Appendix A: Readings

SESSION 2 READINGS

Reflections by Ruan Shyh-zhen, translated by David Alexander

Kaohsiung Christian Family Counseling Center, May 2004

I’m a Taiwanese daughter-in-law from Vietnam. According to Taiwan’s mainstream media I belong to the “overseas brides” classification. This title carries several connotations: that we love money, have no knowledge, have deviant ideas, and so on. The children whom we bear and raise are regarded as being “slow.” When I first heard this I was distressed and dispirited. I learned that stories confirming these ideas are frequently run in the mass media, inducing many people to look at my friends and me with a particular set of prejudices. I admit that there are some overseas sisters who do not make the best show of themselves, yet those with whom I am acquainted do not lack in domesticity, academic ability, effort or willingness to become a part of their husbands’ extended families. Their children are intelligent and adorable, the same as the children of most Taiwanese families. Having heard so many negative opinions, I am both heartsick and driven to speak out my feelings.

Refugees International (RI) concerns regarding Darfur, Sudan

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RI has conducted six missions to Sudan and Chad since 2004 in order to monitor the increased displacement and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Darfur, western Sudan. Militia supported by the government of Sudan have conducted a genocidal campaign that in the name of defending the government of Sudan from rebel forces has targeted villages of African farmers, chased two million people from their homes, killed an estimated 300,000 and resulted in thousands of rapes. Despite wide international recognition of the situation in Darfur, no effective response to the atrocities has been mounted and the violence continues.

Amnesty International Press Release, 02/01/2005, on the discrimination against Roma in Europe

There are an estimated seven to nine million Roma living in Europe today with 80 percent of them living in new European Union member states and candidate countries. The level of income and unemployment is considerably lower for the Roma minorities across the region. According to the World Bank, in Hungary the poverty rate is about five times greater among Roma than among non-Roma.

Reflections on white privilege, by David Baak, director of the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism and interim minister for mission at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

One summer evening, a friend’s car broke down, so he had it towed to a shop for repair. The following day I gave him a ride to the shop so he could get an estimate and make arrangements to have the car fixed. James, an African American, and I, a white person, walked into the shop together through the open overhead door.

We approached the desk of the shop manager. Looking past James and directly at me, the shop manager asked “May I help you?” James said, “I came to see about getting my car fixed—they towed it in last night.”

“What kind of car is it?” the manager asked, still looking directly at me. “It’s James’s car,” I said, but the manager continued to ignore James. By the time we finished, I had been asked to
verify that the car belonged to James and to guarantee his check. The manager never even asked me who I was.

That is white privilege. I did nothing to earn the manager's respect or trust; James did nothing to warrant disrespect and suspicion. For everyone involved, the social and emotional consequences of such interactions are incalculable, especially when multiplied over a lifetime.

I learned that day to pay attention. I am very aware of who is talking to whom—and how they talk, and what words they use. I regularly see other examples of exclusion, and I try to intervene where possible. Most importantly, I have learned to watch how I behave when I sit at the manager's desk.

Letter about racial exclusion in the Reformed Church in America, by Ina Montoya, youth pastor at Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico, and member of the RCA's Commission on Race and Ethnicity

This is a letter describing a situation pertaining to racism or prejudice in the church as told to me by a Native American member of the Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church.

It happened at Triennial 2004 in California. Six of our women attended the conference, with five traveling together by plane and one driving with her family. At the conference the sixth woman often was separated from our group and was doing things with her family between Triennial activities. So naturally she didn't keep her nametag on at all times.

She noticed how other women would treat her differently because she didn't have the “identification” of the church. Some ignored her “hello's” but were nice to those wearing nametags; others automatically thought she was an employee of the DoubleTree Hotel where many Triennial women stayed, or employed as a janitor at the Crystal Cathedral, almost looking down on her (as if a janitorial job is something to look down upon).

Disappointed, we apologized for any negative actions against her, and were thankful she felt secure enough to share this with the consistory of Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church, the women who attended, and the RCA Commission on Race and Ethnicity.

SESSION 4 READINGS

Reflections by Pedro Windsor, pastor of La Capilla del Barrio, an RCA congregation in Chicago, Illinois

Having just received a call from an RCA classis to begin a new Hispanic church start, the first thing on my agenda was to secure housing for my family. I was referred by the classis missions committee folks to a local real estate agent. At the real estate office I was greeted warmly by the agent: “Hello, Reverend, it is so good to meet you.” At my request, the agent drove me around a Hispanic area of the city, showing me a couple of possibilities.

Once back in the real estate office, the agent told me, “Reverend, quite frankly, the neighborhood that you have chosen is not really a good one. Mind you, Reverend, I grew up in that area, but things were different back then. Those people,” he said, referring to Hispanics, “are a bunch of drunks who are dirty and always in trouble with the law…” He continued on in that vein, while I sat in my seat, stunned!

The agent concluded with, “Reverend, frankly speaking, I don’t know why you would want to live in that area with those people.” Gazing directly into his eyes, I responded calmly, “Because I am one of those people!”

The expressions on the face of the real estate agent that followed were a sight to behold. Seeking to regain his composure, the agent said to me, “Reverend, please excuse me for a moment,” and left his office.
This experience left me angry and in pain, not just for me, but also for this man. I was referred to him by Christians, who had identified him as a member of one of our churches. If any good was served by this encounter, it was possibly the realization that racism isn’t as simple as black and white.

Reflections by Anna Jackson, pastor of Queens Reformed Church in Queens Village, New York

Several years ago, in recognition of Black History Month, I led a six-week discussion group on the presence of black people in the Bible using a video series by the Rev. Dr. Cain Hope Felder. To my amazement, the class had about twenty-five people, of whom 75 percent were white. Many of the people in this class were folks that I considered to be enlightened, liberal, open-minded, deeply spiritual, and eager to learn. I had great respect for them and considered them not only my brothers and sisters in Christ but also my friends. This was going to be a great class and I was very excited about it.

By the third week another thought came to me. On this evening, somehow our discussion steered toward prejudice and one's response to it. As I shared some of my feelings of outrage that I have experienced when confronted with the prejudice of another, someone said to me, “Anna, that’s the problem. When will you get over it? You need to get over it and move on.”

I was stunned and wounded. Not because I had not heard people say that before. But I had never heard someone that I respected so highly say such a thing. That was something that I expected from “those” people, not from her—a white woman committed to the celebration of human diversity in the family of God. I wanted to scream.

Instead I took a deep breath and said quite passionately, “How does a wound get to heal if it is constantly poked, prodded, and stabbed? If I left here tonight and went down the street to hail a cab, most would not stop to pick me up. Why? Because I am black.

If I go to one of the boutiques uptown I will be followed around the store by salespeople, not because they are interested in my purchases, but to make sure I don’t steal anything. Why? Because I am black.

If I go to answer the ad for an apartment for rent in certain neighborhoods, all of a sudden the apartment is no longer available, or the person showing it becomes rude and uncooperative, or they will have me jumping through so many hoops to get it that it would not be worth my time. Why? Because I am black. Even in the church today, there are congregations that would not want me to serve among them for no other reason than the fact that I am black.

So how does a person get over something that is a daily reality? This is not the past or a memory from yesteryear that we are having difficulty letting go of and moving beyond. This is stuff that happens every single day.”

I fumed and cried all the way home that night wondering to myself how come people just don’t get this. At that moment, I realized just how difficult multicultural ministry really is in our context, and the great commitment needed to live it out.

Reflections by Steve Long-Nguyen Robbins, Ph.D., president of S.L. Robbins & Associates, a diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency consulting firm, and a visiting professor at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan

When someone asks me what it feels like to be discriminated against, I have to pause and think, not just think a little, but a lot. It’s a difficult question to answer because each act of discrimination, even perceived discrimination, elicits different thoughts and emotions. Some times it is anger, other times it’s confusion, and other times it’s an absence of both thinking and feeling—a numbing shock that is to some degree a coping state that my body engages when in utter disbelief. Still other times it’s a complex combination of many thoughts and
emotions that leaves me feeling awkwardly alone. Though each incident fuels unique initial responses, the resulting and overwhelming feeling I am left with is that I am very tired.

I am tired when store clerks fail to see an upstanding citizen when I use my credit card, asking to see my driver’s license when others in line before (or after) me are not asked. I can understand asking everyone, a policy uniformly carried out, but to be singled out with a negative label is tiring.

I am tired of other kids on the playground asking my kids where they are from, but not asking other kids on the same playground where they are from. I understand the curiosity that kids have, but such questions directed at my kids and not others tell me that other kids see my kids as outsiders, not really part of the “family.” The “family” of which these others kids have a mental model does not seem to include kids that look like mine. All my kids were born in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I am tired when I think about how my life would be happily different if my mother was still alive to play with her four grandchildren. My children do not have a Vietnamese grandmother. She took her own life after facing a lifetime of poor treatment and discrimination. I suspect it was very tiring for my 4’11” mother, who spoke with a distinct accent, to find out that equality, inalienable rights, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were words that apparently applied to some, not all. I am tired, and angry that these country-founding concepts were not operationalized for all.

I do not necessarily view each negative incident as racial discrimination, but am always left with questioning whether it was, and that is very tiring. As an example, when I am treated poorly in a restaurant I do not jump to the conclusion that the wait person was being racist, but I tend to ask two questions in those types of situations. The first is, “Does that wait person treat everyone poorly?” And the second is, “Is that wait person treating me poorly because of my race?” I suspect that those who are part of the white majority rarely find themselves asking the latter question here in the United States. Imagine having to ask (and answer) those two questions on a relatively regular basis. It is tiring.

Alone, each incident does not deplete me of too much energy. But the accumulation over the course of a lifetime of all these incidents (and others)—of what is or what might be racially based prejudice and discrimination—zaps a lot of energy that could be used elsewhere. It leaves me with less physical and emotional energy. I have less energy to use creatively at work.

Comments from the author: It was difficult for me to write the article (not necessarily on an emotional level) because I think what plagues many in the RCA and elsewhere is a misunderstanding of what racism is. Racism itself is much more of an institutional concept that involves privilege and power at institutional levels. Racial prejudice on the other hand is more of the individual level—things that occur in interpersonal interactions. It’s when you combine racial prejudice and power/privilege that you get big “R” racism. And herein lies the perceptual problem. Nice, well-meaning individuals understand racism as individual acts of prejudice, and that’s how they assess the degree of racism in our world. Well, racism today is much more subtle and less noticeable unless you know what to look for. Consequently, many people don’t see racism as a big issue, and they do not see themselves in a bad light because they are “nice people.” They believe that if they just treat everyone with love and respect, then everything will be okay. This approach does not account for all the institutional factors that produce racial disparities. Because of our past history, we do not even need “mean” people anymore to produce unequal outcomes—outcomes that have very little to do with “hard work” and “good personal choices.” Until people can understand and make this vital distinction, we will have lots of folks who feel sorry for other people, but will also blame those very same people.

