

Part I

The Bylaws of the General Synod

Article 1. Privileges and Duties of Delegates

Sec. 1. Seating of Delegates

- a. A classis shall be required to be current in the payment of its General Synod assessments before its delegates are seated as members of the General Synod.
- b. Membership statistics for determining the number of delegates to General Synod shall be computed as of December 31st of the second year preceding the year in which General Synod is convened.
- c. The configuration of classes and regional synods for determining delegates to the General Synod shall be as of December 31st of the year immediately preceding the year in which General Synod is convened.

Sec. 2. Attendance

Delegates are expected to attend all meetings of the General Synod unless excused by the Committee of Reference.

Article 2. Election of President and Vice-President

Sec. 1. Method of Election

Election of the president and vice-president shall ordinarily be by electing ballot. An affirmative vote of a majority of members of synod shall be required for election on an electing ballot.

Sec. 2. Election of the President

- a. The current vice-president shall be the sole nominee on the first electing ballot. If the vote is affirmative, the current vice-president shall be declared elected.

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- b. If the vote is not affirmative, the election for president shall follow the process prescribed in Section 3 immediately following.

Sec. 3. Election of the Vice-President

- a. A nominating ballot shall first be taken. If any delegate receives at least two-thirds of the votes cast, such delegate shall be declared elected.
- b. If there is no election on the nominating ballot, every delegate receiving at least ten votes shall be in nomination and shall be introduced to the synod. The synod shall then proceed to an electing ballot. If there is no election, the synod shall proceed to a second electing ballot limited to the two persons receiving the largest number of votes on the first electing ballot.

Article 3. General Synod Council

Sec. 1. Membership

The membership of the council shall consist of the following:

- a. The president, vice-president, and the immediate past president of General Synod.
- b. One member recommended by each regional synod from among its regular classical delegates to the General Synod, and elected by the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations.
- c. Ten members elected by the General Synod shall be elected from among the regular classical delegates to the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations.
- d. Six members elected by the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations from among the ministers and elders of the Reformed Church in America to assure that requisite gifts, skills, and diversity are present on the council.
- e. One non-voting member from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), upon recommendation of the general secretary of the RCA.

- f. The general secretary of the General Synod, *ex-officio* and without vote.

Sec. 2. Composition

- a. One-half of the membership of the council shall be elders and one-half shall be ministers and not less than one-third of the membership shall be women. The Commission on Nominations shall assure the composition of the council reflects the full diversity of the church and shall obtain recommendations from each racial and ethnic council.
- b. The General Synod Council shall have racial/ethnic councils. The racial/ethnic councils are constitutional bodies of the Reformed Church in America which express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically.

Sec. 3. Term of Office

The term of office for the elected member shall be four years. Members shall be ineligible for two years after they have served their term. Members who have served a partial term of less than two years shall be eligible for an additional full four-year term. The term of office shall be from July 1 of the year they are elected and be completed on June 30. An employee of the GSC, the regional synods, or the classes of the Reformed Church in America may not hold membership on the council. General Synod officers shall serve as members of the council for one additional year following the expiration of their General Synod term of office.

Sec. 4. Officers

The officers of the council shall be: moderator, first vice-moderator, second vice-moderator, and secretary.

- a. The moderator will be elected annually by the General Synod Council from among the voting members.
- b. The immediate past president of the General Synod shall be the first vice-moderator, unless already elected to office, in which case the first vice-

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moderator shall be elected from the membership of the General Synod Council.

- c. The vice-president of General Synod shall be the second vice-moderator, unless already elected to office, in which case the second vice-moderator shall be elected from the membership of the General Synod Council.
- d. The general secretary of the General Synod shall be the secretary.

Sec. 5. Meetings

- a. The council shall hold three stated meetings each year.
- b. The council shall hold special meetings when necessary.

Sec. 6. Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the council shall be:

- a. To serve as the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod, and as the Board of Trustees of the General Synod as may be required by law.
- b. To act as the agent of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to enable its participation in God's work in the world and to equip congregations and assemblies for mission and ministry. As such, it shall establish and review policies for such programs as fulfill these purposes. General Synod Council staff shall implement and administer such programs. It shall work with other agencies, commissions, institutions, and offices of the church to which the General Synod assigns specific responsibility, and as the General Synod directs.
- c. To prepare a budget to sustain the established priorities, ministry, and mission of the Reformed Church in America and propose an assessment to the General Synod.
- d. To administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod.

- e. To manage the property, business, financial, legal, and other affairs and concerns of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.
- f. To support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church.
- g. To review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that the necessity for continuation shall not be assumed.
- h. To select and supervise a General Secretary and to establish personnel policies through which other personnel may be employed as may be beneficial to carry out the work of the church.
- i. To perform such other duties as shall be delegated and referred to it by the General Synod and to submit an annual report of its work to the General Synod.

