krueger
*Timothy Zeutenhorst
Vacancy

CHURCH GROWTH FUND

Class of 2013
*Robert Carlson
*George Schneidermann

MINISTERIAL FORMATION CERTIFICATION AGENCY

Class of 2013
The Rev. Verlyn Hemmen
*Bradley Lewis
Anne Mead
*Bart Strong

REFORMED CHURCH PRESS

Class of 2013
*The Rev. Christopher Poest

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Class of 2011
Vacancy

Class of 2013
Michael Beals

Class of 2014
*David Cooper
Elizabeth Hance (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)
*The Rev. Mark Tyler
Vacancy

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Class of 2012
Karen Barker (Regional Synod of the Heartland)
The Rev. Abram Blaak (Regional Synod of Canada)

Class of 2013
*Chris Crawford
Kenton Dale (Regional Synod of the Far West)
The Rev. Scott DeBlock (Regional Synod of Albany)
Amy DeKruyter (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes)
Kris DePree
*Mark Eriks
*Ronald Hartgerink
Larry Mulder
Douglas Ruch
Judy Spoelhof
Douglas Struyk

CENTRAL COLLEGE

Class of 2013
Vacancy

Class of 2014
Donna Smith
Vacancy
Vacancy

HOPE COLLEGE

Class of 2014
Jeffrey Clark
Douglas Ruch
The Rev. Jill Ver Steeg

R- 97
To elect the above-named nominees to the General Synod commissions and agencies and the boards of directors or trustees of RCA-related educational institutions as indicated. (ADOPTED)

R-98
To elect Carol Mutch moderator of the Commission on Nominations for the 2010-2011 term. (ADOPTED)

Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

It is customary for this annual report to the General Synod to highlight some of the seminary programs that have had a profound effect on our mission and work. While such a summary has been helpful in the past, it felt particularly fitting this year for this report to draw attention to ten of the most significant ways the seminary and the RCA have nurtured and strengthened their very sacred and special partnership in this past year.

1. The seminary has provided for a number of years, through the theological education assessment designated for New Brunswick, an RCA credit for every RCA student who matriculates into one of our degree programs—this amounts to a $75 reduction for each credit hour taken. Over the course of a 96-credit course of study for the master of divinity degree, this represents approximately $7,100 in savings for RCA candidates and thus a clear and concrete incentive for their attendance at New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS).

2. The seminary continues to actively recruit RCA students to its classrooms. Mark Kraai, a recently retired professor who has relocated to Kalamazoo, Michigan, has taken on a new role as our special liaison with the three RCA colleges. In addition, our two part-time recruiters have begun to establish good relationships with the Student Care Committees in the classes where they serve (New Jersey and the New York metropolitan areas). Our present enrollment of twenty-five to thirty RCA students, out of a total enrollment of about two hundred students, is lower than we would like, but it is not radically different than the about forty RCA students we served annually during most of the twentieth century. It remains our deep commitment that every RCA classis should provide strong encouragement for each of its candidates to consider NBTS as a dynamic and relevant option for their theological formation.

3. About a decade ago the seminary initiated the Reformed Church Center, which has as its mission 1) the encouragement of our RCA students in their sense of belonging to the RCA, and 2) critical and prophetic reflection on the RCA's traditions and its pressing current concerns. One expression of that mission is a full annual calendar of public events for our students and the RCA community of pastors and congregational leaders in the New Jersey/New York area. These gatherings nurture disciplined reflection on the faith and life of the church and often focus on the unique concerns and questions of the RCA. The center also offers regular opportunities for our RCA students to gather for fellowship and learning. The administrative and programmatic work of the center is underwritten through the assessment for theological education.

4. New Brunswick Theological Seminary, like Western Seminary, provides for the generous sharing of the time of its RCA professors to be deeply involved in the theological life and mission of the denomination. Up until a few years ago, our ranks included six General Synod professors of theology, all of whom participated in the work of General Synod commissions and the extensive work of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, through its subcommittees and board. Anticipating the reappointment of Renee House to the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology, the seminary will return to three General Synod professors of theology and the very active involvement of our affiliated faculty professor, Allan Janssen.

5. The continued support and affection for the seminary by RCA congregations and members, especially in the three eastern synods, is evident in the continued financial gifts to our operating budget. While our operating budget includes three significant streams of income (tuition and fees, gifts and grants, and the support of our endowment), we continue to estimate that more than three-quarters of our gifts come directly from RCA individuals, congregations, and estates.

6. In response to the commissioned pastor initiatives and church order changes in the RCA, the seminary established five years ago a separate certificate program that is taught on Saturday mornings. The curriculum for the certificate closely mirrors the order requirements for commissioned pastors, and is available to classes in New Jersey and New York that have encouraged commissioned pastors to be trained. In addition, the faculty has just approved a new certificate program in Korean Youth Ministry that we believe will serve well the RCA's Korean and Korean-American congregations in the greater New York area.

7. New Brunswick Theological Seminary was one of the founding members of the Capital Region Theological Center, located in the Albany area and growing out of the cooperation of the Formula of Agreement partners (RCA, ELCA, UCC, and PCUSA). Because of its location among almost one hundred RCA congregations within an hour's drive, this center has been of enormous assistance in the training of congregational leaders and the continuing theological education of pastors. The seminary continues to provide the free services of one professor every other year to teach a course for the center. In the past year the seminary has entered into a more sustained conversation about offering accredited classes through the center.