—Steve Robbins
I have less energy to spend with my wife and kids. But ultimately I have less energy to further God’s kingdom. That is the tragedy of racism, that there are countless people in our communities that are seen negatively, are treated as outsiders, that have lost loved ones, and who are left with less energy than they should have to serve God, to make heaven on earth. We should all be tired of that.

The Poison of Prejudice

In the 1960s Iowa teacher Jane Elliott led her all-white, all-Christian, third-grade class in a simulation in which the children were separated into superior and inferior groups based on their eye color. Children with brown eyes were praised and given special privileges, while children with blue eyes were denied basic classroom rights.

With disturbing speed the children fell into their roles. The children designated as inferior performed worse on classwork, began calling themselves stupid, acted aggressively and even, in some cases, began banging their heads on their desks in anguish. In contrast, dyslexic brown-eyed boys suddenly could read. This simulation demonstrated the poisonous effects of prejudice and discrimination on self-esteem and performance.

Read more about this project by typing “Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes” or “Jane Elliott” into your Internet search engine.

SESSION 5 READINGS

Injustice Against Innocents in an Age of Terror, by Habeeb G. Awad, Palestinian-American and international student advisor at Hope College in Holland, Michigan

Below, you will find some of my personal insights and experiences that I felt directly and indirectly as a Middle Easterner after 9/11.

On 9/11, my parents, who live in the occupied West Bank of Bethlehem, were very worried about me. They insisted that I should stay home for some time and not venture outside the house unless it was necessary. My parents learned from the news that some Arab and Muslim citizens in the United States were arrested without charge and held in jail despite their rights. This worried my parents a lot. I assured my family that I felt safe in the community in which I live.

Once in a while, my wife and I go to eat at a Middle Eastern restaurant. I noticed, shortly after 9/11, the Middle Eastern restaurant’s owner decorated his establishment with American flags. Looking at how we, the Arab-Americans, use flags after 9/11 reminds me of the biblical story when God instructed the Hebrews to mark their doors with blood so that God’s wrath bypasses their homes.

Shortly after 9/11, a friend told me, “They [the U.S. government] are focusing their attention on your people.” My people! I felt the burden on my shoulders simply because I am a Palestinian-American, that somehow I am guilty by association.

As a Palestinian-American, I have a deep concern with the alarming hostility expressed by U.S. media commentators towards the Palestinian people in the wake of the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. While I was watching the funeral proceedings on MSNBC on November 13th, the show host, Don Imus, described Arafat as “stinky,” a “rat” with “beady eyes.” He also added statements claiming “all Palestinians look like him.” Then, one guest at Imus’s show described the crowds of Palestinians attending the funeral as “animals” and joked about their hygiene. “They’re dropping soap from the helicopters,” the guest laughed. I felt that I was dehumanized by Imus’s racist remarks and that the general public will take it for granted that all Palestinians are “animals.”
The Belhar Confession Speaks to Injustice in Palestine

Excerpts from an address by the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

In 2004 the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and general director of the International Center of Bethlehem, addressed the RCA’s General Synod. Among many other things, he said...

What we are facing in Palestine today is what can best be called a land grab. The state of Israel is confiscating nearly every plot of land in the West Bank upon which there is not Palestinian habitation, which will leave no room for any future growth. My two daughters, who are now fourteen and ten, will not in twenty years be able to find in Bethlehem or anywhere else in the West Bank a free plot of land, even one acre of land, upon which to build a home, because all the empty land, which is our treasure for future expansion, will have already been confiscated. In 1948 the state of Israel was carved out of around 78 percent of historic Palestine. When we were still calling for a two-state solution, we were saying, “Okay, Israel, take your 78 percent and leave to us the other 22 percent.” What’s happening today is that Israel has already taken 60 percent of the 22 percent, which leaves us with only 10 percent of historic Palestine. In this 10 percent we have 6 million Palestinians. Israelis, who are also 6 million, have the other 90 percent.

…Israel is currently constructing [a wall] around almost every town on the West Bank. If you come to visit us in the little town of Bethlehem, you will see that Israel is already building this wall…When it is completed, a twenty-six-foot-high wall stretching for fifty miles will completely surround Bethlehem, leaving just one big gate by which we can come and go. And the Israelis will control that gate, leaving us completely at their mercy. While you are singing “O Little Town of Bethlehem” on Christmas Eve, the actual town of Bethlehem will be imprisoned behind these high walls, forever confined to an area as small as two square miles.

Even more difficult is that Israel’s decision to build these walls comes with an American blessing. The Belhar Confession speaks to this in what it says about any forced unilateral separation. This is what we have in Palestine today—a forced unilateral separation…And what this will inevitably lead to, unfortunately, is a system of injustice—which is irrevocable. Once these walls are in place, there will be no one to tear them down. What this will lead to in increasingly overcrowded Palestinian towns is high levels of unemployment, dangerously low water supplies, a lack of local control over resources, with no proper access to the outside world…

The Belhar Confession of our brothers and sisters in South Africa is encouraging us not to remain silent as a church regarding any ideology or policy which results in the exclusion of the Palestinian people. I would call upon you, as our partners, to help us initiate together a process of confessing.

Excerpts from an address to RCA General Synod 2004, by Christo Lombard, Namibia/South Africa, member-in-residence at the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton Theological Seminary

During the first ten years of its existence [the Belhar Confession] triggered and hastened the collapse of apartheid in South Africa, and now in the last decade or so, it has been an inspiration and theological backup for diverse initiatives in church and society: e.g. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, the quest for the continuing unifying movement within the Reformed family and the wider ecumenical world, and various involvements with justice issues in society, not only in Southern Africa, but in the “global village”…

When I accepted the position of head of the biblical studies department at the University of Namibia, in 1984, and my family joined the congregation of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Windhoek, soon to be followed by a few other white “Protestants,” Belhar immedi-
ately became the tower of strength that carried forward the difficult work of bringing down the walls of separation, prejudice, and fear in this “mixed” Christian community. Through shared meals in the white, black, and so-called colored townships of Windhoek, of the initiative “Koinonia Windhoek,” we brought Christians together in the spirit of Belhar; the Confession was studied, preached, and lived, until in 1995 we published a book, “Kom ons word EEN” (“Let us become ONE”), through which the Uniting Reformed Church (the old DR Mission Church in Namibia) invited the white DRC and the black Evangelical Reformed Church of Africa (ERCA) to indeed become one…

Another personal example of the effect of the Belhar is the inspiration it provided for me and a few other white Namibians to help break the deadlock in the Namibian peace process…Through carefully planned peaceful marches and demonstrations and information campaigns, the newly formed Namibia Peace Plan 435 group managed to overcome the severe ideological and smear campaigns of the South African “dirty tricks department” and to help mobilize the majority of the Namibian people, so that within three years the South Africans were probably even relieved to withdraw from Namibia “with honor,” to be able to deal with their own volatile situation. We still believe that it was the Belhar-like spirit of reconciliation and the sense of justice that helped Namibia to make its enormous transition in such a peaceful and orderly way…

I can mention a last Namibian-based instance of an “implication” of Belhar: the paradigm that was developed in public schools regarding the teaching of religion in Namibian schools. As chairperson of the new curriculum committee for religious and moral education, established by the minister of education, soon after independence, I was faced with the task to chart a new course in this crucial area. The committee had the new Namibian Constitution as a guideline, together with the resolve never again to privilege one religion above others. However, we did not want to throw the child away with the bathwater, and thus decided to develop a curriculum in which all major religious traditions would be taught, with an emphasis on their ethical teachings, so as to foster real understanding and respect (not only “tolerance”!), and so to prepare our learners to make informed ethical choices in life ahead. Thus, when September 11 came in 2001, we were sitting in a multi-faith meeting with the Muslim imams of the local mosques, together with Jews, Christians of evangelical and ecumenical persuasion, Baha’is and representatives of other religions—already busy with the agendas of working together towards better understanding and a “common ethos.” Belhar’s emphasis on God’s justice in all spheres of our worldly existence provides a very powerful theological back-up for such uncharted terrain—terrain which, worldwide, we cannot avoid any longer, not even under the First Amendment…

It seems to me that the inclusiveness of the Confession, not only dwelling inside the safe walls of the church, but “stepping off the plank” (Leonard Sweet), as it were, into the world, especially the world of the “other” (so easily seen as the stranger or the enemy), and the deep concern for all forms of marginalization and exclusion, are aspects of Belhar that present a powerful hermeneutic of “justice for all.” These principles, working positively for reconciliation wherever there is estrangement or exclusion (“women,” “children,” “gays and lesbians,” “foreigners,” “Muslims,” “white middle-aged males”!) and “looking for other bikers to wave to on the roads of life,” and sensing God’s way of justice and peace in the world—are they not treasures exactly because they are part of what we believe, of what we confess, and thus live?

**Excerpts from an address to RCA General Synod 2004 by the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb**

There is another very important aspect of the Belhar Confession which we can apply to our context, which is the option for the poor and the concern for justice. Doug [Fromm] just quoted Martin Luther King Jr.: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Because
Justice cannot be divided, justice cannot be partial. In the last part of the Belhar Confession it is clear that the approach is more general in this way. It doesn't speak specifically about the revelation of God through Christ but about revelation in broader terms. “We believe,” the confession says, “that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men.” Clearly the confession draws our attention to the fact that God's option for the poor is universal. God is interested in bringing justice to all peoples in every nation, irrespective of their social, economic, or cultural background. This approach of Belhar is certainly a platform that can apply to Jews and Muslims. In this moment of truth I hope that holding up the Belhar Confession as a model for our own context can help us facilitate an interfaith confession which would restate some of what we are confessing here as Christians.

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This principle, God's and the church's justice and care for the poor and suffering, is one of the most spiritually significant and theologically compelling contributions of Belhar for our Reformed faith.

—Gretel Van Wieren, in her address to the RCA General Synod, June 2003

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**SESSION 6 READINGS**

**Mennonite Church USA experience with Damascus Road and racial reconciliation**

Since 1995, the Mennonite Church USA has been engaged in Damascus Road, an initiative designed to address racism in the church. In an editorial in the February 15, 2005, issue of The Mennonite, Everett J. Thomas writes the following:

Until an institution or group identifies its beginning place with honesty and humility, not much progress can be made. This also means that those in our denomination charged with dismantling racism cannot simply create one analysis that fits all groups and then write a curriculum.

Rather, each group interested in creating a truly multicultural, antiracist church must do the hard work of locating themselves on the road and committing to taking the next step along the way.

Damascus Road maintains at least two important principles associated with this journey. First, no group or institution can skip a stage in the transformation process. Second, moving from any one stage to the next is difficult and can be painful—no matter how advanced the stage.

The discouraging part of this work is that the more we work at dismantling racism, the more problems we uncover. Mennonite Church USA peace advocate Susan Mark Landis, a member of the Executive Board's antiracism team, recently explained why.