Article 4. Membership on General Synod Agencies and Commissions

Sec. 1. Terms of Office

The following shall apply to all General Synod agencies and commissions, except as otherwise provided in the constitution or other enabling documents of the agency or commission:

- a. The term of office for members shall be three years.
- b. Members may be elected to two consecutive terms.
- c. All terms shall begin on July 1 and end on June 30.
- d. A partial term of more than one year shall be considered a full term in determining eligibility.

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Sec. 2. Eligibility

Membership on General Synod agencies and commissions shall be open to all confessing members of the RCA. An employee may not hold membership on the agency or commission to which that person is accountable unless specifically provided in the agency constitution or bylaws; nor may an executive employed by the General Synod or any of the regional synods hold other than *ex-officio* membership on the General Synod Council.

No person shall be eligible to hold other than *ex-officio* membership on more than one agency or commission in each of the following groups:

- a. The General Synod Council and the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald*.
- b. The commissions of the General Synod.
- c. Delegations to ecumenical organizations.

Sec. 3. Vacancies

All vacancies shall be filled by the General Synod Council unless otherwise specified in the Bylaws. All such appointments shall be subject to approval of the General Synod at its next regular session.

Sec. 4. Racial/Ethnic Participation

A racial/ethnic council recognized by the General Synod Council may request racial/ethnic participation in other agencies and commissions of the General Synod. Such requests shall be directed to the General Synod Council which shall consult with the affected agencies and commissions and make recommendations to the General Synod. If the request for participation is granted by the General Synod, it shall be implemented by the Commission on Nominations.

Article 5. Commissions

Sec. 1. General Provisions

- a. Membership

Members of the General Synod commissions shall be appointed by the synod at its annual stated session. Unless otherwise specified, each commission shall have a moderator and a secretary elected by the commission at the meeting prior to General Synod.

b. Responsibilities

The commissions shall prepare studies and develop policies for recommendation to the General Synod as they shall consider useful or as the Synod shall assign. They shall also carry out other responsibilities specifically assigned in these Bylaws or by legislative act of the General Synod.

c. Consultants

All commissions of the General Synod, except the Commission on Judicial Business and the Commission on Nominations, shall have authority to engage as consultants up to three persons with special qualifications in major areas of current concern. Such consultants shall be engaged for a period not to exceed one year and shall serve for not more than three consecutive years. They shall serve without remuneration but may be reimbursed for expenses.

Sec. 2. Commission on Christian Action

a. Membership

The commission shall have nine members. There shall also be two ecumenical observers named by the Commission on Christian Action, subject to the approval of the General Synod: one from other Reformed churches and one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The term of office for ecumenical appointees shall be three years. They shall be subject to re-election for one additional term. All members shall be persons who have a strong desire and demonstrated ability to make the gospel and the Christian way of life applicable to contemporary social issues in both the United States and Canada.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall inform and advise the church concerning current

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social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised on those issues and proper action taken.

Sec. 3. Commission on Christian Unity

a. Membership

The commission shall have nine members. One of the members shall be from another denomination and shall be named by the Commission on Christian Unity subject to the approval of General Synod. The general secretary shall be a member *ex-officio* without vote.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall initiate and supervise action with respect to the Reformed Church in America's membership in or affiliation with ecumenical bodies.
2. It shall engage in interchurch conversations and appoint ecumenical delegates to other church bodies.
3. It shall inform the church of current ecumenical developments and advise the church concerning its ecumenical participation and relationships.

Sec. 4. Commission on Church Order

a. Membership

The commission shall have five members. Two shall be lay persons with legal training and experience. A general knowledge of, and interest in, the structure, government, and function of the denomination shall be required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall have responsibility for making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the *Book of Church Order*.

2. The commission shall provide advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the *Book of Church Order*.

Sec. 5. Commission on History

a. Membership

The commission shall have six members. The archivist and the general editor of the historical series shall serve as continuing consultants. A knowledge of, and interest in, the history of the Reformed Church in America shall be required of all members. Professional competence in this field is desirable.

b. Responsibilities

1. Through a sub-committee of two or three of its members, chosen on the advice of the RCA archivist, the commission shall advise the General Synod on the collection of official records and documents of the Reformed Church in America, its churches, assemblies, and agencies.
2. The commission shall actively promote research on, interest in, and reflection on, the history and traditions of the Reformed Church in America through whatever means as it may find effective.
3. The commission shall be responsible for complete oversight of the Historical Series:
 - (i) It shall define the mission and scope of the series.
 - (ii) It shall appoint the general editor of the series and review his/her work.
 - (iii) It shall invite publications, fully review publications recommended by the general editor to determine whether or not they shall be published, and make decisions concerning reprinting previously published works.
 - (iv) It shall create and maintain policies concerning such matters as author/editor remuneration, royalties, publication

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subventions, the means of production and distribution, and handling of proceeds.