8. The new strategic plan of NBTS, approved by the board of trustees in January of 2009, includes ten strategic directions that will lead us through the next decade of our mission. The first strategic direction reads: "Our commitment to forming new generations of healthy, Spirit-filled, biblically grounded, theologically wise leaders will invigorate congregations, ministries, and communities toward greater faithfulness to God and neighbor." This strategic direction is very conscious of the Our Call commitment of the RCA, and intentionally directs the seminary to cultivate relationships with "revitalizing congregations" and those pastors/congregations who are involved in starting new congregations, as teaching laboratories for both our students and the seminary. In addition, the strategic plan calls for the seminary to focus more intentionally on our metro-urban and global contexts, our commitment to interreligious dialogue, our commitment to the full inclusion of women in the life of the church, and our deep commitment to create an anti-racist community of faith and learning. It is clear that these values reflect deeply the vision the RCA has for itself.

9. Perhaps the most important role the seminary plays in the life of the RCA is that it is a creative and dynamic laboratory for the intercultural vision that the RCA has envisioned for its own future. In the middle of the 1980s the seminary changed from a predominantly white and RCA environment to one that was increasingly multicultural, multigenerational, and multidenominational. At the moment, 75 percent of our students are people of color, almost half of the members of our board of trustees are people of color, and almost half of the members of our full-time teaching faculty are people of color. We are deeply committed to becoming an anti-racist institution and after three years of reflection, training, and dialogue, and almost $75,000 of budgeted expenses, the seminary board has adopted an anti-racist action plan that includes a significant Anti-Racism Transformation Team to

address the systemic racism in our structures and culture as the seminary intentionally seeks a future freed from racism. We are convinced that our commitment and experience with a multicultural community of faith and learning is a pioneering one among seminaries and can be both encouraging and helpful to the RCA in its own commitment to become a richly diverse denomination. We are also pleased to announce that the seminary has begun to receive pledges toward a Horace G. Underwood Chair in Global Christianity, which will address the missiological imperatives for a new age. As of the writing of this report, we have received more than half of the $1.5 million for the chair from our church partners in Korea.

10. Finally, it is clear from not only our purpose statement but also from our experience that the following words are seared deeply into our experience, hearts, and values: "Rooted in the Reformed tradition and centered in its trust in God's sovereignty and grace, the seminary is an intercultural, ecumenical school of Christian faith, learning, and scholarship committed to its metro-urban and global contexts." The Reformed Church in America has a remarkably similar goal and vision for its own future. We genuinely commit New Brunswick Theological Seminary to be a faithful partner in mission with the Reformed Church in America as together we care for and inspire each other in God's amazing story of grace.

Upon the recommendation of the president, the board of trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary acted at its October 2009 meeting to request the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to return Renee S. House to the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology.

R-99
WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Renee S. House served as General Synod professor of theology from June 2003 through June 2005, and relinquished the office when she moved from full- to part-time service within our faculty; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Renee S. House returned to full-time service as a member of our faculty and dean of the seminary in January of 2010 fulfilling the order requirement that she be employed full time by the seminary; and

WHEREAS she has contributed significantly to the mission of New Brunswick Theological Seminary during her twenty-six years as a student, director of Gardner Sage Library, associate professor of Christian education, and dean of the seminary; and

WHEREAS she has assumed a role as a theological leader for the whole church and has served the RCA faithfully on its Commission on Theology, with the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, on the most recent three-year Reformed and Roman Catholic Dialogue, and as a distinguished member of the plenary commission of the World Council of Churches;

THEREFORE, the board of trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary nominates the Rev. Dr. Renee S. House, associate professor of practical theology and dean of the seminary, to the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology.
(ADOPTED)

Report of Western Theological Seminary

The mission statement of Western Theological Seminary (WTS) guides its life together: "The purpose of Western Theological Seminary is to prepare Christians called by God to lead the church in mission. Western Theological Seminary is an evangelical and ecumenical community of faith and learning in the Reformed tradition that serves the church of Jesus Christ. In covenant with the Reformed Church in America, Western equips men and women for Christ-centered, biblically based, theologically integrated, culturally sensitive, mission-oriented Christian leadership." The challenging dimensions of Our Call, particularly regarding church multiplication and revitalization and a future free of racism, sends WTS back to its mission statement both to find direction and energy to participate in these significant goals and to ask what changes will be needed to be more effective partners in achieving those goals denomination wide. The seminary is approaching this work as transparently and courageously as possible.

Update on the Life and Witness of Western Theological Seminary

Enrollment

Overall enrollment has continued to remain strong following a decade of steady growth. During the 2009-10 academic year a total of 237 students were enrolled, the majority of which were candidates of the master of divinity degree in both residential and distance learning. Remaining students were enrolled in the doctor of ministry program or as non-degree students who wished to continue their learning. It will remain an ongoing challenge for Mark Poppen, the seminary's director of admissions, to attract and retain qualified and dedicated students for degree programs.

Financial Support in a Difficult Economic Context

Western was certainly not immune to the economic realities of 2008 and 2009. Given that roughly one-third of the seminary's operating budget is generated through earnings on its endowment, it was necessary to reduce the budget by 10 percent to $6 million for fiscal year 2009-10. This was accomplished through a combination of reducing program expenses, leaving some vacated staff positions unfilled, and the painful process of not renewing the contracts of two non-tenured faculty members. Thankfully, donor giving remained remarkably strong and this helped to partially offset the endowment losses.