“The more we get into it,” she said at last month's Executive Board meeting, “the harder it gets because [racial-ethnic] people finally have the courage to speak up. It is very hard.”

The more we work at dismantling racism, the more those victimized by it begin to trust us—and then reveal more of how they experience our racism. They also ask for action.

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To learn more about Damascus Road, go to www.mcc.org/damascusrroad.
January 16, 2006, letter from Ina Montoya, youth pastor at Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico, and member of the RCA’s Commission on Race and Ethnicity

Dear Friends,

This is a letter describing racial prejudice or insensitivity that I have experienced in the church as a Native American. Most situations seem to happen out of ignorance, and I cannot say that in my lifetime I have been completely innocent of my own prejudices due to ignorance.

My first examples happened in churches where I’ve spoken. At one church, an elder Anglo woman commented to me on my oily skin: “Back in my day, we never allowed our forehead to become shiny; it was unheard of!” Some people, when I came to speak, expected me to have a broken English accent, and as they shook my hand on exiting the church they told me: “I was so relieved when I heard you speak good English with no foreign accent!” Actually, I myself prefer the voices of my grandmothers and other Native elders over my “midwestern” accent.

Then there is the frequent claim of white people to Indian heritage, particularly royal Indian heritage: “My great-great grandmother was a Cherokee Indian princess, though I cannot prove it.” In reciprocation to this, Native Americans sometimes wear a T-shirt that reads, “I have a little bit of White in me, but I can’t prove it.”

My final example comes from worship at General Synod 2003. In response to my request that Native music be included, I was given a hymnbook to look for appropriate songs, but found nothing except songs that were very stereotypical. To my surprise, one of the songs chosen for worship was one of those songs, and it was accompanied by a monologue that took me back to a cowboy and Indian movie from the 1960s. Our Native drum beat was played on African drums for the sake of convenience and because “they both sound the same.” The beat used for another Native song was more like one the cavalry would have used during a march of attack than like the steady American Indian rhythm we refer to as a heart beat.

Though these incidents happened years ago, the painful feelings they stirred in me are still present. The comments about my different skin and my non-accent rekindled the feelings of self-consciousness and self-contempt I experienced growing up as a Native American child.

Perhaps I should have been more insistent and assertive in the General Synod worship situation. I practiced notes to the stereotypical tune on my wooden flute without knowing or inquiring about the words that were to be used with it. And I should have walked across the stage of the Hope College chapel to correct the drum beat, but I did not feel it was my place to do so. Not enough self-esteem, I guess.

Nevertheless, my experiences at my speaking engagements and General Synod worship were mostly positive. I was able to tell about God’s work being done on the Jicarilla Apache Reservation and to educate others about Native American culture.

—Ina Montoya

Letter from Tom Danney, pastor of First Reformed Church in Nyack, New York

We weren’t looking to become a shared facility. We had heard the stories of scheduling and maintenance problems. We liked having the place to ourselves. One tenant five days a week was enough. But one problem was obvious: the church facilities (sanctuary, fellowship hall) sat idle for most of the week.

In the space of three years, we were approached by two individuals: the first wanted to begin a ministry to recent Spanish-speaking immigrants in the area, and the second wanted to begin a ministry to French-speaking Haitian Seventh-day Adventists. Permission was easily
given for both to begin. One ministry has been here for just over three years and has grown remarkably. The other has been with us only one year and has only a small worshipping congregation to date.

While financial contributions have been a welcome benefit to our budget, there are other ways both new congregations have given back to the “host” church. Their spiritual fervor, for starters. Their care of the building and care for the building is another. Out of immense gratitude, both congregations have been understanding and cooperative around scheduling matters, and they have been strong prayer partners with respect to the current ministry of this 166-year-old congregation.

Yet, different styles and languages have prevented unified worship times. In addition, both new congregations hold their services at unfamiliar worship hours for the “host” congregation. While unity is annually prayed for in our traditional congregation, unifying experiences—if only to simply know each other—have not found legs to move on. The newer congregations, while welcoming the idea of fellowshipping or eating together, have been slow to follow up when suggestions are made. And the “host” congregation struggles with its memories: other tenants in the past impacted the free use of “our” church space when we wanted to use it. Fear that this will happen again is very real.

If Christian unity is to be realized at all in this exciting mix of culturally and racially different congregations, the “host” congregation will have to move beyond permission-giving to real and desired participation. It will help if our congregation can lose the “host” mentality and risk new initiatives to connect with and know those who live with us in our home.

—Rev. Thomas C. Danney, February 2005

SESSION 7 READINGS


Graham Cyster, a Christian whom I know from South Africa, recently told me a painful story about a personal experience two decades ago when he was struggling against apartheid as a young South African evangelical. One night, he was smuggled into an underground Communist cell of young people fighting apartheid. “Tell us about the gospel of Jesus Christ,” they asked, half hoping for an alternative to the violent communist strategy they were embracing.

Graham gave a clear, powerful presentation of the gospel, showing how personal faith in Christ wonderfully transforms persons and creates one new body of believers where there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, rich nor poor, black nor white. The youth were fascinated. One seventeen-year-old exclaimed, “That is wonderful! Show me where I can see that happening.” Graham’s face fell as he sadly responded that he could not think of anywhere South African Christians were truly living out the message of the gospel. “Then the whole thing is a piece of sh—,” the youth angrily retorted. Within a month he left the country to join the armed struggle against apartheid—and eventually giving his life for his beliefs.

In Our Own Backyards, by Karen Barker, professor at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa

At Northwestern College we are working diligently to be more ethnically aware and diverse. We enter into relationship with an organization from Chicago. We do all kinds of mission trips during school breaks and during the summer. It looks good. It makes us feel good.
But all of these populations are away from us, mostly urban or in a different country. And all the while we are stumbling on what is right outside our doors. The Spanish-speaking population here has exploded in numbers. The American Indians have reservations less than an hour away from us. There is one of the largest Sudanese populations in this country an hour and a half from us in Sioux Falls. There is a large Asian population living in the Sioux City area. Where is the denomination’s money so that individuals from these groups can attend one of its colleges? Of the four houses across the street from me, two of them are Spanish-speaking households. They are the best kind of neighbors. If they see me raking my leaves, they come over with their leaf blowers and their pick-up trucks to help. These households are Roman Catholic, so the chances are slim that they will come to church with me. So, the question becomes: What is the need that my church and my college can meet? We can hold free ESL classes for the parents of the children my children play with. We can hold free Spanish classes for people like me. Mission trips and long-distance relationships just aren’t enough, when the nuances of racism and prejudice are all around us. Even in Iowa.

Making a Difference in Chicago

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The Church of the Good News (RCA) has a long history of involvement with its integrated Lathrop Homes neighborhood in north-side Chicago. This was once a thriving industrial area, but during the 1980s and ’90s, manufacturers began fleeing the cities for the suburbs or rural areas (where land was cheaper) or for the South or other countries (where labor was cheaper).

The loss of jobs was devastating to Lathrop residents, many of whom had lived and worked in the area for many years. Liala Beukema, at that time the pastor of Church of the Good News, cites the case of her neighbor. “He has been employed at four different neighborhood plants. He has never been fired from any of those jobs. Each job loss was the result of a layoff due to a plant closing.” By the late ’90s the unemployment rate in the area had risen to around 90 percent.

Even as jobs were moving out of the neighborhood, often beyond the reach of residents unable to afford transportation to more distant locations, welfare reforms made finding stable employment all the more critical. Adding to the neighborhood’s woes was gentrification, a process in which older, low-income and blue-collar neighborhoods are redeveloped into updated, upscale new communities. Already, one former manufacturing site in the area had been converted into an expensive, gated community. Long-time residents feared that the result would be rising housing costs that would drive them from their homes.

When community leaders learned that yet another manufacturer (Cotter & Co.) was leaving the area, and that a gated community was being proposed for this site too (by the developer of the first gated community), they decided that enough was enough.

The Church of the Good News had hooked up with the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in connection with an earlier issue, and the LSNA now became the main vehicle for neighborhood action.

One of the toughest challenges leaders faced was mobilizing neighborhood residents, many of whom, after prior defeats and years of being neglected and ignored, felt they had no hope, that “you can’t fight city hall.” But persistence paid off. People began meeting weekly at the church to research the issues and decide what they could do to stop the gated community.

Talking to the owner of the manufacturing plant, the neighborhood group learned that building the gated community would require a zoning change. Investigating further, they learned that in Chicago, aldermen had a key role in zoning changes in their wards, and that the developer of the proposed gated community was currently building their alderman a very large
home in the first gated community at a very good price. A meeting was called, and over three hundred neighborhood people packed the church. At the meeting, another area manufacturer told the residents that if the gated community were built, he would be forced to relocate, taking with him another five hundred jobs. When this story hit the news, the mayor stepped in and declared that there would be no housing at the Cotter location.

This was a victory, but the residents felt they needed to decide what they did want to see on the property. They produced a document setting forth their requirements: five hundred living-wage jobs (jobs that paid well enough to support a family) with benefits and job training. Every time a developer made a proposal that did not meet LSNA’s requirements, they fought it. They relentlessly pressured city officials. Says Beukema, “Every time we’d hear that there was going to be a meeting with a developer, we’d try to meet with the [planning] commissioner, try to meet with the developer. If we couldn’t get any satisfaction there, we’d end up on the fifth floor to meet with the mayor. We became very close friends with the fifth-floor security guards. They’d see the elevator doors open, they’d see our faces, and they’d pull out the ropes to block off the door to the mayor’s office.”

Their unrelenting presence made a difference. Planning department officials, perhaps embarrassed by the group’s frequent visits to the fifth floor, began to be more proactive. But, says Beukema, it also made a difference in the attitude of the neighborhood. “Partly because of the early decision of the mayor not to put housing there. But also because a kind of community camaraderie developed over the course of time, as people went to actions together and heard reports about actions. People began to feel like something was really possible.”

Eventually a proposed use was put forward that the LSNA felt would be beneficial to the neighborhood. Costco Companies Inc. wanted to open its first Chicago store on the site. Costco offered living-wage jobs with benefits for all employees, both full- and part-time. They planned to hire over two hundred people, and other development at the site was expected to bring in the rest of the jobs the group hoped for.

The new alderman called a meeting to discuss Costco’s proposal, but held the meeting in a location that was not convenient for the Lathrop residents. Beukema and other community leaders felt this was a deliberate strategy to limit the neighborhood’s participation. In an interview, Beukema and Nancy Aardema, executive director of LSNA, described how the community responded:

Beukema: We organized a march from the Church of the Good News, which is right by Lathrop, over to St. Bonaventure [the meeting location]. We wanted to all enter in a group and show our unity. We also wanted to make it fun. We had over 70 people. We handed out sack lunches. We had drums. We had signs. It was a parade.