- (v) It shall annually receive and review a complete financial report from the general editor of the series.
4. The commission shall inform the Reformed Church in America of the relevance of the denomination's history and traditions to its program, and regularly review denominational resources that present the church's history.
 5. The commission shall provide a "history center" by regularly reporting on the activities of the Reformed Church in America's educational institutions as these relate to the history and traditions of the denomination.

Sec. 6. Commission on Judicial Business

a. Membership

The commission shall have eight members, one representing each of the regional synods. Each regional synod shall nominate a layperson or a minister in alternating six-year periods in order to ensure that the commission will have within its membership at least three laypersons and at least three ministers. Legal training and experience shall be required of lay members. A broad knowledge of and background in the structure, government, and function of the denomination shall be required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall carry out the responsibilities assigned to it in the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures.

Sec. 7. Commission on Race and Ethnicity

a. Membership

The commission shall have eight members. The membership shall include at least one person recommended from each of the racial/ethnic

councils of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America. At least one-half of the membership shall be laypersons.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall advise the church on policies and initiatives that address issues of institutional racism and the commitment of the Reformed Church in America to become a fully multicultural and multiethnic denomination.
2. The commission shall serve as an advocate for transformation of the Reformed Church in America in regard to its multiracial and multiethnic life.
3. The commission shall recommend policies, objectives, guidelines, and strategies to assist the Reformed Church in America in its effort through all of its agencies, commissions, institutions, and other affiliated bodies to become a fully multiracial and multiethnic church.
4. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the Reformed Church in America's progress in achieving its multiracial and multiethnic objectives.

Sec. 8. Commission on Nominations

a. Membership

The commission shall have thirteen members, one representing each of the regional synods, one representing African-Americans, Hispanics, Native American Indians, and Pacific and Asian Americans, respectively, and one being the immediate past president of General Synod. Each regional synod shall nominate a layperson or a minister in alternating six-year periods in order to ensure that the commission will have within its membership four laypersons and four ministers. The members representing African-Americans, Hispanics, Native American Indians, and Pacific and Asian Americans shall be nominated by their respective councils or representative bodies.

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b. The Moderator

The commission moderator shall be nominated by the commission from among the members who have served at least two years and shall be elected by the General Synod.

c. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall nominate members for the General Synod Council and all General Synod commissions and agencies, unless otherwise specified in the Bylaws.
2. The commission, in consultation with the general secretary, shall search the denomination for suitable nominees. In making nominations it shall consider the geographic location, occupation, and record of previous service to the denomination of persons suggested by classes, regional synods, and other sources. It shall consider this and other pertinent data in light of each commission's or agency's responsibilities, membership needs, suggested nominees, and place and schedule of meetings.
3. The commission members shall, in consultation with the stated clerks of the classes and regional synods from which they are appointed, be responsible for gathering information on nominees within the bounds of the respective synods.
4. The commission shall monitor the inclusiveness of the membership of the various commissions and agencies with respect to geography, gender, age, cultural and social differences, and academic and other appropriate expertise.

The commission shall also monitor required nominations of racial/ethnic persons to insure that the nominating body has consulted with the appropriate racial/ethnic council and that it has shown cause if it has been unable to meet the requirement.

Sec. 9. Commission on Theology

a. Membership

The commission shall have ten members. The membership shall include three persons from among the Reformed Church seminary faculties, two persons from among the faculties of the Reformed Church colleges, three pastors, and two laypersons. There shall also be two ecumenical observers named by the Commission on Theology, subject to the approval of the General Synod: one from other reformed bodies and one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The term of office for ecumenical appointees shall be three years. They shall be subject to re-election for one additional term. Competence in theology is required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall study theological matters arising in the life of the church and referred to it by the General Synod or initiated within the commission itself.

Sec. 10. Commission for Women

a. Membership

The commission shall have eight members. All members shall share a strong desire to work for the full and complete participation of women in realizing the vision of a church and society inclusive of all gifts of all persons. At least two members shall be men.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall:

1. Provide opportunities and resources for developing awareness and raising consciousness concerning human liberation related to the role of women in church and society.
2. Participate and provide information for appointments to committees, commissions, agencies, and staff positions to insure partnership of men and women in the professional and decision-making leadership of the denomination.
3. Assist the church toward insuring inclusive attitudes, images, and

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language in all materials published, designed, or provided for use in the denomination.