In an effort to keep tuition from increasing significantly, the advancement office continues to seek financial support from individuals, congregations, and corporations. (Student tuition accounts for less than one-third of Western's operating income.) While individual donors have been exceedingly generous, the financial support Western receives from RCA congregations is declining. This year, WTS will receive less than 9 percent of its financial support from RCA congregations—down from 15 percent just ten years ago and 55 percent thirty years ago. Only 27 percent of all RCA congregations voluntarily support Western. The seminary would be grateful for and encouraged by an increase in congregational support. Western is truly blessed by the generosity of its donors and thanks God regularly for each of them. Without them, Western could not exist.

Distance Learning Master of Divinity Program

The 2010 commencement will graduate the third class of Western's distance learning M.Div. There are sixty-three students enrolled in the degree program, representing all RCA regional synods. By the summer of 2010, twenty-four graduates will be placed in every regional synod with the exception of Canada. In the 2009-2010 academic year, the program enjoyed its largest entering class of twenty-six students. This blended program

design which inserts an on-campus intensive mid-way through each semester is a strong feature of the program for professors and students.

Certificate for Urban Ministry Program
Participation in the Certificate of Urban Pastoral Ministry (CUPM) program has increased significantly this year to thirty-three students, primarily through Western's first off-campus course. Galilee Baptist Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, is hosting thirteen new students in an Old Testament course taught by Thomas Boogaart. WTS is also working at Angel Community Church in Muskegon, Michigan, with Fred Johnson, who is teaching a free, not-for-credit class on African American history. This effort serves as an introduction to WTS and the CUPM program. Seminary faculty and staff continue to learn how to be more administratively flexible and culturally hospitable in working with this more diverse and nontraditional student population. Their presence is enriching the seminary community.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity Initiatives
Eric Williams, an African American Ph.D. candidate, has been received well this year and has been offered a second year reappointment as Faculty Fellow. The Latino/a research effort is gaining helpful feedback by providing theological training workshops in Spanish with local pastors. This initial phase in program development will help determine the feasibility of ongoing learning programs for Spanish speaking pastors. The WTS Diversity Committee is in a reorganizational phase as it seeks to address the recommendations of Salter McNeil and Associates in its 2008 assessment report.

Curriculum Revision
A committee has been formed to work on curricular revision at Western Theological Seminary. Curriculum Revision Committee members include Thomas Boogaart (professor of Old Testament), Stephanie Croom (associate director of formation for ministry), Leanne Van Dyk (academic dean), and Kristen Livingston (residential M.Div. student). The committee's work will include identifying and prioritizing key facets of curricular revision; identifying seminary constituents, emergent themes, and core values; critiquing present curriculum; and seeking the input of stakeholders.

The work of this committee will be coordinated with the work of a separate committee charged with rewriting the seminary's mission statement and missional literature.

Journey
Journey, Western's Center for the Church's Learning, survived the June 2009 flood by the tireless efforts of the seminary's custodial and technical support staff and the generous gifts of many RCA folks from across the country. The Journey staff is grateful for the thoughts, prayers, and gifts to Western during this unexpected experience.

In living out its purpose to create learning communities for the church, Journey's initiatives have had, and continue to have, significant impact throughout the RCA.

The Ridder Leadership Initiative concluded its first round of scheduled learning events by holding an Integrative Retreat in May 2009 at Western Seminary. Over the past two years, seven leadership development events were facilitated by Journey staff, the Ridder Leadership Team, and Jim Herrington and Trisha Taylor, authors of *The Leader's Journey*. This initiative designed a learning process that included twenty-six pastors and denominational leaders (four CRC pastors, fifteen RCA pastors, and seven RCA and CRC denominational leaders) and their congregational leadership teams (134 leaders from sixteen Ridder Leadership congregations from both the Synod of the Great Lakes and the Synod of Mid-America). A second round of Ridder Leadership events is currently being designed

by the Ridder Leadership Team.

In 2008, the Lilly Endowment Inc. awarded Western a five-year Sustaining Pastoral Excellence grant which allows Journey to create learning experiences for pastors and congregation members to learn together over a determined period of time. Currently, three RCA Journey Groups consisting of pastors, congregational members, and youth leaders from across the country are meeting on a regular basis.

Journey's strong commitment to developing learning events in partnership with other agencies and judicatory leaders will generate several new opportunities for 2010-2011: a joint RCA/CRC discipleship event in November 2010, a new youth leader's distance learning program to sustain momentum from Western's annual Youth Conference, and a two-year multiracial learning initiative in partnership with the RCA and the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes.

Journey occupies an important space in the life of Western Theological Seminary and an influential place in the life of the RCA as it seeks to offer learning experiences for both pastors and congregational members. Journey is passionate about serving the church as the church serves the world.

Celebrating Faculty Accomplishments
Since the 2009 General Synod, members of Western Theological Seminary's faculty have published a number of articles, chapters, and books. A book by J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), explores the challenges and joys of Scripture as it forms the community of faith. In addition, Todd Billings continues his series of lectures as a part of the provisions of the Templeton Award he received in 2009. One of his lecture series was the 2010 Osterhaven lectures at WTS in March 2010.

Carol Bechtel, president of General Synod in 2008-09, has been named a Distinguished Alumna at Hope College, her alma mater. She was recognized for this honor during commencement activities at the college in May 2010.

Petition for Substitution of a Period of Supervised Ministry for a Portion of the Twenty-Four Month Requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry
The board of trustees of Western Theological Seminary approved the petition from the Classis of Holland to substitute an eighteen-month period of supervised ministry for part of the twenty-four month requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for John Paul Sundararajan.