Aardema: By this time, we had had many, many actions. We had fliered all the traffic in the neighborhood. We’d had candlelight vigils. We’d had prayer vigils. This march was a celebration of all of our work, with songs and a festive atmosphere.

Beukema: We sat very respectfully in the back of the room. We far outnumbered the people from the gentrified area. Costco did their presentation, then we began to ask questions. Really we just wanted a public agreement to two things: that they would do the job training with us, and that they would utilize us as a resource for hiring people in the neighborhood. And the alderman stood up and totally lost it. Just absolutely got furious. He said we didn’t have a right to ask that, and who did we think we were. What happened next was great. A number of people in the gentrified section of the audience stood up and said, “We don’t get it. Why can’t you agree to that?” So most of the anger got
directed toward the alderman, and we were sitting in the back of the room eating our sack lunches.

Aardema: As we were leaving the meeting, the police [who had been called by the alderman] were standing there. And they said, “You guys look pretty peaceful.”

Beukema: We offered them sandwiches, apples, juice boxes. It was fun. So that was a victory, at least a partial agreement on the hiring. But the bigger victory was that here are all of these people who at one time were our enemies, or seeming enemies, who are supporting us now, who are starting to understand our concerns. That was very encouraging.

Further reflections from Liala Beukema

The lesson of changing the leadership paradigm from top down to bottom up is one the most valuable gifts I have been given from the Church of the Good News community. Early on in our tenure at Good News, the good people of Good News and the public housing community gently but firmly challenged us to move from the process of “doing for” to “doing with” and to experience the power of this change. That story is documented in my husband George Beukema’s book, Stories from Below the Poverty Line: Urban Lessons for Today’s Mission (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001).

In the mid ’90s, as conditions in our community began to change and gentrification was steadily eating away at valuable resources for economic development and stability, our church engaged the neighborhood in an intentional process of organizing. Weeks and months of one-on-one interviews, community gatherings, brainstorming, prioritizing, and relationship-building created a strong, dedicated, and unified body of folks who were able to withstand seven long years of combating market forces, political resistance, and human discouragement while we worked to prevent the eighteen-acre [Cotter] site from being converted from manufacturing to upscale housing. Because of our unified voice, at the end of the struggle our community was able to negotiate with the city of Chicago and the commercial developer for resources for job training for community residents, first opportunity for job interviews, and a year-long mentoring and support program for training graduates who were hired. As a result, fifty people from our community garnered living-wage jobs with full medical and dental benefits. Three years later 65 percent of those hired from our program are still employed.

We would not have had this success without creating a strong bond. It was this bond, rooted in the wisdom, the voice, the dreams, the commitment of the people of the community that shaped and sustained the movement through the ups and downs, the victories and defeats of a seven-year struggle. It was the people’s collective history of being too long forgotten and neglected that fueled stamina and perseverance when other folks might have been inclined to give up the fight.

To have been invited into this process has been one of the most amazing and humbling experiences of my life, one for which I am truly grateful.

Orange City and Bronx Churches Partner in Mutual Mission, by RCA editorial staff

As president and vice president of General Synod, respectively, Steve Vander Molen and Irving Rivera are spending a lot of time together this week. But this is hardly their first meeting, though Vander Molen pastors a church in Orange City, Iowa, and Rivera in the Bronx, New York. For the past nine years, their congregations have kept up a relationship of friendship, mutual support, and joint mission in a bond Rivera says was “birthed by the Holy Spirit.”

In early 1996, First Reformed Church in Orange City was looking for a spring mission trip destination. They decided on Fordham Manor Reformed Church in the Bronx, where good
things were happening in the ministry of the congregation, but the building was damaged beyond the congregation’s ability to patch it up.

The RCA calls the kind of relationship between First Reformed Church and Fordham Manor Reformed Church “mutual mission.” RCA Global Mission encourages RCA members, congregations, and classes to form partnerships with people and churches in other parts of their country and abroad, for the enrichment and support of both partners.

These partnerships also include classis companionships, experiential journeys, and pastoral and seminary student exchanges, but many mutual mission relationships begin with a volunteer service trip. Steve Vander Molen says about his church’s work group experiences in New York City, “We have as much to gain from the partnership as to give. The kind of ministries they’re involved in have enlivened and empowered people from our congregation.”

On March 3—“a day that will live with me forever,” Rivera says—three vans with thirty-some members of First Reformed Church, including Pastor Vander Molen, pulled up at Fordham Manor. To the surprise of Pastor Rivera (not to mention the Iowa work group), thirty people from the Fordham Manor congregation ran up and hugged the work group members.

“I couldn’t believe what I was seeing,” Rivera recalls. “It was beautiful; I had to pull aside to a corner, and I wept. I thought, ‘This is truly Pentecost.’”

The Iowa team, joined by members of the New York congregation, painted, replaced windows and doors, and replaced worn-out flooring. But the most significant transformation wasn’t in the facilities. As members of the two congregations shared meals and worked side by side, a deep relationship developed. There were tears in the eyes of both church groups when they said goodbye at the end of that week.

Both Rivera and Vander Molen describe those five days together as a turning in their congregation’s outlook. Rivera felt encouraged in his own ministry and was amazed at the change he saw in the congregation. “We were experiencing slow growth, but since ’96 it took off and hasn’t stopped,” he says. “Now we’re talking about expanding the building eight hundred to a thousand feet!”

Since then, the relationship has deepened. When First Reformed has sent work groups to other New York City churches, members of Fordham Manor have often offered them hospitality and sent members to work alongside them. Members of Fordham Manor have visited First Reformed, and First Reformed now funds a scholarship for minority students at Northwestern College in Orange City, which has enabled at least one student from Fordham Manor to attend. Fordham Manor has started relationships with other churches in their area, collaborating in evangelism ministries and spending time enjoying each other’s company.

Officiating at this General Synod is another step in the partnership between the two churches, as Vander Molen sees it: “So here we are, two pastors who’d rolled up their sleeves together in ’96, president and vice president nine years later.”

“We’re from very different cultures and contexts, but our two congregations have really bonded in unique ways,” Vander Molen says. Rivera comments, “Whenever the two groups meet, it’s amazing. There’s a real bond there that speaks of what God is trying to do in our denomination.

“I pray that this would happen with more churches,” he adds. “Whenever I go to First Reformed in Orange City, I feel like I’m going to my home church.”
Isaiah 61 Project Brings Hope to Urban Youth, by RCA editorial staff

“The Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed...They shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations” (Isaiah 61:1, 4).

Dr. Oliver Patterson is a professor of language and literacy at New York University and a member of First Reformed Church in Jamaica, Queens, New York. After September 11, 2001, Patterson and Reformed Church World Service coordinator Betty Voskuil discussed how to help urban youth deal with the violence of the terrorist attacks, as well as the stresses of their daily lives.

The Isaiah 61 project arose out of those discussions. With help from funds from Reformed Church World Service, two Reformed congregations in inner New York City now welcome dozens of children and young people who come two days a week to play basketball, spend time with friends, and learn more about themselves and the world around them.

Why did project leaders choose the name “Isaiah 61” for the project?

Isaiah 61 is the clearest statement of the social justice mission of Jesus Christ: to free the imprisoned, the brokenhearted, and the poor. We take imprisonment to mean more than physical incarceration but also mental imprisonment caused by the brokenness of society.

Our project attempts to heal that brokenness by having children and youth critically understand the social forces that work to maintain such evils as racism, sexism, and social classism. We attempt to teach them that all things are possible through Jesus the Christ. Our hope is that the children who attend the project will become the leaders of the cities and bring healing to all who hurt.

How does the project go about doing that?

We focus on four themes: peace and violence, identity, health, and leadership.

The program opens with worship, prayer, and contemporary gospel music, songs the kids like—it opens their spirits after a day of school. We have a social drama that vivifies the real-world issues of the children. Then we talk about it, interpret it. We do a lot of talking, a lot of writing, a lot of reading.

People in the community—teachers, nurses, construction workers, plumbers—have come and talked to the kids about their lives and work. A local shop owner who sells very expensive jackets gave the kids insight into the costs of the clothing and how much profit is made; they engaged in critical reflection about marketing and costs. The shop owner told the children that the jackets were overpriced and that they should not buy them.

The images presented by the pop media, especially for black kids, are not very wholesome. When we introduce them to people in the community who are positive, they get to see true role models.

We also integrate field trips into the curriculum.

“One of the real goals of the project was to learn from the things we did and share them with other churches,” says Oliver Patterson. “We’re currently sharing what we’ve done with other churches; Elmendorf Reformed in Harlem is adapting the curriculum to their after-school program.” For more information about the Isaiah 61 project or suggestions on applying the project’s curriculum at your church, email Michelle Patterson at Michelle1367@netzero.net.
SESSION 8 READINGS

Reflections on Civil Disobedience, by Robina Winbush, ecumenical officer for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

“Pastor, Pastor...did you go to jail?” The children of my church and community greeted me with this question one afternoon in the spring of 1999. I looked at their questioning faces and knew that it was important that I find the correct way to explain my actions to them. These children were used to adults going to jail, but usually it was for something that the adult had done wrong. How did I explain going to jail for something that was right? I smiled and told them to make sure they were in church the next Sunday and they would get an answer to their question.

Needless to say, they were all at the Hollis Presbyterian Church the next Sunday and they had also brought their friends. As they rushed down for the children's message, I looked at their expectant and waiting eyes. “I hear there's a rumor going around that the pastor went to jail. Yes, I did.” Somewhere between the gasp and the dead silence, I knew I had their attention. I asked them how many had heard about a man named Amadou Diallo, who had been shot forty-one times by police officers in the Bronx and he hadn't done anything wrong. Their faces dropped and their heads nodded. I explained that I had joined with other ministers, people of faith and just plain citizens in going to One Police Plaza to let the police, the mayor, the city and the world know that we thought this was very wrong and we wanted the police officers brought to trial. They began to understand. We talked about Martin Luther King, Jr. and how he led people to jail to protest when African Americans weren't being treated fairly or justly. I watched them begin to connect history with their lives. I explained that I went to jail for a very little while, to make sure that they lived in a city where they would be treated fairly and justly.

A year later, on the Friday when the four police officers were acquitted of the charges related to shooting an innocent Black man forty-one times and killing him, I had a confirmation class to teach. I wasn't sure how I was going to teach class that evening. As the class gathered, there was an uneasy and unusual quietness about the students. It was a class made up of 60 percent African American males between the ages of ten and thirteen. They were never quiet. But this day was different. I asked them what was up. They asked me if I had heard about the verdict in the Amadou Diallo case. I said yes. I knew that before we could talk about the catechism questions, we needed to talk about the verdict and where was Jesus in all of this. I let them talk and listened to their stories of seeing their fathers' and brothers' and uncles' and grandfathers' encounters with the police. I saw the fear in their eyes and the vulnerability of their spirits. Their anger was minor in comparison with the deep sense of betrayal they felt. As I listened, I prayed for a way to pull them out of the traps of helplessness and defeat that were holding their spirits. I knew that confirmation for these children would have to be more than learning the catechism questions, reciting the Apostle's Creed and professing the faith of their parents and the church. Confirmation would have to answer the fundamental question, “Who is Jesus to an African American male child in world that is hostile to his very life?”

