

## **Missional and Reformed: How the RCA Might Continue the Dialogue Requested in R-16**

The 2007 General Synod, after not adopting two proposals made by the Missional Structures Task Force, voted to adopt the following new recommendation in connection with the report of the task force:

### **R-16**

**To instruct the Executive Committee of General Synod to continue the denomination-wide dialogue and data collection with written survey and other means on the missional purpose and work of the Reformed Church in America, its assemblies and congregations; and further,**

**with all regional synods, all classes, consistories, and other bodies, to facilitate this conversation in order to gather wisdom, share ideas, and encourage experimentation, so that the RCA might discover new means by which to more effectively equip congregations for mission and ministry with measurable outcomes; and further,**

**to share the results of these actions with the General Synod no later than 2010, in order to determine what future steps, if any, might be undertaken. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)**

The officers of the General Synod, meeting in August, asked vice-president Carol Bechtel to convene a team to develop possible means by which to carry out this recommendation, for report to the General Synod Council. That team included GSC members Mary Bechler and Tom DeVries; General Synod 2007 major-issue moderators Jan Hoffman, Curry Pikkaart, and Dennis TeBeest; General Synod 2007 process consultant Peg Luidens; and Jeff Japinga as staff support. It met on September 27 in Grand Rapids.

### **Background**

The team built its work on the structure and learnings from the major-issue advisory process at General Synod and on themes identified in wider conversations with RCA members in the month prior to its meeting. The team identified key themes that included a widespread desire to learn from multiple perspectives about what missional purpose and work of the Reformed Church means, how it is being lived out, and how it might be in the future; and the relationship between our ecclesiology, our polity, and the expected work of the Spirit in our ministry. The church is also asking that carrying out R-16 must build bridges and build trust; include as many voices as possible; consider the varied contexts of RCA ministry; and, always, ask how these discussions finally enhance and equip the ministry of our congregations.

### **Proposed Process**

General Synod 2008 would become both the foundation and launching point for a two-year, denomination-wide dialogue on “the missional purpose and work” of the RCA by deeply exploring our understandings of and commitments to being both Reformed and missional in who we are and what we do. The dialogue would be informed by Scripture; by our traditions and our order; by our current contexts for and experiences in ministry, and by our understandings of how the Spirit is calling us forward in ministry. The proposed process would include the following elements and timeline:

- **General Synod 2008:** Synod has already been extended by half-a-day in order to accommodate the necessary work. That would provide time for a Sunday afternoon and/or evening speaker and panel discussion on what it means to be both missional and Reformed. Included in these presentations / discussions would be an attempt to better define “missional.” With those presentations would be opportunity for small-group discussion, using the already-formed major-issue advisory groups, as well as opportunity for feedback through the moderators.
- **Fall, 2008:** The General Synod dialogue process would be extended throughout the church, utilizing a video resource based on the Synod presentations and other print materials, and guided by leaders trained in the major-issue dialogue process being used at Synod. Its purpose would be to assist the whole church in more deeply exploring its ecclesiology, its call to mission, and the impact on the missional process and work of the RCA—“discovering what we want to do about something we all care about,” to use the words of leadership author Meg Wheatley. All consistories and classes would be invited to hold these conversations; in addition, regional synods, commissions, the GSC, staff, would also be invited to participate. There might also be broader, regional discussions, perhaps in cooperation with our seminaries. We would meet each other face-to-face, in environments made intentionally safe, with specific feedback mechanisms to collect learnings and insight for the whole church and for individual members.
- **Spring, 2009:** The working team designated by GSC would receive responses from these church-wide dialogue sessions, and from those responses prepare two documents: one, a report to the 2009 General Synod; and two, in consultation with specialists, a written survey. This survey would seek the kind of empirical data on missional understandings, activities, impediments, and outcomes from across the church, as mandated by R-16.
- **Synod 2009:** The interim report would allow Synod to discuss preliminary findings, identify areas in which further work was required, and make recommendations, if necessary, to assist in the completion of the dialogue.
- **Fall, 2009:** Wide follow-up through the church, guided by the actions of Synod.
- **General Synod 2010:** A final report, with “future steps, if any, (that) might be undertaken.” The working team made no attempt to predict the content or exact outcome of this report, because we don’t know where this process will lead us.