Report of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency

The year 2010 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the agency which has existed to oversee candidates for ordained ministry in the Reformed Church in America (RCA) who do not attend either New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) or Western Theological Seminary (WTS). The agency has been renamed twice since its inception as the Theological Education Agency (TEA). In 1998 it was named the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA), and in 2007 it became the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA). With each name change there were also bylaw changes, resulting in different responsibilities and yet always having the oversight of candidates for

ordained ministry as the central focus. During its twenty-five years the agency has awarded 335 Certificates of Fitness for Ministry.

The agency was an idea conceived by General Synod professor of theology James Cook, and he brought it as a recommendation to the General Synod in 1984. The General Synod approved the necessary *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) changes in 1985 and appointed Kenneth Van Wyk its first director. Van Wyk served the TEA for six years. Given the twenty-fifth anniversary the MFCA Board of Trustees offers the following recommendation:

R-100
To give thanks for the visionary leadership of the late James Cook and for the faithful service of Kenneth Van Wyk in the establishment of the Theological Education Agency, now called the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency. (ADOPTED)

General Synod exercises oversight of ministerial formation and the standards for preparation for ministry through its two seminaries and the MFCA.

The MFCA of the RCA possesses a deep commitment to developing faithful, educated, and evangelical Reformed leaders. Its purpose is the preparation of men and women for the ministries of Christ and his church, most specifically those called to be ministers of Word and sacrament.

The MFCA Board of Trustees has the following as its mission statement:

> The MFCA is to strengthen the ministry of Word and sacrament in the RCA by overseeing and awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry to RCA candidates graduating from non-RCA seminaries or pursuing an approved alternate route.
>
> The MFCA will accomplish this mission by:
> - Ensuring that the RCA Standards for Preparation for Ministry are upheld in the oversight of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry and periodically reviewing the standards and the process by which they are applied.
> - Evaluating progress of candidates and confirming their continuation in the process through the Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC) and Approved Alternate Route (AAR) committees.
> - Providing graduate level courses designed to meet the standards for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.
> - Collaborating with and providing counsel to congregations and classes in the care and nurture of candidates for the ministry who are seeking the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry through the MFCA.
> - Interpreting and advocating for the work of the MFCA to the larger church.

The board is in dialogue with the General Synod Council about adopting policy governance with the goal of clarifying its role with the Minister for Candidate Care and Certification as well as creating efficient processes for its own operation. The global policy statement, executive limitations, and management delegation statements have been designed to implement the mission statement of the agency.

Board Members

The new definition and role of the agency formulated in 2007 resulted in a new configuration for the board. The board consists of nine members; five of the nine are drawn from

the certification committees. The board will continue to be the agent awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry to candidates completing the requirements of the Approved Alternate Route and the Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care programs.

The current board members for the MFCA are Eddy Aleman, Dwight Bailey, James Brownson, Ann Callender, Marjorie Giles, Renee House, Brad Lewis, Bart Strong, and David Theonugraha. The board is especially grateful to Marjorie Giles and James Brownson, who have served their terms and whose replacements will be elected at this General Synod.

The Board Responds to the Economic Pressure on Candidates

MFCA candidates have traditionally been required to incur more expense for pursuing ordination in the RCA than candidates at the RCA seminaries. Extra costs have been identified as being anywhere from $4,500 to $6,500 over the life of the program. Costs include enrollment fees, psychological assessment fees, course tuition fees, credo fees, and costs for enrollment in a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).

The MFCA board has actively reduced costs to students by implementing a subsidy toward enrollment fees and discounting tuition for those who do not take courses for credit. In 2010, candidates who opt to take RCA courses for non-credit will have tuition discounted by forty percent. This has increased the stress on the overall MFCA budget but the board felt compelled to ease some of the financial pressures incurred by our candidates.

General Synod Professors of Theology

The Task Force on General Synod Professors informed the MFCA board that there is consideration being given to broaden the eligibility for the professorate and that this change could make it possible for the MFCA board to nominate candidates for the office in a similar fashion to what occurs presently at the two RCA seminaries. The response of the board has been positive and there is a belief that this could not only enhance the preparation of MFCA candidates but also increase the number and the diversity of the professorate. The MFCA facilitating possibilities for the "fourth office" that were not possible before holds great appeal to the board.

The MFCA Board of Trustees is encouraged by this possibility and has started thinking about how this new function for the MFCA might be implemented. Although they will wait on action by the General Synod, the board wants to go on record letting it be known that this could present an extraordinary opportunity for broadening the representation within the General Synod professors, adding various ministry skills, competence, and diversity, including that of women and ethnic minorities.

Courses

Since 1992 the agency has been offering RCA specific courses. The four courses offered every year are RCA Polity, RCA Standards, RCA History and Missions, and RCA Worship. These courses not only prepare candidates with knowledge about the RCA and its rich historical and theological tradition, but also bring dozens of candidates together in one location. The networking and fellowship create an intangible benefit to the individual and the denomination.

The agency has continued to provide distance learning courses to its candidates as well, allowing them to meet the requirements of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry in a form that is flexible and accessible. During the spring of 2010 there were four courses running

simultaneously. The courses were RCA History and Missions DL (Voskuil), RCA Polity DL (Kors), Seminar on Pastoral Formation (Hamman), and Summary of Christian Doctrine–Credo (Fries). These courses have been well received by candidates, allowing them to complete program requirements from their location and doing so at less cost.