4. Develop, advocate, and implement strategies for systematic change to enable the full and complete participation of women in church and society.
5. Collaborate with other RCA bodies working on issues affecting women.
6. Develop and maintain relationships with similar groups in other denominations, exchanging ideas and materials regarding issues affecting women.

Sec. 11. Commission on Christian Worship

a. Membership

The commission shall have seven members. An interest and competence in the fields of liturgics, arts, or church music shall be required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall:

1. Advise the church of changes needed in the Liturgy and the Directory for Worship.
2. Create and disseminate worship resources for church and personal use.
3. Recommend standards for worship music and be responsible for *Rejoice in the Lord*, its subsequent editions and successor.
4. Advise the church with critique of the various versions of the Bible.
5. Inform the church of current development in liturgics, hymnody, and other worship resources with appropriate critique.

Sec. 12. Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship

a. Membership

The commission shall have seven members. At least three shall be persons with responsibility for education and discipleship in RCA churches and two shall be members from the faculties of RCA-affiliated institutions. A general knowledge of, and interest in, Christian education shall be required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall prepare studies and develop policies for recommendation to the General Synod concerning Christian education and discipleship within the RCA.
2. It shall inform and advise the church concerning new developments in the practice of Christian formation and religious education.
3. It shall advise the General Synod and RCA colleges and seminaries with regard to the preparation of those who carry out the church's teaching ministry.

Article 6. General Synod Agencies*Sec. 1. Definition*

General Synod agencies shall be those boards and institutions the enabling documents or constitutions of which have been approved by the General Synod.

Sec. 2. Content of Enabling Documents

The enabling documents of General Synod agencies shall include articles stating the name, purpose, and membership, and providing for meetings, reports to General Synod, bylaws, and amendments.

Article 7. Advisory Committees

Sec. 1. Function of Advisory Committees

The advisory committees shall conduct the business of the General Synod as assigned to them by the General Synod Council and as reported to the first business session of General Synod.

Sec. 2. Advisory Committees

The General Synod shall have such advisory committees as it deems appropriate.

Sec. 3. Membership of Advisory Committees

- a. The president shall ordinarily appoint the delegates to the advisory committee of their choice. All changes, with rationale, shall be reported to the General Synod Council.
- b. The advisory committees shall all be approximately the same size.
- c. Representatives of the agencies or institutions whose reports are being reviewed shall be corresponding members of the appropriate advisory committee.
- d. Each assembly having business before an advisory committee shall be permitted to send two representatives as resource persons.

Article 8. Corresponding Delegates

Sec. 1. General Synod Professors of Theology

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

Sec. 2. Colleges

- a. The presidents of the colleges officially related to the Reformed Church in America or other persons designated by the respective boards of

trustees in place of the presidents shall be corresponding delegates.

- b. Each college shall appoint two students as corresponding delegates.

Sec. 3. Church Herald

The editor of the *Church Herald* shall be a corresponding delegate. The Editorial Council may appoint one of its members, who shall also be a corresponding delegate.

Sec. 4. Seminary Students

The students of each RCA seminary shall appoint two of their members as corresponding delegates.

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) shall appoint two students not enrolled in an RCA seminary as corresponding delegates.

Sec. 5. Reformed Church Women's Ministries

Reformed Church Women's Ministries shall appoint two of its members as corresponding delegates.

Sec. 6. General Secretary

The general secretary shall be a corresponding delegate.

Sec. 7. General Synod Council

The members of the General Synod Council shall be corresponding delegates.

Sec. 8. Commissions

Each General Synod commission shall appoint one of its members as a corresponding delegate.

Sec. 9. Seminary Presidents, Moderators, or Members of Boards of Trustees

The presidents of the seminaries and the moderator or another member of the

respective boards of trustees for the seminaries and for the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall be corresponding delegates.

Sec. 10. Ecumenical Delegates

The Commission on Christian Unity may invite not more than eleven ecumenical delegates, who shall be corresponding delegates.

Sec. 11. Regional Synods

- a. Two women shall be appointed corresponding delegates by each regional synod; said appointments may be made in consultation with the Commission for Women.
- b. One young adult may be appointed as a corresponding delegate by each regional synod.

Sec. 12. Board of Benefits Services President or Member

The president of the Board of Benefits Services, or another of its members designated by the Board of Benefits Services, shall be a corresponding delegate.

Article 9. Rules of Order

The rules of order of the General Synod shall be those set forth in the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* except as is otherwise specified in the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod.

Article 10. Amendments

The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod may be amended at any stated meeting of the synod by vote of a majority of all the members present, provided that due notice of the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing at a previous stated session and has received the approval of a majority at that session. An amendment to the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order shall go into effect upon announcement by the president of the Synod of favorable action under this provision.