The working team also named these particular values and practices by which this two-year dialogue process should be guided and carried out:

- *Intentionality and commonality.* We need to be talking about the same subjects using the same parameters, while acknowledging that our contexts for ministry, and the language to describe them, might be very different from each other.
- *Cooperation.* We need to live out this process together with our other assemblies and educational institutions. No one group “owns” this; it is “our” work, and through it, we would hope that our trust for each other begins to grow as well.
- *Explicit feedback.* We’re not talking just to hear ourselves talk. We want to learn from each other and, from that, together chart a common missional future.

- *The importance of story*, both story told and story heard. There is much innovation and creative ministry happening throughout the church; we all need to hear and celebrate those stories.
- *Faithfulness*. We believe that the Holy Spirit is guiding our work, and must design any process with that expectation.

### **Implementation**

The proposed process will require a team to oversee development and implementation of the proposed dialogue process. It will also require designated budget of approximately \$10,000 in FY2008 to fund implementation team meetings, video and print resources for the church, and leader training. The comprehensive survey proposed for the spring of 2009 would require funding in the FY2009 budget, as would the continuing efforts of the implementation team.

### **GSC Response and Action to the Report from the R-16 Committee**

**Option A:** *The GSC determines that it is its direct responsibility to carry out the General Synod's instruction in R-16.*

1. Rationale –

- a. The General Synod assigned R-16 to its executive committee (the GSC).
- b. GP-3.1: It is the GSC's job to "create the link between the General Synod, the GSC, and the GSC staff." The objectives in the instruction from the General Synod, to continue a dialogue, to collect data, to share results, are central to the GSC's responsibility to create appropriate links between the assemblies who send delegates to the General Synod and the GSC itself.
- c. GP-3.3: It is the GSC's job "to create assurance of successful organizational performance on Ends..." R-16 in policy governance understanding is a means to the accomplishment of E-1, the GSC's Global Ends Policy.
- d. GP-3.6: It is the GSC's job to create "means to perform all duties assigned by the BCO."

2. Possible GSC action:

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The General Synod Council directs the moderator to appoint an ad hoc R-16 implementation team to implement the process (attached) proposed by the officer's ad hoc R-16 committee and revised by the GSC at its October 2007 meeting; and, further the GSC instructs the General Secretary to not fail to make available adequate staff support to the ad hoc R-16 committee; and, further the GSC instructs the General Secretary to not fail to make available budgeted funds within the approved FY 2008 GSC budget in the amount of \$10,000; and, further, the GSC instructs the moderator to provide a report on the committee's work at least annually at the spring meeting.

**Option B:** *The GSC determines that it needs to delegate the responsibility to implement R-16 to the General Secretary.*

1. Rationale –

- a. MD-1, MD-3: The accomplishment of an instruction to the General Synod to the GSC has always and consistently been regarded as “operational” and thus logically should be delegated to the General Secretary who has been given the responsibility to achieve the Ends and the capacity (staffing and budget) to do so.
- b. MD-4.1: “The GSC will develop policies instructing the General Secretary to achieve specified results, for specified recipients at a specified worth or priority...”
- c. MD-4.2: “The GSC will develop policies that limit the latitude the General Sec’y may exercise in choosing the organizational means...”
- d. GP-8.1: “GSC committees are to help the GSC do its job, not to help or advise the staff. Committees ordinarily will assist the GSC by preparing policy alternatives and implications for GSC deliberation...” Appointing an ad-hoc GSC committee to implement an operational means to an end seems to confuse the GSC’s governance role and the General Secretary’s responsibilities for achieving the GSC’s Ends.

2. Possible GSC action:

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The General Synod Council instructs the General Secretary to not fail to develop and implement a process to ensure the accomplishment of R-16 in accord with its E-1 sub-Ends policy #1 (attached); and, further, to not fail to utilize the GSC Officer’s Ad Hoc R-16 committee report as revised by the GSC at its October 2007 meeting (attached) as a guide for implementation; and, further, to not exceed the FY 2008 GSC budget in accomplishing this directive; and, further, to not fail to report annually to the GSC within the E-1 Ends Monitoring Report.

3. Current E-1 Global Ends Policy:

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the General Secretary and staff, the General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where: Congregations are following Christ in mission, are equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

*Possible E-1 Sub-End#1:* Congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America and those who provide leadership in them will have broad consensus on the missional purpose and work of the church and how it applies specifically to the missional purpose of the RCA.

*Possible E-1 Sub-End #2:* Congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America will have the understanding, skills, and resources they need to accomplish the mission.