RCA Courses in Spanish

The last five years the MFCA has offered RCA courses in Spanish. The courses are designed with MFCA program requirements in mind even though most of the students are either commissioned pastors or preparing to be a commissioned pastor. Board member Eddy Aleman has been extremely helpful in identifying individuals for these courses, and it appears the program may grow significantly in the next few years as the RCA expands church multiplication among Hispanic populations.

This year's course, RCA Standards (Spanish), was taught by Jhonny Alicea-Baez in January. The next course scheduled will be RCA Worship (Spanish) in October and it will be taught by Reggie Padin. The courses have all been offered at the Reformed Theological Studies Centre in Paramount, California.

Classis Candidate Care Seminar

The MFCA has taken an active leadership role in working with classes around the care process. The RCA seminaries and MFCA offered a two-day training event in Phoenix, Arizona, in February where resources and best practices for candidate care were shared. The project also gave rise to a new website where numerous resources for supervising and mentoring candidates will be available to each classis.

Twenty-four classes participated in the event and about fifty people were present throughout the two days. Discussions around "call" were highlights for most and the group agreed that there were new demands on those called to ministry in 2010. New trust was built between the seminaries and the classes and all indicated a preparedness to work together in developing the future of ministry in the RCA.

Certificates of Fitness for Ministry Awarded

The MFCA Board of Trustees awarded twenty Certificates of Fitness for Ministry, sixteen through the RCSC process and four through the AAR process.

Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC)

Blakeslee, Ann M.	Classis of Rocky Mountains	Denver
Cano, Christopher Lee	Classis of California	Fuller
Colton, Dennis Steven	Classis of Pleasant Prairie	Trinity
Ebbens, Daniel W.	Classis of Illiana	Dubuque
Ehrhardt, Timothy Alan	Classis of Central Iowa	Grand Rapids
Falconer, Benjamin Jacob	Classis of South Grand Rapids	Trinity
Hoerner, Nancy Carol	Classis of Passaic Valley	Yale
Kelley, Jeffrey A.	Classis of Rochester	Regent
Lin, San-Yi	Classis of Queens	Yale
Maag, Brian C.	Classis of Chicago	Northern
Teague, Tyler Jason	Classis of Rocky Mountains	Denver
Thorne, Adriene Jenine	Classis of New York	Pacific
Van Peursem, Ronald Howard	Classis of Minnesota	Sioux Falls

Wulkan, David George	Classis of British Columbia	Regent
Yi, Bryan Gregory	Classis of Queens	Gordon-Conwell
Zylstra, Nicholas Ryan	Classis of Zeeland	Fuller

Approved Alternate Route (AAR)

Beebe, Brandon C.	Classis of Cascades	Western
Bragdon Nelson, Frances	Classis of Central California	Westminster
Te Winkle, William P.	Classis of Wisconsin	Trinity
Veldt, Stanley Mark	Classis of South Grand Rapids	N/A

Changes to the Bylaws

At the General Synod of 2007 in Pella, Iowa, the bylaws for the newly constituted MFCA were approved on an interim basis (*MGS 2007*, R-58, pp. 218-224). The understanding was that the MFCA board would present final changes to the bylaws to the General Synod in order to make them more permanent and no longer considered "interim." Although the board predicts there will be minimal changes recommended, it decided to wait on the results of a study on governance models before submitting more permanent bylaws. It will continue to use the existing interim bylaws approved by the 2007 General Synod until it is ready to submit final revisions to the General Synod for adoption. The board is confident that the changes will be presented at the 2011 General Synod.

Alternate Means and Twenty-Four Month Reductions

Reduction in Twenty-four Month Requirement: The City Classis request, on behalf of Daniel Gannon, to substitute a period of time to make up any deficiency of the twenty-four months of being in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process, was approved by the board (*BCO* 1.II.8.3). The board recognized the twelve months of supervised ministry performed at City Church San Francisco, prior to entering the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process, as meeting this requirement.

Reduction in Twenty-four Month Requirement: The City Classis request, on behalf of Matthew Nault, to substitute a period of time to make up any deficiency of the twenty-four months of being in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process, was approved by the board (*BCO* 1.II.8.3). The board recognized the twelve months of supervised ministry performed at City Church San Francisco, prior to entering the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process, as meeting this requirement.

Report of Central College

Ninety-four years ago the Reformed Church in America (RCA) assumed denominational support of Central College in Pella, Iowa. Central is a residential liberal arts college dedicated to helping students discover and develop their greatest potential. Guided by its ecumenical Christian tradition, the college community engages in vigorous, open inquiry in pursuit of academic excellence. Central's covenant relationship with the RCA has grown into a mutually beneficial and meaningful bond. Central is privileged to share this annual report with the General Synod of the RCA.

News

- Dr. Mark Putnam was named Central College's twenty-first president. Putnam assumes leadership in July 2010 following president Dr. David Roe's retirement in June 2010. "We were pleased to welcome Central College's twenty-first president, Dr. Mark Putnam, to the Central College family. He has an outstanding set of capabilities that will help Central College build on the very successful legacy of Dr. David Roe," said David Wesselink, chair of the Central College board of trustees.
- Central has signed an agreement with Allen College in Waterloo, Iowa, to enable qualified Central students to complete the requirements for a bachelor of arts degree from Central and then enter Allen College's accelerated nursing program. This allows students to graduate with both a BA and a BSN in a little over four years.
- Central's nationally recognized study abroad program has added a site in Ghana, Africa, offering a performing arts and culture immersion program. Dr. Samuel Mate-Kodjo (associate professor of Spanish) will lead this program in his homeland.
- Central College is one of 120 institutions nationwide named to the Carnegie Foundation Advancement of Teaching's Community Engagement Classification. According to Carnegie, Central's application documented excellent alignment among mission, culture, leadership, resources, and practices that support dynamic and noteworthy community engagement.
- Central was awarded a platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating from the United States Green Building Council for its newly constructed education, psychology, and communication studies building, which opened this past fall. This is Central's third LEED-rated building, following Vermeer Science Center, the first LEED-rated building in Iowa, and Howard McKee Hall, the first residence hall in Iowa to receive LEED certification.
- Inspired by the book *Three Cups of Tea*, alumni Kyle Dykstra '06, stationed in Afghanistan with the 82 Airborne, led the college in collecting school supplies for the children of Afghanistan.