A Ministry of Hope in the Holy Land, by John Hubers, supervisor of RCA mission in the Middle East

January 6, 2005

The Belhar Confession was formulated as a response to an oppressive political situation based at least partly on what some South African Christians considered good biblical teaching (much as those who held slaves did so based on their reading of scripture). Those who wrote this confession challenged these beliefs, noting that they flew in the face of one of the most
important themes of the Bible, which is reconciling justice.

Palestinians face a similar situation to that faced by black South Africans under apartheid. Here, too, they find themselves living under the heel of a government which has put in place an oppressive system which robs them of their dignity and humanity. With the construction of what has been called by some an “apartheid wall,” their lives are even more circumscribed and delimited. They “live and move and have their being” in the suffocating grip of a humiliating military occupation.

Some Palestinians have responded with retributive violence, which has only served to make the situation more desperate. Others approach it with resignation. Palestinian Christians have for the most part chosen to take a more constructive path, one which echoes Belhar’s prophetic witness to the biblical voice of reconciling justice.

One such person is Palestinian Lutheran pastor the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, whose moving presentations at last year’s General Synod helped those who attended gain a better understanding of the true nature of the issues involved. Dr. Raheb does not mince words when it comes to identifying the evils of the Israeli occupation: “The Israeli government is unilaterally deciding where the boundaries for the Palestinian homelands should go,” he says with a justifiable sense of outrage. “We can compare the resulting situation to a piece of Swiss cheese. Israel controls the cheese, and the Palestinians live in the holes. And what this will inevitably lead to, unfortunately, is a system of injustice—which is irrevocable.”

This, however, does not lead him to despair or to justify a nihilistic violent response. On the contrary he continues to hold out hope that justice will prevail. This is what has led him to establish what may be the most hope-filled ministry taking place in the West Bank today with his International Center of Bethlehem (www.annadwa.org). Inaugurated in 1995 with a staff of four, the ICB has now become “one of the largest private employers in the Bethlehem region.” Its stated aim is “to equip the local community to assume a proactive role in shaping their future” through quality educational programs for all ages (“womb to tomb”). In a conversation I had with Mitri this past summer he said that what he is attempting to do with this ministry is to create a sense of normalcy in a situation which is anything but, preparing Palestinian young people in particular for a future which will allow them to live as responsible and productive citizens in a free society which he believes they will one day have.

The biblical foundation for this ministry is clear. It’s found in the way God’s people have always lived as though God’s promised “shalom” is a given. The framers of the Belhar Confession had a similar vision—believing that injustice cannot and will not stand in a world ordered by a God who demands justice. Here, too, the call is to live as people who know that “redemption draweth nigh.”

The Reformed Church through its volunteer office is encouraging young people to get involved with this ministry of hope by volunteering their time and gifts to a summer program the center runs for Palestinian children. Northwestern College is considering it as part of their Summer of Service program. The hope is that there will be a good response to this so we, too, can have a role to play, however small, in Christ’s ministry of hope in the Holy Land.

**Letter to My Grandson, by Dr. Edwin Mulder (who is white)**

Dear Tom,

Your grandmother and I want you to know how very proud we are of you. Congratulations on making the golf team of your high school as a freshman. And what is this that we hear about your having a lead in the spring musical at your school? All those piano and voice lessons are paying off. We think it is great that in addition to your studies you are taking advantage of all these opportunities.

Life is like that Tom, full of opportunities. In your short life you have had so many wonder-
ful experiences of traveling, living in an affluent neighborhood, and having parents who make possible lots of neat things. Along with all of these privileges comes responsibility. We know that you are grateful for all this, and, that there are tons of kids in the world who do not have the opportunities that are yours. The world can be a cruel place, and it is for many people. What the world needs are people who care and strive to make a difference. I believe that you are one of those persons whose life is going to make a difference.

One of the most formative experiences of your grandfather's life was a visit to South Africa. There I saw how white people exploited people of color in the name of God. At the same time it made me look into my own life, and I realized that while there had not been many people of color in my world, I had prejudices that I needed to acknowledge. I realized that I had much to learn from people of other races and cultures. I was fifty years old at the time. Since then I have come a long way in valuing all God's people. You are living in a multicultural world. Affirm that world, Tom. Learn from people whose traditions and cultures are different from yours. Be an advocate for people who have no voice.

I remember the day you were born. What a great day that was! I can hardly believe that you are 15 and beginning to notice girls. I know that you are starting to think about where you want to go to college, and what you want to do with your life. Whatever you do, I pray that you will think about how you can make the world a better place in which to live. Never discount the difference you can make. The Jesus in whom you have put your faith calls you to be a light in a world where there is a lot of darkness. Tom, let Jesus live in and through your life.

Remember your grandmother and I will be in the bleachers cheering you on as you run the race of your life.

With all the love in the world,
Your grandfather (Ed Mulder)

Letter to a Grandson, by Sara Smith (who is African American)

Dear Justin,

Today, while cleaning and sorting out books in an overloaded bookcase, I found an old journal of mine that was written many years ago. When I opened the journal and started reading, time stood still!

Landing at Jan Smuts Airport—I shall never forget. The narrow entrance to the custom hall was flanked by two policemen in olive garb fatigues with sub-machine guns casually swinging over their shoulders.

A cold streak went up and down my spine as I observed young white armed soldiers and policemen strolling arrogantly throughout the big custom hall displaying their badge and dress of authority. This eerie scene introduced this black American to the police state of South Africa.

As I waited in the big custom hall many thoughts and expectations about the journey to South Africa drifted to and fro through my mind.

Justin, that was many, many years ago. But as I kept on reading the “happenings” I experienced in that time and place, I reflected on our family life's journey and our involvement in the civil rights movement. I can truly say God has blessed us with some progress and some victories. But, the struggle for justice and human rights for all of God's children is still ever present all around us and world wide.

I was truly grateful for the genuine honesty of the people I met on that South African journey. I will always treasure the memory of sharing everyday experiences under apartheid, worshipping and praying together. These unforgettable opportunities reinforced for me the determination and steadfastness in “keeping the faith” in the midst of despair and overwhelm-
ing pain. It was a privilege to have lived with my sisters and brothers in the segregated townships and witnessed the experiences of their daily lives.

Many incidents during that South African journey often forced me to revisit painful racist memories in my life. Even today when I recall some of these experiences the pain is still there.

Florence Seese was one of my favorite grammar school teachers. On the first day of school in fifth grade, Ms. Seese seated all of the black children in the last seat in each row in the back of the room. Ms. Seese was the organist for the “uptown” United Methodist Church.

As a college student in Kansas, I was refused service in the main room of a local diner. My fellow students organized a protest demonstration led by the president of the college in front of the diner.

During the early years of our marriage Grand-dad (a war veteran) and I had to write a scathing letter to the Mayor of New York City to secure decent housing for our growing family.

Justin, these experiences and many, many more have impacted our lives and demanded that we be “doers of the word.” And, today more than ever Christians are demanded to actively witness against and strive to eliminate any form of injustice. Sadly to say, the tentacles of racism are still found in our society and even within our Christian community of faith.

My hope and constant prayer is that Christians everywhere will truly become the “light of the world” to ensure “there is a better day a coming” for you and future generations.

Love and prayers,
Grandma Sara

As long as we have stories to tell to each other there is hope. As long as we can remind each other of the lives of men and women in whom the love of God becomes manifest, there is reason to move forward to a new land in which new stories are hidden.

—The Living Reminder, Henri J. M. Nouwen
(New York: The Seabury Press, 1977)

SESSION 9 READINGS

Report on speech given on October 3, 2000, at Western Theological Seminary (Holland, Michigan) by Dr. Sam Pick, director of Diaconal Services in Cape, South Africa

“I open my eyes and feel like I’m in another country,” says Dr. Sam Pick, referring to the last decade of conciliatory changes in South Africa.

One component of the positive changes has been the Belhar Confession, adopted as a creed by the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa and integrated into music, worship, and personal confessions of guilt…

Although Pick does not foresee immediate reconciliation between whites and blacks in South Africa, he remains optimistic about the future. He believes that policy will bring South Africans together, despite the many dialects and cultures prevalent there. For example, schools are now open to all students, and children of all races learn together.
Excerpts from an address to RCA General Synod 2002 by Dr. Molefi Seth Petikoe, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

Mr. President, moderators of committees, honorable members and guests of this great gathering, ladies and gentlemen, it is both an honor and a privilege for me to represent the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa…

We were…delighted to learn that General Synod 2001 approved the [Belhar] Confession [for] church-wide study…

The Confession of Belhar is indeed a valued possession of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. It functions in the Uniting Church as an instrument for profound self-examination, to help determine whether the church really lives by the faith it proclaims…

The traditional Reformed confessions that date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite their value and significance for the faith of the church, are inadequate to express the fullness of the Reformed faith. The main themes of the Belhar—the unity of the church and the reconciliation between peoples and God’s justice for the poor and the destitute—are not addressed in these confessions. Very little is said about the unity of the church. Reconciliation and justice for the poor are completely absent…

The Reformed churches, not only of South Africa, but of the world, would be significantly poorer without Belhar and what Belhar professes. The implications of Belhar are far wider than its original context. Our wish is that the Reformed family would recognize this and not see it as only South African.

Excerpt from an address to RCA General Synod 2003 by the Rev. Gretel Van Wieren, pastor of Lawyersville Reformed Church in Cobleskill, New York

Belhar follows in the Reformed tradition of expressing core beliefs through confession. The theological contributions of Belhar—unity, reconciliation and justice—are solidly biblical and affirm fundamental aspects of Reformed faith. Belhar is special in that it has been issued as a cry of faith from brothers and sisters in Christ—who have suffered immeasurable oppression and pain—on the other side of the world. Because of its solid theological content and special geographical and social context, Belhar represents a profound and unprecedented gift to the broader church.

Excerpts from an address to RCA General Synod 2004 by the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, general director of the International Center of Bethlehem and senior pastor of Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem

The fact that this confession deals with a very specific context at a very specific time in history, with reference to a very specific land, ironically gives it greater significance for the worldwide church. This because it is not theory, but a statement of truth arising out of a very real life situation…At the same time, we must say that its contextual nature means we cannot just take the Belhar Confession as it is to use for our (the Palestinian) situation, which reflects yet another context. This is the work of the Holy Spirit—to help us to take the Word of God spoken in the Belhar Confession and help us articulate it in a new way for our context.

RCA General Synod resolutions relevant to the Belhar Confession

R-1 (MGS 1995, p. 405) – RCA to pursue relationship with Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa:

To request the Commission on Christian Unity to consult with the appropriate offices of the URCSA with the input of the African-American Council, to develop a plan for correspon-
dence and continuing relationships between the respective assemblies and congregations of the RCA and URCSA.