RCA Initiatives

At the 2004 General Synod there was a recommendation (*MGS 2004*, R-19, p. 119) passed to affirm the three RCA colleges in their mission and ministry, to encourage every RCA congregation to regularly pray for and support the colleges with students and financial support, and to review the historic covenant between the colleges and the RCA. With the recommendation came this charge—the General Synod Council, in dialogue with the colleges, should explore specific means to strengthen the relationship between the RCA and the colleges. As a result of annual meetings held on the college campuses and at the RCA offices in Grand Rapids in support of R-19, Central has committed to the following to strengthen its relationship with the RCA:

- Continue the RCA scholarship given to incoming freshman students from RCA congregations and youth groups. The scholarships are renewable for up to four years. For an application visit www.central.edu/go/rca.
- The annual RCA Heritage Award of $1,500 to $2,100 is given to students of the RCA, to children of alumni, or to students with a sibling currently attending Central.
- For the third consecutive year Central hosted the winter session of the Central Iowa Classis. Members of classis were invited to meet, learn, dine, and conduct business on Central's beautiful campus.
- Strengthen the collaborative efforts of all three colleges affiliated with the Reformed Church in America. Under the leadership RCA coordinator for of discipleship Kirsty DePree, the three colleges and the RCA have met together twice and held three conference calls as they continue a trend of working together.
- Kristin Sullivan '03 continues as coordinator of RCA relations and has completed a

year-long assignment with Campus Ministries. She works closely with congregations and pastors to increase RCA enrollment, to encourage prayer support from individual churches, and to develop a program of more intentional interaction.

Spiritual Life

Spiritual life is an integral part of the overall educational environment at Central. Below are a few of the many activities within the Christian community that have occurred this year:

- A group of ninety-nine students, along with members of local RCA congregations, traveled to Reynosa, Mexico, over winter break for the tenth year in a row. Reynosa is an area of repeat ministry for Central students with the intention of continuing ministry and relationships with the people they love.
- For spring break 2010 Campus Ministries teams traveled to Pignon, Haiti, with Second Reformed Church in Pella, and returned to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in the summer. Among other things, students worked with refugees from the 2010 earthquake, led vacation Bible schools and women's conferences, and poured concrete floors for homes. Student Clayton Boeyink spent an entire semester doing mission work in Haiti. He and his wife, Taylor Boeyink, who is also a student, led the second trip.
- Student Cory Nikkel organized a Read the Bible in a Year program through Campus Ministries with 160 participating students, faculty, and staff.
- Campus Ministries students held six events for Angel Tree kids (a program for children of incarcerated parents).
- Salvation Army bell ringing, collectively with students, faculty, and staff, raised $3,180.72.
- Students and staff collected ninety Christmas gifts for children and youth residing at Orchard Place, a residential treatment facility in Des Moines, Iowa, and then provided a Christmas party for them.
- Central College was a great contributor to Pella's annual CROP Hunger Walk, with a total of 672 students donating their meals and raising over $5,500 to support Church World Service, an ecumenical organization that the RCA helped found and that partners to eradicate hunger and poverty and promote peace and justice around the world.

To receive the *Mission:Central* publication addressing faith life at Central, send your name and address to sullivank@central.edu. Also keep up to date with faith life at Central by visiting www.central.edu/faith or www.central.edu/development/churchGiving.cfm.

Enrollment

Enrollment for the 2009 fall semester included 443 freshmen; it was the tenth time in ten years Central has had an incoming class of over four hundred students. Total enrollment was 1,636. Central enrolled fifty-three new transfers in 2009. The RCA affiliated student population represented 7 percent of the freshman class and 9 percent of the student body. Twenty-two percent of the total enrollment is from outside of Iowa.

Faculty

During the 2009-2010 academic year, Central faculty members demonstrated extraordinary achievements in teaching and scholarship. Professional activities included the publishing of books and articles in professional journals. Faculty members also made presentations at regional and national workshops, were featured artists at exhibits and concerts, and were recognized by public leaders and national organizations for contributions to education and humankind. Below are examples:

- **Terence J. Kleven** (religion) led church services at Peoria Christian Reformed Church in Peoria, Iowa. His sermon title was "The Teaching on the Holy Spirit" (John 14:15-21). He also presented a paper titled "Liberalism's Quest to Create a Universal and Homogenous State and the Response of Particular Religious Communities" for the Iowa Dialog Conference at the University of Northern Iowa.
- **Elena Vishnevskaya** (religion) presented a paper at the Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Studies Conference held at Villanova University. Her paper was titled "Plausibility of Influence: Did Julian of Norwich Know of Maximus the Confessor's Concept of Human Will?"

Conclusion

Central College is proud of its covenant with the Reformed Church in America to "infuse and deepen a superior education in the liberal arts with a mature understanding of the sources and resources of the Christian heritage, maintaining a friendly appreciation for the reformed tradition and its implications for faith and learning." As we strive to teach our future leaders to leave Central empowered to make an impact on this world, we continue to enlist the support of our community. The prayers, gifts, and support of the individual churches of the Reformed Church in America do not just enable us in part to uphold this covenant; they are vital to the heart and mission of Central College. Central is truly blessed to be part of the RCA family.

[*See page 75 for the resolution on the retirement of President David Roe.*]

Report of Hope College

Hope College continues to cherish its covenantal relationship with the Reformed Church in America. It is a relationship of historical significance that is increasingly important for today. In the whole realm of higher education, there are very few institutions that value a meaningful relationship with their funding denomination. Hope College remains unequivocally committed to its covenantal commitment with the Reformed Church in America and desires an even stronger relationship in the future that will be mutually beneficial to the college and the church. Given the record of history which clearly demonstrates that these relationships are not sustainable, the college recognizes the major challenges which mark our efforts to maintain this partnership. Even as the college pledges itself anew to this covenant, there is trust that the denomination and individual congregations will do the same.

The mission of Hope College is to educate students for lives of leadership and service in a global society through academic and co-curricular programs of recognized excellence in the liberal arts and in the context of the historic faith. It is a noble mission and one which necessitates our unwavering attention on a daily basis. Our passion is to be exceptional educationally and vibrantly Christian at the same time. Not many institutions have this resolve, and fewer still are able to implement it at the highest levels. Hope College is such an institution and strives diligently to hire people who are unequivocally committed to our mission, provide programs that support our mission, and seek the resources that enable us to fulfill our mission. In these difficult economic times, this presents a significant challenge for the college.

Yet, several distinctive qualities distinguish Hope College from the competition. One of

these is most certainly the amount and quality of undergraduate research that takes place at Hope throughout the calendar year. The college repeatedly receives more external funding from the National Science Foundation for undergraduate collaborative faculty-student research than any other liberal arts college in the country. It is very affirming for the college, its professors, and students to be recognized so highly in the natural and applied sciences. Hope clearly has one of the best science programs in the country at the undergraduate level and is so recognized by reputation and external evaluators. But, Hope also displays great strength in the arts, where it remains the only liberal arts college in the country to offer nationally accredited programs in the major arts areas of dance, music, art, and theatre. The college remains committed to excellence in the natural and social sciences and in the arts and humanities. The college is grateful for professors who are able to teach well and engage in significant scholarly activity primarily with students, and for a staff which so capably facilitates the Hope experience.

Another distinctive of Hope is the vibrant spiritual life program. Chapel on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and the Gathering on Sunday night are always filled to overflowing with voluntary student attendance. The Christian character of Hope is unique in that there are so many opportunities to grow spiritually but so few requirements. There is on campus an intentional, pervasive Christian spirit which is marked not by prescription, indoctrination, or suffocation, but rather by a dynamic vitality. For this God is praised.

A third major distinctive of the college is the caring atmosphere which is so prevalent among members of the campus community. Faculty and staff genuinely care for students and their well-being—intellectually, socially, physically, and spiritually. It is a most desirable distinctive of the institution. The college takes care of students by providing an exceptional educational experience both academically and in co-curricular activities, by providing a wholesome residential life experience, by assisting with financial resources that help to keep a Hope College education affordable, and by providing the facilities which enable students and faculty to perform at the very highest levels. While students and their families are interested in having Hope take *care of* students, they are even more interested in having the college *care for* them. There is a difference. The distinctive at Hope is that the college cares for each student individually and for how each student can be assisted in becoming all that God intends that student to be.

Hope's part of the covenantal relationship with the Reformed Church in America is to provide a quality Christian education. It occupies our thoughts, prayers, and commitments on a daily basis.

The church's part of the commitment is to pray regularly for the college, encourage young women and men to consider Hope for their undergraduate education, and to provide resources as they are able. The college thanks those pastors and congregations who regularly uplift the college in their prayers. As a people who believe in the power of prayer, the college seeks God's providence and blessing in all its activities.

With regard to encouraging young people to consider Hope for their undergraduate experience, the college community again thanks those who so willingly attend to this. Unfortunately, the college has experienced a precipitous decline in the number of students from the Reformed Church in America who attend the college. This is a major concern for Hope because it potentially impacts the ethos of the place and because it potentially limits the number of parishioners who might one day populate the congregations of the Reformed Church in America. A more seamless effort for RCA students to attend an RCA college and populate an RCA congregation upon graduation would seem to be in the best interests of the college and the church. In order to advantage RCA students in the recruitment

process, the college does depend on pastor recommendations from a joint survey sent out by Hope, Central, and Northwestern. In recent years, the response rate by pastors has markedly declined, mirroring the decline in RCA connectedness. This is regrettable, and pastors are urged to assist the college by recommending the names of the students in their congregations who could benefit from a Hope College education. The colleges are working jointly on several initiatives with the denomination to better facilitate the recruitment of RCA students to the three RCA colleges. Hope does give favorable preference in admission and financial aid decisions to students of the Reformed Church in America.