R-14 (MGS 1999, p. 115) – RCA to to address racial prejudice and intolerance:
To encourage all members of the RCA to speak boldly, in the spirit of Christian love, against acts of intolerance, racism, and police violence; and further, to encourage commissions, synods, and classes to work with all deliberate speed in the implementation of past and present recommendations in addressing issues of prejudice and racial intolerance.

R-13 (MGS 2000, p. 100) – Belhar Confession as a means of responding to R-1 and R-14 (above)
To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to commend the Belhar Confession to the church over the next decade for reflection, study, and response, as a means of deepening the RCAs commitment to dealing with racism and strengthening its ecumenical commitment to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and other Reformed bodies.

Reasons:
1. This recommendation is one of CCUs responses to R-14 (MGS 1999, p. 115).
2. Racism is a sin that the Belhar Confession confronts.
3. The RCA needs to take a look at racism within the RCA.
4. This recommendation honors the RCAs relationship with the URCSA and previous agreements.

Overview of Current Reformed Confessions and Comparison with Belhar Confession

Belgic Confession:
Date: 1561
Author: Primarily Guido de Bres, a preacher in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands
Birthplace: The Netherlands
Context: Severe persecution of Reformed churches in the Netherlands (including Belgium) by its then Roman Catholic government
Purpose: Sent to King Philip II to protest the cruel oppression and to prove to the persecutors that Reformed Christians were not rebels, but law-abiding citizens who professed true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures

Heidelberg Catechism:
Date: circa 1563
Authors: Credited to Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus
Birthplace: Heidelberg, Germany
Context: Requested by Elector Frederick III, ruler of the German province of Palatinate, to provide a basis for Reformed theological instruction in the church.
Purpose: To teach

Canons of Dort:
Date: 1618-1619
Birthplace: Dordrecht, The Netherlands
Context: Severe disagreement in the church over key issues of theology
Purpose: To affirm principle beliefs of Calvinism—total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints (TULIP).
Belhar Confession
Date: 1982
Birthplace: Belhar, South Africa
Context: Unjust, racist system of government in South Africa called apartheid.
Purpose: In opposition to apartheid, to affirm the unity of the church, reconciliation between peoples, and God's justice for the poor and destitute.

Why the Belhar Confession is valuable—a summary
- It fills a significant gap: there is little mention in classical confessions of the central biblical principle of God's justice and special care for the poor and suffering. The Belhar fills this gap in the standard confessions.
- Its content is fundamental to our faith: the unity of the church, reconciliation of peoples in Christ, and God's justice and care for the suffering and poor are fundamental biblical principles that lie at the core of the Reformed faith.
- It's the only confession the global church has from Africa and the Southern hemisphere.

How could the church make use of the Belhar Confession?
- As a study/reflection resource document
- As a confession on par with Our Song of Hope
- As a new standard of unity on par with the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort
- A new category could be created, such as confessional documents. Confessional documents would function more like the Presbyterian confessions. They would not have the same weight as the Standards (they wouldn't, for example, be part of the Declaration for Ministers).
Appendix B: Songs

SESSION 2

“Perdon, Senor”/“Forgive Us, Lord”

Text and music: Jorge Lockward

A native of the Dominican Republic, Jorge Lockward is Global Praise program coordinator for the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. He served on the editorial board of Mil Voces Para Celebrar, a Methodist hymnal (Abingdon Press, 1996). Lockward is also the conductor-in-residence of Cantico Nuevo (New Son), a music, arts, and liturgy ecumenical project in New York City, and he leads numerous worship and music workshops throughout the U.S.
Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

“Nkosi! Nkosi!”/“Lord, Have Mercy”

Words: Traditional prayer of petition in Xhosa language (South Africa)
Music: Mziwamadoda Joseph Singiswa, South Africa (Xhosa), 1979; trans. David Dargie
“Nkosi! Nkosi!” (“Lord, Have Mercy”) from Halle, Halle compiled by Dr. C. Michael Hawn
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This song is from the Xhosa (South Africa) tradition. It was created in one of the many group composition workshops facilitated by David Dargie throughout South Africa. Singiswa composed the Kyrie as part of a complete musical setting of the mass in 1979 while he was still a school boy. His mass has proven to be very popular in Xhosa churches. Singiswa is now a choirmaster at Zwelitsha. The mass is often accompanied on the maribas developed by David Dargie from Shona instruments for use in the Xhosa context.

“Nkosi” is obviously a traditional prayer of petition derived from the Greek text “Kyrie Eleison.” It can prepare the congregation for offering spoken prayers. The choir could continue to hum “Nkosi” as petitions are spoken over it. It is an excellent selection to establish a sense of unity between praying and singing.

“Psalm 51”

Text: Early Greek liturgy
Music: Dina Reindorf (20th cent.), Ghana; arr. Sing! A New Creation
©1987, Dina Reindorf; arr. ©2001 CRC Publications. Used with permission.

This refrain was composed in 1987 by Dinah Reindorf of Ghana, who formerly conducted the Nigerian National Orchestra.
Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

SESSION 3

“¡Miren que Bueno!”/“Behold, How Pleasant”

Words: Pablo Sosa (Argentina) 1972, tr. Pablo Sosa (based on Psalm 133)
Words and music ©1974 Pablo Sosa. Used with permission.

Pablo Sosa is one of the foremost authorities on Latin American sacred music. He has degrees from an ecumenical seminary in Buenos Aires now called Instituto Superior Evangelico de Estudios Teologicos (ISEDET) and Westminster Choir College, as well as further study at Union Seminary (New York) and in Germany. A Methodist minister, professor, composer, and conductor, Sosa has a varied career both at home and abroad. His works appear in several hymnals in North America and are sung widely at ecumenical gatherings around the world. Sosa has a passion to bring congregational song to his people in their own musical idiom.

Sosa was asked by the pastor of the Flores Methodist Church to write a song for a fellowship occasion following a worship service in 1970. The pastor wanted to encourage a sense of communion among the members of the congregation and a celebration of the joy of being together. After choosing Psalm 133 as the text, Sosa inquired among his biblical colleagues at ISEDET, the seminary where he taught, about the meaning of oil running down Aaron’s beard. He was told that it was an image of extravagance and joy. At the church social, Sosa invited the people to think of other delightful images of extravagance. These were inserted into the song along with the text written by Sosa. Among those ideas offered was one by a child who said that the joy of being together was like tasting the first ice cream of the hot summer, especially in January, the middle of the summer in the southern hemisphere.
SESSION 4

“Somos Uno en Cristo”

Spanish: Somos uno en Cristo, somos uno, somos uno,

English: We are one in Christ Jesus, all one body, all one spirit,

u-no solo. solo. Un solo Dios,
all together. gather. We share one God,

un solo Se-nor, una sola fe,
one mighty Lord, one abiding faith,

un solo amor, un solo bautismo, un solo Es-
one binding love, one single baptism, one Holy

p’ri-tu y es el Con-so-la-dor.
Com-fort-er, the Ho-ly Spir-it, uniting all.

Text and music: Anonymous; tr. Alice Parker, arr. Philip W. Blycker, all arr. Jorge Lockward
“Somos Uno en Cristo” is a *corito*—a short, lively folk song, with its text based in Scripture or a scriptural story. In this case, the text is from Ephesians, a reminder to the body of Christ of who we are and what truly unites us: one Lord, one faith, one love, one baptism, one Spirit. This song could be used on Worldwide Communion Sunday (the first Sunday in October) or during the passing of peace. Sing twice, then improvise softly while the congregation greets each other. When they return to their places, sing again.

Philip Blyker, who arranged the music for this anonymous piece, is a Texan who served as a missionary in Venezuela. He was a major force behind the recent outpouring of traditional hymn texts written to Latin American music. He has also composed or arranged more than a dozen songs in the Spanish-language Methodist hymnal *Mil Voces*.

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“Be Thou My Vision”

Irish folk melody; tr. by Mary Byrne, 1905; versified by Eleanor Hull, 1912.
SESSION 5

“Canto de Esperanze”/“Song of Hope”

Argentinian folk song, anonymous; tr. Alvin Schutmaat
“Canto de esperanze”/“Song of Hope” arranged by Tom Mitchell ©1993 Choristers Guild, Garland, Texas. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
“Canto de Esperanzé,” an anonymous Argentinian folk song, reminds us that although Christ has come already and God’s full reign is imminent, we are still waiting, struggling, praying, and celebrating as we work faithfully together—in hope—for the world God loves.

SESSION 6

“Mayenziwe”/“Your Will Be Done”

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

SESSION 7

“Sikhulule”/“Liberate Us, Lord”

Words and music by Thozama Dyani, South Africa (Xhosa); tr. David Dargie
“Sikhulule?”“Liberate Us, Lord” from Halle, Halle compiled by Dr. C. Michael Hawn ©1999
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During the nearly fifty years of apartheid in South Africa, beginning in 1948, black South Africans suffered increasing violence and restrictions on their freedom to assemble, to receive adequate education, and to choose where they could live. In 1960 and 1986, the white apartheid government called two “Emergencies” during which the movements of black South Africans were even more severely restricted than usual. It was especially during these times that innocent people were shot and killed on sight by police without any recourse for the victim’s family.

This song grows out of a personal experience by the composer in 1984 not long before conditions led to the second Emergency of 1986. Dyani’s brother was jailed after an incident with police. He was walking home from a choir rehearsal when he was shot by police. In apartheid South Africa, if the police shot you, you were automatically guilty. Detainees in jail had no rights and no due process. They often died due to the violent conditions of incarceration. Dyani composed a complete Liberation Mass that grew out of this experience and in memory of the events of Soweto Day (June 16, 1984). “Sikhulule” is a part of this mass. Its simple text is undergirded by the unwarranted violence against her brother and friends who suffered and died on this day.

Singing is a natural response to oppression throughout Africa. Congregational song serves to unify the prayer of the suffering community, offers a sense of healing through the solidarity of singing together, and helps maintain hope in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Without song, there would be little hope.
“Cantai ao Senhor”/“Rejoice in the Lord”

3. The ends of the earth have seen God’s salvation; (x3)
   Rejoice, let us sing. (x2)
4. Break forth into song with trumpet and lyre; (x3)
   Rejoice, let us sing. (x2)
5. The rivers and mountains join in the singing; (x3)
   Rejoice, let us sing. (x2)
6. For God will return and judge all the nations; (x3)
   Rejoice, let us sing. (x2)

“Cantai ao Senhor”/“Rejoice in the Lord” from Halle, Halle compiled by Dr. C. Michael Hawn
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The tune for this song comes from Brazil, and the words are a paraphrase of Psalm 98. Brazil is one of the most diverse countries in South America and one of the world’s largest economies. It is a complex collection of indigenous peoples and immigrants whose varied musics and cultures constantly influence one another.
“Thuma Mina”/“Send Me Lord”

Words: Traditional, South Africa/Zulu
Music: Traditional, South Africa; tr. David Dargie
“Thuma Mina”/“Send me, Lord” from Halle, Halle compiled by Dr. C. Michael Hawn ©1999 Choristers Guild, Garland, Texas. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“Thuma mina” ("send me Lord into the world") is a text that appears in different versions throughout South Africa because it is essential to the worship of many denominations. The musical style is derived from a mixture of traditional Western hymns and the popular township sounds of the South African urban areas.
Appendix C: Worship Materials Based on the Belhar

**Belhar Hymn**, composed by David Alexander  
Tune: O Waly Waly (folk tune, The Water Is Wide)  
Meter LM (8-8-8-8)

Verses based on numbered divisions in the confession itself: 1) Trinity; 2) Unity; 3) Reconciliation; 4) Justice; 5) Obedience.

1. Since the beginning of the world  
one triune God protects the church.  
By Word and Spirit this is done,  
and will be so until the end.

2. The gift of unity is shown  
as witness to the world abroad,  
by means of willing, joyful faith  
and service to the least of all.

3. The pow'rs of sin and enmity  
in Christ are conquered totally.  
To reconcile us each to all,  
this mission is the church's call.

4. For justice God has been revealed,  
the church for justice God has sealed,  
to stand with those who have been wronged,  
to join the voiceless in their song.

5. We must obey the Church's head,  
Jesus, the Christ whom we confess.  
Though human pow'rs and laws forbid,  
still we must walk the way he led.

**Belhar Litany I**, composed by David Alexander

We believe in the triune God who gathers, protects, and cares for the church by Word and Spirit.

**We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, called from the entire human family.**

We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church.

**Unity is both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.**
We share one faith, have one calling;

**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.

We reject doctrines which absolutize natural diversity or sinful separation of people in
ways that break the visible and active unity of the church;

We reject doctrines which profess that spiritual unity is maintained in the bond of peace while
believers of the same confession are alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in
despair of reconciliation.

We reject doctrines which maintain that descent or any other human or social factor
should be a consideration in determining church membership.

We believe that God has entrusted the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ
to the church;

We reject doctrines which sanction the forced separation of people on the grounds of
race and color.

We believe that God is self-revealed as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true
peace in a world full of injustice and enmity. God is the God of the destitute, the poor and the
wronged. God's church is called to follow our Lord in this.

**God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; frees prisoners and
restores sight to the blind.**

God wishes to teach all people to do what is good and to seek the right;

**God's church must stand by people in any form of suffering and need,**

the church must witness and strive against any form of injustice,

so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The church must stand where God stands, follow Christ against the powerful and privileged
who selfishly seek their own interests.

We reject the ideologies which legitimate injustice and all doctrines which use the name
of the gospel to support those ideologies.

We believe that the church is called to confess and do all these things, even though the
authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the
consequence.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory for ever and
ever. Amen.
Belhar Litany II, composed by David Alexander

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.

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.

We believe that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.

We believe that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought.

We believe that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin.

We believe that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

We believe that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

Therefore we reject any doctrine that absolutizes natural diversity in such a way that this hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church.

We reject any doctrine that professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers are alienated from one another and in despair of reconciliation.

We reject any doctrine that denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin.

We reject any doctrine that maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

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.

We believe that Jesus is Lord. To the one and only God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.
Appendix D: Dictionary of Terms Relevant to the Belhar Confession

Apartheid – Afrikaans for “apartness,” apartheid was a social and political policy of racial segregation and discrimination enforced by white minority governments in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. The term includes an assumption that racial groups are segregated because of the superiority of one group over the others.

“Benign” neglect – A policy or attitude of ignoring a situation instead of assuming responsibility for managing or improving it.

Civil disobedience – The active refusal to obey certain laws, demands, and commands of a government or of an occupying power without resorting to physical violence.

Confession – A formal statement of religious beliefs; creed.

Discrimination – Selective or preferential treatment of an individual or group of people based on race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc.; prejudice plus action.

Ethnic group – A group of people who have certain background characteristics in common (e.g., language, culture, religion, traditions, tribal or national origin), which provides the group with a distinct identity as seen by themselves and others.

Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) – A denomination established in 1951 made up mostly of black members of the DRC.

Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) – A denomination established in 1652 that embraces three standards of unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of the Synod of Dort), yet is more widely known as a “white” denomination associated with the politics of the Afrikaner community and the system of apartheid.

Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) – A denomination established in 1881 by congregations that departed the (white) Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa in order to become a racially mixed (colored) church. The denomination embraces the same standards of unity as its parent denomination.

Implicit stereotype – A stereotype that is powerful enough to operate without conscious control.

Internalized racist oppression – Internalization of negative stereotypes about one’s race.

Justice – The fair, moral, and impartial treatment of all persons, especially in law. Includes concepts of right relationships and equitable distribution of resources.

Prejudice – An irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics; stereotype plus hostility.

Race – A distinct population of humans commonly distinguished on the basis of skin color, facial features, and ancestry.

Racism – Subordination of a person or group based on their color. Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practices; color prejudice plus power.

Reconciliation – Bringing together again in love or friendship.

Segregation – The separation of people based on a characteristic such as race or ethnicity.

Standards or Forms of Unity – Three creeds—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—commonly held by Reformed churches with origins in the European continent, especially the Netherlands.

Status confessionis – a Latin term meaning that which is foundational for belief and behavior, and must be affirmed by professing members of the church body.

Stereotype – A standardized mental picture held in common by members of a group and representing an over-simplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment.
Systemic (institutional) racism – Structural racial discrimination. Racial discrimination by governments, corporations, or other large organizations. Common results are illiteracy, unemployment or underemployment, and high rates of incarceration.

Unity – Biblically, the oneness of believers with God and one another in Jesus Christ through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) – A denomination established in 1994 by the union of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA).
Appendix E: Welcoming Diversity: An Inventory for Congregations

GRACE/Racial Justice Institute
Summit on Racism – Religion Sector

As our communities become more diverse, every congregation is faced with the challenge of how to reach out to people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. We believe an important step in meeting that challenge is to ask whether our congregation is truly welcoming to all people. While our initial answer may be “Yes, of course,” focused introspection might reveal hidden barriers that may hinder people from other racial/ethnic backgrounds from feeling at home in our congregation.

A subcommittee of the Religion Sector of the Summit on Racism has created this inventory to aid congregations seeking to embrace and welcome the diversity of their communities. The inventory focuses on six areas: perceptions, leadership, worship, visual, educational, and events. The subcommittee recommends that this inventory be used by a committee or a team of interested persons.

Read each statement and, using the scale below, place your most appropriate response to the statement in the space provided.

NA = not applicable  DK = don't know  1 = not at all true  2 = sometimes true  3 = true, most of the time

PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES, VALUES: What we hold in our minds and hearts affects our actions.

1. ___ The healing of racism and an appreciation for racial/ethnic diversity are values of the leadership of our congregation.

2. ___ Opportunities for dialogue are provided about these values between our congregation and our leadership.

3. ___ Our leaders comprehend and communicate the way in which ethnic, economic, social, and political justice makes visible the reign of God.

4. ___ Our congregation is receptive to preaching, teaching, and dialogue about the harm of racism and the value of diversity.

5. ___ Our congregation is open to the ideas that people from other racial/ethnic traditions bring about worship, education, community, and outreach.

6. ___ Our congregation is aware of our denomination’s position on issues of racism, poverty, and violence because the positions are consistently held before the people.
7. ___ Members who reflect our congregations’ racial/ethnic diversity are being recruited and equipped for leadership.

8. ___ Our congregation addresses root causes of poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination, while also relieving immediate needs through ministries of charity, compassion, and mercy.

9.
   a. ___ Past attitudes or actions of prejudice and discrimination have been addressed in our congregation forthrightly, and healing is taking place around these issues.

   b. ___ We have a process of reconciliation in place when needed.

**LEADERSHIP/ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: Leaders and structure set a congregation’s course.**

10. ___ Our congregation’s leadership promotes anti-racism and diversity.

11. ___ The leadership is conscious of diversity when selecting vendors for supplies and services.

12.
   a. ___ Our congregation has a team that works with the leadership to address issues of racism in our congregation and society.

   b. ___ The team has developed a strategy for addressing racism within the congregation and community.

   c. ___ The resources of our congregation support this team.

13. ___ People outside our congregation’s primary racial group are consulted about how we might address unintentional racism and become more inclusive.

14.
   a. ___ We have a system of greeting in place so that all those who attend receive a warm welcome.

   b. ___ Members of the “greeting team” are educated to be welcoming to a wide variety of people.

   c. ___ The members of the “greeting team” are representative of the racial/ethnic make-up of our congregation.

**WORSHIP: Does our worship inspire us to greater understanding and appreciation for the diversity of God’s people?**

15. ___ Our liturgies and music incorporate a variety of racial/ethnic traditions.
16. ___ We invite speakers, dramatists, musicians, etc. who represent a variety of racial/ethnic traditions.

17. ___ Our preaching addresses the sin of racism and challenges the congregation to examine themselves in light of Scripture and religious vows.

18. ___ The gospel message is expressed in ways relevant to diverse people.

19. ___ We give voice in worship to issues important to diverse people.

20. ___ As a congregation we welcome and befriend all visitors before, during and after worship.

**VISUAL: Visually strong messages. What do we see around us?**

21. ___ A wide variety of racial/ethnic people are represented in our windows, pictures, wall hangings, etc.

22. ___ The classrooms for young children are supplied with dolls, books, games, and other toys that represent a wide variety of racial/ethnic people.

23. ___ All classrooms and libraries have books, videos, etc. that represent a wide variety of racial/ethnic people.

24. ___ Our displays, brochures, and publicity pieces reflect diversity.

25. ___ The staff and leadership visually reflect a commitment to multicultural ministry.

**EDUCATIONAL: What are we reading, studying, and promoting?**

26. ___ We strive to teach a respect for diversity.

27. ___
   a. ___ Our educational materials reflect a variety of racial/ethnic people (and language groups if appropriate to our congregation).
   
   b. ___ Racial/ethnic people are consulted when new curriculum or educational materials are developed.

28. ___
   a. ___ We regularly offer classes that give insight into different racial/ethnic groups.
   
   b. ___ We are sensitive to the differences in teaching and learning styles among people from a variety of cultures and traditions.
   
   c. ___ Our faith is presented in terms of the history, tradition, and contribution of minority cultures as well as the dominant culture.
29. 
   a. ____ We offer on-site racism- and diversity-sensitivity training.
   b. ____ We promote off-site racism- and diversity-sensitivity training for members of our congregation.
   c. ____ We offer our site for racism- and diversity-sensitivity training.