With regard to the third component of the church's covenantal relationship with the college, there is also reason for concern. On an annual budget of $90 million, total church support for Hope is now less than $100,000 annually. There has been a continual decrease in church support for many years. Church funding for Hope is different than many denominationally affiliated institutions because the college receives no direct support from the Reformed Church in America. The college is supported by a few individual congregations who make the decision to support Hope financially. Hope is grateful not only for the dollar support but also symbolically for the relationship of partnering with the college in fulfillment of the covenantal relationship. Individual congregations in the RCA do support the spiritual life program at various public institutions. This is to be applauded. What hurts from Hope's standpoint is that this support for campus ministry at our competitor public institutions exceeds the support of these congregations and classes for the support of covenantally affiliated Hope. That doesn't seem right or appropriate.

There is little doubt that Hope will continue to be a distinguished and distinctive Christian liberal arts college for the foreseeable future. Its commitment to excellence educationally and simultaneously to a vibrant Christian faith dimension is unwavering. The greater question for Hope and the Reformed Church in America is whether our institutions will be able to defy the record of history and remain in a meaningful relationship in the future. It is a relationship to which Hope College is unequivocally committed. Covenantal relationships, however, require a commitment from both parties. The other half is a commitment by the Reformed Church in America and its individual congregations. May God grant both the college and the church the wisdom and the resolve to live out the denominational motto, *Eendracht Maakt Macht,* "Union Makes Might," for in unity there is strength!

Report of Northwestern College

In 1882 Northwestern's founders envisioned a place dedicated to academic rigor combined with Reformed and Christian principles. While much has changed in how Northwestern accomplishes this mission, the core purpose has remained constant. Northwestern recently revisited how it articulates its mission to ensure it is clear, concise, and compelling. The board of trustees approved this expression of the college's mission statement:

> Northwestern College is a Christian academic community engaging students in courageous and faithful learning and living that empowers them to follow Christ and pursue God's redeeming work in the world.

Northwestern's faculty and staff are deeply committed to the mission, desiring every student to experience what the mission statement describes. Below are a few examples of the college's mission at work.

Christian Academic Community

In an email, the parent of a current Northwestern student praised the college's integration of faith with students' learning and living:

> Our son is our 3rd (and sorry, last) child to send to you. Some friends think we are nuts because it's so far away, and it's cheaper to send their kids to state schools nearby. We see the difference in their godly convictions and choices immediately. While those parents are worried about how their children are spending their free time, our kids talk of discussions with their chaplain, Bible studies in their dorm, coaches that pray, and teachers that care…How could we wish for more? And each time, we are more convinced that sending our children to Northwestern was the best thing we could do…I know they are surrounded by godly examples of living one's faith in all areas. Thanks again for that personal touch that can only come from God's love working through all of you.

Engaging Students in Courageous and Faithful Learning and Living

Northwestern students challenge themselves and each other. They ask questions, seek God's truth, and prepare to transform their communities with insightful compassion. As they worship God with their excellence, they gain recognition for Northwestern's education around the globe.

In February, a team of Northwestern students competed in the collegiate computer programming world finals, sponsored by IBM, in Harbin, China. It was the second year in a row a Northwestern team was among the world's top one hundred, competing against teams from institutions like Duke, MIT, Stanford, and the universities of Buenos Aires, Helsinki, and Moscow to solve complex, real-world problems—a semester's worth of curriculum—in just five hours. Students Curt Van Wyk, Mark Haselhoff, and John Calsbeek represented Northwestern with excellence at the competition and said, "It's just a fun experience being in a huge room with around three hundred nerds hearing fifty to sixty different languages."

Empowering Them to Follow Christ and Pursue God's Redeeming Work in the World

The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll lists Northwestern among U.S. institutions whose students display exceptional volunteerism. In addition to the ways in which they serve the local and global community each year through regular volunteering and spring break and summer short-term mission trips, they also discover new, creative opportunities to make a difference.

This past school year, junior Lanet Hane, a Middle School Huddle Leader at Trinity Reformed Church and a member of Northwestern's Hunger/Homeless Ministry, pursued and received a $1,000 grant from the Walmart Foundation. The grant enabled the students to buy fabric and host "Fleece and Film" events in which students made tie blankets for families served by area ministries while they watched films that tell true stories of hunger or homelessness. Students have made and donated more than seventy-five blankets for low-income families that often have to choose between heat and food during the winter months.

Love INC shared with Lanet the impact of the blanket ministry. “Know that you and your fellow students truly demonstrated the love of Christ through these blankets. I knew God was working through your efforts as parents looked at me with tears in their eyes because of the gratitude in their hearts. I value our partnership and thank God for your motivation to help those right here in northwest Iowa.”

There is perhaps nothing more important for an organization than to know and accomplish its mission. Faculty and staff at Northwestern have the honor and privilege of participating in the lives of the world’s future servant leaders—watching them learn, mature, and respond to God’s call.

The Rev. Donald J. Poest, pastor of Brunswick Reformed Church, Reformed Church, Brunswick, Ohio was elected president. The Rev. Lisa Vander Wal, pastor of Lisha's Kill Reformed Church, Schenectady, New York, was elected vice president.

CLOSE OF GENERAL SYNOD

RESOLUTIONS OF GRATITUDE

Resolutions of thanks and appreciation for those volunteers, local churches, local businesses, and the Northwestern College community who were instrumental in making the synod meeting function smoothly were scrolled on the overhead screens. A motion was made and seconded from the floor to adopt the resolutions of thanks and appreciation.

VOTED: To adopt the resolutions.

ADJOURNMENT

President James Seawood presented the traditional president's bell to president-elect Donald Poest.

The meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America was declared to be adjourned after closing worship, which included the installation of officers and communion. Thus, the two hundred and fourth session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America adjourned at 10:50 a.m. on Tuesday, June 15, 2010.