**EVENTS: Do we schedule events to broaden our experiences and perspectives?**

30. ___ Our congregation invites other congregations representing different racial/ethnic groups to share in opportunities for outreach, recreation, and worship.
31. ___ Our congregation promotes times for members to visit or to participate in other racial/ethnic groups’ work, play, or worship experiences.
32. ___ We hold activities to celebrate the diversity already among us and to become familiar with a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural traditions.

Thank you for your efforts with this inventory. Racism is a serious and often subtle problem in our country and in our congregations and must be addressed. This inventory is intended to help a congregation engage in conversation about its own reality of racism. Then, from that discussion, the congregation can enter into designing ongoing healing actions that will serve as a guide for planning and annual evaluation.

If you would like more information, we invite you share your experience with others and us. Please contact the GRACE/Racial Justice Institute office listed below. We are interested in your feedback and progress.

**RESOURCES**

GRACE (Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism)/Racial Justice Institute
207 E. Fulton, 4th Floor
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-3210
Phone: (616) 774-2321 Web: www.graceoffice.org

Woodrick Institute for the Study of Racism and Diversity at Aquinas College
1607 Robinson Rd. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506
Phone: (616) 632-2177 Web: woodrick.aquinas.edu

Institute for Healing Racism
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce
111 Pearl St. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
Phone: (616) 771-0330 Web: www.diversitygrandrapids.org/institute.asp

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Appendix F: World Recipes from Extending the Table

Banana Oatmeal Cookies (Jamaica)
Makes 4 dozen
375°F/190°C
12-15 min.

Cream together until light and fluffy:
- 3/4 c. margarine (175 ml)
- 1 c. sugar (250 ml)
Beat in:
- 1 egg, beaten
Add:
- 2-3 bananas, peeled and mashed (about 1 c./250 ml)
- 3 1/2 c. rolled oats (875 ml)
- 1/2 c. peanuts or almonds, chopped (125 ml)
Mix thoroughly.
Combine in separate bowl:
- 1 1/4 c. flour (300 ml)
- 1/2 t. baking soda (2 ml)
- 1/2 t. salt (2 ml)
- 1/4 t. ground nutmeg (1 ml)
- 3/4 t. ground cinnamon (3 ml)
Add to banana mixture and mix well. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Drop dough by teaspoonfuls on ungreased baking sheets, about 1 1/2 inches apart (3.5 cm). Bake 12-15 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on rack.

—Pauline Cousins, St. Mary, Jamaica

Sesame Seed Cookies (Nigeria)
Zakin Ridi (ZAH-kin ree-dee)
Makes 4-5 dozen
400°F/200°C
8-10 min.

Cream together:
- 3/4 c. shortening or margarine (175 ml)
- 1 c. sugar (250 ml)
- 2 eggs
- 1 t. vanilla (5 ml) or 1/2 t. lemon extract (2 ml)
Add:
- 2 1/2 c. flour (625 ml)
- 1 t. baking powder (5 ml)
- 1 t. salt (5 ml)
- 1 c. sesame seeds (250 ml)
Stir until well blended. Cover and chill at least 1 hour. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Roll dough 1/8 inch thick (1/3 cm) on lightly floured, cloth-covered board. Cut into desired shapes. Place on ungreased baking sheets. Bake 8-10 minutes or until very light brown.

—Martha Adive and Suzanne Ford, Jos, Nigeria
Coconut Crunchies (India)

Bolinha (bohl-EEN-yah)

Makes 4-5 dozen

375°F/190°C
8-10 min.

These unique cookies made with cream of wheat instead of flour are popular in the Indian state of Goa. The original recipe uses yolks of six eggs; we substitute three whole eggs.

Combine in saucepan:
1 c. sugar (250 ml)
1/2 c. water (125 ml)

Boil to make thin syrup, about 5 minutes.

Add:
3 c. fresh or packaged coconut, grated (750 ml)
1/4 t. ground cardamom (1 ml)

Cook over low heat 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and cool.

Add alternately to cooled coconut mixture:
3 eggs
2–2 1/2 c. uncooked cream of wheat (500-625 ml)

Mix well. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Drop batter by spoonfuls on greased cookie sheets and bake 8-10 minutes until golden brown.

—Rose Chater, Barde, Goa, India, and Cynthia Peacock, Calcutta, India

Chick-Pea Dip (Turkey)

Hummus (HOO-moose)

Serves 4-6

Drain, reserving liquid, and place in blender or food processor:
6 c. canned or cooked chick-peas (1.5 ml)

Puree.

Add alternately and continue pureeing:
1/2 c. sesame butter (125 ml)
1/2–1 c. lemon juice (125-250 ml)

Add and blend until smooth:
4-5 cloves garlic
1 1/2 t. salt (7 ml)

Sauce should be thick and smooth. If too thick, thin with some of the chick-pea liquid. Place on small serving platter and garnish with parsley; black olives; drizzle of olive oil; dried, crushed mint; or red pepper to taste.

—Jewel Wenger Showalter, Irwin, Ohio
Dutch Spice Cookies (Netherlands)
Speculaasjes (spay-kou-LAHSS-yuhs)
Makes 3 dozen 325°F/160°C 10-12 min.
Speculaasjes, known many places as windmill cookies, take their name from a spice mixture of ground cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and allspice marketed in the Netherlands. Traditionally associated with St. Nicholas Day, December 6, Speculaasjes are now a year-round favorite.

Cream:
2/3 c. margarine (150 ml)
3/4 c. brown sugar, packed (175 ml)
1 egg

Add dry ingredients, alternating with milk:
2 3/4 c. flour (675 ml)
1/2 t. baking powder (2 ml)
1/2 t. salt (2 ml)
1 t. ground cinnamon (5 ml)
1/2 t. ground ginger (2 ml)
1/4 t. ground cloves (1 ml)
1/2 t. ground allspice (2 ml)
1/3 c. milk (75 ml)

Knead dough with floured hands until smooth. Chill at least 4 hours. Roll out to thin dough on floured surface and cut into shapes or use cookie press. Bake on greased cookie sheets 10-12 minutes in preheated 325°F (160°C) oven.

—Juliette Kuitse, Elkhart, Indiana

Almond Cookies (China)
Xingren Dangang (shing-RUN DAHN-gahng)
Makes 7-8 dozen 375°F/190°C 10 min.

Cream:
1 c. shortening or margarine (250 ml)
3/4 c. sugar (175 ml)

Add:
2 eggs, one at a time
1 T. almond extract (15 ml)
2-4 drops yellow food coloring (optional)

Combine:
2 1/2–3 c. flour (625-750 ml)
1/2 t. baking soda (2 ml)
1/4 t. salt (1 ml)

Using fingers, mix dry ingredients with wet mixture into fairly stiff dough. Divide in half. On floured surface, roll each half with palms into 1 foot long, 1 1/2 inch diameter roll (30 cm, 3.5 cm). Wrap in waxed paper and refrigerate 3 hours. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).

Beat lightly:
1 egg white

Cut cookies in 1/4-inch slices (3/4 cm) and place on ungreased cookie sheet. Press almond half in center of each cookie. Brush with egg white and bake 10 minutes.

—Nav Jiwan International Tea Room, Ephrata, Pennsylvania
**Anthill Cake (Brazil)**

*Bolo Formigueiro (BOH-loh for-mee-GAY-ee-roh)*

*Serves 20-30*  
350°F/180°C  
45-60 min.

Mix together:
- 2 c. sugar (500 ml)
- 2 c. flour (500 ml)
- 1 c. cornstarch (250 ml)
- 1/2 c. unsweetened grated coconut (125 ml)
- 1 T. baking powder (15 ml)

Combine:
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 c. coconut milk (250 ml) (see below)
- 1 c. margarine, melted (250 ml)

Mix dry and liquid ingredients.

Beat to stiff peaks:
- 4 egg whites

Fold into mixture.

Add:
- 1/4–1/3 c. semi-sweet chocolate, grated (50-75 ml)
- Pinch of salt

Mix gently. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Pour batter in greased and floured bundt, angel food or 9x13-inch pan (3.5-L). Bake 45-60 minutes (depending on size of pan) or until golden brown on top and toothpick comes out clean. When cool, sprinkle with powdered sugar.

—*Dona Lourdes, Jardim Primavera, Recife, Brazil, and Mert Brubacker, Lancaster, Pennsylvania*

*(To make coconut milk from packaged coconut, heat, but do not boil, 1 1/2 c. milk (375 ml) and 1 1/2 c. water (375 ml). Pour over 1 1/2 c. grated coconut (375 ml). Let stand in cool place 2 hours. Strain and use. *Extending the Table*, p. 280)*
Lemon Loaf (Norway)
Citron Kake (sih-TROHN KAH-kah)
Makes 2 loaves 350°F/180°C 50-60 min.

Option: If potato flour is not available, substitute cornstarch or rice flour, or increase white flour to 3 c. (750 ml).

Beat until thick:
  2 c. sugar (500 ml)
  3 eggs

Add and mix until blended:
  1 c. margarine, melted (250 ml)
  1/2 c. potato flour (125 ml)
  2 1/2 c. white flour (625 ml)
  1 c. milk (250 ml)
  rind of 1 lemon, grated

Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Pour batter into 2 loaf pans, greased and floured on bottoms only. Bake 50-60 minutes. Remove from pans. While still warm, glaze with thick paste of juice from 1 lemon and confectioner’s sugar. Serve in slices with fresh fruit or sherbet.

—Gerd Doroshuk, Dauphin, Manitoba

Cheese Pastry (Bolivia)
Rollos (ROH-yohs)
Makes 24 pieces 350°F/180°C 30 min.

This is a delicious and simple adaptation of Bolivian cheese rolls, a snack food often sold at bus stops to people who are traveling.

Sift:
  4 c. flour (1 L)
  4 t. baking powder (20 ml)
  1 t. salt (5 ml)
  2 T. sugar (30 ml)

Add:
  1/2 c. margarine (125 ml)
  1 c. warm milk (250 ml)
  4 egg yolks (reserve whites)

Mix well. Divide dough in half. Pat out half in greased 13x9-inch pan (3.5 L). Bake at 350°F (180°C) about 30 minutes until golden brown. Cut in squares to serve.

—Sherry Holland, Caracas, Venezuela
Guacamole (Mexico)
(gwah-kah-MOH-lay)
Serves 4-5

In bowl, chop or mash:
1 avocado, peeled

Stir in:
1 small tomato, finely chopped
1-2 T. onion, minced (15-30 ml)
1 T. lemon juice (15 ml)
1 clove garlic, minced or crushed
salt to taste
cilantro, chopped (optional)
1/2 fresh green chili pepper, minced, or substitute a dash of Tabasco pepper sauce or a bit of coarsely ground black pepper (optional)

Add 2 T. sour cream (30 ml).

Serve as a dip for tortilla chips or raw vegetables.

—Marie Palafox, Guadalajara, Mexico, and Emily Will, Cuidad Guzman, Jalisco, Mexico